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The Implantation of Socialist Realism in the DPRK and North Korean Literary Politics 1945-1960

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This thesis is my own original work.

Tatiana Gabroussenko 

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Abstract

The first decade of North Korea's history was a formative period for the country's political and social institutions, and its literature was no exception. The system of political management of literary affairs, sets of established clichés and officially sanctioned topics which were promoted in these years redefined North Korean culture and moved it in a novel direction.

The present thesis outlines the history of North Korean literary policy from 1945 to the early 1960s and discusses how this development reflected the contemporary political situation in the DPRK and influenced the subsequent cultural and social history of that country. It pays special attention to two major intertwined problems of early North Korean cultural history: the implementation of the Soviet-originated model of "socialist realism" and the political campaigns directed against the famous intellectuals Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun, Kim Nam-ch'on and their colleagues. The research traces how imported notions of "proper" Communist literature were imposed on the North Korean cultural world and how the North Korean intellectuals struggled to adjust themselves to these new demands. We also analyse the factors behind the purges of the early 1950s, consider possible reasons which determined the fates of particular writers and trace the impact of these campaigns on the North Korean cultural and political atmosphere in general.

The thesis draws on a variety of sources ranging from interviews with Korean and Soviet participants in the events, materials from public and family archives, memoirs of North Korean defectors, items from the contemporary press, original literary and critical texts and other documents.

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First of all I would like to thank the Australian National University for awarding me the scholarship and travel grants which have made this research possible. I consider myself to have been fortunate to be able to conduct my project in the stimulating atmosphere of the Australian National University, with its highly intelligent and open community of scholars. Among many colleagues I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Andrei Lankov. Without his constant care and support as a mentor and friend this project could not have been completed. I would also like to thank Prof. Kenneth Wells for his assistance and valuable advice at various stages of this project. My research has benefited greatly from his careful reading and suggestions. I am also much indebted to Dr. Shin Gi-hyun who provided me with help and advice.

I owe a particular debt to the interviewees who were helpful and kind in sharing valuable information with me, especially Chŏng Ryul, Cho Yurii and Elena Davydova (Pak Myŏng-sun). I want to thank the Russian Koreanists who helped me during my study trip to Moscow, and Dr. Leo Kontsevich in particular. Much assistance was provided by the staff of the Russian National Library, especially by its deputy director Boris Perli. I also found the copies of original North Korean materials which were kindly provided by Dr. Brian Myers extremely valuable.

I am grateful to Darrell Dorrington for his help with editing the text as well as for his valuable advice. Last but by no means least I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant faith and support.

All translations of Chinese and Russian language materials, except where indicated, are my own. For all mistakes, errors and matters of opinion in this work I alone am responsible.

had at their disposal a rich lode of factual information about the North Korean intellectual world, including a considerable amount of otherwise unobtainable data. For this reason these works are not without academic value, even if one has to learn to ignore the obligatory references to the wisdom of the Party and the ubiquitous quotations from Lenin.

Unfortunately, the dramatic political changes which occurred in the USSR during the last decade have not only caused the previous politicised agenda to be seen as outdated, but they have also rendered research into North Korean literature highly unpopular among post-Soviet students of Korean culture. Thus the former Soviet academic tradition of North Korean literary studies has no continuity today.

The situation in South Korean scholarship is the reverse. While before the late 1980s, studies of North Korean literature were rare, the political atmosphere after the collapse of military rule in 1987 made North Korean literature a prominent academic issue. Most South Korean publications demonstrate a remarkable knowledge of North Korean literary texts and personalities and offer valuable background information about the historical roots of North Korean literary processes.[7] Many of today's Seoul academics, even those who do not specialise in North Korean literature, incorporate detailed analyses of North Korean works into their literary studies.[8] Yet in some respects the South Korean investigations of North Korean literature should not be accepted without reservation. Like their Soviet colleagues the South Korean scholars are not politically detached: they, as a rule, consider their subject through the prism of leftist and nationalist biases. In the light of this now dominant political agenda of South Korean academia, North Korean literary development is normally perceived as an inseparable part of a conjoined "glorious national tradition", which in the first instance is to be defended and glorified. We can only agree with a remark of the American scholar Brian Myers about the tendency of South Korean scholarship to "gloss over"

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voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree" [Soviet Patriotic War Literature in Korea], in *Literatura stran zarubezhnogo vostoka i sovetskaia literatura* [Literature of the Overseas Oriental Countries and Soviet Literature], Moscow: Nauka, 1977, 339-354; V.N. Li, "Koreiskaia literatura pervyh let posle osvobozhdeniia (1945-1950) [Korean Literature in the First Years after Liberation], in *Hudozhestvennyi opyt literatur sotsialisticheskih stran* [Artistic experience in the literature of socialist countries], Moscow: Nauka, 1967, 339-354; V.N.Li, *Sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature* [Socialist Realism in Korean Literature], Tashkent: Fan, 1971.

[7] I must cite a few examples of the scholarship which particularly impressed me in this regard. Kim Yun-sik, *Yim Hwa yŏngu* [A Study of Yim Hwa], Seoul: Munhwa sasangsa, 1989; Kang Yŏng-ju, *Pyŏkch'o Hong Myŏnghŭi yŏngu* [A Study of Pyŏkch'o Hong Myŏng-hŭi], Seoul: Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1999; Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak* [Yi Ki-yŏng: His Era and His Literature], Seoul: Pulpit', 1994.

[8] See for instance the works of South Korean scholar Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, who in his literary studies often resorts to North Korean literary patterns. (See Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, *Sosŏl-ŭi ihae* [Understanding the Novel], Seoul: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1998; Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, *Munhak-ŭi ihae* [Understanding Literature], Seoul: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1995).

the deficiencies of this literature and judge it on the basis of the perceived "good intentions" of an author.[9]

When accessing North Korean literature, Seoul scholars also often demonstrate an excessive trust in the thoroughly biased verdicts of North Korean officialdom, at times totally embracing this position.[10] What is particularly important for the purposes of this work is that the majority of the South Korean scholars, while admitting the connections between the North Korean literary world and Pyongyang's politics, tend to isolate this literature from the political context of the era and overlook the overtly earthy, self-serving motives which at times feature quite strongly in the activities of North Korean writers.[11]

As an exception to this tendency I would mention the work of Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin (North Korean Men of Literature and the Arts)*[12] (1986). This book, written during the Cold War by a conservative Seoul non-academic expert on North Korean questions, has its obvious limitations such as the excessively emotional approach of the author, the poorly devised structure of the work and its repetitive arguments, etc. Still, in general Yi Ki-pong's perspective on the North Korean literary world is quite original. What I would regard as the authors' particular strength is his efforts to consider the development of North Korean literature through the prism of the non-literary political currents of the time.

Western scholarship has not been too prolific in the realm of North Korean literary studies. However, the scarcity of such works is compensated for by their quality. One must mention the two-volume classic account of Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea* (1972)[13] which among numerous aspects also deals with North Korea's literature. It also contains a short but perceptive article by Marshal R. Pihl, "Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today",[14] the author of which

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[9] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, the Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK*, NewYork: Cornell University, 1994, 9.

[10] See, for example, Yim Yŏng-t'ae, Ko Yu-han, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa* [50 Years of North Korean history], Seoul: Tŭlnyŏk',1999, Vol.1; Sin Hyŏng-gi, O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa* [North Korean Literary History], Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000.

[11] This tendency clearly emerged in the above-cited work by KimYun-sik *Pukhan munhak-ŭi yŏksajŏk ihae* which tends to ignore the political constituent of Yim Hwa's activity and presents him exclusively as a highly motivated idealistic poet. See also Kim Chae-yong, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi yŏksajŏk ihae* [An Historical Understanding of North Korean Literature], Seoul: Munhak-kwa chisŏngsa, 1994; Ch'oe Ik-hyŏn, "1956 nyŏn 8 wŏl chongp'a sakŏn chŏnhuŭi pukhan munhak chilsŏ" [The Situation in North Korean Literature Around the Event of August 1956], in Yi Myŏng-jae (ed.) *Pukhan munhak-ŭi inyŏm-kwa silch'e* [The Ideas and the Reality of North Korean Literature], Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1998, 59-91.

[12] Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin* [North Korean Men of Literature and the Arts], Seoul: Sasayŏn, 1986.

[13] Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.

[14] Marshal R. Pihl, "Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today", *Korean Studies* 1 (1977), 63-110.

considers North Korean literature within the context of its didactic tradition. In 1994 Western scholarship was enriched by the brilliant work of Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, the Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK*. Whilst being concerned with the activity of one particular writer, the work presents an original and coherent picture of North Korean literature in its formative years.

Now let us see how the major issues of the formative period of North Korean literature have been reflected in the above-mentioned scholarship.

Most of the scholars agree that the period 1945-1960 in North Korean literature was marked by the official implementation of the Soviet-originated doctrine of "socialist realism" as an artistic form of Communist ideology and politics in literature. Much like China, the USSR and other Eastern Block countries, in North Korea socialist realism was officially pronounced to be "the only method of creative activity in the field of literature and art, which is socialist in content and national in form". In the Charter One of the General Federation of Korean Literature and Arts Unions the fundamental function of the Federation was formulated as "to reward the working masses with Communist ideology and revolutionary tradition through literary and artistic activities under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea".[15] Thus the literary tendency, which in the pre-Liberation Korean intellectual world was associated exclusively with the realm of "proletarian literature"[16], was after 1945 officially promoted as an obligatory course for all North Korean writers.

Most scholars agree with the definition of most mainstream North Korean literature as socialist realist. The sole exclusion is Brian Myers, who argued for "the failure of socialist realism" in the DPRK and the basic incompatibility of the exemplary works of North Korean literature with the major principles of socialist realism.

1945-1960 also witnessed various political campaigns and purges in the North Korean intellectual world, which firstly emerged around 1946 and reached a crescendo in 1953-1959. The victims of these campaigns (of which Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn are the most famous figures) were formally accused, among other crimes and transgressions, of vicious deviations from the Party's line of socialist realism and of promoting "bourgeois ideology". This official Pyongyang verdict has influenced the perception of modern scholars who tend to consider the political campaigns as largely ideological conflicts, as the principled struggle of proponents and opponents of socialist realism over this aesthetic and ideological doctrine.

It is no surprise that the DPRK discourse of literary history, being thoroughly politicised, presents the first years of the North Korean literary stage as a period of dramatic struggle between "progressive" protectors of the "genuine" authentic traditions of socialist realism (who were mostly ex-KAPF writers) and vicious

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[15] Ryu Hun, *Study of North Korea,* Seoul: Research Institute of International and External Affairs, 1966, 287.

[16] Look for example at the work of Yi Hun "1930 nyŏndae Yim Hwaŭi munhakron kŭndaesŏng" [A Study of Yim Hwa in the 1930s and Modernity], in *Minjŏk munhak-kwa kŭndaesŏng* [National literature and modernity], Seoul: Munhak-kwa chisŏngsa, 1995, 407-427.

"reactionaries" (including Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn among others) who schemed to destroy the "progressive" traditions. The very titles of the majority of North Korean critical articles and books of the time are self-revealing: Hŏ Kyŏng, *Munhak yesul punya-esŏ-ŭi kyegŭp t'uchaeng (Class Struggle in Literature and the Arts)* [17], *Munyechŏnsŏn-e issŏsŏ-ŭi pandongjŏk purŭjyoa sasang-ŭl pandaehayŏ (Against Reactionary Bourgeois Ideas on the Literary and Artistic Front)*[18], Ch'oe T'ak-ho "Uri munhak-ŭi sasangjŏk sungyŏlsŏng-ŭl wihan tang-ŭi t'ujaeng" ("The Struggle of Our Party for the Ideological Purity of Our Literature"),[19] or Ŏm Ho-sŏk "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk ponjil" ("The Reactionary Essence of Yi T'ae-jun's Literature")[20], etc.

Contemporary North Korean scholarship still maintains a similar line, although there has been some modification in order to adjust to current political trends. South Korean scholar Pak T'ae-sang, in his account of recent alterations in North Korean literary historiography *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏnsang (The Situation in North Korean Literature),* [21] relays in extravagant detail the updated North Korean version of the political events of 1953-1959 as they were recently described by the contemporary Pyongyang author Chang Hyŏng-jun. This author explains the purges of Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn as … the exceptional wisdom and political vigilance of the "Beloved Leader" Kim Chŏng-il. According to Chang's story, the "reactionary essence" of Yim Hwa's poem "Nŏ Ŏdie Innŭnya" ("Where Are You Now?") (1951) was hidden even from seasoned experts, and that the canny insight into the work's reactionary content was made possible by the wisdom of the then nine year old Kim Chŏng-il who spotted and wittingly analysed the reactionary "defeatism" and "pessimism" of the poem. This breakthrough which was achieved by the "rising genius" allegedly inspired the purge of the "hidden reactionary" Yim Hwa.[22]

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[17] Hŏ Kyŏng, *Munhak yesul punya-esŏŭi kyegŭp t'ujaeng* [Class Struggle in Literature and the Arts], Pyongyang: Munhwa sŏnjŏnsŏng, 1953.

[18] *Munye chŏnsŏne issŏsŏŭi pandongjŏk purŭjyoa sasang-ŭl pandaehayŏ* [Against Reactionary Bourgeois Ideas on the Literary and Artistic Front], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1956.

[19] Ch'oe T'ak-ho, "Uri munhak-ŭi sasangjŏk sungyŏlsŏng-ŭl wihan tang-ŭi t'ujaeng" [The Struggle of Our Party for the Ideological Purity of Our Literature], in *Kongsangjuŭi kyoyang-kwa uri munhak* [Communist education and our literature], Pyongyang: Kwahakwŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1959, 24-76.

[20] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk ponjil" [The Reactionary Essence of Yi T'ae-jun's Literature], in *Kongsangjuŭi kyoyang-kwa ch'angjak* [Communist education and creativity], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1961, 436-476.

[21] Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏnsang* [The Situation in North Korean Literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1999.

[22] Chang Hyŏng-jun, *Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il Sung tongji munhak puŏngdosa* [The Directions of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung in Regards to Literary Criticism] 2, Pyŏngyang: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1993, 428-435. Quoted in Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏnsang* [The Situation in North Korean Literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1999, 178-179.

The picture of North Korean literature as a battlefield where protectors of the ideological purity of "socialist realism" fight its vicious and scheming enemies partially influenced Soviet scholarship as well. Pyongyang propagated its official line in the USSR through a multitude of propagandistic brochures and booklets which were translated into Russian such as *Rastsvet i razvitie koreiskoi kultury (The Prosperity and Development of Korean Literature)*[23] or Sin Gu-hyŏn's *Koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia (Korean Literature After Liberation)*[24], etc. These booklets were full of Stalinist notions and expressions which had originated in the Soviet propagandistic discourse but which had decisively gone out of fashion in the post-Stalinist USSR. Take, for instance, the following passage from Sin Gu-hyŏng's booklet where he writes about the "reactionary anthology" *Ŭnhyang (Hidden Aroma)* (1946) and the scapegoats of the political campaigns of 1953-1956:

"The reactionary poems of *Hidden Aroma* idealised vulgar love. Publishing this garbage, their authors, being enemies of the people, tried to slander and pour filth over the Korean people who were moving along the path of the construction of the new life"; "Loudly declaring that "the national culture we are creating now should by no means be class conscious", the clique of Yim Hwa attempted to give birth to a reactionary literature and arts... They strove to create a literature which would be servile to American imperialism".[25]

The contemporary Soviet scholars were not pleased with these clauses which reminded them too painfully of their own Stalinist experience. Still, they were subject to certain political obligations which required them to support this supposedly "fraternal socialist state".[26] For that reason, Soviet scholars who wrote about the North Korean literature of 1945-1960 were forced to include several passages about the "vicious activity of reactionaries" in their works. As a rule, these parts were rare and oblique and constituted little more than casual tributes to Pyongyang's official line. V. Ivanova in "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree (1945-1955)" ("Soviet Literature in Korea (1945-1955)"[27] and "Sovetskaia voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree 40-50h

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[23] *Rastsvet i razvitie koreiskoi kultury* [The Prosperity and Development of Korean Culture], Pyongyang: Isdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannyh iazykah, 1959.

[24] Sin Ku-hyŏn, *Koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia* [Korean Literature After Liberation], Pyongyang: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inoistrannyh iazykah, 1957.

[25] Ibid., 6.

[26] The Soviet scholar V. Ivanova claimed that political censorship in academic studies on North Korean literature appeared excessive even by the notorious standards of the USSR in the late 1950s. Referring to her research on Korean literature in the early 1950s, she said: "It was a nightmare. We had to rewrite and rewrite it endlessly, in order to appease all the necessary political accents of the moment." (Interview by telephone with V.I. Ivanova, Moscow, 03 February 2002). According to the senior Soviet scholar L. Kontzevich, there always existed a palpable disagreement between most Soviet Koreanists and the DPRK political line which some managed to express through Aesopian language. (Interview by telephone with L. Kontsevich, Moscow, 10 October 2003).

[27] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree", 190.

godov" ("Soviet war patriotic literature in Korea 1940-1950s")[28] referring to the decision of the presidium of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party of May 1947, claimed that "the Workers' Party identified some mistakes on the literary front" and was determined to fight against "the remnants of bourgeois ideology" in the DPRK. S. Nam in *Formirovanie narodnoi intelligentsii v KNDR (The Formation of the People's Intelligentsia in the DPRK)* also vaguely referred to the struggle of the Korean Workers' Party against "remnants of bourgeois ideology in literature and arts" and its determination to uproot "art for art's sake" principle [29]. We will notice that the Soviet authors merely reiterate the particular Party decision without expressing a personal opinion of the problem and without mentioning the names of any "bourgeois reactionary writers". However, there were some works of Soviet scholars, such as the PhD thesis of A. Taen on North Korean literature,[30] where the author fully sided with the North Korean official line. The stylistics and vocabulary of this work are strongly reminiscent of the propagandistic Korean brochures:

"Some South Korean writers started to promote in veiled form the ideas of cosmopolitanism, bourgeois nationalism, formalism and naturalism in DPRK literature. The proof of this fact is the recent disclosure of an anti-Party group of writers headed by Yim Hwa ... All of these reactionary literati came from South Korea. Some of them, such as Yi T'ae-jun or Ch'oe Myŏng-ik, were in the past strongly influenced by decadence and naturalism. They announced their determination to break with their literary past and claimed their readiness to serve the Korean people but these were in fact just vacuous and false declarations".[31]

The majority of today's South Korean academics also perceive the issue of socialist realism to be the major bone of contention in the clash of forces on the North Korean literary scene in 1945-1960. Yun Chae-gŭn and Pak Sang-ch'ŏn, the authors of one of the earliest Seoul accounts of North Korean literature, *Pukhan-ŭi hyŏndae munhak (Contemporary North Korean Literature)* in their analysis of the period 1953-1956 leaned upon the official Pyongyang version which links the purges of Yi T'ae-jun, Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn with "formalism", "pessimism", and "defeatism" in their writings. The authors of this book came to the conclusion that the victims of the political campaigns were doomed since they lived in a "society where ideology was an absolute, and literature was ruled by an absolutely powerful ideology which admitted no free thought".[32] Thus, the South Korean scholars considered the purged writers to be

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[28] V.I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree", 131.

[29] S.G. Nam, *Formirovanie narodnoi intelligentsii v KNDR* [Formation of the Peoples' Intelligentsia in the DPRK], Moscow: Nauka, 1970, 50-51.

[30] A.N. Taen, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury (demokraticheskie natsional'nye tendentsii i sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature)* [Essays on Contemporary Korean literature. Democratic National Tendencies and Socialist Realism in Korean Literature]. PhD thesis. Leningrad: Herzen Institute, 1954.

[31] Ibid., 176.

[32] Yun Chae-gŭn, Pak Sang-ch'ŏn, *Pukhan-ŭi hyŏndae munhak* [Contemporary North Korean Literature] 2, Seoul: Koryŏwŏn, 1990, 199-203.

the victims of a constricting ideology and of the ruling theoretical principles. Sim Wŏn-sŏp in his article "1950 nyŏndae pukhan si kaegwan" ("A Survey of North Korean Poetry of the 1950s")[33] argues that Yim Hwa was purged because the political leaders of the country were "oversensitive" to the private and "excessively soft" themes in his poems which contradicted the Party line. Kim Chae-yong in his book *Pukhan munhak-ŭi yŏksajŏk ihae (An Historical Understanding of North Korean Literature)*[34] concurs with this opinion. This author considers the campaigns against Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn as, first and foremost, a "clash of aesthetic worldviews". But in Kim Chae-yong's writings there appears to be a problem of consistency. In another article published in 1994, while expressing his disagreement with the opinion of the defector Yi Ch'ŏl-ju as "overtly anti-Communist", Kim claimed that the controversy between Ŏm Ho-sŏk and Ki Sŏk-pok in 1952, which preceded the political campaigns, was not a result of political games but an aesthetic dispute over "socialist realism" and "revolutionary romanticism". However, when speaking about the results of this dispute – "the groundless criticism of the writers" on a massive scale, which made North Korean intellectuals "timid and servile" – Kim could not find any ideological or aesthetic explanation for this: he presumed that these purges might be not of a literary but, indeed, political nature.[35] Kim Chae-yong, however, candidly admits that his assessment could hardly be deemed objective, since he had read a lot of North Korean critical articles on the subject but none of the works which became the objects of this criticism.[36]

The perception of political campaigns of the period as the results of ideological and aesthetical disputes in the North Korean literary world remains popular in later South Korean scholarship. Most of the South Korean critics profess the belief that the 1953-1956 purges were provoked by some "ideological deficiencies" in the victims and an inconsistency between their writings and the demands of officialdom. Ch'oe Ik-hyŏn, for instance, represents the whole situation as a deep inner conflict of Yim Hwa and Yi T'ae-jun with the existing political system, as a "struggle of believes".[37] Ch'oe is compassionate towards the victims of this struggle; he disapproves of the DPRK political system, which subordinates literature to ideology, thus denying any capacity for aesthetic variety. However South Korean academics today often observe the events of 1953-1956 from an angle which differs little from that of the North Korean officials. Consider, for instance, a remarkable passage from *50 Years of North Korean History (Pukhan-ŭi 50 nyŏnsa).* Analysing the literary process in Pyongyang in the 1950s and stressing the role of socialist realist theory at the time, its authors claim that "socialist

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[33] Sim Wŏn-sŏp, "1950 nyŏndae pukhan si kaegwan" [A Survey of North Korean Poetry of the 1950s], in *1950 nyŏndae nampukhan munhak* [Literature of North and South Korea of the 1950s], Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 1991, 107.

[34] Kim Chae-yong, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi yŏksajŏk ihae* [An Historical Understanding of North Korean Literature], Seoul: Munhak-kwa chisŏngsa, 1994.

[35] Kim Chae-yong, "Pukhan-ŭi namnodanggye chakka sukch'ŏng", 328-364.

[36] Kim Chae-yong, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi yŏksajŏk ihae*, 134-135.

[37] Ch'oe Ik-hyŏn, "1956 nyŏn 8 wŏl chongp'a sakŏn chŏnhuŭi pukhan munhak chilsŏ", 72.

realism not only played the role of an ideological weapon in realising the great task of post-war reconstruction, but was also used in the struggle against the remnants of reactionary bourgeois ideas and the "pure art" tendency of the members of the South Korean Worker's Party."[38] Thus the South Korean authors tacitly agree that "remnants of bourgeois ideology" as well as "pure art" tendencies not only existed in North Korean literature between 1945 and 1960, but constituted real problems which required fighting against.

Sin Hyŏn-gi and O Sŏng-ho, the authors of *Pukhan Munhaksa (North Korean Literary History)*[39], when addressing the issue of the political campaigns of 1953-1956, retell the North Korean version of events without applying any independent critical analysis. Apparently, they, like the authors of the previously cited work, take at face value the official descriptions of the scapegoats of these campaigns as vicious "formalists", "naturalists", etc which supposedly contradicted genuine "socialist realism".

Kim Sŏng-su in his book *T'ongil-ŭi Munhak Pip'yŏng-ŭi Nonli (Theory of Critique of United Literature)*[40] supports this idea even more fervently. In his opinion, there were "serious ideological discrepancies" between the conflicting forces in the North Korean literary world; "formalism", "revisionism", "remnants of bourgeois aesthetics", and other "reactionary trends" with which the Party struggled at the time represented actual threats to socialist realism in the DPRK's literature and arts.[41] The victorious political campaigns against these tendencies led to a "theoretical deepening" of the theory of socialist realism in North Korea, and this should be appreciated, in Kim Sŏng-su's opinion, as "the most important success of our literary history of this period".[42] The influential South Korean scholar Kim Yun-sik also claims that the conflict between Han Sŏr-ya and Yim Hwa over the latter's anthology *Nŏ Ŏdie innŭnya? (Where Are You Now?)* was a result of theoretical disparities between the two and led eventually to the endowment of "revolutionary romanticism" in North Korean socialist realism.[43] The South Korean scholar Kim Sŭng-hwan[44] searches for the roots of the principal difference in the literary images and approaches of Yim Hwa and Han Sŏr-ya via the nebulous concept of "Seoulism" and "Pyongyangism" in their mentalities.

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[38] Yim Yŏng-t'ae and Ko Yu-hwan, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa* [50 Years of North Korean History], Seoul: Tŭlnyŏk', 1999, Vol.1: 333.

[39] Sin Hyŏng-gi and O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa.*

[40] Kim Sŏng-su, *T'ongilŭi munhak pip'yŏng nonli* [A Critical Survey of the Unified Literature]. Seoul: Ch'aek sesang, 2001.

[41] Ibid.,153-186.

[42] Ibid., 186

[43] Kim Yun-sik, *Pukhan munhaksaron* [A Study of North Korean Literary History], Seoul: Saemi, 1995, 52-58.

[44] Kim Sŭng-hwan, "Haebang Kongganŭi pukhan munhak, munhwajŏk minju kiji kŏnsŏl ronŭl chungsimŭro" [North Korean Literature After Liberation. A Study of the "Construction of Democratic Cultural Base" Theory], *Hanguk hakpo (*63), 201-224.

As we can see, all the above-mentioned accounts largely imply that there were actual differences between the ideological or aesthetic positions of the purged writers on the one hand and the official Party line, associated mainly with Han Sŏr-ya, Ŏm Ho-sŏk, An Ham-gwang, etc, on the other. According to this view, which is generally accepted in the dominant discourse of contemporary South Korean academia, these ideological and/or aesthetic differences inspired the political campaigns and purges of intellectuals in North Korea.

This approach is palpable in Scalapino and Lee's *Communism in Korea,* where the dramatic events of 1955 are largely presented as a struggle between those who supported the "shift from Stalinism" and the die-hard adherents of Stalinist orthodoxy.[45] Scalapino and Lee represent Yim Hwa's purge as punishment for "expressing his feeling in a manner different from what the state desired" and for "writing in stark, realistic terms about the misery and suffering brought on by the Korean War".[46]

Only a handful of scholars disagree with this dominant view, and it is worth mentioning them here. First, it is Brian Myers who, arguing with Scalapino and Lee about their explanation of the purges of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, reminds us of the blatant double standards in the North Korean literary bureaucracy as well as about the fact that Yim Hwa was no aesthete, but a rather conventional if gifted propagandist.[47] Next I should mention the South Korean scholar Pak T'ae-sang, whose vision of the North Korean literary situation differs partially from the common approach of other contemporary South Korean scholars. In his two books *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏngsang (The Situation in North Korean Literature)*[48] and *Pukhan munhak-ŭi tonghyang (Tendencies in North Korean Literature),*[49] Pak connects the purges of 1953-1956 in which prominent writers such as Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun, Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, Yi Wŏn-jo, etc were involved, not with their supposed deviations from the official line of "socialist realism", but, primarily, with the sectarian clashes in the political sphere and the "struggle of inner powers" in Pyongyang officialdom – a vision which all the above-cited South Korean scholars describe as an "oversimplification" of the question. However, referring to the later purges on the North Korean political scene, even Pak T'ae-san tends to take at face value Pyongyang's official statements. The purges of An Mak, Sŏ Man-il, and Yun Tu-hŏn are explained by the alleged ideological incompatibility of these writers with the Ch'ŏllima movement[50] and

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[45] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 493-494.

[46] Ibid., 890.

[47] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 82

[48] Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏnsang* [The Situation in North Korean Literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1999.

[49] Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi tonghyang* [Tendencies in North Korean Literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 2002.

[50] Ch'ŏllima was a major mass mobization campaign, launched in 1957. The workers were encouraged to work hard, to do their utmost to achieve high (and often unrealistic) production targets.

political line of Kim Il Sung after 1958.[51] The cases of Pak P'ar-yang and Han Sŏr-ya, who were officially accused in 1963 of "revisionism" and "factionalism"[52], Pak T'ae-san attributes to the "insufficient co-operation" of these authors with the official ideological course of Kim Il Sung.[53]

Yi Ki-pong in his book *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin (North Korean Men of Literature and the Arts)*[54] holds a more unambiguous opinion: for him, there were no principle differences whatsoever between the winners and losers of these campaigns. The very campaigns constituted nothing more than a simple prolongation of clashes between factional interests in the top political world. In general, Yi Ki-pong's vision of the purges and political campaigns coincides with the opinion of the defector Yi Ch'ol-ju in his above-mentioned book *North Korean Artists.*

Approach

An extensive study of the available material leads me to advance a hypothesis, which I will try to test in this thesis. I would suggest that both orthodox and "ideologically incorrect" literature in North Korea belonged equally to the realm of socialist realism, and that the alleged ideological violations or political deviations of this doctrine have never taken place. To clarify this issue I would like to dwell on the actual meaning of the "socialist realism" doctrine.

What is socialist realism?

The literary doctrine of "socialist realism", authored by Stalin himself in 1932 as the only possible "creative method"[55], was deemed to be obligatory for all aspiring writers in the USSR and eventually in the other countries of the socialist block until the collapse of the Communist system in the late 1980s. The very name of this doctrine implies the depiction of reality from a socialist point of view. But what it was supposed to mean remained unspecified, since, as George Bisztray has noted, "the classics of Marxism-Leninism hardly established any homogeneous aesthetic tradition".[56] If we look at the variety of official Soviet definitions of socialist realism in historical perspective, we will notice obvious inconsistencies between their demands. These official interpretations are vague, elusive and prone to almost unlimited variations under the pressure of the current political circumstances. Let's have a brief look at these diverse definitions.

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[51] Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi hyŏnsang* , 209

[52] Kim Yun-sik. *Pukhan munhaksaron*, 100.

[53] Pak T'ae-sang, *Pukhan munhak-ŭi tonghyang*, 163.

[54] Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin.*

[55] E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo* [Stalin: Power and the arts], Moscow: Pespublika, 1998, 157.

[56] George Bisztray, *Marxist Models of Literary Realism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, 48.

When referring to socialist realism, scholars, as a rule, resort to the first official interpretation of this term given in August 1934 at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers which formulated the idea as follows: "Socialist realism is the main method of Soviet literature and [literary] criticism. It demands a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. These qualities must be achieved through the ideological reformation of all the working people, nurturing them in the spirit of socialism".[57]

It is difficult to overlook the fact that the obligatory tasks of "ideological reformation of all the working people" and "nurturing them in the spirit of socialism" makes the first part of this definition, namely the "truthful depiction of the reality" practically irrelevant. In fact, the definition prescribes a political mission which every writer, despite the difference in his/her visions of "truthful reality", are obliged to join. The "truth" is set and is not to be discovered or discussed.

In 1948 *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia (The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia)* describes Soviet socialist realist literature as follows: "Soviet literature is the freest literature in the world because it depends on neither class interests, nor racial exclusiveness. It serves the Soviet people and Soviet State freely and naturally. A deep knowledge of the laws of historical development of society, a devotion to the people, to the Communist party and to socialist society makes the writer really free"[58]. As we can see, the necessary devotion to the Communist Party and socialist society is declared to be the primary condition of "real freedom" for a Soviet writer. Indeed, a writer is not supposed to depend on "class interest" when "class" means to be bourgeois, but his devotion to the lower classes, or "people" is presupposed. The *Encyclopaedia* cites the characteristic words of A. Zhdanov, then the chief Soviet ideologist, who at the First Congress of Soviet Writers called socialist realist literature "the most ideological, the most advanced, the most revolutionary literature"[59].

The following definition of a typical positive socialist realist hero, as discussed in the 1948 *Encyclopaedia*, proves that the permissible artistic methods and imagery at a Soviet writer's disposal were, indeed, limited. The positive hero of this literature had to be endowed with such qualities as "... a sense of socialist duty, love of one's native land, [and] a selfless readiness to devote one's life to the cause of Communism".[60] In a good heroic image a writer was also obliged to "reproduce the people's life"; his protagonist "should not be limited by the confines of personal feelings"[61]. The Encyclopaedia concludes the topic with the characteristic words of Mikhail Kalinin, the

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[57] *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskih pisatelei,1934. Stenographicheskii otchet. Prilozheniia* [The First Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. Stenographic Record. Appendix]," Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990, 24.

[58] *Bolshaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopediia* [Great Soviet Encyclopaedia], Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1948, Vol. "Sovetskii Soiuz.": 1472.

[59] Ibid., 1472.

[60] Ibid., 1474.

[61] Ibid., 1475.

prominent Soviet politician of Stalin era: "A socialist realist must depict reality, living reality without embellishment. But he must also inspire the development of human thought".[62]

As we can see, the definitions of socialist realism given in Stalinist times steered a writer in an austere, militant direction. He/she was supposed to depict life "realistically", "without embellishment" (which, however, did not mean without proper ideological decoration lest it sounded not "inspirational" enough); a "typical hero" should be a zealous fighter for the revolutionary cause of Communism and not indulge in personal dilemmas.

However, in the definition of socialist realism given in 1957 in a new edition of the *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* the rigid Stalinist formulations of the earlier period are substituted with more "human" images: "The literature of socialist realism combines sobriety and romanticism, reality and flights of fancy into the future. Revolutionary ideas are the soil for revolutionary romanticism".[63] As the major principles of socialist realism the new encyclopaedia names "historical optimism", "party spirit", "popular spirit", and "socialist humanism".[64]

It is easy to notice that the new definition reflected radical changes in the Soviet political atmosphere after Stalin's death. Khruschev's reforms of Soviet society vitalised the society and ushered in a renaissance of the romanticisation of the Communist ideology, akin to the perspective of the early years following the 1917 Revolution. References to "humanism" and "romanticism", even if they were spiced with remarks about "revolution" and the "party", were the hallmarks of this new, more relaxed cultural atmosphere of "thaw".

The tendency to a further "humanisation" of Communist ideas is seen in the definition of the *Malaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia (The Shorter Soviet Encyclopaedia)* in 1960, which reads: "The protagonist of our literature and art became the man of labour. He accepts his dependence on society like the necessity to struggle for the victory of Communism".[65] As we can see, the problem of personal freedom is discussed here. The authors tried to justify "the dependence on society" with the higher moral imperative of Communist faith, not to take it for granted, as was the case in Stalin's time. The definition also ascribes to socialist realist literature a "concrete historical approach to the "eternal" concepts of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery".[66] Stalin's epoch, as a rule, rejected "eternal" topics as "reactionary pure arts" attributes.

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[62] Ibid., 1465.

[63] *Bolshaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopediia* [Great Soviet Encyclopaedia], Moscow: Bolshaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1957, Vol. 40: 181.

[64] Ibid., 181.

[65] *Malaia Sovietskaia Entsiklopediia* [Shorter Soviet Encyclopaedia], Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1960, Vol. 8: 800-801.

[66] Ibid., 801.

The further trends to "humanise" the official Communist discourse are visible in the 1965 Nobel speech of Mikhail Sholokhov. This leading official Soviet writer at the time formulated the essence of socialist realism as follows: "I speak for the realism that bears the pathos of the renovation of life, the reconstruction of life in favour of Man. I speak, of course, of realism, which we call socialist realism now. It is original because it reflects a worldview which rejects both contemplation and alienation from reality. It propagates the struggle for the progress of mankind, it offers the opportunity to comprehend the goals dear to millions of people and to light up the pathway of struggle".[67] As we can see here, the Nobel Prize winner is trying to include socialist realism in a world-wide intellectual tradition. Unlike his predecessors of the 1930s or 1940s, Sholokhov does not proclaim the Soviet socialist realism to be "the most advanced literature" which aggressively demands "the ideological reformation of all working people, nurturing them in the spirit of socialism" – instead, he modestly speaks only of its appealing "originality". Neither "Party spirit" nor "class consciousness" are mentioned here – instead, the task of socialist realism is formulated as a struggle for the common "progress of mankind", for unspecified "goals dear to millions of people".

The formulation of socialist realism given in *Kratkaia Literaturnaia Entsiklopediya (A Short Encyclopaedia of Literature)* in 1972 reflects the new changes in Soviet society. It was the time when the renewed romantic perception of Communist ideas of the early 1960s started to wane and was soon to be replaced by thinly veiled cynicism towards official ideals. The new definition of socialist realism still exploits the standard image of "Party spirit", but surrounds it with verbose and ambiguous demagogy: "A conscious Party spirit, or the conscious assertion of ideas of progress, is becoming an integral part of socialist realism. The concept of party spirit manifests itself in different forms: as a conception of man, some features of whom are approved of or rejected; as a comprehension of the process of life, it's leading historical powers; as an estimation of the historical role of the people. To summarise, it takes the form of the means by which an author approaches his aesthetic goal. The Party spirit of his works is clarified and crystallised in the process of struggle for this goal, for its aesthetic assertion. Every time it is fresh and at times controversial, depending on the different historical situation and on the degree of penetration. The concept of party spirit does not mean at all a stiff, unchangeable, ready-made view of life's problems in a piece of art".[68] The difference with the first militant definitions of "socialist realism" is obvious here: the very declaration that the Party's ideas could be "sometimes controversial" or "depending on the different political situation" would inevitably lead an author to the GULAG in Stalin's time.

The Stalinist idea of "typicality" was also transformed beyond recognition: "A realistic depiction exposes the social life in its development, basing itself on not only

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[67] Mihail Sholokhov, "Rech' na vruchenii Nobelevskoi premii" [Nobel speech], *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1965, 14 December, 1.

[68] *Kratkaia Literaturnaia Entsiklopediia* [Short Encyclopaedia of Literature], Moscow: Sovetskaia ectsiklopediia, 1972, 97.

the dominant, but also the important trends of life".[69] Notice the ambivalence in the criteria, the somewhat uncertain intonation and a readiness to include practically any work inside the shabby old form of socialist realism.

The definition of socialist realism given in *Sovetskii Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' (The Soviet Encyclopaedic Dictionary)* in 1986 mirrored this further blurring of socialist realist criteria in the pre-Gorbachev USSR. This was a time when Communist ideas ceased to play any significant role in the Soviet mindset. The thinly disguised signs of social critique, easily discernable by astute Soviet readers, appeared more and more frequently in Soviet literature and became the principal measure of the popularity of a particular literary piece. Public interest also moved drastically in the direction of foreign literature, which was widely read in translation. However die-hard servants of the regime, the creators of the boring "industrial novels" or "Great War prose", still existed in Soviet literature. Yet even these "dinosaurs", well paid by the Writer's Union bureaucracy, did not raise the issue of Communism any more.

The watery definition of socialist realism given by the *Soviet Encyclopaedic Dictionary* in 1986 reflects this dubious and faltering state of Soviet "socialist realist" literature in its final years: "Socialist realism is an historically open system of artistic form. Its main principles are popular spirit, Party spirit and socialist humanism. Its aesthetic platform includes realistic origins, which depends on the depth of objective comprehension, and creative origins, or romanticism, or the pathos of the subjective activity of a creator.... Socialist realism is an aesthetic expression of a conscious socialist conception of the world and of man. It is a depiction of life in the light of socialist ideals".[70]

As we can see, the new definition contained passages which would be unthinkable in the 1960s, let alone the 1930s, such as "open system of artistic form", "the pathos of the subjective activity of a creator", etc. At the same time, it still included ideas and images from the old ritualistic propaganda such as "Party spirit" and "conscious socialist conception".

It is noteworthy that the range of the above-cited definitions proposes no common artistic conventions, canons or forms for socialist realism. All official demands in this respect are strikingly inconsistent. American scholar G. Bisztray remarked on the absence of practical artistic "criteria set for a socialist realist creative method".[71] The prominent Western scholar Katerina Clark in her book *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual*[72] made an attempt to figure out the literary conventions of Soviet socialist realism through the analysis of some of its "patristic texts" (Sholokhov, Fadeev, Furmanov, Ostrovsky, etc) and the extrapolation of the features of these texts to other

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[69] Ibid., 93-94.

[70] *Sovetskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* [Soviet Encyclopaedic Dictionary], 4th Edition. Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1986, 1251.

[71] George Bisztray, *Marxist Models of Literary Realism*, 45.

[72] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Soviet works. Clark's approach is, indeed, valuable and original. Nonetheless, for all its academic merits, it has its limitations.

To start with, under the banner "patristic texts" she includes "a core group of novels that are cited with sufficient regularity to be considered a canon". In Clark's opinion these books represented actual "obraztsy" ("exemplars"), which were supposed "to guide the writers in their future works".[73] Certainly the works which Clark perceives as exemplary were officially recognised and may even be extolled as works to follow and emulate. The problem was, however, that the status of official classic did not make those works real exemplars for colleagues in terms of literary conventions, just as the customary ritualistic calls of the Writers Union officials to the members of the Union "to learn from the classics of Russian literature" did not turn the poems of Pushkin into "patristic texts" of Soviet literature. As in every sphere of Soviet life, there was a considerable distance between the official slogans and real policy. For all the official calls to "learn from *Virgin Land*" it is difficult to find any real attempt to emulate the methods and conventions of Sholokhov's novel even in the literature of the 1930s, let alone in the texts of later eras.

The primary reason for this phenomenon was probably that the books which Katerina Clark defined as "patristic texts" presented poor material for emulation. In terms of literary conventions they did not constitute a stable and consistent canon. Different periods introduced different artistic constituents, and the Soviet literature of the 1930s in terms of aesthetic rules, differed from the literature of 1950s, not to mention the 1960s or the 1980s; the features of the "master plot" or prototypical heroes which Clark found in the texts of Furmanov or Gorky, even if they could feature in some contemporary literature, were hardly relevant to the later socialist realist works. For example, Gorky's favourite theme of eternal struggle or Ostrovsky's straightforward eulogies to the "imminent era of Communism", had they appeared in even the most orthodox pieces of Soviet "socialist realism" of the 1960s-70s, would have raised a smile at best. Though established Soviet writers routinely paid lip-service to the "great epics" of the Civil War written by Fadeev or Furmanov, none of them actually used these novels as practical guides for the depiction of the "Great Patriotic War" in later periods.

Secondly, even within a single historical period, the patristic texts were not artistically congruent with each other. The "spontaneity-consciousness dialectic" which Katerina Clark suggests as an inseparable part of the socialist realist "master plot", while traceable in the works of Fadeev or Ostrovsky, hardly existed in the works of such a profoundly Stalinist and decorated writer as Vera Panova with her plain domestic motives, for example. The exemplary works of Sholokhov *(Quiet Flows the Don* (1928-1940), *Virgin Land* (1931-1960)), were characterised by a degree of sensuality which was incomparable to other similarly "patristic" works such as the classic texts of Furmanov, Fadeev or Ostrovskii. Thus, with all their variety and mutual inconsistency the "patristic texts" hardly offered any general literary conventions or artistic patterns of socialist realist literature.

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[73] Ibid., 4, 261-263.

Speaking of literary conventions of socialist realism, G. Lukacs suggested that in terms of form, socialist realism rejected modernism and followed the steps of the bourgeois novel, since "socialist realism required new content, but not new forms".[74] Agreeing with this point, I would like to stress that it did not always mean an absolute denial of the new forms, as the Soviet practice proves. The verses of the definitely "patristic" Soviet poet Maiakovskii or the much-praised Robert Rozhdestvensky contained many experiments in form, while the works of their other prominent colleagues in socialist realism remained more traditional.

In my opinion, in order to comprehend socialist realism we should not approach this doctrine in terms of common literary conventions or artistic forms at all. This literature was unified by another common principle which was formulated long before the appearance of the term, in the article of V. Lenin "Party Organisation and Party Literature" ("Partiinaia organizatsiia i partiinaia literatura") (1905). In this article, which later was extolled as the theoretical foundation of the Communist literary policy in the USSR, the future leader of Soviet Russia formulated his vision of literature in a quite unequivocal way:

"Literature… cannot be an individual undertaking…. Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work."[75]

As we can see, Lenin boldly defined the primary function of literature as "a cog and a screw", i.e. an ideological tool under Party leadership.

This demand of Lenin for literature to serve the current Party's needs as a didactic and propagandistic tool was reflected in the speech of Andrei Zhdanov at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. The prominent Party official candidly claimed that socialist realist literature (which he claimed was the "most advanced and richest in the whole world") needed no new specific forms – it could borrow them from previous epochs. The main, really novel thing about this literature was that it was supposed to be "consciously tendentious" and depict "correct" protagonists.[76] Though in Western intellectual circles Zhdanov's speech was later rebuked as too narrow-minded and theoretically unpolished, in fact it expressed the major point of socialist realism clearer than the work of any sophisticated literary theorist. Indeed, Lenin's idea of the transformation of literature into a handmaiden of the ruling ideology was fully realised in the first Communist state and became a cornerstone of the theory and practice of the "socialist realist" doctrine elsewhere. If we look again at the official definitions of socialist realism we can easily notice that despite disagreements about

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[74] Georg Lukacs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, London: Merlin Press, 1962, 17-47, 93-137; Raman Selden, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature*, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1989, 158-163.

[75] V.I. Lenin, "Party Organisation and Party Literature", in *Collected Works*, Moscow: Foreign languages publishing house, 1962, Vol.10: 45.

[76] Cited in the work by George Bitztray, *Marxist Models of Literary Realism*, 43-45.

artistic form and canons, they all demonstrate a consistent and transparent ambition of Communist power to hold literary matters under strict control and to make literature serve the current and ever-changing demands of the regime. I am inclined to agree with the definition of socialist realism given by American scholar Marshal Pihl in his article "Engineers of the human soul: North Korean literature today": "The doctrine of socialist realism, a Soviet aesthetic canon, holds that literature may not be a simple "realistic" or "naturalistic" reproduction of life but must describe reality as the party defines it".[77] I would simply add – as the Party defines reality in *a particular historical moment*. The "patristic texts" of Soviet literature perfectly demonstrate this quality. Be they Fadeev's romantic sagas about the Civil War, Sholokhov's sensual depictions of life in a reforming village, Panova's simple domestic tales, or the faceless "industrial novels" of the 1970s-1980s, all of these texts show the extraordinary ability of their authors to sense the contemporary political needs and force the complicated reality of Soviet life into the narrow confines of the current political demands. This was the primary feature which rendered these texts socialist realist classics. And in this particular respect, these novels were, indeed, exemplars for the average Soviet writer. In practice, the primary concern for Soviet writers was to choose the subject carefully, and this certainly overrode concerns about artistic method or imagery. This general aspiration of the Soviet intellectual world was maintained by a well-designed system of sticks-and-carrots which in the Soviet context took form of, to borrow E. Gromov's expression, "warrants and orders".

Thus, to my understanding, socialist realism is not about form – it is about content. Socialist realism is literature which is designed to serve the practical interests of a state ruled by a Leninist Party. So let us take a look at North Korean literature from this perspective.

Socialist realism in North Korea

As Scalapino and Lee put it, "it is extremely doubtful that Karl Marx, were he resurrected, would view the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a state drawn from his inspiration or as a true socialist society by his definition. Even Lenin would find it difficult to accept as legitimate certain cardinal elements of the prevailing creed and structure of Kim Il Sung's polity."[78] However, most would agree that the DPRK shares the vital qualities of a Communist state, such as a single Party structure, state ownership of industrial enterprises, a centrally planned economy, mass participation, elitist control, etc.[79] What we see in North Korea is still a state controlled by Marxism-Leninism but in a North Korean setting. While the ideology of this state is implemented in different ways and relies upon different myths it is still basically the same at its core.

The same can be said of North Korean literature which, following the Soviet pattern, developed a rudimentary understanding of "socialist realism". The basic social function of North Korean literature remained the same political and utilitarian one,

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[77] Marshal R. Pihl, "Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today", 77.

[78] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea,* 1296.

[79] Ibid., 1297.

similar to the functions of literatures of other states, which had embarked upon the Communist path. All recognised North Korean writers demonstrated an unquestionable loyalty to the current political climate, a complete readiness to fulfil openly propagandistic tasks defined by the Party and a total engagement in the political process of the North Korean Communist state.

In this regard, North Korean intellectuals even overrode their Soviet counterparts. While the Soviet authors of "patristic texts", such as Sholokhov, sometimes deviated from the obligatory political course and included ambiguities and contradictory sidelines in their writings, the North Korean literature of the 1940s and 1950s allowed for no such deviations. In my opinion, this was a reflection of the general atmosphere of North Korean society which, from the very beginning, appeared to be more regimented and rigidly controlled than the Soviet one—and even in some opinions than Maoist China.[80]

Indeed, as Brian Myers noted, in terms of artistic methods North Korean literature sometimes differed from the widely proclaimed Soviet "model" novels. Yet, these different North Korean artistic patterns served the same interests of the ruling Communist elite as Soviet literature did for the Soviet elite. The general paradigm of Pyongyang literature did not significantly deviate from the Soviet originals. The set of social idylls and the picture of the world in North Korean literature are strongly reminiscent of that of the Soviet prototype. The alterations, which were undertaken by the Pyongyang propagandists, represented, in fact, an adaptation of the Soviet models to the North Korean mentality, traditions and particular political circumstances.

For all these reasons I see no grounds for excluding North Korean literature from this literary-cum-political movement of "socialist realism".

Structure

The present thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the implantation of the patterns of "socialist realism" as a part of the broad Soviet influence in the first decade of the DPRK and the development of these patterns in later North Korean society.

The first steps of the North Korean literary policy were marked by the wholesale imitation of the Soviet Stalinist models of the era. This was an inseparable part of the established political pattern of the time—the implantation of the Soviet institutions into every sphere of Korean social, political and cultural life. As Scalapino and Lee noted, "...in cultural as well as in political terms, this was the Soviet era, with Russian literature, Russian movies, and the Russian language featured everywhere".[81]

However, one should not envisage this period one-dimensionally, as forcible Soviet cultural occupation. Certainly, the Soviet policymakers, while widely promoting their cultural and political patterns on North Korean soil, assumed that this tactic would

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[80] Ibid., 845.

[81] Ibid., 375.

guarantee stability in the North and ensure its subordinate position in the Soviet-led camp. However, the DPRK leader Kim Il Sung also had his own reasons to support a pro-Soviet course for the North Korean literary policy. Kim seemed to understand that Soviet literary patterns, necessarily imbued with Stalinist content, could equip the Korean intellectuals with guidelines until national standards in literature could be worked out. Aiming at the creation of a Stalinist society in Korea, Kim readily adopted Stalin's proven methods of handling intellectuals. For this reason during the first years of the Soviet occupation the North Korean never tired of stressing the importance of "learning from the Soviets". Even if he had any ethnocentric propensities at the time he did not reveal them.

In his 24 May 1946 speech at the "Meeting of Propagandists of the Provincial People's Committees, Political Parties and Social Organizations, Cultural Workers and Artists in North Korea", the DPRK leader described the Korean writers as "soldiers on the cultural front" (which was, in fact, a paraphrase of Stalin's idiom "engineers of the human soul" in his reference to Soviet writers), summoned them "to go to the masses" and particularly emphasized the need for the "absorption of the Soviet culture".[82] In 1955 Pak Chong-sik cited an even more forthright statement of the Great Leader which he had made in 1946: "We must keep in mind that **only** (TG's emphasis) through learning the progressive art and literature of the Soviet Union can we construct a glorious North Korean culture".[83]

For a while the Soviet influence was successfully conducted through various channels in the DPRK. However, in the mid-1950s the political perspectives of both states visibly diverged. While the new Soviet leadership was carefully moving towards de-Stalinization, Kim Il Sung opted for a much more restrictive version of state socialism. The DPRK leader strove to escape from Soviet control, and a nationalist rhetoric, even if sincerely believed by its producers, emerged as a useful political tool in this process.

The first signs of these coming changes appeared in a famous speech of Kim Il Sung delivered on 28 December 1955 at the conference of KWP agitators and propagandists. In this speech the Great Leader criticized Koreans for neglecting their own "glorious traditions" and the preponderance of all things "foreign", which in the North Korean context meant, of course, things Soviet. The Great Leader pointed out, for instance, that in Korean schools there are portraits of Pushkin and Maiakovskii, but no portrait of a Korean writer, so the would-be Great Leader righteously asked: "How

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[82] Kim Il Sung, "Munhwawa yesulŭn Inmin-ŭl wihan kŏsŭro toeŏya handa" [Literature and the Arts Must Serve People], in *Kim Ilsŏng sŏnjip* [Kim Il Sung's Selected Works]. Pyongyang, 1955 1: 96-104. As quoted in: B. Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature,* 43.

[83] Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ-ŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang" [The Influence of Soviet Literature in Korean Literature], in *Haebanghu 10 nyŏngan-ŭi chosŏn munhak* [Korean Literature During the First Decade After Liberation], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1955, 417. No such statement was found in the available publications of Kim Il Sung's works. The remarks were most probably deleted from the later editions when relations with the USSR turned sour in the late 1950s.

can our children learn about national pride?" [84] The speech announced the end of the Soviet era in North Korean culture.

The post-1955 growing rift with Moscow and the increasingly nationalist bias of North Korea's official ideology meant that the once glorified connections with Moscow and Soviet-originated cultural patterns were to be downplayed or denied. Nonetheless, a large number of stereotypes, which came to Korea in the late 1940s from the USSR, have survived the de-Russification and remained important parts of the North Korean literary traditions up to this day. Many Soviet socialist realist conventions were strengthened and readjusted to suit the new needs of the North Korean Stalinist state.

I will concentrate on two important and relatively understudied channels of the Soviet intellectual influence, which engulfed Korea in the 1940s and 1950s: the distribution of Soviet fiction in the nascent DPRK and "Ssoryŏn kihaenggi", or travelogues written by North Korean intellectuals who visited the Soviet Union in 1946-1955 as members of specially arranged official delegations.

Though the travelogues were supposed to be documentary reports, in fact these works created by prominent North Korean writers fit perfectly the prescriptions for socialist realism. These writings presented the DPRK intellectuals with one of their first exercises in political servility towards the new power, the first test of loyalty to the demands of their new regime, and North Korean writers passed this test with flying colours. Besides, the Soviet excursions of North Korean intellectuals in 1946-1955 had more far-reaching consequences for the future development of the socialist realist doctrine in the DPRK. Through the depiction of Soviet reality from a particular strict angle, these writings promoted certain models for the DPRK culture and set explicit patterns for North Korean fiction and poetry. In this respect, the travelogues greatly amplified the effect of the translated Soviet literature.

I will base my analysis of North Korean travelogues on the original versions of four books: Yi T'ae-jun's *Ssoryŏn kihaeng (A Trip to the Soviet Union)* (1947),[85] Yi Ki-yŏng's *Widaehan saenghwar-ŭl ch'angjohanŭn ssoryŏn (The USSR Creates a Great Life)* (1952)[86] and *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda (The Sun of Communism is Shining)* (1954)[87], and *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi (The Great Friendship) (*1954), which is a collection of the works of six North Korean writers (Min Pyŏng-kyun, Yi Puk-myŏng,

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[84] Kim Il Sung, *Sasang saŏp-esŏ kyojojuŭiwa hyŏngsikjuŭi-rŭl t'oejihago chuch'e-rŭl hwangnip hal te taehayŏ* [About the Eradication of Doctrinism and Formalism and the Establishment of Chuch'e], Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1960, 6.

[85] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng* [A Trip to the Soviet Union], Pyongyang: Pukchosŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1947.

[86] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Widaehan saenghwar-ŭl ch'angjohanŭn ssoryŏn* [The USSR Creates a Great Life], Pyongyang: Chosso munhwahyŏphoe, 1952.

[87] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda* [The Sun of Communism is Shining], Pyongyang: Chosso ch'ulp'ansa, 1954.

Yun Tu-hŏn, Hong Kŏn, Kang Hyo-sun, Kim Sŭn-sŏk) who visited the Soviet Union at different times.[88]

Through these texts I will trace the major images and patterns of Soviet "socialist realism", which were acquired by the North Korean propagandists in this period. In particular, I will concentrate on the Soviet pattern of the proper social place of a Communist writer, the Soviet cultural images and clichés, and the social idylls of the Soviet style. I will investigate how these patterns were introduced and ingrained into the North Korean discourse and how they were changed during the later decades.

The second chapter considers the activity of a "living source" of socialist realist promotion in North Korea – the Soviet Korean faction and in particular, the figure of the poet Cho Ki-ch'ŏn who became the founding father of North Korean literature.

One of the major influences on early North Korean politics was exercised by the Soviet Koreans who arrived in North Korea soon after Liberation. Most of them were trusted Soviet party members, often with a good education and useful experiences. Their task was to promote Communist ideas and assist the formation of various institutions of the nascent North Korean state that would be pro-Soviet if not completely Communist.[89]

Over the first decade of North Korean history, the Soviet Koreans held major positions in the North Korean establishment: according to Scalapino and Lee, in 1945-1951 "they occupied as many as two hundred key posts during this period".[90] The formation of North Korean literature and the arts as crucial propaganda tools of the Communist state was among the vital political missions entrusted to the Soviet Koreans.

Being people of Soviet upbringing and mentality, but with a strong sense of belonging to the Korean community and a good command of the Korean language, the Russianised Koreans exercised a profound influence on North Korean literary discourse in the late 1940s. To literature and the arts the Soviet Koreans brought new standards of political behaviour, new norms of interaction and, of course, new methods of creative work. A majority of the Soviet Koreans who dealt with literature and the arts were employed as political supervisors, officials in the ideological bureaucracy or as journalists in the official press (and here one should mention Ki Sŏk-pok, Chŏng Yul and Pak Ch'ang-ok in particular). Some of them, however, produced works of fiction and poetry themselves: Chŏng Ryul, Kang T'ae-su, Chŏng Tong-hyŏk, Yim Ha, Kim Il-yŏng and others are good examples of this phenomenon.[91] A particularly crucial impact on the nascent intellectual world of North Korea was made by the Soviet

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[88] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi (Ssoryŏn kihaengjip)* [The Great Friendship (Travels to the USSR)], Pyongyang: Choson chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1954.

[89] Regarding Soviet Koreans in the initial period of the DPRK, see Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, the Formation of North Korea 1945-1960*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 110-135.

[90] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 383.

[91] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

Koreans who worked at the *Chosŏn sinmun* newspaper which was published by the Soviet military in Korea. These Soviet writers and literary-ideological bureaucrats maintained close connections with the then powerful "Soviet faction" in the North Korean leadership. In the late 1940s this was a powerful political group and its sponsorship as well as open support of the Soviet authorities greatly contributed to the rise of the Soviet Korean authors to prominence in the North. However, the very same connections which made them so powerful in the late 1940s eventually led to their dramatic demise in the mid-1950s when Kim Il Sung began to distance himself from his former sponsors in Moscow. Most of these people either disappeared in purges or fled Korea for Russia. Their exploits did not win much official recognition after the mid-1950s. Nonetheless, they were instrumental in introducing the conventions of socialist realism and Stalinist literary politics to the DPRK.

Of all the Soviet Koreans who dealt in any way with the affairs of literature and culture, one person held a special place. This was Cho Ki-ch'ŏn (1913-1951), the Soviet Korean who is often perceived as a founding father of North Korean poetry. This chapter will largely deal with this remarkable figure and his impact on the North Korean literary politics of the late 1940s and early 1950s. I have tried to filter out from his figure various common scholarly misconceptions, add some previously unknown data regarding his life and activity and reflect on Cho's impact and legacy on North Korean socialist realism.

The third and fourth chapters of the thesis analyse the lives and activities of two representative personalities of the nascent North Korean literary world, Yi Ki-yŏng and Yi T'ae-jun, within the political context of the era. The fates of both writers colourfully illustrate the primary political implications of North Korean "socialist realism".

Even a cursory glance at the North Korean literary magazines published in 1945-1960 confirms that the Pyongyang literary pantheon was changing constantly. In the maelstrom of purges and personal clashes that engulfed the North Korean literary world in those years, numerous figures emerged and reached great prominence only to disappear after a few short years. The most prominent literary officials and prolific writers such as Yim Hwa, Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, An Mak, Song Yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, Ch'oe Myŏng-ik or Sŏ Man-il, whose positions at first appeared unassailable, shared a common and tragic fate. Only a few intellectuals could survive the political turmoil of the formative years of North Korean regime, and Yi Ki-yŏng (1895-1984) was certainly one of those few.

His career would appear exceptional. Entering Pyongyang's literary world in 1945 as a well-known leftist writer (his major pre-Liberation novel *Native Land (Kohyang)* (1933-34) was the only bestseller ever produced by a KAPF writer[92] and had been republished in Korea five times before Liberation[93]) Yi Ki-yŏng was soon transformed into a "founding father of Korean proletarian literature", a respected standing which he retained to the end of his life in 1982. His administrative career in

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[92] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 28.

[93] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 44.

North Korea was consistently successful. During his 35 years spent in the office of Chairman of the Central Committee of the North Korean-Soviet Friendship Society and other important official positions, Yi Ki-yŏng enjoyed material well-being, entertaining trips overseas, free and superior Soviet sanatoriums, high quality medical services and other privileges which corresponded to his high official status.[94] Yi's professional ambitions appear to have been satisfied as well. Not only were his novels, which were written after Liberation, printed in numerous copies and met with a eulogizing chorus of North Korean critics, but also his pre-1945 works were also constantly republished and lauded as the first major *oeuvre* of Korean socialist realism. In this regard they were not unlike Gorky's *Mother* which, while written well before the Communist Revolution of 1917, was included in the Stalinist "socialist realism" canon as its earliest "exemplary work". Up to the present day, Yi Ki-yŏng's works have constituted the core of the North Korean literary canon and are still included in textbooks in North Korea.[95] Thus, for all practical purposes, Yi Ki-yŏng represented an example of consummate success in the North Korean literary world.

On the other hand, the fate of Yi T'ae-jun (1904 - after 1969?) appeared quite the opposite. A bright literary talent whose pre-Liberation popularity was unquestioned, Yi T'ae-jun in 1946 willingly went to the North in order to partake in the creation of a "new and happy life" and turned his pen to the service of the nascent Communist regime as yet another "soldier on the cultural front". However, unlike his successful colleague Yi Ki-yŏng, Yi T'ae-jun failed to adjust to the political reality of the North Korean literary world and was purged and anathematized by the very regime he so fervently eulogized. Thus, his North Korean activity represented a quintessential case of "failure" in the Pyongyang literary/bureaucratic environment.

The logical explanation of Yi Ki-yŏng and Yi T'ae-jun's rise or fall respectively would be the compatibility/incompatibility of the writers with the Communist ideology and the domineering principles of "socialist realism", or the "orthodox"/"heretic" natures of their literary and social activities. This explanation would appear even more reasonable given the pre-Liberation circumstances of the writers. While Yi Ki-yŏng belonged to the so-called "proletarian literature camp", Yi T'ae-jun positioned himself as a devotee of "pure art". However, a comparative analysis of the pre-Liberation works of Yi Ki-yŏng and Yi T'ae-jun clearly demonstrates that the actual ideological differences between Yi Ki-yŏng's KAPF works and the allegedly "pure" writings of Yi T'ae-jun were surprisingly small, no matter what both sides claimed about themselves and their opponents. On the one hand, Yi Ki-yŏng could hardly serve as a homogeneous example of Communist orthodoxy. Like the other representatives of

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[94] According to Sŏng Hye-rang, a sister of Yi Ki-yŏng's daughter-in-law, in 1950s Yi Ki-yŏng's house was "the richest in Pyongyang". The author explains this by the privileged position Yi Ki-yŏng enjoyed as the most prominent writer of the DPRK, his chairmanship of the Soviet-Korean Friendship Society and his frequent visits to the Soviet Union which gave him access to much- coveted foreign luxury items. (See: Sŏng Hye-rang, *Tŭngnamu chip* [A House Covered with Wisteria], Seoul: Chisik nara, 2000, 362).

[95] For example, see: *Chosŏn munhaksa* [The History of North Korean Literature], Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1994, Vol.10 "Haebanghu p'yŏn" [After Liberation]: 139-158.

"proletarian literature" of Korea, he was much less "proletarian" or Marxist than was claimed. On the other hand, a closer investigation of Yi T'ae-jun's case confirms that the "pure literature" which he was supposed to represent was not completely divorced from social concerns and political questions. While neither can be described as thoroughly Marxist, often it is not clear whose works adhere more closely to the leftist perspective – the supposedly "proletarian" writings of Yi Ki-yŏng or the "purist" prose of Yi T'ae-jun.

As for the post-Liberation activity of the two, both Yi Ki-yong and Yi T'ae-jun proved to be perfect "soldiers on the cultural front". The works they produced coincided equally with the announced Party demands. However, the relationships of the writers with the contemporary North Korean literary bureaucracy were remarkably different, and my understanding is that this was the primary factor which determined the so vastly different fates of Yi Ki-yŏng and Yi T'ae-jun.

In the relevant chapters I will undertake a comparative analysis of these both figures in terms of their belonging to the "socialist realist camp", investigate their experiences, worldviews and works, scrutinize the reasons for their rise/fall and examine their legacy for the development of North Korean literature.

The fifth chapter of the thesis is devoted to the political campaigns of 1945-1955 and the role of the North Korean critics in them. Though it was implied that the pursuit of "ideological purity" of North Korean "socialist realism" was the major goal of these campaigns, in fact these campaigns were expressions of a specific political phenomenon in the North Korean literary world: clashes between competing factions which North Korean intellectuals had created in alliance with particular Party leaders and their coteries. These blocs of writers mostly represented extensions of the factions active within the Party's top leadership.[96] These clashes were exacerbated by the personal rivalries, mutual animosity and long-standing envy among North Korean writers.

Since the late 1940s, three main groups struggled for domination in the North Korean literary scene. The first one included former members of the KAPF (Yi Ki-yŏng, Song Yŏng, Pak Se-yŏng etc) and some litterateurs of North Korean origin (Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, Han Hyo etc). This group was led by Han Sŏr-ya, who relied upon Kim Il Sung and the so-called "Guerrilla faction" for support. Then, there was the Soviet Korean faction headed by the vice-chairman of the NKFLA Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and included Soviet Koreans and a few other writers such as Yi T'ae-jun. They centered around the Ministry of Propaganda and the newspaper *Nodong sinmun*, which was dominated by Soviet Koreans. This group enjoyed the support of highly positioned Soviet-Korean officials such as vice-premier Ho Ka-i and Pak Ch'ang-ok, the then chairman of the Central Committee's Propaganda and Agitation Department. The third faction included intellectuals belonging to the South Korean Workers Party, or Domestic Communists. This group of writers was led by Yim Hwa and was actively

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[96] About factional struggle in the DPRK see: Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung,* 77-154.

supported by Pak Hŏng-yŏng, the leader of the South Korean underground.[97] This party of Southerners (Domestic), being less numerous and influential, tended to cooperate with the Soviet Koreans against the ex-KAPF members, who were the strongest of the three.[98]

Every faction deemed itself the sole legitimate representative of the Korean Communist literary tradition, pushing forward their real or imagined exclusive attributes. Ex-KAPF members posed as the ultimate and heroic bearers of the Korean revolutionary literary tradition, while doing their best to downplay their rivals as "outsiders" (the Soviet Koreans) or "traitors to the revolutionary cause" (the Southerners, most of whom had collaborated with the colonial regime in the early 1940s). It did not matter that Han Sŏr-ya came to the KAPF much later than the actual founding father of the organization, the Southerner Yim Hwa or that during the mass apostasy of the colonial period, the KAPF's members demonstrated no more visceral fortitude than Kim Nam-ch'ŏn (in fact, under the colonial authorities' pressure "by 1940 all KAPF veterans had renounced the revolutionary cause").[99]

The other faction, the Soviet Koreans, emphasized their Soviet Russian origin. Indeed, their Soviet roots and experiences gave them an actual advantage over their "indigenous" colleagues. Most of the Soviet Koreans were graduates of Russian universities and enjoyed a higher educational level and broader intellectual horizons than their North Korean fellows. In Korea, with its ingrained Confucian respect for education, this was immensely important, and the Soviet Koreans used this advantage in the factional struggles. They strove to position themselves as the only true bearers of the sacred knowledge of "real Communism" and thus the only legitimate arbiters of what was right or wrong in the North Korean arts and literature.[100]

As for the Southerners, their leader Yim Hwa, who enjoyed his standing as a talented and popular Communist poet and critic, strove to gather the young intellectuals around him, while deriding his old enemy Han Sŏr-ya for an obvious lack of artistic achievement.[101] Yim's reputation as a prominent poet and critic was, indeed, unquestioned – to the extent that Han Hyo, a critic who belonged to Han's faction and a relative of Han Sŏr-ya, felt compelled to plagiarize Yim's *History of Korean Literature*.[102]

These groups competed for political influence and privileges, and ostensibly literary discussions became their major weapon. Their obedience to their superiors and impertinence towards their opponents were complemented by the inclusion of the

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[97] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan*, 104-105.

[98] For some reason the Chinese Communists faction, which was quite powerful in Pyongyang politics and included a number of renowned intellectuals (like Kim Tu-bong, the titular head of state in the DPRK), was not represented in literary sphere.

[99] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 29.

[100] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[101] Yi Ch'ŏl-ju, *Puk-ŭi yesurin*, 22-24.

[102] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan,* 114.

pragmatic interests of the faction for which the critics stood, and thus their own practical interests. Long-term mutual animosity was released to wage the ugly sectarian warfare.

In conclusion I will summarise the major findings of my study and compare the Soviet and North Korean "socialist realisms" in terms of their commonalities and differences.

Chapter 1

SOVIET MODELS AND THE FIRST STEPS OF SOCIALIST REALISM IN NORTH KOREA

Soviet Literature in Korea

One of the reasons why the Soviet literary patterns were quickly and successfully introduced in the North Korean intellectual world during the "Soviet era" was the fact that they were not completely alien to the indigenous Korean intellectual atmosphere. The early Soviet literature was relatively well known in pre-Liberation Korea where it enjoyed a measure of popularity among educated Korean readers. This popularity owed much to the authority of its predecessor, the classic Russian literature which began to spread into Korea from the 1890s and in the colonial period came to be widely admired by educated Koreans.[103] Many scholars believe that the perception of Russian literature by Korean readers differed from that of the Western public: Korean readers proved to be more receptive to the moralising aspects of Russian literature,[104] rather than to its aesthetic or emotional aspects. For instance, Koreans remained largely indifferent to Tolstoy's novels *Anna Karenina*, or *War and Peace,* which won world-wide acclaim, but were greatly impressed by Tolstoy's religious and moralistic treatises which had very limited popularity among the Western readership. [105] Korean intellectuals, influenced by the Confucian traditions, searched for useful social recipes in literature, and Russian fiction, according to its own long-standing tradition of preaching at, rather than entertaining the reader, usually satisfied their aspirations.

Soviet literature was also viewed largely through this prism. When the Korean reading public first became acquainted with the writings of Maxim Gorky, Korean leftist intellectuals perceived them primarily as persuasive didactic materials, and for that reason, the founding father of Soviet "socialist realism" gained extreme popularity among Korean intellectuals.[106] Gorky, a life-long Communist sympathizer, not only contributed to the leftward drift of the Korean intellectual world, but also influenced the artistic methods and writing style of Korean literature. It is notable that in Gorky's writing style the Korean intellectuals were impressed by the very traits which many contemporary Russian critics ridiculed, including an exuberance of sentimentality, over-romanticising, etc. Gorky's exultant writing technique and his images of

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[103] Mun Sŏk-u, "Rŏsia sasiljŭi munhak-ŭi suyong-kwa kŭ hakmunjŏk pyŏnyong, Torŭsŭtoi chungsim-ŭro" [The Borrowing of Russian Realism and Its Adaptation to Korea, With Special Emphasis on Tolstoy], in Yi Poyŏng, Chin Sang-pop et al. (eds.), *Hangukmunhak sokŭi segye munhak* [World literature in Korean literature]. Seoul: Kyujanggak, 1998, 214.

[104] See Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 16; V. I. Ivanova, *Novaia proza Korei* [The New Prose of Korea], Moscow: Nauka, 1987, 133-152; Mun Sŏk-u, "Rŏsia sasiljŭi munhak-ŭi suyong-kwa kŭ hakmunjŏk pyŏnyong, Tolŭsŭtoi chungsim-ŭro", 214

[105] V. I. Ivanova, *Novaia prosa Korei,* 133-152.

[106] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree (1945-1955)", 187.

extravagant paupers rebelling against authority and society particularly affected the "new tendency" literature and the KAPF in Korea. For example, the "new tendency" poet Yi Sang-hwa used the storm as a symbol of total rejuvenation in his "Yearning for Storm" ("P'okp'ung-ŭl kidarinŭn maŭm"),[107] a clear allusion to Gorky's "Song of the Stormy Petrel"("Pesnia o burevestnike").[108] The effect of Gorky was especially palpable in the works of the "pillar of Korean socialist realism" Yi Ki-yŏng which will be analysed in the third chapter of the present thesis. It is also worth noting that Gorky's influence touched even those unsympathetic to Marxism.[109] In a sense, the writer was transformed into an artistic icon and a kind of guru, or "life teacher" in the Korea of the 1920s and 1930s[110]. His prestige also remained high in the following decades, despite all the changes in the political situation. Ch'ŏe Sŏ-hae, after the publication of his "Diary of Escape" ("T'alch'ulgi") which was written in 1925 and contained themes of spontaneous revolt and struggle which invoked clear associations with Gorky's earlier works, received the allegedly flattering nickname of the "Korean Gorky". This fact was referred to in a completely positive sense in a South Korean book published in 1978, at the height of the anti-Communist hysteria in the ROK.[111]

According to *Chronology of the History of Korean Literature (Chosŏn munhaksa nyŏndaep'yo),* Gorky was the only Soviet writer whose two short stories had been translated into Korean before Liberation.[112] However, Gorky was not the only Soviet author known to the intellectuals of pre-Liberation Korea; contemporary Soviet fiction was also available in Japanese translations (since by the 1930s virtually every educated Korean read Japanese fluently). V.I. Ivanova, citing a survey undertaken by "Munhak kŏnsŏl" magazine in 1932, claims a number of Soviet writers were known and popular in Korea. These included Serafimovitch, Sholokhov, Fadeev, Gladkov, Esenin, Bednyi and Maiakovskii amongst others.[113]

In the "Soviet era", i.e. in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the number of Soviet books disseminated in North Korea in Korean translation increased dramatically.[114]

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[107] Yi Sang-hwa, "P'okp'ung-ŭl kidarinŭn maŭm" [Yearning for the Storm], Retrieved from http://www2.knu.ac.kr/~psy/kyngsim/space/exhibit/lee_sw/lsw_frm.htm.

[108] Maxim Gorky, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v treh tomah* [Selected Works in Three Volumes], Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951, Vol. 1: 408-409.

[109] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 16.

[110] About the particular influence of Gorky on Korean literature, read Mun Sŏk-u, "Tturŭgenep'ŭwa Korikki Munhak-ŭi kyŏngu" [Cases of Turgenev and Gorky], in Yi Poyŏng, Chin Sang-pop et al. (eds.), *Hangukmunhak sokŭi segye munhak* [World Literature in Korean Literature], Seoul: Kyujanggak, 1998, 293-335.

[111] Ch'u C'hŏn and Ku An-hwan, *Hanguk myŏgjak tanp'yŏn sosŏl* [Famous Korean Short Stories], Seoul: Chiphyŏnjŏn, 1978, Vol.1: 240.

[112] *Chosŏn munhaksa nyŏndaep'yo* [Chronology of the History of North Korean Literature], Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1957, 82, 84.

[113] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree (1945-1955)", 187.

[114] As the main channels for spreading Soviet cultural influence Charles Armstrong names the Soviet Information Bureau, the international book agency Mezhdunarodnaia kniga (which

The precise number remains unclear since the DPRK never published a complete national bibliography. However, Pak Chong-sik in 1955 declares that "hundreds of titles" of Soviet books had been published in North Korea.[115] V.I. Ivanova mentioned that in 1945-1950 "overall seventy titles of Soviet and Russian writers have been translated in Korean and distributed in the DPRK"[116] and that the Soviet translations "outnumbered the works created by Korean authors" during the same period.[117] As for the total figure of all translated Soviet books which appeared in North Korea in 1945-1954, Ivanova quoted an official speech of Yi Ki-yŏng's giving a figure of 8 million copies.

These Soviet texts naturally assumed the role of a guide for North Korean intellectuals in the confusing new world. However, as we have already mentioned, this role was sanctioned and reinforced by the political authorities. The leading North Korean writers fervently supported Kim Il Sung's call for the "absorption of the progressive Soviet culture". In the inaugural issue of the *Munhwa chŏnsŏn* (*Literary Front* – probably, a deliberate allusion to Kim Il Sung's speech) magazine in July 1946, Han Sŏr-ya, the earliest eulogist of Kim Il Sung, published an article entitled "Kukche munhwa-ŭi kyoryu-e taehayŏ" ("On International Cultural Exchange")[118] where he stated that the Korean literature lagged behind that of the "great Soviet Union" and exhorted his colleagues to emulate the Soviet patterns by all means possible in order to produce a "Korean Gorky" some day.[119] Literary magazines of the time strove to particularise the "absorption" trend through popularising Soviet models and patterns. If we look, for example, at the leading literary magazine *Munhak yesul (Literature and Art)* in 1949, we will notice that the lion's share of the publication is devoted either to direct translations of Soviet literary pieces and Soviet literary critical materials or to articles on Soviet literature, art and drama, or to lectures on the Soviet way of life. The very titles of Korean critical articles of the time illustrate this tendency: Ko Il-hwan: "The Influence of Soviet Literature and the Successes of Our Own Literature", Chu

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distributed Soviet books and journals in Korean translation), the Soviet news agency TASS and Sovexportfilm, a branch of the Cinema Ministry (See Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution 1945-1950*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003, 171). However, we have reason to believe that Mezhdunarodnaia kniga was not the only channel for the distribution of Soviet literature in Pyongyang. In all probability, the North Korean state had its own channels. If we look at the numerous Korean translations of Soviet texts which are now kept in the collection of the Russian State Library, it is easy to note that the lion's share of these books were translated and published by Korean publishing houses such as Pyongyang kungnip ch'ulp'ansa, Kungnip tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, Minju ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, Pyongyang Chosso ch'ulp'ansa, Kyoyuksŏng p'yŏnch'an kwanliguk, Minju ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, Nodongsinmunsa, Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, and others.

[115] Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ-ŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 435.

[116] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree' (1945-1955), 189.

[117] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree 40-50 godov", 129.

[118] The publication of this article was mentioned as a special event in *Chronology of the History of North Korean literature* (See: *Chosŏn munhaksa nyŏndaep'yo*, 105).

[119] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 45.

Yŏng-bo "Soviet Gilms Became the Living Textbooks for Our Film Production Industry", Sin Ko-song "What Can We Learn From Soviet Drama?" etc. [120] The leading North Korean critic An Ham-gwang defined the situation in contemporary literature in the following manner, "The Liberation of Korea has at last freed up the path for our assimilation of Soviet literature".[121]

At the time North Korean critics and writers obviously saw nothing abnormal in treating Soviet writers as "teachers" and their novels as "textbooks".[122] Indeed, Soviet literature with its artistic authority and superior understanding of state socialism presented them with a conventional set of themes and images to emulate. With no embarrassment, the North Korean writer Yi Puk-myŏng in the article "Let's Learn the Creative Methods of the Soviet Writers" ("Ssobet'ŭ chakkadŭl-ŭi ch'angjak pangbŏp-esŏ paeuja") described in detail how he "learned" from a particular novel by the Soviet writer Chakovski and called on his colleagues to do the same.[123] Analysing the North Korean literature in the period between 1945 and1955, and, in the first instance, the works of the more established North Korean writers, such as Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, Mun Pyŏng-gyun, Hwang Kŏn, Ch'ŏn Se-bong, Kim Cho-gyu, et al, the contemporary North Korean critic Pak Chong-sik admitted "...it is practically impossible to separate the achievements of these writers from the profound influence of Soviet literature".[124] As an indication of the vast scale of the Soviet influence on North Korean literature, one need only mention the fact that this topic was a hot academic issue in contemporary North Korean and Soviet scholarship. Numerous academics such as An Ham-gwang, Pak Chong-sik, V. Ivanova, E.M. Zsoi, A.N. Taen and V.N. Lee [125] devoted articles and dissertations to monitoring the traces of the Soviet "patristic texts"

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[120] Ko Il-hwan, "Sobet'ŭ munhak chakp'um-esŏ padŭn yŏnghyang-kwa uri munhak-ŭi sŏnggwa" [The Influence of Soviet Literature and the Successes of Our Literature], *Munhak yesul*, #10, 1949, 52-55; Chu Yŏng-bo, "Ssoryŏn yŏnghwanŭn uri yŏnghwachak-ŭi san kyojae-ga toenda" [Soviet Films Became the Living Textbooks for Our Film Production Industry], *Munhak yesul* #10, 1949, 55-59; Sin Ko-song, "Ssobet'ŭ yŏngŭk-esŏ uri-nŭn muŏs-ŭl paeunŭnga?" [What Can We Learn From Soviet Drama?], *Munhak yesul,* #10, 1949, 64-69.

[121] An Ham-gwang, *Chosŏn munhaksa* [Korean Literary History], Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1956, 346.

[122] Ibid., 346.

[123] Quoted in Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ-ŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 438.

[124] Ibid., 418.

[125] An Ham-gwang, *Chosŏn munhaksa*, 346-349; Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenia (formirovanie i stanovlenie sotsrealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena* [Contemporary Korean Literature After Liberation. The Formation and Development of Socialist Realism in Korean Literature – the Case of Yi Ki-yong], Doctoral thesis, Moscow: MGU, 1953; V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree (1945-1955)"; E. M. Tsoi, *Otrazhenie velikih peremen v koreiskoi derevne v romanah Li Giena* [The Reflection of the Great Changes in Korean Villages in the Novels of Yi Ki-yŏng], PhD thesis, Moscow: MGU, 1955; A. N. Taen, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury (demokraticheskie naztional'nye tendenzsii i sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature)*; V. N. Li, "Koreiskaia literatura pervyh let posle osvobozhdeniya (1945-1950)".

(such as works by V. Maiakovskii, N. Ostrovsky, A. Fadeev and M. Sholokhov among others)[126] in Korean writings before and after Liberation. Needless to say, these influences were referred to in extremely positive terms, and the very idea of plagiarism was never raised. Ivanova matter-of-factly remarked that the North Korean writers Ch'on Se-pong and Yim Chŏng-suk, when writing their novels "chose the same story lines as in the novels of V. Vasilevskaya", or that "in terms of artistic manner Hwang Kŏn's novel "Haengpok" ("Happiness") is strongly evocative of Fadeev's *Molodaia Gvardiia (Young Guard)".*[127]

The Soviet observers, however, had their own reservations about North Korean literature. From the very beginning many of them did not fail to notice that the North Korean literature was confined within boundaries which were much stricter than the Soviet ones. The Soviets often tried to play down what they perceived as a misunderstanding of "socialist realism" or the excessive ideological zeal of their "younger brothers". In the late 1940s, for instance, visiting Soviet writers and artists tried to persuade their North Korean colleagues not to write exclusively about the Party and Kim Il Sung, but to extol "eternal objects" such as love or flowers for a change. Both Chŏng Ryul and Pak Nam-su mentioned that the Soviet poet Gribachev, a top official in the Soviet Writers' Union, who often visited Pyongyang in the late 1940s, lamented the absence of lyrical poetry in contemporary North Korean literature.[128] These attempts became more frequent after the Second Soviet Writers' Congress in 1954 which reproved the overt bureaucratisation of Soviet literature and called on the Soviet writers to express their feelings more freely. In light of the steadily increasing creative freedoms permitted to Soviet writers, the established Soviet writer and literary official Aleksei Surkov, on his arrival in Pyongyang in 1955, exhorted his North Korean colleagues to pay more attention to the problem of the individuality of the author.[129]

Soviet scholars of North Korean literature also contributed to this mild criticism. Amidst the obligatory praises of the "new progressive literature of the liberated Korean people", they could claim, for instance, that negative characters in the much-praised novel by Yi Ki-yŏng entitled *Ttang (Land)* which, as the author himself admitted, was an emulation of Sholokhov's *Virgin Land Under the Plough,* were too one-dimensional and plain to move the reader;[130] that *sometimes* North Korean writers were prone to repeating the clichés of ideal heroes which were "too good to be true" or tedious, stereotypical artistic methods; or that *some* North Korean writers were too married to the theme of industrialisation and depictions of technological processes instead of

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[126] A long list of important "exemplary" Soviet works is given in the above-cited article of Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 437-438.

[127] V. I. Ivanova, "Sovetskaia literatura v Koree", 190.

[128] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 126-136; interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[129] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 89.

[130] V. I. Ivanova, "Li Gien i ego roman 'Zemlia'" [Yi Ki-yŏng and His Novel *Land*], *Kratkie soobscheniia instituta vostokovedeniia,* 1955, #18, 38.

presenting "real people" of flesh and bone,[131] etc. Given the fact that contemporary Soviet literature could hardly be described as a realm of creative liberty and imagination, these thinly veiled criticisms by the Soviet academics are significant. They meant that even by the suffocating Soviet standards, the degree of originality, individual touch and artistic freedom in contemporary North Korean writings was deemed to be lacking.

However, this careful reproach did not reach its intended goals. Pyongyang intellectuals did not succumb to the temptation of a Soviet-style "thaw". Even if they had wished, their political supervisors had already made the decision to give the Soviet experiment of de-Stalinization a very wide berth.

Gradually, Soviet readers started to perceive North Korean literature as a laughing stock, as an unwitting parody on "normal" socialist realism. Still, one should not forget that it was Soviet culture which initially equipped the literature of the "fraternal Korean people" with the basic propagandistic images and patterns of political servility. As the contemporary North Korean scholar Pak Chong-sik remarked in the 1950s, "if it were not for Soviet literature with its classical exemplary works, our writers would have to travel a long, complicated and circuitous route".[132]

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Given the realities of the "Soviet era" it was no surprise that the first "artistic task" which Kim Il Sung personally gave to North Korean writers in 1946 was the production of accolades to Soviet-Korean friendship and eulogies to the Soviet "liberators" and the Soviet way of life. North Korean writers quickly responded to this demand by producing numerous pro-Soviet writings in different genres. Brian Myers has already made an original analysis of North Korean fiction on the theme of Soviet-Korean friendship.[133] I shall consider another important genre in this regard: the travelogues of the orchestrated trips by North Korean writers to the Soviet Union in 1946-1955.

The organised pilgrimages of North Korean intellectuals to the USSR constituted an integral part of the Soviet-sponsored propaganda tours which included visits to exemplary factories and collective farms and arranged meetings with top officials as well as "incidental" encounters with supposedly "ordinary Soviet people", etc. These staged trips became especially frequent in the final decade of Stalinism when the establishment of the "socialist camp" necessitated energetic efforts to promote the image of the USSR in the Soviet-dominated areas of Eastern Europe and East Asia. These lavishly sponsored journeys represented a significant burden on the straitened budget of the post-war Soviet Union and necessitated quite sophisticated and expensive

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[131] V. N. Li, "Koreiskaia literatura pervyh let posle osvobozhdeniia (1945-1950)", 345-346.

[132] Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ-ŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 436.

[133] Brian Myers, "Mother Russia: Soviet Characters in North Korean Fiction," *Korean Studies* 16 (1992), 82-93; Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 67.

logistics.[134] Yet Soviet policymakers rationalised these material expenditures as essential costs of opinion formation among the new allies, and, as time proved, they were correct in this assumption. Even foreign observers admitted that, "although the effort to manipulate foreign visitors may be costly in material terms, such costs have …been more than offset by [eventual] material and propaganda gains".[135]

North Korean writers were also targeted by this scheme. The treatment they were subjected to in the USSR was, indeed, lavish and flattering, which proves that the Soviet policymakers did not perceive North Korean intellectuals as ready-made political servants of their occupying force but did their best to convert them to an admiration of the USSR. All the visiting North Korean writers commented on the "politeness and hospitality of the Soviet people" and the "perfectly organised service".[136] Yi T'ae-jun, who visited the USSR in 1946, a year of great food shortages in the post-war USSR, exclaimed: "Everything was free for us! For the last ten days we have forgotten how to use money!"[137] Yi Puk-myŏng excitedly wrote about the luxury Hotel National in Moscow (where he resided, of course, for free).[138] What made the Korean guests especially susceptible to this side of the Soviet visits was the miserable situation in their own country. Two of Yi Ki-yŏng's long visits to the USSR were organised in 1952 and 1953, at the height of and closely following the devastating Korean War. Not surprisingly, the writer greatly appreciated all the luxuries he enjoyed in the USSR, including the entertainment in theatres and the careful choice of the best food, which the Soviet hosts endeavoured to make to suit Yi's chronically sick stomach. When the writers' health problems were exacerbated during the 1953 visit, the Soviet hosts surrounded him with particular care. For one month Yi Ki-yŏng stayed in a comfortable hotel room separate from the other members of the delegation, enjoyed the best quality medical service and a special diet. The Soviet hosts subsequently offered him several months of hospitality in the best Soviet sanatorium, an offer which Yi happily accepted. And again, all this was free of charge.[139] The contrast with the life the writer had in Korea was just too strong to resist.

These pleasures made it easier for the Korean visitors to fulfil the demands of the Pyongyang authorities and to present the USSR as a "land of fulfilment" or "land of happiness".[140] Without a single exception, the North Korean visitors accepted the

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[134] For an insider's account of the staged Soviet trips in the 1930s see the memoirs of the established Soviet interpreter V. Berezhkov: Valnetin Berezhkov, *Kak ya stal perevodchikom Stalina* [How I Became Stalin's Interpreter], Moscow: Daem, 1993, 170-185, 235.

[135] Sylvia Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia, the Soviet Union and Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937*, Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, 211.

[136] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 143-149.

[137] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng,* 67.

[138] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 44-54.

[139] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 170-188.

[140] Yi Ki-yŏng persistently stressed that "dear marshal Kim Il Sung" was the very first person who had inspired Koreans "to learn from the USSR". See Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 88.

offered perspectives and myths and wrote what they were supposed to write about the "elder brother and teacher".

The more important fact was that many of these myths and perspectives were soon integrated into North Korean discourse and became inseparable parts of the DPRK self-depiction in various forms of North Korean propaganda. Let us have a look at the major propagandistic messages which the Soviet travelogues of the 1940s-1950s delivered, and trace the connection of these messages with the political patterns in the North Korean literary writings and the literary world of the contemporary and subsequent epochs.

Image of the "elder brother"

The positive image of the Soviet Union was the primary intended message of the travelogues, and Korean visitors delivered this without exception. The overtly eulogistic images of Soviet life in North Korean travelogues exceeded the boldest expectations of their Soviet sponsors. Here are a few characteristic quotations:

"The sun of Communism is shining above humanity. Who hates the sun? Only hateful insects living in total darkness like mosquitoes, lice, or leeches. Capitalists hate Communism because they are in fact like these bad insects. They want to live in darkness and suck the blood of the working people… There are no peoples who hate Communism! Only capitalists and their acolytes can hate the sun of Communism!"[141] (Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda* (*The Sun of Communism is Shining*)).

"The USSR is a country of wisdom"; "All the old and ugly human things have disappeared here. It is a new world with new life, new habits and a new culture of a new people"; "The Soviet Union is a society with which Korea's present and future are closely connected".[142] (Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryôn kihaeng (A Trip to the Soviet Union)*).

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[141] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 210-212. Being a chairman of the Soviet-Korean friendship society and having particularly good relations with his Soviet colleagues, Yi Ki-yŏng enjoyed Soviet hospitality more frequently than other DPRK writers. We cannot say for sure how often Yi Ki-yŏng visited the USSR during his lifetime, but his collection of Soviet travelogues published in 1960 in Pyongyang referred to four such trips. The first took place in 1946, when Yi headed a delegation of North Korean writers to the USSR. Yi T'ae-jun was a member of this delegation. The second occurred in 1949, when Yi Ki-yŏng received a personal invitation to visit the USSR to take part in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Pushkin. The third time was in 1952, when Yi Ki-yŏng visited the USSR as a representative of North Korean litterateurs to attend the celebration of the 100th anniversary of another Russian classic, Gogol. On the fourth occasion, Yi Ki-yŏng visited the USSR in 1953-1954 to participate in the celebration of the 36th anniversary of the October Revolution. This trip was the longest, since at this time Yi stayed in a Soviet sanatorium. (See Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kihaeng munjip* [Collection of Travelogues], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1960).

[142] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng*, 5, 92-93, 122.

Though this positive attitude towards the Soviet Union was not rare among visiting foreign intellectuals,[143] the Soviet eulogies of North Korean writers markedly surpassed Western accounts. In the North Korean case, the homage to all things Soviet was often augmented with characteristic self-humiliation. While extolling the strong and determined Soviets, the travelogues present Koreans, not as a people of independent spirit who consciously chose an alliance with Communism, but as timid and weak beings, ever grateful to their Soviet liberators. The examples of this tendency are numerous. In the travelogue poem of Min Pyŏng-gyun entitled "Yŏngye" ("Pride"), happy liberated Koreans "hid their faces in the wide chests of their Soviet liberators".[144] Hong Kŏn depicts a Korean student of Moscow State University who "was close to tears when he talked about the help which the Russian students gave to Koreans who were non-fluent in Russian".[145] During a meeting with Soviet children, Kang Hyo-sun told them about the Korean War which was being waged at the time, and he was surprised that Russian children felt compassion for the poor Koreans. The author drew the conclusion that "Soviet children are very kind – as are all Soviet people who are helping Korea".[146] The Korean writer certainly viewed the normal feeling of compassion as something extraordinary, as if he thought that Koreans did not deserve it, and ascribes it wholly to the exceptionally generous Soviet policy. Kang also relates his conversation with Samuel Marshak, a prominent Soviet children's poet. Marshak again asked the Korean delegation about the fate of Korean children at this time of war and was told that despite many Korean children having lost their parents during the war, now they live happily under the loving care of the Party. At the same time, "South Korean children have a dreary and impoverished life under the pressure of American imperialism". Kang Hyu-sun exclaimed humbly: "Listening to our story, Marshak lowered his head. We felt that he genuinely loved the Korean children. Why does he love them so much?"[147] The Korean author failed to ask himself the obvious opposite question: why should not Marshak love them?

The poetry of late 1940s and early 1950s, devoted to Soviet-Korean relations, also takes the perspective of a powerful and wise Russian versus the weak and helpless Korean. For instance, the protagonist of Pak Sŭng-gŏl's poem from the anthology *Glory to Stalin* (1949) claims that the Soviet liberators "raised the flame of life" in the soul of a Korean who had previously lived "as a submissive animal".[148] Brian Myers attests to this same intonation in the contemporary North Korean fiction and mentions

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[143] See: Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928-1978,* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

[144] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 6-8.

[145] Ibid., 136-137.

[146] Ibid., 170-173.

[147] Ibid., 198.

[148] Han Sŏr-ya (ed.), *Yŏnggwang-ŭi Ssŭttalin-ege: Ssŭttalin t'ansaeng 70-chunyŏn kinyŏm ch'ulp'ansa* [Glory to Stalin: an Anthology of Works Dedicated to the 70th Birthday of Stalin], Pyongyang: Pukchosŏn munhakyesul ch'ongtongmaeng, 1949, 86.

that the Soviet side was often "embarrassed by these tributes which far exceeded even the Eastern Block standards of obsequiousness".[149]

However, this self-humiliating tendency proved to be short-lived. In the mid-1950s, when the DPRK was moving beyond Soviet control in order to construct its own model of national Stalinism, the teacher/apprentice pattern in the relations of both countries began to deteriorate. Moreover, very often it was substituted for the opposite model. As a characteristic example we might cite a commemoration essay of Han Sŏr-ya, "P'ajeyebŭ-wa na (Fadeev and I)" which was published in the August (No. 8) 1956 issue of the literary magazine *Chosŏn munhak*[150] and was devoted to a memoir of the recently deceased Alexander Fadeev, the Chairman of the Soviet Writers' Union.

According to Han Sŏr-ya, Fadeev, the mighty top-ranked Soviet official, appears as a timid, naive and ordinary creature who readily blushed before his Korean colleague. Fadeev allegedly used to seek Han's company, asked for Han's advice and opinion about his new writings and was as happy as a lark when he finally received the long-awaited encouragement from Han. Fadeev was allegedly impatient when waiting for the translation of Han's works into Russian and especially for his works "of the anti-Japanese fighting period," because these novels, he hoped, would give the ignorant Fadeev a clear perspective on Korea's history and mentality. Han Sŏr-ya, on the contrary, emerged as self-sufficient, confident and slightly condescending to his eager Russian friend. Han mercifully granted his company to the timid Russian but would also skip a meeting if he felt too busy.

Certainly the portrait of Fadeev which Han presented to the Korean readers in 1956 is not a plausible description of a high-ranking Soviet administrator. These fantasies revealed more about Han himself, with all his wishful thinking and hidden inferiority complexes. But more important, this picture indicated that the earlier pattern of "a Korean crying on the broad chest of a Soviet liberator" was to be reversed with the growth of Korean national Stalinism.

The proper place of a Communist intellectual

Another important message of the travelogues was the endorsement of the Soviet pattern of the proper social place of a Communist writer and the application of this pattern to the cultural environment of the DPRK.

The frequent meetings with the Soviet writers, which took place during these staged trips, provided North Korean intellectuals with a living model of the interactions between an intellectual and the power-holders in a socialist country. Soviet intellectuals eagerly offered spiritual leadership to their Korean colleagues on the questions of how a "progressive writer" was supposed to behave and what he or she should produce in order to serve the Party. These ideas had been conveyed by the translated literary texts,

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[149] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 70.

[150] Han Sŏr-ya, "P'ajeyebŭ-wa na" [Fadeev and I], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956, #8, 97-106.

but the first-hand experience, be it staged, real or invented, confirmed and reinforced these messages.

With the help of the Soviet hosts, Pyongyang intellectuals established personal contacts with distinguished Soviet writers, most of whom doubled as high-level literary officials, including Surkov, Simonov, Leonov, Polevoi, Gribachev and Mikhalkov. North Korean writers visited Soviet literary dignitaries in their offices as well as in their private homes; they attended official ceremonies and were entertained together at parties. The atmosphere of these meetings was warm and friendly, and the guests, being accustomed to the traditionally more hierarchical and reserved style of relations common to the Korean bureaucracy, admired the easy-going approach of the Soviet "literary dignitaries".[151] However, the Soviet colleagues never ceased to preach to their Korean "younger brothers", instilling in them the rigid formulae and hackneyed phrases of the Soviet ideological and political discourse. Yi Puk-muŏng recollected that while meeting with the North Korean delegation, A. Surkov stressed that in the first instance: "We have to show you a lot of things here... North Korean writers must learn a lot from the USSR".[152] Yi T'ae-jun recalled that the Soviet writers instructed them in the importance of "leaning from real life", "working in the thick of things" and noted that all the Soviet writers themselves are either "of common origin" or had "lived for a long time immersed in the people".[153] Even the children's writer S. Marshak failed to miss the opportunity to urge the visiting writer Kang Hyo-sun that "our literature is a Party literature and this principle must be reflected in children's literature as well."[154]

Apart from this general guidance, Soviet writers would also give their Korean colleagues more concrete instructions. Hong Kŏn recollects a meeting with A. Shtein, a director of the drama department in the Soviet Writers' Union. Shtein indignantly told the Korean guests about some visiting West European writer who had published his Moscow diary in a foreign newspaper and claimed that there was no toilet paper in a Moscow hotel. Shtein called this article very "narrow-minded" and stressed that Koreans should write "deeper memoirs" about the Soviet Union.[155] It is noteworthy that Shtein did not accuse the Western writer of lying and that toilet paper was in fact available in the hotel. He made it quite obvious that his major concern—even demand—of his Korean guests was not truth itself but the "correct" image of the USSR.

It is curious how masterfully the Soviet officials managed to present the activity of the Soviet Writers' Union "in a proper light" to their Korean guests. Yi Puk-myŏng relates an interesting episode. When the delegation of North Korean writers visited the Moscow office of the Soviet Writers' Union in early May, they could find no writers there. The Korean quests were told that the majority of Soviet writers had willingly left

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[151] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 56, 160, 196-20.

[152] Ibid., 55-59.

[153] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng,* 195-198.

[154] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 200.

[155] Ibid., 161-162.

their comfortable Moscow offices and gone to the factories and industrial sites in order to "study real life". It took some time before several "important" Soviet writers (including Surkov, Simonov, Leonov and Polevoi), managed to take a break from their busy schedules to meet the Korean delegation and lecture the visitors on what and how the writers of a "progressive country" were supposed to write.[156]

Yi Puk-myŏng seemed to be deeply impressed by the meeting with these Soviet "teachers" and skilled "engineers of the human soul", as well as by the enthusiasm of the Soviet writers. As a foreigner he naturally did not suspect that the absence of the Soviet writers at their workplaces could be explained by the chain of national holidays which still empties Moscow's offices in early May, rather than their alleged presence at factories and plants. As we can see, the Soviet guides skilfully turned the potentially embarrassing situation into a lesson, demonstrating the exemplary behaviour of the Soviet writers who were allegedly completely devoted to Party tasks.

With similar dexterity, the Soviet officials managed to reinterpret politically slippery incidents inside the Soviet Writers' Union to their Korean "apprentices". Such incidents were, indeed, not rare in the final decade of Stalinism. Suffice it to mention the campaigns over the literary magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* (1946), Party criticism over Fadeev's novel *Molodaia Gvardiia (Young Guard)* (1947), or the persecution of Jewish writers (1950-1952).[157] Since the victims of these incidents were often well- known in Korea, the Soviet writers felt the urge to "explain" the situations to their North Korean colleagues. For instance, Yi T'ae-jun was openly frustrated by the 1946 political campaign over the Soviet poet Akhmatova whom he deeply admired.[158] Soviet officials during Yi's visit to the USSR in 1947 took pains to explain to him all the "wrong doings" of his favourite poet.[159] Often Soviet officials presented "adapted versions" of the events. For instance Yi Puk-myŏng, during a conversation with the Soviet writers, broached the topic of the rewriting of Fadeev's *Molodaia Gvardiia (Young Guard)*. This novel about young resistance fighters who operated in the occupied territory during the Second World War and died at the hands of the Gestapo, was deemed exemplary in North Korea and enjoyed a great popularity among North Korean readers. Yet on the 3rd of December, 1947 the editorial of *Pravda*, an official organ of the Soviet Communist Party, criticised Fadeev's best-seller for its "overtly independent" young heroes and its alleged "underestimation of the Party's leading role". As a result, in 1951 the writer was forced to rewrite the entire novel.[160] Polevoi explained to Yi Puk-myŏng that the novel was "correct" until the moment that the new historical facts about the Party's actual supervision of the partisans became known from declassified documents. Following a personal visit to the city of Krasnodon, the site of the resistance group's activity, Fadeev allegedly came to an

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[156] Ibid., 55-59.

[157] E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo,* 452.

[158] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[159] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng,* 123-125.

[160] Aleksander Nemzer, *Razgromlennyi generalnyi* [Demolished General Secretary]. Retrieved from at http://www.ruthenia.ru/nemzer/FAD.html (24.12.01)

independent decision to rewrite the novel in order to make it fit the real situation.[161] As we can see, the Soviet literary officials turned an uneasy episode into yet another lesson for their Korean apprentices. In this version, the exemplary writer Fadeev demonstrated commendable self-criticism and political consciousness, attributes which all devoted Communist writers should demonstrate.

Through all this ideological drilling and preaching to their Korean colleagues, the Soviet writers instilled a general pattern of social attitudes which an intellectual must demonstrate under the new conditions. In the Soviet official parlance it was referred to as the "active social position of a progressive writer". On the surface it was the idea that "progressive literature" and "progressive" Communist politics were inseparable, but in reality it meant that North Korean writers were to turn into Party propagandists.

These educational efforts of the Soviet writers were not in vain. As the subsequent history of North Korean literature proved, North Korean policymakers not only incorporated the Soviet stereotypes of the obligatory "active social position" of an intellectual, but they also soon created their own much more regularised and constrained system of political involvement of writers.

Indeed in North Korea, this system emerged in patterns which were unthinkable even in the Stalinist Soviet Union with its frequent use of militarist and mechanical rhetoric in relation to cultural affairs such as, "cultural fronts", "engineers of the human soul", "building poetry", etc. One such specific form was the distribution of obligatory topics to North Korean writers. Pak Nam-su mentioned the frustration which Pyongyang intellectuals felt when the Party began this practice in the late 1940s, since many of these mandated topics (such as land reform or industrialisation) did not lend themselves easily to poetic.[162] Chŏng Ryul recollects that Soviet Koreans treated this system with light irony.[163] Indeed, in the Soviet Writers' Union the similar system of "obligatory themes", though at first actively promoted by some overzealous members, was soon discarded as absurd, and one of the most fervent critics of the "obligatory themes" was the prominent Soviet writer Yuri Olesha.[164] The absence of mandatory topics did not leave Soviet literature free from political commitments, but it did give Soviet writers some space to manoeuvre.[165]

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[161] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 80-86.

[162] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏk-ch'i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan*, 59.

[163] Interview with Chŏng Ryul. I would like to add, however, that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, being a Soviet Korean poet, tolerated this system. For more information concerning Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, read the next chapter.

[164] George Bisztray, *Marxist Models of Literary Realism*, 42-43.

[165] Though Stalin often expressed his disappointment over the lack of novels on contemporary themes in Soviet literature, even he hesitated to mandate that the Soviet writers write on specific topics. (See K. Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia, Razmyshleniia o I. V. Staline* [Through the Eyes of a Person of My Generation. Contemplations on Stalin], Moscow: Respublika, 1989, 183.

In North Korea there was no intellectual who was willing to raise a voice against the distribution of literary topics, and this system soon became deeply rooted in the North Korean literary tradition.

Pak Nam-su reports another specific form of political control over intellectuals in the DPRK: the so-called "production plans", which were modelled after those in industry. According to these plans, a writer was required to "produce" a particular number of novels or poems in a given period of time. Those who for some reason failed to fulfil the "production plan" were to be criticised and punished. Chŏng Ryul recalls that the entire "production plan" system was initiated by Kim Ch'ang-man, the then head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (munhwain pujang) in the KWP Central Committee.

Chŏng also claims that Kim Ch'ang-man authorised the system of the obligatory dispatch of North Korean writers to exemplary plants, factories and farms in order to extol these "real life" experiences in their works (a task which in its turn was also compulsory).[166] The roots of this system can be traced to the rhetoric of the Soviet Writers' Union which, as we have just seen, promoted it to their North Korean guests. In practice, however, the visits of the Soviet writers to plants and factories were encouraged but never deemed obligatory.

The wide promotion of obligatory "educational tours" to industrial sites had far-reaching consequences for North Korean literature. By placing more emphasis on factual rather than on the artistic aspects of literature, the Pyongyang literary officials stimulated the growth of so- called "silhwa munhak", or "documentary literature" in the DPRK which presented depictions of technological processes or offered biographies of "people's heroes" and, in fact, differed very little from journalistic reports. The writers were forced to adjust to the new demands and this could not but influence the artistic quality of their creative writings. A typical example of this tendency is Yi Ki-yŏng's novel *Han yŏsŏng-ŭi unmyŏng (The Fate of A Woman)* written in the early 1960s and, as the author claims, based on real events. Yi Ki-yŏng readily acknowledged the low artistic quality of his work and its overburdening with factual data, but justified these deficiencies by its political "usefulness" and the alleged truthfulness of his book, as well as the "urgent necessity of class education for young people".[167] It is noteworthy that "documentary prose" still occupies an important place in North Korean literature to this day.[168]

North Korean intellectuals not only unquestionably subordinated themselves to the demands which the Party imposed on them, but often initiated their own forms of control and restrictions. The poet Paek In-chun, for instance, advocated the so-called

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[166] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[167] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Sud'ba odnoi zhenshchiny* [The Fate of a Woman], Pyongyang: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannyh iazykah, 1964, 8.

[168] See the collections of contemporary North Korean literary writings *Pitnanŭn Rojŏng* [A Brilliant Course], Pyongyang: Munhakyesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998; *Yŏngyŏnhan Noŭl* [Eternal Sunrise], Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998; *Pokpadŭn kangsan* [Blessed Rivers and Mountains], Pyongyang: Kŭmsŏngch'ŏngnyŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1998.

"brigade method" according to which poetry and prose were supposed to be created by collectives ("brigades") of authors in order to avoid individual political mistakes.[169] Though this system was not fully established in the 1940s, it flourished later in the 1960s when the individual authorship of literary works was practically abolished for a decade and Korean prose came to be written by anonymous "creative groups".

Thus, in respect to the political control over literature and men of the pen, the North Korean policymakers soon left their Soviet teachers far behind.

Acquisition of Soviet cultural images and clichés

The acquisition of officially endorsed Soviet images and clichés and the absorption of these foreign stereotypes into the North Korean discourse, became an inseparable part of the policy of "learning from the Soviets". As we have mentioned already, the Soviet literary dignitaries strongly encouraged their North Korean "younger brothers" to assimilate the vital traits of "the most progressive world culture". The process of adaptation of the Soviet culture and mythology and their amalgamation with the Korean heritage was actively proceeding at the time, and the literary writings present numerous examples of this.[170]

The visiting North Korean writers strove to keep abreast of this political line. While presenting an embellished image of Soviet reality, they constantly resort to Soviet-made images, trying to intertwine them with the Korean discourse and include significant Soviet political and cultural figures and events into the DPRK heroic pantheon. In the poem "Two Leaders" Min Pyŏng-gyun has the Korean narrator cry at the sight of the two deceased Soviet leaders Lenin and Stalin in the Moscow Mausoleum, completely overlooking the fact that both were the leaders of a distant foreign country.[171] In another poem Min depicts the mother of two Soviet Communist martyrs Zoya and Shura Kosmodemyansky ("Ŏmŏni" ("Mother")) as an image which was supposed to touch the hearts of the Korean audience.[172]

Not only contemporary Soviet figures, but also events and personalities of traditional Russian culture were expected to be inserted into the Korean discourse. Yi Ki-yŏng reported on the speech which he delivered in Moscow at a ceremony commemorating the opening of a monument to Gogol. Yi declared that: "Gogol loved the people of his country and hated its enemies. So, too, must the Korean people, now fighting for their independence against the American invaders, learn from Gogol."[173] It

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[169] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[170] One of the earliest examples of this tendency was the above-cited anthology, Han Sŏr-ya (ed.), *Yŏnggwang-ŭi Ssŭttalin-ege: Ssŭttalin t'ansaeng 70-chunyŏn kinyŏm ch'ulp'ansa* [Glory to Stalin: an Anthology of Works Dedicated to the 70th birthday of Stalin], published in 1949. It contained North Korean poems devoted to Stalin, which, in fact, presented this foreign leader as a pure Korean hero.

[171] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 12-14.

[172] Ibid., 15-18.

[173] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Widaehan saenghwal-ŭl ch'angjohanŭn ssoryŏn*, 11-20.

was as if the Korean people had no appropriate national figure from whom to draw inspiration.

Soviet political symbols were supposed to inspire Koreans as well. Many visiting writers eagerly presented "the hero city of Stalingrad" as a part of their own culture. Yi Puk-myŏng, for instance, claimed that Stalingrad was "a hero city, close to the hearts of all Koreans, who, just like the Soviets before them, are fighting now with the foreign (i.e. American-TG) invasion".[174] Moscow, being a Soviet capital, was presumed to occupy a special place in the Korean heroic pantheon. Yi Ki-yŏng wrote: "Everybody in Korea has a great desire to visit Moscow at least once. And the reason is not just a simple gratitude for the liberation of our country from Japanese colonisation. Nor is it simply because of the heartfelt brotherly assistance which the Soviets are providing to Korea nowadays. It is because the Soviet people are in the first ranks of those who are struggling for peace and democratic progress all over the world and they lead mankind on the road to freedom and happiness".[175] "Moscow is the heart of the whole world nowadays,"[176] continued Yi Ki-yŏng, repeating a cliché which was at the time oft-repeated in Soviet verse and song.[177]

Soviet images were often used to justify or reinforce current domestic political trends in Pyongyang. The chapter entitled "A brilliant flourishing of socialist culture and art"[178] in Yi Ki-yŏng's travelogue of 1954, is characteristic in this regard. While depicting the splendid Soviet theatres, museums, music halls and opera houses which represented "the wealth of the great socialist art and the wonderful achievements of the Soviet Union", Yi stressed that Soviet art presents no examples of so-called "pure art" – an "anti-people art" which supposedly "symbolises bourgeois interests" and flourishes in contemporary South Korea where the enslaved artists must serve the interests of the American imperialists.[179] The author extols the "progressive socialist Soviet literature which was born in the struggle with reactionary tendencies". The implications of these statements were all too clear – Yi Ki-yŏng (or his editors) resorted to Soviet authority to rationalise the incipient purges against the "reactionary pure artists" in the DPRK.

The process of Sovetisation/Russification of the North Korean discourse naturally led to the absorption of Soviet political catchphrases and formal clichés. The Korean visitors endlessly repeated stale Soviet propagandistic dictums and slogans, such as

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[174] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 59-67.

[175] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 13.

[176] Ibid., 14.

[177] The description of Moscow as "the heart of the world" was a very common cliché in the Soviet propaganda of the late 1940s. For example, Alexei Surkov, a prominent Soviet poet and literary functionary who was sometimes involved in North Korean literary politics as well, published in 1946 a collection of poems under the telling title *The Heart of The World. Poetical Tributes to Moscow* (See: Aleksei Surkov, *Serdtse mira. Stihi o Moskve* [The Heart of the World. Poetical Tributes to Moscow], Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1946).

[178] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 158-163.

[179] Ibid., 160.

"Moscow is a harbour of the five seas", "Moscow is the heart of the whole world" (Yi Ki-yŏng), "the First of May is a festival of hope and peace", or "Soviet people make a garden out of their land" (Hong Kŏn), "those foreign idiots who trumpet the slogan of Communist danger in fact hate the common workers and peasants who refuse to bow to them" (Hong Kŏn), "The Volga river is the mother of Russia" (Kang Hyo-sun), or "people are the main values in the Soviet Union" (Yi Ki-yŏng). During his fourth visit to Moscow soon after Stalin's death, Yi Ki-yŏng attended the Mausoleum where he saw Stalin lying in state near Lenin. The writer, like the above-cited Min Pyŏng-gyun in his poem, passionately described the grief and sadness which allegedly overcame him when he saw the "two great leaders who devoted their lives to giving happiness to all humanity". Yi concluded this passage with the following statement: "And I deeply empathised with the emotions of the people who gathered before the Mausoleum on this chilly, winter's day".[180] In fact, the image of "chilly and snowy weather" and the crowd of people gathered before the Mausoleum "despite the weather" was one of the stalest images of official Soviet journalism. This image of a phenomenon which was very common in Russia anyway, was supposed to stress the devotion of ordinary people who could not be stopped by external obstacles in their eagerness to honour their leaders.

All these clichés and catchphrases, which first appeared in the North Korean depiction of the Soviet reality, quickly moved to the political lexicon of the DPRK, filling the pages of North Korean newspapers and works of fiction. It is worth noting, however, that the wholesale acquisition of Soviet political clichés by North Korean intellectuals was also accompanied by the creation of parallel stereotypes of their own which better correlated with the Korean traditional heritage. Though stemming from the same political perspective, these newly forged Korean "socialist realism" stereotypes appeared to be more sentimental, calling to mind the traditions of the Korean "new novels" of the beginning of the 20th century.[181]

Take, for example, the Korean descriptions of Leningrad which had survived 900 days of siege by the Nazi army. In the contemporary Soviet discourse, Leningrad was usually referred to as "a hero city", "a staunch city", "a city of indomitable citizens", with endless allusions to the stoic endurance and unbending will of its citizens. In North Korean accounts it, however, was turned into "a city of suffering and tears" (Min Pyŏng-gyun, "Leningradesŏ" ("In Leningrad").[182]

The topic of international friendship was also delivered in images which Soviet readers would probably find too sentimental. Yun Tu-hŏn devoted a whole chapter of his travelogue to a lengthy and sugary story about his friendship with a little Russian girl called Nellie, with whom he used to speak "through feelings". Nellie asked the author about Korean children; the author told her that Korean children were bravely

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[180] Ibid., 8-9.

[181] For a discussion of these "new novels" see: V. I. Ivanova, *Novaia Proza Korei*; Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk-ŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron* [Study of the Works of Modern Korean Writers], Seoul: Sŏnggyunkwan taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu. 1993, 10-13.

[182] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 19-22.

fighting with the enemy and persistently studying at school; the author told the little girl that Koreans were very thankful to Soviet people; the girl seemed to be very impressed and determined to visit Korea in the future. The girl played with an unusual toy, a rubber frog, but decided to present it to the author, in order he might give it to some Korean child. When the author tried to refuse this precious gift, the girl started to cry bitterly. Thus, Yun was forced to accept the gift. And now every time he looked at the rubber frog he "thought about the little Russian girl with her big, kind heart"[183]. This narration is inappropriately sweet for the contemporary Soviet discourse.

Characteristic in this regard is Yi Ki-yŏng's account of his visit to the museum of Gorky in Gorky City. Speaking about the writer who, in Soviet discourse, was often referred to as the "Stormy Petrel", Yi chose to concentrate not on the struggle and resistance in Gorky's life story (which any Soviet author would), but, primarily, on the writer's bitter family background and his childhood sufferings. Yi Ki-yŏng eloquently narrates the story of a poor talented boy who could not study since his vicious grandfather refused to support him and tearfully contrasts the grandfather as "the embodiment of evil" with his angelic grandmother.[184]

Thus, with a stroke of Yi Ki-yŏng's pen, the indomitable "Stormy Petrel" has turned into a pitiful personage, somewhat reminiscent of the characters of Yi's own pre-Liberation novels. Yi Ki-yŏng's perception of Gorky strongly reflected Korean cultural predispositions: the author primarily focused on family and educational issues; he was more inclined to lament obstacles than to exalt the fortitude in required overcoming them.

Quite predictably, under the increasing influence of the nationalist rhetoric in the DPRK in the late 1950s, the images of ever-grateful Koreans crying at the Mausoleum over the departed Lenin or Stalin evaporated from the pages of North Korean writings. However one cannot say that the propagandistic clichés which entered the North Korean discourse at the time completely disappeared from later publications: one need only to look through the pages of *Nodong Sinmun* where one will encounter huge amounts of Soviet-originated idioms. And the old Soviet political clichés are noticeable even in today's North Korean literature and press.

Indeed, to some extent these stereotypes were Koreanized: the characteristic touch of sentimentalism, which emerged in the stories about the rubber frog or the pitiful childhood of the "Stormy Petrel" in the initial period of North Korean propaganda, was preserved. It is especially traceable in the North Korean works about the historical past (look, for instance, at Yi Ki-yŏng's above-mentioned novel *The Fate of a Woman* which was written in the early 1960s). However, these occasional streaks of sentimentalism failed to outshine the general militant (and, for that reason, quite Soviet-like) aspect of North Korean propaganda.

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[183] Ibid., 97-106.

[184] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 55-60.

Social Idylls

The travelogues made a great contribution towards the crystallisation of the general propagandistic image of the DPRK as another heavenly "socialist Eden". In many regards, the picture of the DPRK which emerged in North Korean fiction mirrored the embellished image of the USSR which appeared in the travelogues. Although Soviet literature also promoted the idea of the USSR as a "socialist paradise", this literary portrait was not particularly clear-cut or unequivocal: even in the most orthodox Soviet novels sub-plots often diluted the intended propagandistic message of a writer, or even supplanted it. Staged trips represented a much more refined and strict kind of propaganda: the pictures of the "socialist paradise" which were presented to the foreign tourists surpassed the literary "socialist realist" depictions in terms of exaltation and gross overstatement. North Korean writers digested these patterns, not only applying them to their depiction of the Soviet Union, but also projecting their basic traits onto the propagandistic self-image of the DPRK. Let us consider these major sets of Soviet self-presentation myths and their parallels with the self-image of the DPRK as they appeared in North Korean literature.

The USSR is a rich, developed, industrialized society.

The presentation of the USSR as a developed industrialised country constituted the major postulate of Soviet domestic and international propaganda. It would be wrong to reject this assumption as patently false since up to 1945-1955 the Soviet Union was, indeed, a relatively developed industrial country which could boast real achievements such as rapid industrialisation and post-war reconstruction, long holidays, relatively short working hours, free education and medical services, some legal and social rights for women, etc. However the promoters of the essentially propagandistic image of a successfully industrialized USSR deliberately misrepresented three important constituents of the picture:

a) The relative technical sophistication of the Soviet industries when compared to industries of the world's leading counties (propaganda insisted that the Soviet technology was superior which was not the case in most areas);

b) The labour conditions and living standards of the majority of the population (the hardships were ignored, and living standards grossly embellished);

c) The human costs which had been paid for the "Communist wonder" (the costs were recognized, but presented as voluntary sacrifice).

For instance, Yi Ki-yŏng described a Soviet automated brick factory which he visited during one staged trip as "the most progressive factory in the world" on the grounds that there was "no use of manual labour needed whatsoever". As an entirely unique "miracle machine" in this factory Yi mentions a weight-lifting crane (kijunggi) which was allegedly invented in the Soviet Union and existed "nowhere else" in the

world.[185] Needless to say this was not true. The propagandists certainly assumed their audience was ignorant about the real situation in the world of construction technology.

Or take the characteristic notion which Yi Puk-myŏng presents in 1954: "The USSR is a country of aircraft. And I do not mean military but civil air-planes, which are used for pleasure by everybody. One of my colleagues joked that there are more air-planes in the Soviet Union than chickens in North Korea".[186] The writer certainly exaggerated the role of aviation in the USSR of 1954 where civil aircraft were by no means a common form of travel for ordinary Soviet citizens. Yet, given the closed character of Soviet society, his Korean readers had no way of verifying this statement (and note again the self-effacing intonation of the joke).

A similar gross exaggeration of Korea's own achievements and material progress soon became a typical hallmark of Pyongyang's official propaganda. One of the authors who laid the foundation for the image of a heavily industrializing "new Korea" was the Soviet Korean poet Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, whose activity will be discussed in the next chapter. As a typical example of this tendency one might usefully look at this poet's long epic "Saengae-ŭi Norae" ("The Song of Life") (June, 1950)[187] in which Cho extolled North Korean tractors, airplanes and the "proud smoke of success" of Korean factories as progressive signs of the new socialist Korea. Naturally Cho omitted to mention that North Korea had already been quite heavily industrialized by the Japanese colonial rulers, so these miracles had little to do with the socialist system. Other contemporary North Korean stories devoted to the topic, whilst admitting the existence of factories and enterprises in pre-liberated Korea, stressed that only after Liberation could Koreans work at these factories happily and effectively, while in earlier times they had just suffered as slaves.[188]

The image of industrialization allegedly first brought to North Korea by the socialist system is still popular in Pyongyang's domestic propaganda. Of course no references to the Japanese role in the creation of a modern infrastructure can be tolerated. Today, again, Pyongyang's propagandists can count upon the virtual complete isolation of their audience from the world and their lack of historical knowledge. Take, for instance, the recent poem "Hago tto hago sip'ŭn mal" ("Words Which I Would Like to Say More and More") where the author Chŏn Kŭm-ok, while referring to the achievements of socialist Korea, resorts to the stale truism of a country boy who before Liberation "had never heard the sound of a train" but now enjoyed the

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[185] Ibid., 25.

[186] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 69.

[187] *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip* [Collection of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's Works], Pyongyang: Munhwa chŏnsŏnsa, 1952, Vol. 1: 153-360.

[188] See, on this matter, the novel by Yi Sang-hyŏn, *Namyŏnbaek-esŏ on p'yŏnji* [The Letter Which Came From Namyŏnbaek], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956 #4, 22-35, or the poem by Han Myŏng-ch'ŏn, "Pot'ong Nodongil" [The Ordinary Day of Labor], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1956, #2, 76-79.

opportunity to taste the fruits of civilization and study at university.[189] It is interesting that today's Pyongyang propaganda writers, while facing unpleasant questions and difficult choices, defensively turn to the old propagandistic clichés of an allegedly high-tech North Korean society. The symbols of this "high technology", however, have remained largely unchanged from the 1950s. Take the characteristic poem "Hyŏnsil-ŭl Pora!" ("Look at the Reality!"), written by Sŏ Chŏng-in, a member of Ch'ongryŏn.[190]. Protecting the reputation of the DPRK from the attacks of unspecified "reactionaries" (obviously fellow Ch'ongryŏn Koreans who had lost their faith in the paradise-like qualities of the DPRK), Sŏ points to what he considers to be the signs of a happy North Korean society: girls working on tractors whilst singing merry songs, children sitting on buses and smiling, etc.[191] The very imagery used to demonstrate the alleged "development" of Korea has remained unchanged over the decades. In the 1990s, Sŏ Chŏng-in refers to the same "new tractors" and "merrily laboring factory workers", etc as were used, for example, in the poem of Chŏng Mun-hyang "Chogukiyŏ kkŭt'ŏmnŭn na-ŭi kippŭmiyŏ" ("O, My Country, My Endless Joy!") which was written in 1956.[192]

The problem of the real life conditions of the Soviet workers constituted the most inglorious aspect of the Soviet "industrialisation miracle", and for that reason became the object of particularly intense false advertising. Yi Puk-myŏng depicted a "typical" large apartment house where ordinary Soviet workers allegedly lived. He noted a few supposedly private cars near the entrance and overheard the sounds of a piano through the window. The author "felt attracted to the life of the Soviet workers"[193].

Of course this picture by no means reflected the "typical" conditions of the workers' lives in the post-war Soviet Union.[194] It is interesting that Soviet literature

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[189] Chŏn Kŭm-ok, "Hago ttohago sip'ŭn mal" [The Words Which I Would Like to Say More and More], in *Pit'nanŭn Rojŏng,* 169-172. The remark about the "sound of a train" is especially curious since for all practical purposes the North Korean railway network has remained unchanged since the colonial era. Most of the existing lines were built by the Japanese. The railway technology has also not changed much. (See Ch'oe Hyŏn-su, "Pukhan-ŭi ch'ŏldo hyŏnhwang" [The Contemporary State of Railways in North Korea], *Kukmin ilbo*, 2000.09.19, 5)

[190] Pro-North Korean organisation in Japan. For a discussion of Ch'ŏngryŏn's activities, see: Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity,* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997.

[191] Sŏ Chŏng-in, "Hyŏnsirŭl pora!" [Look at the Reality!], in *Pit'nanŭn rojŏng,* 100-102.

[192] Chŏng Mun-hyang, "Chogukiyŏ kkŭt'ŏmnŭn naŭi kippŭmiyŏ" [O, My Country, My Endless Ioy], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956, #1, 13-15.

[193] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 66.

[194] In reality, most of the Soviet workers at the time lived in dugouts, decaying barracks or in so-called "communal flats" with kitchens and toilets shared by a dozen or so families. A separate apartment was a luxury which only the chosen few could enjoy – not to mention private cars which remain relatively rare even in present-day Russia. See: Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo: politika i povsednevnost' 1945-1953* [Postwar Soviet society: politics and everyday life in 1945-1953], Moscow: Rosspen, 2000, 55-56; Bryon

was demonstrably less involved in this kind of falsification: in a Soviet novel or poem of the 1940s-1950s it is difficult to find a protagonist who is described as living in a separate apartment, let alone owning a car. However, the North Korean "socialist realism" widely promoted myths about the luxurious living conditions of Korean workers or farmers. Yi Ki-yŏng in his novel *Ttang (Land)* (1949) constantly used the image of a new house as a symbol of the new and progressive lives of his heroes. When the female protagonist Sun-Ok expresses her doubts about the possibility of constructing a new house, her husband quickly reproaches her: "I am a son of North Korea. Has there ever been anything in North Korea which has been planned but not fulfilled?!"[195] The images of workers' families moving into spacious new houses, a child taking a bath in a big bathtub,[196] or a pretty worker's wife dressed in new expensive clothes[197]became extremely popular in North Korean literature, especially after the Korean War. While eulogising these life's essentials as expressions of the benevolence of the Party and the socialist state, the authors failed to explain, of course, that in reality "new houses" known as "munhwa chut'aek" or "cultural accommodation" meant very uncomfortable apartments which Korean families were forced to share with others, and that the new clothes of a Korean wife would probably be the only clothes she would have to wear for at least half a year. Recent Korean writings still widely resort to images of a "munhwa chut'aek" as the symbol of a happily developed North Korean society. The poet Ch'oe Ch'ang-man, depicting the happy life of North Koreans in 1998, uses the same image of "happy laughter pouring from the open window of the cultural accommodation"[198] as the poet Kim Ch'ŏl did in 1956.[199]

Another common element used to demonstrate the "beautiful life" of Soviet workers was the frequent depictions of banquets the Korean writers enjoyed in Soviet factories. For example, visiting the GAZ plant in Gorky City, Yi Ki-yŏng mentioned a sumptuous dinner he had enjoyed in the factory cafeteria.[200] Yi implied that this feast represented a regular meal for common workers in the plant, which was certainly not the case, and ascribed its possibility to the endless benevolence of the Soviet state which cared about its workers so totally.

MacWilliams, "Communism at Uncomfortably Close Quarters," *Chronicles of Higher Education*, 26 April 2002, A56.

[195] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang* [Land], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1955, 343.

[196] Kim Ch'ŏl, "Irhagi do chok'ho salgi do chot'ha!" [It Is Good to Work, It Is Good to Live!], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956, #5, 96-99.

[197] Ch'ŏn Se-pong, "Sŏkkaeul-ŭi saepom", [New Spring in Sŏkkaeul], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956, #6, 21-64; Kim Kwang-sŏp, "Pidan", [Silk], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1956, #6, 65-67.

[198] Ch'oe Ch'ang-man, "Onŭldo ch'ŏngsanbŏle kyesine uri suryŏngnim" [Even Today Our Leader Is in Ch'ŏngsanpŏl], in *Pit'nanŭn rojŏng*, 107.

[199] Kim Ch'ŏl, "Irhagi do chohko salgi do chohta!" 96-99.

[200] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 72.

The images of an abundance of food and scenes of happy family/neighbourhood feasts which are relatively rare in Soviet prose or poetry of the Stalin era,[201] became popular in North Korean literature from the very outset. Yi Ki-yŏng in his novel *Land (Ttang)* (1949), in order to demonstrate the socialist achievements of the DPRK barely one year after Liberation, carefully described the scenes of lavish celebration, complete with lists of served dishes.[202]

However such scenes have practically disappeared in the North Korean literature of the 1990s which have taken a more ascetic approach, reflecting the revered "konanŭi haengun" ("march of hardships"). In recently published Pyongyang anthologies which ritualistically extol "the achievements of socialism", one can also find works which exhort Korean people not to complain about food shortages, not to waste a grain of precious rice and to unite around the Great Leader even more closely. Look, for example, at the recommendations of Han Chŏng-gyu in his poem "Chasikdŭl-ege chaju hanŭn mal" ("The Words Which I Often Say to My Children"):

"Though today we all keenly sense what rice means to us,
Though we have all suffered during the brief "march of hardships",
My family members, do not say that it is hard!
…Do not waste an ear of rice in the fields,
A grain of rice in your homes!
Remember what our leader said:
"Rice is socialism!""

The author then advises his readers to "sing and dance merrily" despite their bellies not being full and not to ask for rice from "mother Korea" in order to "save socialism which others could not save". [203]

The most problematic constituent of the Soviet "industrial miracle" was the horrible price which the Soviet people were forced to pay for it, or, to be more precise, the scale of human sacrifice which the Stalinist regime exacted from its people. It is remarkable how eulogists of "socialist construction" managed to hush up the issue of the human price of "economic miracles" or reinterpret this as expressions of enthusiasm and willing self-sacrifice by the Soviet people. For instance, Yi Ki-yŏng devoted an entire chapter of his book to the glorification of the "heroic construction" of the Volga-Don canal allegedly undertaken by the willing and creative labour of the masses.[204] In reality, the construction of the Volga-Don canal was the result of the slave labour of prisoners from Stalin's GULAG whose numbers reached an astonishing

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[201] Soviet authors on the contrary tended to stress the simplicity of the food which their heroes enjoyed. See, for instance, Yurii Trifonov, *Studenty* [Students], in *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works], Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia literatura, 1985, Vol. 1: 68-70, 158, 200.

[202] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang* [Land], 100, 200-211, 377-384.

[203] Han Chŏng-gyu, *Chasikdŭr-ege chaju hanŭn mal.* [The Words Which I Often Say to My Children], in *Pit'nanŭn rojŏng*, 130-132.

[204] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 23-30.

118,000 by January 1952, shortly before the project's completion.[205] Thus, Yi's enthusiastic notion that "this kind of project could be possible only in the Soviet Union" had a touch of bitter irony.

Yun Tu-hŏn delivers another characteristic tale. While travelling in Tajikistan, he saw an artificial lake near Dushanbe. His guides said that the lake was dug literally with the "bare hands of young communists": the land was allegedly too bad to be dug with spades, and the young communist workers used their hands to create the lake.[206]

Yun Tu-hŏn did not suspect (or, at least, did not reveal his suspicions if he had any) that the most probable reason for digging the lake with bare hands was not the enthusiasm of the Communist workers, but a scarcity of earth-moving equipment. The episode presents a characteristic example of Stalinist propaganda—the tendency to make virtues out of miserable necessity and eulogise sacrifices and physical sufferings as immanent attributes of virtually any work in a Communist society. This notion was also popular in the Soviet literature as the official classic *How The Steel Was Tempered* by Ostrovskii (1932) will attest.

In the North Korean discourse, this type of propagandistic cliché eventually became a special favourite. For instance in his novel *Ttang (Land),* Yi Ki-yŏng depicted the protagonists as draining marches and working the fields with their bare hands or with heavy, unwieldy tools. He stressed this as a particular virtue, as an indication of their industriousness and readiness to work eagerly, not caring about themselves.[207] Even the slightest attempt of a North Korean literary hero to consider his/her physical or personal needs was treated as evidence of "reactionary tendencies". In 1953 Song Yŏng wrote the play "Tu Ch'ŏnyŏ" ("Two Girls")[208] which dealt with the post-war reconstruction of a village. One of the protagonists, a young girl who had been sent to a rural area, at first feels uncomfortable and lonely in the village and wants to return home. Then she overcomes her negative feelings and starts to work enthusiastically. Despite the sugary exemplariness of the entire situation, Song Yŏng quickly receives a critical reprimand. The critic Kim Myŏng-su claims that the positive heroine should not feel this way and express such "petty-bourgeois feelings".[209] Or take, for instance, the representative novel of Sŏk In-hae entitled "Maŭl-ŭi nyŏsŏnsaeng" ("Female Village Teacher") (1956)[210] in which the female protagonist, a village teacher, organises the "voluntary" work of her colleagues and pupils in the construction of a new school building. Though the labour was considered to be

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[205] M. B. Smirnov (ed.), Sistema ispravitelno-trudovyh lagerei v SSSR [The System of Penal Correction Camps in the USSR], Moscow: Zvenia, 1998, 128-130.

[206] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 122.

[207] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang*, 156-161.

[208] Song Yŏng, "Tu ch'ŏnyŏ" [Two Girls], *Munhak yesul*, 1953, #9, 65-79.

[209] Kim Myŏng-su, "Uri munhak-e issŏsŏŭi chŏnhyŏng-kwa kaldŭn munje" [The Problems of Typicality and Conflict in Our Literature], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1953, #11, 135-137.

[210] Sŏk In-hae, "Maŭl-ŭi nyŏsŏnsaeng" [Female Village Teacher], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1956 #8, 80-112.

voluntary, to be done after normal hours, a male colleague who attempted to avoid it for personal reasons was publicly criticised as a "hostile element". An enthusiastic schoolboy was injured at the construction site and his mother expressed anger at the carelessness of his supervising teacher. This episode is presented as a harassment of the progressive heroine who is enveloped in the lofty ideals of socialist revolution while the mother's line of reasoning is not even discussed.

In general the motif of enthusiastic workers who, while working, have to overcome enormous obstacles and may even die in the process was widely promoted in North Korean literature. One of the earliest examples of this "martyr syndrome" is a short story by Pyŏn Hŭi-gŭn entitled "Haengbokhan Saramdŭl" ("Happy People") (1953)[211] in which the female worker protagonist T'an-sil, during an American air raid on her factory, saves the factory equipment (an electric furnace) and receives serious facial injuries. Though her mutilation turned out to be irreversible, her fiancée, the exemplary fighter Ch'ang-sŏn, loved her even more. He claimed that: "You, comrade, have saved an electric furnace from enemy attack, sacrificing for that your flower-like face. This is such a wonderful and proud deed! The scars on your face do not matter. What really matters is how deeply you love the country, what a beautiful and noble heart you have. I am really happy to love such a wonderful girl". The young man makes a vow to defeat the wicked enemy and "to return to you, comrade, and to the electrical furnace that you have saved".[212]

This tendency of North Korean literature has continued to the present day. A minor character in the contemporary short story "Tonggabi" ("Person of the Same Age") heroically dies on a construction site. The author Chŏng Ok-sŏn obliquely hints that the death occurred at some "critical moment" and that the young hero "gave his life for his friends, without any hesitation".[213] Another short story by Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn mokp'yo" ("Lofty Goal"), depicts a talented young doctor Yun who, after graduation from university, does not remain in Pyongyang, but enthusiastically chooses to work in a small provincial town hospital with no proper medicines or equipment. This becomes his "lofty goal".[214]

It is curious that North Korean policymakers, as well as their Soviet predecessors, do not notice the major contradiction between two essential elements of this particular Communist idyll. On the one hand, a socialist worker is supposed to enjoy a wealthy and comfortable lifestyle as a result of socialist prosperity and the unwavering care of the Party. On the other, the exemplary worker is expected to endure all manner of hardships or, even better, heroically die battling impossible odds.

The USSR has the most progressive agricultural system in the world.

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[211] Pyŏn Hŭi-gŭn, "Haengbokhan saramdŭl" [Happy People], *Munhak Yesul*, 1953, #6, 75-85.

[212] Ibid., 85.

[213] Chŏng Ok-sŏn, "Tonggabi" [Person of the Same Age], in *Pit'nanŭn rojŏng* [Brilliant course], Pyongyang: Munhakyesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998, 260

[214] Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn mokp'yo" [Lofty Goal], in *Pitnanŭn rojŏng*, 304-323.

Another range of widely exaggerated tales in the travelogues referred to the well-being of the workers in the Soviet kolkhozes or collective farms. Given the miserable reality of Soviet rural areas, this fiction was grotesque.[215] For instance, Yi Ki-yŏng, after visiting the "typical" Ukrainian collective farm, wrote that for one "working day" (Rus. *trudoden'*) a Soviet farmer received a kilo and a half of flour, two kilos of potatoes and a sum of money.[216] Hong Kŏn relates the story of some "ordinary farmer" in Abhasia in Georgia who allegedly earned 50,000 roubles for the previous year and spent this enormous income in the following manner: "I bought a new Pobeda (a large passenger car – T.G.) and constructed a two-storey house. The remaining money I just wasted".[217] The poet Kim Sun-sŏk relates a similarly false interview with an allegedly "ordinary" farmer from a kolhoz near Stalingrad: "Last year I spent 8 thousand roubles on a car. There are a lot of private cars on our collective farm".[218]

The life of Soviet farmers, as it is presented in the travelogues, is not just prosperous but also economically free, technologically advanced and highly cultured. Needless to say, these were a gross exaggeration: the post-war reality of the Soviet village was very different.[219] Yi Ki-yŏng claimed that Soviet collective farms allegedly

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[215] 1946-1947 was in fact a time of acute food shortages in the Soviet Union which are often described as "famine" by modern historians of the USSR. The famine hit rural areas with a particular ferocity. According to recently available data, in 1946-1947 some 100 million Soviet people were severely malnourished and up to 2 million died of hunger and related diseases. For a review of food shortages and famine in post-war USSR see: V. F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 19456-1947 godov: proishozhdenie i posledstvia* [The Famine in the USSR in 1946-1947: its Origins and Impact], Moscow: IRI, 1996.

[216] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 98. In the real life of Soviet kolkhozes, "working days" ("trudodni") were records in accounting books. The Soviet farmers used to call "trudodni" derogatorily "little sticks" (palochki). In most cases the "working days" were repaid in kind with small portions of grain, but too often farmers received nothing. According to the official data (classified at the time, but still probably over-optimistic), in 1946 75.8% of all Soviet kolhozs provided their members with less than 1 kg of grain per working day, and 7.7% kolhozs paid nothing, leaving their members to their own devices entirely. (See: Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo: politika i povsednevnost' 1945-1953* [Postwar Soviet Society: Politics and Everyday Life in 1945-1953], 61-62). This is why an ironic rhyme, popular among the Soviet farmers at the time, said: "Proletarians of the world, unite! Treat yourself 100 grams of bread a day, don't hesitate!". Apart from this impossibly exaggerated amount of grain, the potatoes and other vegetables which Yi Ki-yŏng mentioned as compensation, were seldom given for "working days" – the farmers were supposed to grow these themselves, in their tiny backyard patches after a full-day's work on the kolhoz.

[217] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 151-152.

[218] Ibid., 215.

[219] In 1949 Olga Berggolts, the then famous Soviet poetess, spent a few weeks in a village located between Moscow and Leningrad (that is, in a relatively prosperous part of the country) and wrote in her diary: "The sowing has been transformed into the hardest, almost penal, corvee: the authorities exert great pressure in regards to the time and area [to be sown] while there is nothing to use for ploughing—few horses (14 horses for 240 households) and merely two tractors. The women used hoes to prepare the fields for wheat [...] Yesterday I saw women dragging a plough themselves" (cited in Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo:*

sold milk and meat at the local market and distributed the profits among the collective farm members.[220] The writer waxed lyrical about Soviet miracle machines for potato harvesting and modern tractors which he saw on a Ukrainian collective farm, and marvelled at the TV system in the kolhoz's school.[221]The poet Kim Sun-sŏk eagerly reiterates the words of the members of another Soviet collective farm: "Thanks to the care of the Party and the Government, we all received bright and modern houses. Every evening they show movies in our club. There is a radio, a telephone, and an electrical heating system in every house. There is no difference between the city and rural lifestyles in our country."[222]Yi Ki-yŏng also concludes that: "The cities and the rural communities in the Soviet Union have the same quality of life. The only distinction between them is the beauty of nature in the countryside that cannot be found in big cities".[223] Both propagandists obviously implied that it was only the "beauty of nature" that held farmers to the countryside.[224]

This false image of the affluent Soviet village was greatly reinforced by the contemporary Soviet literature. S. Babaievski, who specialized in sugary depictions of booming villages, became one of the first winners of the Stalin Prize for literature, at that time the most prestigious official award in the USSR. However, Stalinist literature did not always present the rural situation in such an idealized a manner as the Soviet hosts presented it before their Korean visitors. Soviet "agricultural" novels, such as A. Musatov's *Stozhary* (1948), V. Panova's *Kruzhiliha* (1950), or G. Nikolaeva's *Zhatva (Harvesting)* (1950), despite their generally triumphalist tone, occasionally referred to material hardships and concealed social discontent (under the label of "class struggle") in Soviet kolhozes. Perhaps unwittingly, the Soviet novels also made some reference to what can be described as "deviant behaviour" of farmers or to material hardships in the post-war village. This was even more common in earlier eras. In the 1930s,

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politika i povsednevnost' 1945-1953, 69). This was written at the very time the Korean visitors were busy praising the feats of the Soviet agrarian technology.

[220] By spreading this falsehood, Soviet propagandists intended to invent parallels between kolkhozes and farmers' co-operatives in capitalist countries – a propagandistic leitmotif which is also prominent in Sholokhov's *Podniataia Tselina* [Virgin Land Under the Plough] (1932), a famous Soviet saga of agricultural reform. (See M. Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina* [Virgin Land Under the Plough], Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1973, 123, 221).

[221] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 101-103.

[222] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 215.

[223] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 104.

[224] Nothing could be further from the truth. It was not the beauty of nature which tied Soviet collective farmers to the rural areas but a strictly enforced system of administrative controls. Unlike the urban dwellers of the Soviet Union, collective farmers did not even have their own ID and thus were not able to move freely around the country or get regular employment outside their native village. In later eras the dissidents often described the system as a "new serfdom" and they were not too far off the mark. For more information on the control of population movement, see: *70-letie sovetskogo pasporta*. ["The 70th anniversary of the Soviet passport"], Demoscope-weekly, #93, 2002. (http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2002/093/arxiv01.php, retrieved in December 2003).

collectivization novels (and most prominently, Sholokhov's *Virgin Land)* provided anything but a bucolic depiction of happy village life.

In contrast, the North Korean works on rural subjects, which constituted the lion's share of all the literary works of the DPRK, presented the reality of the newly created "co-operatives" as an implausible harmony, a paradise for voluntarily united peasants, despite the fact that the reality of the North Korean village in the 1950s was even harsher than the Soviet one.[225] No social problems are mentioned in North Korean agrarian novels; all farmers are depicted as "simple-minded" (the much-trumpeted "sobakham") but honest people working towards common goals. These traits were noted by Brian Myers in relation to Han Sŏr-ya's writings on agrarian topics, but they are equally identifiable in the works of other North Korean writers of the era. The protagonists of Yi Ki-yŏng's *Land* enthusiastically work for the common good and selflessly deliver "patriotic rice". The vast majority of the heroes in Ch'ŏn Se-pong's novel "Sŏkkaeul-ŭi saebom" ("New Spring in Sŏkkae-ul")[226] eagerly and happily work on the land. The conflicts, if they appeared at all in these chocolate-box environments, are so childishly innocuous as to scarcely bother anybody. Take for instance the short story by Pak Hyo-jun, "So" ("Ox") (1956).[227] The protagonist, the elderly farmer Un-bo, does not want to pool his precious ox with the co-operative because he is not sure whether the other farmers would take proper care of it. His son, a conscious and enthusiastic collectivist, is trying to convince his father that the co-operative needs the ox to achieve a good harvest and that the ox would be cared for by everyone in the collective, "as if it were their own". The ox finally goes to the collective farm. The co-operative achieves a good harvest, and the old farmer relaxes when he discovers that the ox receives good care at the hands of the other members of the co-operative. In the end Un-bo becomes an enthusiastic supporter of the collective farm. As we can see, all the problems of the North Korean post-war village in the story are narrowed to the peculiar stubbornness of an old man which quickly gives way to the "norm" of collective consciousness and progressive thinking. No reference is made to the actual

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[225] During his meeting with a senior Soviet diplomat, Yi P'il-gyu, then a prominent North Korean statesman, in 1956 described the situation in contemporary Korean villages in the following manner: "Farmers comprise eighty percent of the population of [North] Korea. After Liberation they were offered an excellent opportunity for a better life, however they remain very poor. The government has been following an incorrect taxation policy. During the past ten years, instead of 23-27% tax, they have been taking more than 50% from the farmers. Such a policy continues to this day. It is not necessary to recount the methods employed in 1954-1955 to gather taxes. Tax-collecting was accompanied by beatings, murders, and arrests. The Party's activities are based on violence, not persuasion. The co-operative movement is based on violence. The workers live poorly, [they] do not have enough grain or soy beans. The intellectuals and students live in difficult conditions. " (Document kindly provided by Andrei Lankov, to be quoted at greater length in his forthcoming book, *1956: Failure of de-Stalnization in the DPRK,* to be published by Hawaii University Press in Honolulu).

[226] Ch'ŏn Se-pong, "Sŏkkaeul-ŭi saebom" ["New Spring in Sŏkkaeul"], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1956, #6, 21-64.

[227] Pak Hyo-jun, "So" [Ox], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1956, #3, 16-44.

resistance or discontent of the farmers, and no mention of the real material problems of North Korean villages can be found in this type of writing.

However, in the North Korean literature of the 1990s, the depiction of village life has changed. Despite an abundance of the still popular images of "fields of gold" and the "aroma of fruit gardens" as symbols of an allegedly prosperous rural life,[228] "clean houses with snow white walls" and "bathrooms with bathtubs" as signs of cultured lifestyles,[229] or references to the "blooming people's paradise" of Korean village,[230] the earlier pattern of the complete harmony of rural life began to deteriorate. This process is visible, for instance, in the short story of Chŏng Ok-sŏn, "Tonggabi" ("Person of the Same Age").[231] The protagonist of this story Yŏng-jin, who is studying in Pyongyang, hesitates about returning to his home village after graduation. His female classmate Hye-yŏng, a pretty fashion-lover who is now living in a provincial town with her uncle's family, is definitely against the idea. When both meet in their home village where the student returns for vacation, the girl makes it clear that she would do anything to remain in town. Yŏng-jin is not so sure. He is ashamed of his yearning to become a city-slicker and feels that in a moral sense it would be more honest to return home and face the hardships of life in the province. Several meetings with the mother of his late classmate, a classmate who had lived in exemplary fashion and died heroically on a construction site, and another with a city girl of the same age who had come to their home village to work and struggle with difficulty, inspired him. Yŏng-jin understood that "it is time to march in front ranks of the century. I have no right to be a straggler on the general course of the "march of hardships," as proclaimed by our glorious Leader".

As we can see, despite the obligatory upbeat tone and predictable outcome, the story mentions the real troubles of the village and the unwillingness of the young people to remain there. Thus, the previous pattern of an agricultural paradise is visibly blurring in recent North Korean literature.

The USSR is an educational and cultural paradise

It comes as no surprise that the visitors from Korea, with its deep-rooted Confucian reverence for education, frequently extolled the high cultural level and rich intellectual life of the Soviet citizens, eagerly describing wonderful Soviet universities, public libraries, theatres and museums.[232] Their presentation of this aspect of Soviet life

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[228] Pak Chŏng-ae, "Nae kohyang-ŭi irŭm" [The Name of My Home Town], in *Yŏngwŏnhan Noŭl*, 101-103; Ch'oe Ch'ang-man, "Onŭldo Ch'ŏngsanbŏle kyesine uri suryŏngnim", 107-109.

[229] Sŏng Man-sil, "Sinjŏng maŭl-ŭi haengbokhan pamiyŏ" [Happy Night in a New Village], in *Yŏngwŏnhan Noŭl,* 128-129.

[230] Pak Hŭi-gu, "Kohyangjip ap'esŏ" [Before My Native House], in *Pit'nanŭn Rojŏng*, Pyongyang: Munhakyesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998, 99-100.

[231] Chŏng Ok-sŏn, "Tonggabi", 255-276.

[232] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 158-163.

was not strictly false: indeed, the Soviet system of free university education, a well-developed system of student scholarships, ballet theatres, numerous libraries and museums represented real achievements of Soviet socialism. Yet, even these true achievements were often presented with gross propagandistic overstatement. For instance, Hon Kŏn reported that every student in Moscow State University allegedly lived in a separate room, each room being 8 p'yŏng; that PhD students enjoyed separate rooms with telephones and each room was 12 p'yŏng. Every room allegedly had a kitchen and a bathroom—and all for a monthly fee of a mere 15 roubles.[233] According to Yi Ki-yŏng the student dormitory in the Moscow State University looked "like a first class hotel". The rector of this "palace of science" (the then standard Soviet cliché which Yi eagerly utilised) mentioned that from now on "all the students of the university will live in separate rooms so as not to disturb each other's studying" since "sharing a room with another student must be a very uncomfortable practice, so the university does not use it".[234] Quite expectedly, all of these pluses of the Soviet educational system in the travelogues were also contrasted with alleged shortcomings in the capitalist world. Yi Ki-yŏng stressed, for instance, that in capitalist countries like the USA or Great Britain most working people suffered from exploitation and even... illiteracy, since even primary schools in the capitalist world, unlike the Soviet "educational paradise", were allegedly too costly for ordinary people.[235]

In general, the USSR was presented as a highly developed country which was enveloped in an educational zeal, and the North Korean writers in their travelogues appeared to express a particular admiration for this. Surprisingly, the self-image of Korea in its own literature, rather than mirroring the Soviet propagandistic self-image, was different. The cultural aspects, the lives of students and intelligentsia, and the idea of the DPRK as a "cultural/educational paradise" are much less prominent in the propagandistic self-image of North Korea.

While Soviet Stalinist novels often depicted college and university students, their everyday life and problems (take, for instance, the popular and officially acclaimed novel by Yurii Trifonov, *Studenty (Students)* (1951)), the protagonist of North Korean poems and novels was rarely a full-time student, let alone one enjoying the comfort of a

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[233] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 133-137.

[234] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 42. Of course the reality of Soviet dormitories was different. Given the fact that separate bathrooms and kitchens were an unbelievable extravagance even for most Soviet families, the cohabitation of 20-25 students in the same room was the norm in most university dormitories at the time. At the highly privileged Moscow State University, the number of students sharing the same room, of course, might be smaller. But providing every student with a separate room would be beyond the means even of the most prestigious Soviet universities of the 1950s. Only foreign students could sometimes enjoy this luxury. (Interviews by telephone with Valentina Lankova (Moscow, 22 October 2002) Leo Kontsevich (03 September 2002), Valeri and Irina Gabroussenko (Novosibirsk, 5 November 2003), Novosibirsk, 5 November 2003), all of whom were students of major Soviet colleges and universities from the late 1940s through the late 1950s).

[235] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda,* 160.

separate dormitory room. This is especially significant if we take into account the fact that students returning from Japan were favourite heroes in pre-Liberation Korean novels. The academic activity or studies of the North Korean literary hero, if mentioned at all, always followed some long-term engagement in physical labour in industry or agriculture (see, for example, the poem Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, "Huip'aram" ("Whistle")),[236] or was considered to be only a preparation for such work (Han Sŏr-ya, "T'an'gaengch'on" ("Mining Settlement")).[237]

The Soviet Stalinist literature produced a large number of works about "progressive intelligentsia", i.e. Soviet scientists, teachers or writers. Their work was described in greater detail and often constituted one major storyline of a particular novel (see, for instance, K. Lokotkov's *Vernost' (Loyalty)* (1951), [238] Vadim Ohotnikov's *Dorogi Vglub' (Roads to the Depth)* (1950),[239] or Frida Vigdorova's *Moi Klass (My Class)* (1949)[240]). Scientists, engineers and university professors were among the favourite characters of the Soviet fiction of the 1940s and 1950s. In contrast, contemporary North Korean literature seldom dealt with intellectuals. On the rare occasions when the protagonist happened to be an educated person, his/her activity is either overburdened with raw political motives, or has little to do with intellectual work at all. Take, for instance, the short story of Sŏk In-hae "Maŭl-ŭi nyŏsŏnsaeng" ("Female Village Teacher") (1956),[241] whose main protagonist, the female village teacher Yŏng-ae, is largely preoccupied with the construction of a new school building, overcoming difficulties and repelling "reactionary elements". Only once in this quite lengthy story is Yŏng-ae shown engaged in her professional activity: she reads with her students a long propagandistic text about the "wicked Americans" and "brave Koreans", which is generously quoted by the author.

The tendency to neglect or downplay the intellectual activity of the characters is also visible in North Korean literature of the 1990s. In the short story of Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn Mokp'yo" ("Lofty Goal"),[242] the characters, who are provincial doctors, are never depicted studying or working. Instead they indulge in lengthy political and moral discussions, one of the main postulates of which is that "real education is not to be found in books but in work among the people". The same tendency to belittle intellectual work is palpable in the above-mentioned story of Chŏng Ok-sŏn, "Person of the Same Age"[243] in which the protagonist, a student, feels deeply inferior before the

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[236] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, Vol. 2: 69.

[237] Concerning this short story, read Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature,* 54-60.

[238] K. Lokotkov, *Vernost'* [Loyalty], Novosibirsk: Novosibirskoe knizhnoe isdatel'stvo, 1951.

[239] Vadim Ohotnikov, *Dorogi vglub'* [Roads to the Depth], Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1950.

[240] Frida Vigdorova, *Moi class* [My Class], Novosibirsk: Novosibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1951.

[241] Sŏk In-hae, "Maŭl-ŭi nyŏsŏnsaeng", 80-112.

[242] Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn mokp'yo", 304-323.

[243] Chŏng Ok-sŏn, "Tonggabi", 255-276.

provincial folks who, unlike him, are "real people" and know how to grow a good persimmon.

North Korean fiction also rarely depicts its characters while visiting a theatre or a museum or reading fiction – i.e. occupied with the very "proper cultural entertainment" which the visiting Korean writers once admired in Soviet life. The only common sign of a cultural life which I have been able to discover in North Korean literature is "the sound of an accordion" pouring out of the open windows of a new house.[244]

Indeed, Communist ideology has always stressed that workers and peasants constitute the social base of society while intellectuals are merely a thin "layer" which is supposed to serve the interests of the two major classes. In North Korean propaganda this postulate was expressed much more strongly than in the USSR, which is somewhat surprising given the Confucian background of Korea and its culturally preconditioned respect for intellectuals combined with an ingrained contempt for physical labour. It appears likely that this under-representation of the intellectuals in North Korean literature was related to the "deep mistrust of intellectuals" by the North Korean elite which Brian Myers mentioned when writing about Kim Il Sung's policy.[245] Unlike the Soviet Stalinist policymakers, many of whom originally came from the intelligentsia and maintained strong connections with this social stratum despite all the "proletarian" rhetoric, the nascent North Korean elite (and especially the eventually triumphant "Guerrilla faction") included people of rather low educational levels who distrusted urban elites quite sincerely regardless of any ideological considerations. This vision could not help but influence the patterns of North Korea propaganda and the wider worldview presented in North Korean literature.

The USSR is the center/hope of the world

In the official Stalinist propaganda of "the world" this world consisted of two clearly defined parts: the "progressive camp" which was led, transformed and inspired by the Soviets, and the "reactionary camp" which viciously opposed the "only true course" of Communism. The Soviet Union was depicted as a protector of the oppressed and a model to be emulated. From the 1920s, a special emphasis was placed on the anti-imperialist essence of Soviet policy and the generous aid provided by the Communist authorities to the "less developed" ethnic groups inside the USSR.[246]

These stereotypes were especially meaningful to the newly liberated Koreans, and the Soviet propagandists paid particular attention to this aspect. A large number of works by minority writers were translated into Korean in the 1940s, while the propaganda machinery produced an avalanche of Korean-language booklets eulogizing

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[244] See, for example, Pyŏn Hŭi-gŭn, "Haengbokhan saramdŭl" [Happy People], *Munhak yesul*, 1953, #6, 75.

[245] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 38.

[246] For the most recent and profound study of the early Soviet nationalities policy, see: Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

the Soviet policy in non-Russian republics. The travelogues followed the same line. Yi T'ae-jun could not find enough words to express his admiration for the "wise and noble ethnic policy" of the USSR.[247] Yi Ki-yŏng eulogized the USSR where "all the ethnic groups live as one big happy family".[248] Min Pyŏng-gyun exclaims enthusiastically, repeating the popular Soviet stereotype: "The USSR is a land of many nations. But you do not feel as if there are too many peoples here. Everybody is happy. Everybody is singing only songs of happiness".[249]

The propagandistic stereotype of "freedom of minority cultures" in the USSR naturally demanded the idea of previous shackles, the image of the successfully repelled "Other". Yun Tu-hŏn, who visited Tajikistan, an alleged "Soviet paradise risen from the desert", wrote with great regret about pre-Soviet Tajikistan which was allegedly "suppressed by Arabs" for centuries. Although the Tajiks had had their own native alphabet since the 8th century AD, they were forced to use Arabic letters until liberated from this by the Communist revolution.[250] The author delicately omitted the critical details as to which alphabet the Tajiks used at the time of writing – which was the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, of course.

Min Pyŏng-gyun wrote about Tajikistan as previously poor and "suppressed by the Muslims" (sic), but affluent and exuberant now. The faces of liberated Tajik girls shine with content; they play musical instruments and the people gather around, now free from the Muslim tenets, merrily drink red wine – a commodity which is really quite rare in this area where strong distilled liquors have always been much more popular, etc.[251]

However, to make the propaganda more effective, the image of a subjugated enemy is not sufficient enough: an active threatening force is necessary. In the Soviet propaganda this role was bestowed on "imperialist America". As we have seen already, in the North Korean travelogues most allegations about the technological or educational achievements of the USSR had strong anti-American, anti-Western implications. When writing about the "rich cultural life" of the Soviet collective farms Yi Ki-yŏng compared it with the situation in capitalist countries where "even workers in cities live under the strong oppression of illiteracy, not to mention the peasantry".[252] When Yi visited the Research Institute for Labour Protection in Leningrad, among the other inventions of this institute he mentioned a Soviet factory machine which was made in order to replace a pre-existing American contraption. The guides noted that the American device was too noisy and uncomfortable for the workers.[253] The obvious implication was that unlike Soviet state industrial managers, American capitalists do

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[247] Yi T'ae-jun, *Ssoryŏn kihaeng,* 102, 104, 113-116, 133-136, 191.

[248] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 12.

[249] Min Pyŏng-gyun, "Myŏngnanhan saram" [Merry People], in *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi*, 32-35.

[250] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 107-124.

[251] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 32-35, 36-39.

[252] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kongsanjuŭi t'aeyang-ŭn pit'nanda*, 103.

[253] Ibid., 123.

not care for their workers. Yi comments on the situation: "....if Soviet workers live in a living paradise, their Western counterparts work in a real hell".

American capitalism, a thoroughly "evil" force, was depicted also as a threat to the independence of nations all over the globe. After visiting Norway, Yi Ki-yŏng, mimicking the Soviet propaganda statements, boldly claims that, "Norway is turning into an American colony".[254] As an irrefutable proof of his thesis he offers the fact that unlike the USSR, ".... even the soap in Norway's hotels is made in America".

As a rule, the Soviet propaganda took care to distinguish between the "bad" ruling classes of the Western countries and the potentially good or at least redeemable "masses" who either supported the Communist cause in the depth of their hearts or would do so had they known better. As a testimony to the miserable situation of the working class in Norway and Sweden, in comparison to the Soviet situation, Yi Ki-yŏng mentioned .... the long queues in Moscow's shops. To his mind, the absence of queues in capitalist shops meant that ordinary people in these countries are too poor to buy products, while Moscow's shops overflowed with people who had lots of money to spend.[255]

Yet, sometimes in Soviet propaganda the normal ideological line between "good" (exploited) and "bad" (exploiting) Westerners is blurred, offering some concession to the usual xenophobic generalisations which were aimed at winning popularity among the Soviet "rednecks". North Korean travelogues often resorted to a common popular cliché of Soviet propaganda according to which the "Westerners", independent of their class, regional or national differentiation, were weak, cowardly people, and could not conceive of the feats of labour which the tough and energetic Soviet people were able to produce. Yi Puk-myŏng, for instance, retold Soviet stories of "dim-witted foreigners" who refused to believe in the speedy reconstruction of Stalingrad which had been ruined by war. The Soviet people of course proved to be much stronger than the "reactionaries" expected.[256]

For a time the place of North Korea in this propagandistic scheme was quite clear-cut: it was supposed to be one of the numerous recipients of generous Soviet internationalist benevolence and an object of protection against a common enemy. Min Pyŏng-gyun, eulogizing the "Soviet paradise for the national minorities", made sure that the Korean reader would grasp his message: he stressed that the Soviet Union "is opening up the same paradise for us Koreans".[257] North Korean writers at first obediently toed the line, an approach fully reflected in the above-cited "Soviet-Korean friendship stories". Soon, however, the situation began to change.

From the late 1950s North Korea started to position itself as a self-sufficient state with a potentially world-dominating ideology whose destiny was to lead others rather than be led. Thus there emerged the image of North Korea as an independent centre of

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[254] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Widaehan saenghwal-ŭl ch'angjohanŭn ssoryŏn*, 53-63.

[255] Ibid., 100-105.

[256] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 64.

[257] *K'ŭnak'ŭn uŭi,* 32-35, 36-39.

all the truly progressive forces of the globe. This image was strongly reminiscent of the image of the USSR in old Soviet propaganda, with Pyongyang replacing Moscow as the centre of the Universe. One of the earliest examples of this emerging trend can be seen in Yi T'ae-jun's story "Dear People" ("Kogwihan saramdŭl") (1951),[258] which dealt with Chinese-Korean friendship. During a conversation with his Korean friend, the protagonist of the story, a Chinese volunteer in the Korean War, claimed that only his acquaintance with the North Korean Communists and the heroic Korean girl Kim Ok-sil "helped him to understand better his own Chinese Liberation Army and the Chinese Communist Party".

In visual arts the North Koreans tend to depict themselves as the pinnacle of world progress at quite an early stage. Since the early 1960s the depictions of Kim Il Sung, surrounded by happy crowds of Africans or Latin Americans holding his books and admiringly looking upward to him, became a common sight in the glossy propaganda magazines. However in literature the situation was different. The Soviet Stalinist writings readily depicted heroes interacting with people of other cultures and demonstrating their cultural superiority in the process. For instance, the hero of Trifonov's novel *Studenty (Students),* who had served in several European countries as a soldier during WWII, came to the inescapable conclusion that "there are a lot of things which should be redone in these places", "the peoples who live abroad still have to learn a lot from us".[259] Unlike the Soviet literature, North Korean fiction seldom depicted its heroes dealing directly with foreigners. Though North Korean literature today still uses the image of the DPRK as the hope of all progressive mankind (see, for instance, the above-mentioned poem of Han Chŏng-gyu, "The Words Which I Often Say to My Children"), [260] it is quite reluctant to become more specific. For instance, the heroes of the above- mentioned story of Yang Chae-mo, "Lofty Goal," [261] learn unspecified "foreign languages", read "foreign newspapers", sympathise with the people of an unspecified "poor foreign country" and criticise "foreign scientists" from "another country which claims itself to be developed". Apparently the author of the story, along with other North Korean authors, feels uncomfortable in the multinational sphere. This is quite natural, given that North Korea is a mono-ethnic state with a strong tradition of ethnocentrism if not xenophobia, without significant ethnic minorities and practically devoid of contacts with the outside world. In North Korean ideology the role of the only visible "other" who "has a lot to learn" from North Korea is bestowed on South Korea which allegedly "languished under American occupation" while dreaming about following the North Korean course. This tendency was already visible in Yi Ki-yŏng's *Ttang (Land)* (1948-1949) and Yi T'ae-jun's "Somewhere Near

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[258] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kogwihan saramdŭl" [Dear People], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of Yi T'ae-jun's literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭn saem, 1995. Vol. 3: 147-159.

[259] Yurii Trifonov, *Studenty,* 40.

[260] Han Chŏng-gyu, "Chasikdŭ-rege chaju hanŭn mal", 130-132.

[261] Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn mokp'yo", 304-323.

the 38th Parallel" ("38 sŏn ŏnŭ chigu-esŏ") (1949),[262] works which will be discussed in later relevant chapters, and became especially pronounced after the Korean War.

The roles of a "subjugated enemy" and a "threatening force" in North Korean propaganda were bestowed on the "Japs" and "Yankees". However, the common Soviet differentiation between "good" (exploited) and "bad" (exploiting) members of foe nations has never been applied to the DPRK world picture. The DPRK stereotypes of "the bestial Japs" and "the weak and vicious Westerners with ugly pale faces" versus "the strong, vigorous and generous North Koreans" soon developed to the level of wild racism which was unthinkable in the multi-national USSR. Yi Ki-yŏng, when writing about the historical past of Korea, eagerly exploited the stereotype "the inhumane Japanese versus the humane Koreans", which reached extremes in his novel *Han yŏsŏng-ŭi unmyŏng (The Fate of a Woman).*[263] In this novel the writer, among other horrifying details of the Japanese occupation, repeated the rumour about bestial Japanese who allegedly killed Koreans and then... used their flesh for fishing. On the other hand, the writings of Han Sŏr-ya, Yi T'ae-jun and other presented clear examples of out-and-out anti-American racism.[264] Brian Myers stresses with respect to Han Sŏr-ya's "Sŭngnyangi" ("Jackals"), that "there is no precedent for this kind of vilification in the Korean literary tradition, nor in socialist realism".[265]

With the arrival of the *chuch'e* era in the 1960s, anti-Western stereotypes became favourite topics in North Korean propaganda.[266] As a recent example we might cite the above-mentioned story by Yang Chae-mo, "Lofty Goal".[267] The protagonist of this novel, the elderly doctor Yun from a provincial North Korean hospital, debunks a "foreign professor" from "a country which claims itself to be developed". This professor insisted that he had discovered a new anti-cancer panacea, while in reality the medicine had been invented a number of years ago by a rural North Korean doctor. Also, unlike North Korean doctors, this vicious foreigner does not care about the possible side-effects of his treatment. Though the story is devoid of Han Sŏr-ya's characteristic blatantly racist notions, an attempt to belittle foreigners as thieves of ideas and cold-hearted people is visible here. Incidentally, the idea of plagiarizing

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[262] Yi T'ae-jun, "38 sŏn ŏnŭ chigu-esŏ" [Somewhere Near the 38th Parallel], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip,* [Anthology of Yi T'ae-jun's literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭn saem, 1995, Vol. 3: 121-129.

[263] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Han nyŏsŏng-ŭi unmyŏng* [The Fate of a Woman], Pyongyang: Chosŏn sahoejuŭI Nodong ch'ŏngnyŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1965.

[264] For a discussion of the racist implications of war-time North Korean literature, read the insightful and well-researched account in Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature,* 94-109.

[265] Ibid., 95-96.

[266] Brian Myers even suggests that the anti-Western tendencies in the subsequent North Korean literature might be a part of Han Sŏr-ya's legacy (See: Ibid., 153).

[267] Yang Chae-mo, "Nop'ŭn mokp'yo", 304-323

foreigners who were ever ready to steal the fruits of Russian/Soviet creativity was very common in the Soviet literature of the late 1940s.[268]

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If we look at the major Soviet patterns in the DPRK literary policy from an historical perspective we will notice that most of them were successfully embedded into the North Korean discourse, though not without predictable adaptation. For instance, in the North Korean version, the rigid clichés of Soviet propaganda sometimes acquired more sentimental forms which reflected the earlier cultural traditions of Korea. Some conventions, such as the concept of a "cultural paradise" were less palpable in the North Korean discourse, while the image of "weak and cowardly" Westerners versus "tough and vital" Koreans was definitely among the favourites. The latter leaned toward an ethnocentric model of the world and could not help but obliterate the pattern of the relations of the USSR/DPRK as an elder/younger brother from the North Korean discourse. (The greatest irony was that, after the triumph of nationalism in the 1960s, the Soviets themselves also eventually joined the list of "pale-faced Western whiners").

However, the majority of these patterns not merely survived the de-Russification of North Korean life, but under the influence of later political changes in the DPRK, re-emerged in a tougher guise. For instance, the Soviet notion of the essential political engagement of a Communist intellectual in the North Korean discourse was transformed into complete servility to the ruling Communist regime, underpinned by specific forms of control over the writers. Many Stalinist propagandistic truisms which had been quickly forgotten and even ridiculed after Stalin's death in the USSR, such as eulogies to the sacrifices and suffering of Communist workers on the road to virtually any significant achievement, or the description of the most mundane chores as "struggle" (such as the proverbial annual "struggle for harvest" in the USSR), the concept of self-reliance, or images of "lakes scooped out with bare hands" blossomed in North Korea. And, above all, the basic notion of a "socialist paradise" and its accompanying myths still constitute the cornerstones of the national ideology of the DPRK.

In general, it can be said that North Korean ideologists grasped the torch of Stalinist propaganda at the very moment that the Soviet Union's own faith in the Communist orthodoxy began to wane. The fates of the writers who took an active part in this re-definition of literature were widely different, but their efforts and experiences

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[268] Look, for example, at the Soviet biographical movies of the 1940s: in *Michurin* the cunning foreigners steal miraculous seeds developed by a Russian scientist and in *Popov* the Americans make off with Popov's contraption thus paving the way for the "invention" of the wireless by Marconi (Marconi's role was never recognized by Soviet officialdom). Even the idea of a dream cure for cancer which was stolen by the cunning foreigners from unsuspecting Russian scientists had a well-known predecessor in Soviet culture: this was a topic of Konstantin Simonov's 1948 play "Sud chesti" ("Court of Honour") and its 1950 screen version, both highly acclaimed in the USSR and widely shown in the "fraternal countries".

were equally instrumental in the emergence of a new model of literature in North Korea.

Chapter 2

SOVIET KOREANS IN NORTH KOREAN LITERATURE: LIVING CONDUCTORS OF "SOCIALIST REALISM"– THE CASE OF CHO KI-CH'ŎN

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was one of the first Soviet Koreans to enter the country with the Soviet troops in August 1945. The duration of his activity in North Korea was relatively short: it comprised less than six years from his arrival in late August 1945, to July 1951 when he was killed in an American air raid. Yet these final six Korean years of Cho were particularly productive. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn managed to become a leading authority in the Pyongyang literary world. He achieved a high degree of recognition among young North Korean readers and forged good relations with Kim Il Sung which allowed him to exert a profound influence on North Korea's literary politics as well as on literature itself. Until his untimely death in 1951, Cho's literary career had been steadily ascending. Even now Cho Ki-ch'ŏn is considered to be one of the founding fathers of NK literature, the pride and glory of the first years of the DPRK's cultural history.[269] He is one of a handful of Soviet Koreans whose work remains officially recognized and honored in the present-day DPRK while the achievements and contributions of other Soviet Koreans were erased from the official history long ago.[270]

In my opinion, this congruence of the poet with the DPRK literary and political standards was a primary reason why in North Korea his name soon became surrounded by various biographical myths, mostly aimed at downplaying the Soviet aspects of his worldview and stressing his real or imagined "Koreanness". These myths have long been ingrained in North Korean scholarship and have unavoidably influenced South Korean academics as well. While such influences are not uncommon in South Korean scholarship dealing with North Korean culture (it is sufficient to mention the abundance of incorrect data about Han Sŏr-ya in the works of Seoul academics who, in all probability, uncritically accepted the statements of the North Korean sources),[271] the situation with Cho Ki-ch'ŏn is quite special. Some recent South Korean publications demonstrate a clear tendency to mythologize Cho's personality and legacy. In this they are obviously driven by certain political agendas now fashionable in Seoul.

For a long time the approach to Cho was quite straightforward: North Korean, South Korean, and Soviet scholarship alike perceived Cho as an official eulogist for the new society, one who left no grounds to doubt his orthodox Communist beliefs and his unwavering loyalty to the Soviet Stalinist model. Almost all scholars represented Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as the "Korean Maiakovskii". This depiction implied such qualities as a devotion to Communist ideals, a decisive break with the old literary style and impulsive, even eccentric social behavior, characteristics usually ascribed to Cho's

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[269] Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova; "Famous Korean Poet" distributed by Korean Central News Agency. 5 July, 2001.

[270] Sin Hyŏng-gi, O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa*, 29.

[271] Bryan Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 6-9.

alleged Soviet archetype, Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893-1930), the founding father of official Soviet literature[272] – not to mention the emulation of famous images taken from Maiakovskii's poems (such as the equation of a Communist writer's pen with a bayonet) which often occurred in Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poetry.[273] This epithet, initially applied to the poet in his lifetime,[274] was at the time widely used in both a positive[275] and negative[276] way.

However, nowadays some South Korean publications suggest another, revised image of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: Cho the Korean nationalist,[277] Cho the partisan of pure poetry, Cho suffering under the pressure of dictatorship, or Cho "fascinated by [Communist] ideology"[278] but tragically misled. In his article "Puk-ŭi huip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn" [The North Korean "poet of whistle"] South Korean scholar Yi Ch'ang-ju, a director of Pukpang yŏngusŏ (The North Research Institute), went even further and attributed to this founding figure of North Korean literature "an attempt to flee from the North".[279]

However, following an intensive study of various sources and data relating to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, we have come to the conclusion that no matter how tempting it might be to "re-illuminate" this North Korean Communist icon and "humanize" his cultural legacy, the long-established approach to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn proves to be more convincing. New primary sources discovered during my research once again attest to the fact that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's Communist beliefs were by no means superficial or false. Cho Ki-ch'on, indeed, formed a consistent Communist worldview but this worldview was essentially Soviet, not nationalist Korean, in origin. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was born and brought up in Stalin's Soviet Union with all that this implied and he came to Korea as

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[272] Perzhov V.O., Serebrianskii I.M. (ed.). *Maiakovskii. Materialy i issliedovaniia* [Maiakovskii. Materials and Research], Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Gudozhestvennaia literatura", 1940; Usievich E. *Vladimir Maiakovskii,* Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1950, 32.

[273]V.N. Li, "Koreiskaia literatura pervyh let posle osvobozhdeniia (1945-1950), 341.

[274] Interviews with Chŏng Ryul.

[275] See, for instance, a detailed North Korean biography of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn written by Yi Ch'ŏng-gŭ: Yi Ch'ŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn ron* [Study of the Poet Cho Ki-ch'ŏn], Pyongyang: Munye ch'ong ch'ulp'ansa, 1953 or the Soviet article: L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Kich'ona" [The poetry of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn], in *Koreiskaia literatura* [Korean Literature], Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1959, 150-179.

[276]See, for instance, an anti-Communist work by the South Korean scholar Yi Ki-pong written when the "Cold War" between Seoul and P'yŏngyang was at its height. This book represents Cho Ki-ch'ŏng as an arrogant intruder into Korean literature, but still employs the same epithet. See: Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin*, 219-224.

[277] Yim Yŏng-t'ae, Ko Yu-han, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa*, Vol.1: 144.

[278] "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng. 'Na' poda 'uri' kangyohan sunsujuŭija" [Re-illumination of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: the Purist Who Worshiped "Us" More than 'I'], in *Hanguk ilbo*, 08 August 1992.

[279] Yi Ch'ang-ju, "Puk-ŭi huip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn" [The North Korean "Poet of Whistle"], in *Koryo times: weekly magazine for the foreign Korean community,* 10 August, 1992: 21.

an already ripened product of the Soviet Communist system and served the cause of Communism in North Korea eagerly and enthusiastically.

This chapter is largely based on new primary sources which were discovered during my research trips to Russia and Central Asia. This new material includes Cho's personal dossier, a copy of which was kept by his family, and his letters and private papers. Of great help in reconstructing the picture of Cho's life and activity were interviews with the people who were once personally close to Cho, especially his only son Cho Yurii,[280] and his friend Chŏng Ryul. An interview with Elena Davydova, a Russian-Korean translator and North Korean citizen now living in Pyongyang, sheds light on the perception of the poet by the contemporary North Korean literary establishment and its current attitude to Cho's legacy.[281] I feel particularly grateful to Cho Yurii who gave me access to some important materials from the family archive: Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personal file, [282] the letters of Cho's university girlfriend Liia Grigorievna Yudolevitch[283] containing memoirs regarding the poet, and Cho Ki-chŏn's final letter, sent to his wife from Pyongyang on 13 April, 1951.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: The pre-Korean experience.

The first myth surrounding Cho Ki-ch'ŏn concerns the poet's birthplace and his early childhood. The South Korean *Dictionary of North Korean Literature* insists that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was born in Hwaryŏng county, in the province of Hamgyŏng-pukto,[284] on November 6th 1913. It is also stated that while still a child his family "fled the oppression of the Japanese colonial authorities" in Korea for Russian Siberia. This has been reiterated in a number of South Korean publications. For instance, Yun Chae-kŭn and Pak Sang-ch'ŏn in their collective work affirmed that "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn had gone abroad to the Soviet Union for study and returned home after Liberation. This can explain why he produced so many pro-Soviet works".[285] Authors of *A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, published in English went even further – they claim that Cho Ki-

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[280] Interviews with Cho Yurii.

[281] Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova.

[282] "Lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov". Official questionnaire, completed by Cho Ki-chŏn. 18 June 1946. A copy is now kept in the author's archive. Such personal files were compiled in the former USSR every time a person took a new job. The file forms were filled out by the person himself and then checked by the employer. Often people were given an extra form or two, to better prepare a draft. One such draft was kept by Cho's family.

[283] Private letters of Cho Ki-chŏn's girlfriend Liia Grigorievna Yudolevitch, written to the poet's son Cho Yurii in 1977. The originals of the undated letters are now kept in the author's archive.

[284] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn* [Dictionary of North Korean literature], Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1995, 942.

[285] Yun Chae-kŭn, Pak Sang-ch'ŏn, *Pukhan-ŭi hyŏndae munhak* [Contemporary North Korean Literature], Seoul: Koryŏwŏn, 1990, Vol 2: 176.

ch'ŏn allegedly was, along with Yi Ki-yŏng and Han Sŏr-ya...a member of the KAPF, Korean Proletarian Artists Federation. [286]

However, Cho Ki-chŏn's personal file provides us with different information. According to this official Soviet data, Cho was born in 1913 in a village called Ael'tugeu in the Vladivostok district of the Russian Far East[287] to a family of poor Korean peasants. Cho Yurii, a son of the poet, and Chŏng Ryul, a disciple and close friend of Cho from the Soviet period, confidently confirmed this.[288] Both asserted that Cho Ki-chŏn was born in Russia and had never been in Korea before he entered the country with the Soviet Army in 1945.

In all probability, the incorrect information concerning Cho Ki-chŏn's birthplace has been uncritically taken from North Korean sources. North Korean scholars are determined to prove the "purely Korean" origins of any cultural phenomena they believe to be valuable,[289]and Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's case fully reflects this tendency. For instance, *Anthology of Cho Ki-chŏn* published in 1952, soon after the poet's death, states that: "Cho Ki-chŏn, a fighting poet and a son of the Korean nation, was born on the 6th of February, 1913 in Hwaryŏng district, in the province of Hamgyŏng-pukto, to a family of poor peasants. In his childhood he joined the struggle against Japanese imperialism and for that reason moved to a progressive country, the Soviet Union. There he displayed his talents in acquiring the progressive culture of the Soviet Union".[290] Even in this early statement we see the obvious signs of myth-making. The background attributed here is that of the common North Korean heroic image: he is supposed to be both a native and poor, subjected to oppression but determined to resist. The North Korea authors show no concern that their Hero was obviously too young to make the conscious choice of a "progressive country" as his destination.

The story of the alleged indigenous Korean roots of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn had grown to epic proportions in a monograph written in 1953 by Yi Chŏng-gu, an influential North Korean scholar. This supposedly scholarly work is imbued with specious passages on the imaginary past of Cho. Describing the Soviet period of Cho Ki-chŏn's life, for instance, Yi Chŏng-gu writes: "When he was giving lectures at the university or deep at night, when he felt tired of writing poems, familiar scenes rose before his eyes, scenes he had never forgotten. Beautiful Korean landscapes, faces of the people from his hometown which he missed so badly—they all sparkled in his head like lightning. At

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[286] Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt, with additional material by James Hoare, *Korea, A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, Great Britain: Curzon, 1999, 260.

[287] "Lichnyi listok".

[288] Interview with Ch'ŏng Ryul.

[289] In fact, foreign connections and influences are anathema to official DPRK scholarship. In the early 1950s the North Korean press tried not to mention the foreign connections of the new regime's leaders, once again in order to portray them as "authentic Koreans". The Soviet origins of North Korean prominent officials were never mentioned in the press even at the time when the "unbreakable friendship" of the USSR and North Korea was widely extolled in the press. For example, Kim Il Sung's four-year stay in the USSR during WWII was a secret in North Korea until very recently.

[290] *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip*, Vol.1:1.

that moment an impulsive hatred rose in his heart, hatred against the Japanese colonial authorities who had pushed his family out of their native land".[291]

These claims were supported by early Soviet scholarship, either because they simply followed the official North Korean media, or because they wanted to downplay the Soviet involvement with the North (the very presence of the Soviet Koreans in the DPRK was seen as a major secret at the time). For example, a Soviet-Korean scholar wrote in 1954: "The remarkable event in the poet's life was his arrival in the Soviet Union where he came as a youngster. It is not incidental that Cho, who returned to his home country after a long stay in the USSR, became a leader of Korean socialist realist poetry."[292]

A recent document distributed by the North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) attests to the fact that this officially endorsed biography of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn has remained unchanged in North Korea. The material "Famous Korean Poet" describes Cho's early years as follows: "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was a passionate poet produced by Korea. Born in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, he was well known in the surrounding areas for his outstanding poetic talent from childhood. However, he was unable to bring his talent to bloom as he was forced to live abroad as part of a stateless nation. It was not until Liberation (15 August 1945) of the country that he could realize his dream".[293] Hence, as we have seen, North Korean scholarship sustains the myth created in the 1940s. Also, by omitting the date of Cho's alleged departure from Korea, the unknown author intentionally gives the impression that he left the country as an accomplished poet or, at least, as an adult.

We would like to stress, however, that defining Cho Ki-chŏn as foreign-born (and foreign-educated) poet we do not imply any lack of "Koreanness" in his life or upbringing. Though born abroad Cho Ki-chŏn was indeed raised as a Korean, not as a Russian. To understand this we must take into account the situation in his native milieu, the Korean community in the Russian Far East in the early 20th century.

From the late 1860s until their forcible resettlement in 1937 the Korean community in first Russia, then the Soviet Far East was numerous and steadily increasing.[294] The Koreans largely lived in their own villages and had limited interaction with the surrounding Russian communities. The Soviet Koreans possessed a solid system of national education. German Kim, a leading authority on the history of the Soviet Korean community, wrote: "Up to the moment of their forcible resettlement from the Far Eastern region, Koreans exercised their rights to receive education in their

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[291] Yi Ch'ŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏnron*, 6.

[292] A.N. Ten, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury* [Study of contemporary Korean literature], Leningrad: Herzen Institute, 1954, 459.

[293] "Famous Korean Poet" distributed by KCNA. July 5, 2001.

[294] In 1917 about 81, 825 Koreans lived in the Far-Eastern region of Russia. They comprised one third of the total population of the region. In 1923 the number of Koreans in the region grew to 120,982 (see: Kim German and Sim Yŏng-sop, *Istoriia prosvescheniia koreitsev Rossii i Kazahstana* [History of the education of Koreans of Russia and Kazahstan], Alma-Ata: Kazak universiteti, 2000, 93-96.

native language. Korean schools operated at all levels, and there were also Korean technical colleges and a Korean Teachers College. The non-Korean universities had departments and faculties where instruction was in Korean".[295] Recollecting his youth in the Far Eastern region in the early 1930s, Chŏng Ryul confirmed that the system of primary and secondary Korean education in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s had been able to provide a good grounding in the natural sciences and the Korean language, albeit lacking in some aspects of the humanities curriculum such as calligraphy, Chinese characters, and Korean history and literature. Nevertheless, this deficiency was partially compensated for by home education within Korean families. Soviet Koreans also had many opportunities to acquaint themselves with traditional and modern Korean literature because until the mid-1930s the new publications were imported to Russia from Korea in large quantities.[296] In most families, including Cho Ki-chŏn's, parents taught their children Chinese characters as well.[297]

Cho Ki-chŏn graduated from a Korean school in the Soviet Far East. His friend Chŏng Ryul, and his son Cho Yurii, confirm that Cho spoke Korean, not Russian, at home and in everyday life.[298] Chŏng also recalls Cho Ki-chŏn as a well-educated man, who often used quotations from modern and classical Korean literature. When Cho was 17 years old, he published his first poem in a local Korean newspaper *Sŏnbong ("Avant-garde").*[299] In the years 1930-33 he continued to contribute to this newspaper. *Sŏnbong* published his poems under such telling titles as "The Morning of the Construction", "To the Advanced Workers", "The Military Field Study", "Paris Commune" and so on. These verses were unabashedly political and propagandist, and were replete with the hyperbolized images that later became so typical of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's Pyongyang poetry.[300] The above-cited North Korean scholar Yi Chŏng-gu asserts that these early verses brought Cho Ki-ch'ŏn wide popularity among the local readership,[301] but such statements are hard to verify now.

Cho continued his education in the Korean Teachers College in Voroshilov-Ussuriisk (1928-1931). This institution (Rus. Tehnikum) was a place where many future teachers of Korean schools received their education. In 1928-1932, Cho was a member of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) and in 1946 he became a candidate for the Communist Party (candidate card # 8234828). From 1931 to 1933 Cho attended "editors' courses" in Khabarovsk where young educated Koreans were trained to become editors in the Korean language press. The next step in his education was the Pedagogic University named after Gorky and located in Omsk, where Cho

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[295] Ibid.,113.

[296] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Interviews with Chŏng Ryul and Cho Yurii.

[299] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn* , 942.

[300] L.K.Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 150-151. Kim gives Korean titles of Cho's poems in Russian translation.

[301] Yi Chŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn ron*, 5.

studied in the Faculty of Literature (1933-1937). At this university the students were taught in Russian. Information on this period was well documented in the letters of Cho Ki-chŏn's girlfriend, Liia Yudolevitch, a student at the same university.[302]

Liia Yudolevitch writes that she first met Cho in 1933 in class and subsequently was his constant companion in the classroom. She helped Cho with Russian and became one of his "closest friends". Liia Yudolevitch describes Cho as a popular student and reports that Marxist philosophy was one of his favorite subjects. Cho was quite adept at polemics and eagerly took part in the numerous political disputes popular at the time. Liia highlights the same traits that Chŏn Ryul stresses in Cho: his gentleness in everyday life, but his ability to change radically during public meetings and political discussions, when he was suddenly transformed into a fervent orator and an emotional propagandist of Communist ideas. This transformation may appear awkward to his Korean colleagues but his Soviet friends perceived it as a sign of praiseworthy "Communist spontaneity". It seems that years of study in Omsk matured the "Russian" side of Cho Ki-chŏn. In addition, the entire university environment was strongly politicized and this gave an added impetus to Cho's behavior. Here are some quotes from Liia's letters to Cho Yurii, the poet's son:

"Cho was a man of principle; he was very honest and direct. He has never made excuses, even for friends. I recollect one incident that shows this clearly. Books and teaching materials in the university library were in short supply so we used them in turn. One day it so happened that I borrowed a book out of turn. I remember what a dressing-down he gave me! He shamed me for my unfair behaviour. His accusation was justified and I was not hurt, I just felt awfully ashamed of myself".

"He was a man with inner pride. When he felt offended he acted emotionally and he would boil, seethe with indignation".

"He was a marvelous man – very committed, with a steady political world view… He became our dearest comrade".

The above-mentioned characteristics hardly sound now like loving descriptions of a former boyfriend, which is what they really were. However they convey the Soviet atmosphere of those years when young people in love called each other "comrade", and when a "steady, uncompromising political worldview" was considered the best personal trait. As Liia Yudolevitch herself wrote: "We are the generation of the 1930s, those remarkable and wonderful years. My comrades and I have always been proud of our contemporaries as symbolized by Pavel Korchagin. Those years were full of hardships - no paper, no good clothes - but it was a beautiful time. All the country lived under the slogans "Let's do it!" ("Dayosch!" in Russian-TG) "Let's do Kuzbass!", "Let's do Magnitka"[303]…It was so exiting".

Liia Yudolevitch described Cho as a gifted student who read books in Russian very quickly and gave brilliant presentations. In her opinion, this skill can be partly explained by his previous experience as a journalist in the newspapers of the Far East.

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[302] Letters of Liia Yudolevitch.
[303] Major Soviet industrial projects of the early 1930s.

She also stressed that Cho was very concerned about Korea and often wrote poems about people of that distant country: "He loved Korean people very much, and his later personal fate is no surprise to me. He told me a lot about the life of Korean farming folks and said that he would go to fight for a better life for the Korean peasantry…He used to write poems in the library after we had finished studying. He would sit nearby and write with great concentration. Sometimes he raised his head and would start to relate emotionally how difficult the life of a Korean peasant was. He insisted that they had to fight against the Japanese yoke… He talked about the industriousness of the Korean people and described poor old Korean men who were exhausted by labor. He depicted the scene as if he had seen it with his own eyes. I was touched by his ardency, by the sincerity of his invectives. He told me he was going to write an epic poem about Korea".

After graduation they parted and Liia had no accurate information about Cho's life thereafter. She heard later that he had entered University in Moscow. But, as we shall see, this information was wrong. Cho never studied in any Moscow university for the following reasons:

In 1937 Cho returned to the Far East, where he got a teaching job in the Korean Pedagogical Institute (a four-year college). According to his file, Cho worked there from August 1937 to August 1938. However, in 1937 all ethnic Koreans from the Soviet Far East were relocated to Central Asia. The Korean Pedagogical Institute was also moved from Vladivostok to Kzyl-Orda in Khazakhstan.[304] In this college where Cho taught world literature, he met Chŏng Ryul, a student at the time. As Chŏng Ryul recalls, when in 1938 Russian became the language of tuition in the Korean Pedagogical University, Cho became very upset at the practice and even expressed resentment at the forcible resettlement of Koreans, a very dangerous sentiment at the time.[305]

The following year was marked by a significant episode in Cho's life – his temporary imprisonment. According to both Chŏng Ryul and Cho Yurii, in 1938 Cho made a decision to continue his education as a post-graduate student in the Moscow Literature University. In the summer of 1938, during the school vacation, he collected all the necessary papers in Kzyl-Orda and left for Moscow to apply for admission. But he was not even allowed to apply: a new law restricted the movement of Koreans and prohibited them from leaving the officially defined settlements in Central Asia. As soon as Cho arrived in Moscow and showed his documents at the reception center of the Literature University he was arrested for violating the registration law.[306] The situation was critical; in accordance with Stalinist judicial practice Cho could be easily executed on a charge of spying. Fortunately, one of his high-ranking Korean friends, Cho Tong-kyu who held an influential position in the NKVD (the former name of the KGB) intervened on his behalf and arranged for Cho's release after several months in prison.

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[304] "Lichnyi listok..."

[305] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[306] Interview with Cho Yurii.

Moreover, he somehow managed to erase the records of this incident from Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's files.

As one might expect, Cho hid the entire incident from his friends. Only his family members knew about it. Cho Yurii keeps a photo of his father soon after his release—with a short haircut which was a telltale sign of a Soviet ex-prisoner. After this incident Cho returned to Kzyl-Orda. When Chŏng Ryul met him there, Cho explained that he had been prohibited from entering Moscow University because of the new legal status of Koreans. At the time Cho appeared very disappointed and said to Chŏng Ryul: "Now I do not believe in the so-called Leninist national policy any more. The alleged freedom for all the nations in the USSR is a fiction. Nobody here needs us Koreans. They do not want our language and schools; they do not want us either".[307] However, this critical perception bordering on outright rebellion did not influence Cho's later life and probably did not last very long.

Cho then abandoned his dreams of education in Moscow or Leningrad. From August 1938 to December 1941 he worked as a teacher in the Pedagogic University of Kzyl-Orda (Kazakhstan). This was essentially the same Korean Pedagogical Institute that in 1938 had been renamed and transformed into a Russian-language school. Then he returned to journalism.[308] From December 1941 to September 1942 Cho worked as a translator in a local newspaper in Kzyl-Orda and then was drafted into the Soviet Army. From September 1942 to December 1943 he served in the Soviet 25th army as an "instructing writer" in the editing office (Rus.: instructor-literator redaktzii) at the army's headquarters which at the time was located in Voroshilov-Ussuriisk. From November 1943 to July 1945 he served in the Political Department of the Pacific Navy as a "writer in the editing office" (Rus.: literator redaktzii) in Khabarovsk. From August to October 1945 Cho served in the Political Department of the Primorskii Military District as a chief of department of local affairs in the editing office (Korean language) (Rus.: nachal'nik otdela mestnoi zhizni redaktzii). From October 1945 he worked as a "writer in the editing office" (Rus.: literator redaktzii) of the Political Department of the First Far Eastern front.[309]

A recent South Korean publication insists that Cho was forcibly recruited into the Red army.[310] Yet this information is hardly probable. At the time a brutal but popular war was being waged with Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union (1941-1945), so most males in the country were subject to military service and most of them were willing to fight. According to Cho Yurii, his father was happy to learn that he had been recruited

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[307] Interview with Chŏng Ryul

[308] Letters of Liia Yudolevitch.

[309] Lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov. Copy kept in the author's archive.

[310] Hong Chŏng-sŏn etc, "Ŭnp'ye, waegok... Kim Il Sung's ch'eje "hŭisaengyang"" [Re-illumination of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: Silenced and Distorted... Scapegoated by Kim Il Sung's System"], *Hanguk ilbo*, 05 August 1992, 4; "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng. 'Na' poda 'uri' kangyohan sunsujuŭija", 4.

for it meant that he was trusted in spite of such taints in his biography as a "suspicious" nationality and a brief imprisonment. The same feelings have been expressed by many other ethnic Koreans who perceived the draft as a sign of their acquittal and even privilege. As a rule, most Soviet Koreans were barred from military service during the war on the grounds that they were from an "unreliable ethnic group".[311]

In his file Cho mentions that he "took part in the campaign against the Japanese imperialists as a writer and editor in the Korean language" (Rus. "literator redaktsii na koreaiskom yasyke"). The military regulations prevented Cho from sharing much information about this period of his life with his family. However, it is clear from his CV that his main activity was related to psychological operations, then run by the network of "7th departments" within the political departments of the Soviet Army. Chŏng Ryul, a former marine who took part in amphibious operations on the Korean coast, recollects the convincing, touching and skillfully written propaganda leaflets which the Red Army spread over Korea during those days. After Liberation and already in Korea, Chŏng Ryul found out that the author of those leaflets was none other than Cho Ki-chŏn. The South Korean scholar Yi Ki-Pong also mentions Cho's name among those Soviet Korean editors who had supposedly translated into Korean the first speech of Kim Il Sung. The future North Korean leader delivered this speech (actually written by the Soviet military administration) when he made his first appearance before the Korean public in October 1945.[312]

By this time Cho Ki-ch'ŏn already had a family. In the late 1930s, he married Kim Hae-sŏn and had a son named Yurii (born 24 April, 1939) by her. Cho Yurii strictly denies that he ever had the Korean name "Cho Uk-chin" (which is mentioned in the article in *Hanguk ilbo*)[313] or any other Korean name. The fact that Cho gave only a Russian name to his son testifies to the fact that at that stage Cho Ki-ch'ŏn associated his family's future with the USSR, not with Korea. However, the situation changed and in late summer 1945 the 32 year old Cho entered North Korea with the troops of the Soviet Army. He had never previously left the Soviet Union and socialism was the only way of life he had experienced. The communist worldview was not a distant inspiration for him but a world he had been brought up in. Given these circumstances, the assertion that Cho had been a sensitive intellectual (somewhat like Yi T'ae-jun), romantically "fascinated with Communist ideas" is untenable.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in North Korea

Cho began his career in the Red Army's Korean-language newspaper *Chosŏn sinmun*. He published there a number of poems and also translated the Soviet poets Maiakovskii, Gribachev, and Dzhambul into Korean.[314] He visited plants and villages

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[311] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[312] Yi Ki-Pong, *Pukui munhak-kwa yesurin,*143.

[313] "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaechomyŏng.'Na' poda 'uri' kangyohan sunsujuŭija".

[314] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna",146; Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 942-945.

(under the slogan "immersion in the masses")[315]and wrote poems on the recent land reform and industrialization.[316] In addition he often gave lectures on Soviet literary theory and politics and on the history of world literature, and took part in numerous literary conventions and discussions.[317]

According to the recollections of Chŏng Ryul, Cho quickly immersed himself in this new atmosphere. He made a lot of Korean friends and took part in numerous political meetings and seminars in Pyongyang. Cho enjoyed his new status and responsibility while at the same time appreciating the material stability of his new life. Like other Soviet Koreans, Cho received a salary from both the Soviet Army and the Korean agencies he was working for. These arrangements made Soviet Koreans affluent by the standards of 1940s Pyongyang.[318]

However, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's official life was far from trouble-free. The factional rivalry in North Korean literary circles was rapidly becoming a persistent problem. This constant of the North Korean literary reality was so significant that many defectors to South Korea made the factional strife the central topic of their writing. Brian Myers in his work on Han Sŏr-ya even expressed the regret that these defectors "concentrated so exclusively on factional struggles at the expense of policy developments and literary issues".[319]

Indeed, almost all North Korean writers belonged to one of several factions that were constantly fighting with each other. The three most influential factions were: a) ex-KAPF members, b) former South Korean writers who moved to the North (kor. wolbuk chakka), and c) Soviet Koreans.[320] Cho Ki-chŏn became a leader of the Soviet Korean faction, which included all Soviet Koreans but also included some local employees of the *Chosŏn sinmun* and a few local Korean associates.[321] The "Soviet faction" in literature was closely connected to its political counterpart – the "Soviet faction" in the country's leadership which at the time included a number of Soviet Koreans.

Like other factions, the Soviet Koreans were striving for influence in the NK literary scene. However, some serious impediments hindered this process. Firstly, the entire attitude toward Russia and Russians in post-Liberation Korea was rather ambiguous – despite the powerful barrage of pro-Soviet propaganda which began in 1946. Before Liberation Korean intellectuals had been fond of Russian culture and leftists had admired the Great October Revolution and Communism. However in 1945, when the Korean citizens met Soviet Russians face to face, their attitude changed

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[315] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna",146-147.

[316] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 60.

[317] Ibid., 81-83.

[318] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[319] Bryan Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 4.

[320] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*,104-107.

[321] Ibid., 104.

somewhat. The Soviet troops on the Korean peninsula engaged in large-scale pillage, rape, and plunder, which could not help but produce bad feelings among the Koreans.[322] Though the harsh measures of the Soviet commanders led to a decline in the number of such incidents in 1946, the initial impression was too strong to erase. The bad reputation of the Red Army inevitably influenced the perception of the Soviet Koreans as well. This was also reinforced by the increasing persecution of the Nationalist Right, whose leaders had a large number of supporters within the country. The rightists often perceived the situation in the North as a simple change of occupying power: the Japanese gave way to the Soviet Russians.

Secondly, the sudden political rise of newcomers openly supported by foreign forces could not help but annoy local native Koreans including those who were inclined to support the emerging Communist government. Elena Davydova in her interview continuously stressed the importance of the terms "aliens" and "outsiders" in the relationships between Soviet and native Koreans, and between South and North Korean native writers. The irritation Korean intellectuals might have felt towards the Soviet Korean newcomers was also aggravated by some additional factors. Though Koreans in language and appearance, Soviet Koreans often behaved in "strange" and unexpected ways.[323]

A shortsighted policy of the Soviet authorities was also partially responsible for the alienation between the local and Soviet Koreans. The Soviet Koreans who were supposed to be intermediaries between the Soviets and Koreans were nevertheless treated as ordinary Soviet citizens abroad and thus were rigorously controlled in all their actions by the Soviet agencies. The "excessive" interaction with the locals was a major concern for the Soviet officials who supervised the Soviet citizens overseas. Chŏng Ryul recalls that Soviet Koreans were strictly discouraged from forming close relationships with local Koreans. Each contact with native Koreans had to be reported to "special agencies" of the Soviet embassy. When celebrating birthdays Chŏng Ryul had to give separate parties for Soviet and native Korean guests. Marriages between Soviet Koreans and local Koreans were very rare. The children of Soviet Koreans in Pyongyang attended "Soviet Army schools" and after 1953, "High School Number Six," both of which were inaccessible to ordinary Koreans.[324] In these schools the language of tuition was Russian and their curriculum closely followed the Soviet pattern. Most Soviet Korean children did not communicate with the local Korean children and often spoke poor Korean. This practice vividly reminded Koreans of the special schools for Japanese children in Korean cities during colonial times.[325]

The high standards of living of the Soviet Koreans were also serious grounds for resentment. Soviet Koreans were much more affluent then their local colleagues. Like

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[322] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 46.

[323] Sŏng Hye-rang, *Tŭngnamu chip*, 56.

[324] Andrei Lankov, *Severnaia Koreia: Vchera i Segodnia* [North Korea: Yesterday and Today], Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1995, 174-175.

[325] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

the families of the colonial rulers, many Soviet Koreans employed Korean servants while their spouses were in fact full-time housewives. Chŏng Ryul recollects that this lifestyle annoyed his Korean colleagues who were not able to spoil themselves in this way. As a result the native Koreans were irritated by the contradiction between the official image of the Soviets as the protectors of the poor and the repository of the altruistic Communist spirit, and the real people who enjoyed a high level of material comfort and isolated themselves from the impoverished locals.

All these factors, greatly reinforced by Korean tradition of factionalism, inevitably alienated the native Koreans from their Soviet Korean colleagues. Though Cho Ki-chŏn was modest in his daily life and eagerly made friends with local Koreans[326] he could not avoid the estrangement either. In addition, his emotional fervour and intolerance in political disputes, treated as a virtue in the Stalinist Soviet Union, often set him against the locals.

The hostile attitude toward Cho and the other Soviet Koreans was amply conveyed in the memoirs of Pak Nam-su. Pak, in spite of some attempts to appear calm and objective, was a sharp critic of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. In general, Pak's work is significant because it provides important information about the literary atmosphere of the late 1940s. However, these records must be used with care for reasons I would like to explain.

Chŏng Ryul recollected that Pak Nam-su maintained a very high profile in the NK literary scene. Humble and quiet, Pak was eager to demonstrate his loyalty to all of his superiors. Chŏng Ryul remembers the uneasy feeling he had every time the poet, in spite of his being several years older, would respectfully bow to him first. While in the North, Pak had never shown any animosity to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. The literary activity of Pak Nam-su does not show any traces of dissent either. When in 1949 *Glory to Stalin,* an anthology of obligatory homage to Stalin, was published under the editorship of Han Sŏr-ya, Pak Nam-su contributed three poems. Most of the other contributors meanwhile wrote only one or two. The poems glorified Stalin and Russians: "A Paean to Stalin" ("Sŭtaline ch'anga"), "Tower" ("T'ap") (the "tower" refers to the Morangbong monument erected in Pyongyang to honor the Soviet army), and "A Photo" ("Sajin").[327] In "A Paean to Stalin" Pak Nam-su called the Soviet dictator "a sun, a person whose name is reflected even in the hearts of Negroes and Arabs".[328] In "A Photo" the author sentimentally recollects a farewell exchange of photos with some "kind uncle Nikolai, an uncle in the Soviet Army, who waved his big hand which had beaten the Japanese". In the poem "Tower" Pak Nam-su eulogises the "Soviet soldiers with red stars on their foreheads who liberated Korea".

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[326] Ibid.

[327] Han Sŏr-ya (ed.), *Yŏnggwang-ŭi Ssŭttalin-ege: Ssŭttalin t'ansaeng 70-chunyŏn kinyŏm ch'ulp'an*, 26-36, 167-170, 260.

[328] Ibid., 28.

No wonder Pak's North Korean colleagues were amazed to learn that such a person had defected to the South.[329] They would probably have been more stunned had they had an inkling of the anti-Communist, anti-Soviet, and rigorously nationalistic rhetoric Pak was to use in his Seoul book published in 1952, a mere 3 years after his "A Paean to Stalin". For this reason I cannot agree with Brian Myers who believes that Pak Nam-su (Hyŏn)'s memoirs are "surprisingly evenhanded".[330] To my mind, Pak's memoirs were scarcely more evenhanded then his poems in honor of the Soviet dictator. Rather, the book was written as a propaganda exercise to slander Pak's erstwhile partners, friends, and employers. For this reason the book contains a number of intentional falsifications and such a characteristic cliché of anti-Communist propaganda as the stories about the alleged practice of "exchanging wives" in Russian families.[331]

Two chapters of Pak's memoirs are almost exclusively devoted to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, while other parts of his book are dotted with remarks about him. The book's third chapter even has the sarcastic title "How a genius was made" and deals with the most significant episodes of Cho Ki'ch'ŏn's North Korean biography, his ascent in the Pyongyang literary scene and disputes over the *Paektusan* poem.

Pak asserts that before coming to Korea Cho, like the other Soviet Koreans, spoke bad, almost incomprehensible Korean,[332] but his works soon achieved model status in North Korea; they were published in many editions, used as study materials in universities and literary circles, and awarded the so-called Festival Prize (a Korean analog of the Soviet Stalin Prize, the nation's highest literary award).[333] Explaining Cho's unusual success, Pak points not only to the support of Cho by the Soviets, but also by native Korean "assistants" especially by Kim Cho-gyu (born in 1914). Kim Cho-gyu was employed at the *Chosŏn sinmun* as an "editor" but, Pak insists, his main task was to rewrite the allegedly unreadable works of Soviet Koreans.[334]

To summarize Pak's assertions, the poems of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and other Soviet Korean writers were in fact written with the help of native Korean editors, for the Soviet Koreans allegedly did not know Korean well enough. This is obviously a propaganda exercise. As we know, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's native language was Korean, not Russian. That is why Cho used to translate poems by Gribachev and Maiakovskii into Korean.[335] But, like the other Soviet Koreans, he had never undertaken translations

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[329] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[330] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature,* 4.

[331] In reality, after the 1930s the Stalinist Soviet society, which at first supported certain popular ideas about sexual liberation, began to reinforce a very rigid traditionalist approach to family issues.

[332] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 78, 90.

[333] Ibid., 88, 94.

[334] Ibid., 78, 90.

[335] Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn...*, 943.

from Korean into Russian.[336] The system of Korean education in the Soviet Union before 1937 provided opportunities for full training in the Korean language up to the tertiary level. The only problem of the Soviet Koreans was their enduring North-Eastern dialect, which might have be regarded with disdain by some Korean intellectuals. Indeed, arrogance towards regional accents has deep roots in the Korean tradition. Another refugee, Yi Ch'ŏl-chu, referring to the Soviet Koreans and Ki Sŏk-pok in particular, also scorns his "clumsy Hamgyŏng dialect" in his memoirs.[337] Sŏng Hye-rang, writing quite recently, also refers to the same accent as a telltale mark of Ki Sŏk-pok and other Soviet Koreans.[338] As for the work of Pak Nam-su, in the other sections the Hamgyŏng-do natives are described with great irony, as primitive and uneducated rustics.[339]

Chŏng Ryul and Cho Yurii recollect that Cho always wrote his poems by himself and did so openly, under the gaze of his family members and friends, often asking for their judgment. Cho Yurii recollects his father reading aloud the parts of his unfinished poems to his friends and family.[340] Chŏng Ryul remembers particularly that Cho used to read his freshly written verses to his wife, who, in Chŏng Ryul's opinion, "did not know a thing about poetry".[341] Chŏng Ryul wondered why Cho listened to his wife's advice on such a lofty subject as poetry. Cho, convinced of the necessity of the "popular spirit" in socialist literature, used to answer: "If she understands, it means that everybody will understand. I must write in the most comprehensible manner possible".

Accustomed to discussing his verse, Cho could indeed have sought Kim Cho-gyu's opinion and even accepted some editing. A Pyongyang native and a lyrical poet with close connections to the Soviet Koreans, Kim Cho-gyu was a well-educated man who once majored in English.[342] Being a personal friend of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and an employee of the *Chosŏn sinmun,*[343] Kim might in fact have been a good advisor. But it seems rather unlikely that he actually *rewrote* Cho's verse. The styles of both poets were very different. While Kim Cho-gyu wrote in quite a traditional manner, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poetic style was very distinctive. Pak Nam-su also mentions Cho's specific writing technique though deriding it as "abnormal" and "unnatural".[344] This very notion testifies to the fact that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's style was his own, no matter how one may judge the quality of his writing.

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[336] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[337] Yi Chŏl-ju, *Pig-ŭi yesurin*, 199. Quoted in Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 88.

[338] Sŏng Hye-rang, *Tŭngnamu chip*, 170-171.

[339] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 209.

[340] Interview with Cho Yurii.

[341] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[342] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn* , 197.

[343] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[344] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 79, 86.

Cho's specific manner was already apparent in the first verses he wrote in Pyongyang: "Tumangang" (1946)[345] and "Ttang" ("Land") (1946).[346] This style found its fullest expression in Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's big poem *Paektusa*n, which was then regarded as the first real masterpiece of Korean Communist literature, and brought a wide popularity and fame to its author.[347] Still, this work also gave rise to a controversy in Pyongyang's literary world.

Discussions over *Paektusan*

Paektusan, the long epic written in 1947 and published in the *Nodong Sinmun* in 1948, was devoted to the theme of the anti-Japanese guerrilla activity of "Marshal Kim Il Sung" and the Poch'ŏnbo raid of the Korean guerrillas in 1937 – a topic which had always fascinated Cho. The stories about the anti-Japanese guerillas, sometimes embellished, filtered across the Soviet-Korean border; some exploits of the resistance fighters were occasionally described by the Soviet press. According to Chŏng Ryul, Cho always wanted to write poetry on the Korean anti-Japanese guerrilla movement. Chŏng Ryul recollects that the arrival of the famous Cho Myŏng-hŭi, a Korean nationalist writer, in the Soviet Far East in 1928 especially inspired Cho Ki-ch'ŏn.[348] Lylia Yudolevich also mentions in her letters that in his student years Cho wanted to write about Korean partisans. Chŏng Ryul recollects that Cho started to write the above-mentioned poem after talking with a former anti-Japanese guerrilla, Ch'oe Hyŏn. In his poem Cho Ki-ch'ŏn employed a genre defined by his contemporary critics as the "lyrical epic". The very name of the genre sounded peculiar to Korean intellectuals for it meant an improbable mix of (and was obviously influenced by) Maiakovskii's poems.[349]

Chŏng Ryul recalls some curious moments in the writing of the poem. Cho would sometimes read unfinished parts of the poem to him and on one occasion Chŏng criticized one episode of the epic. One character, "Paektusan", a young partisan exhausted by four days of hunger in a mountain camp, violates the order of Commander Kim and kills a local farmer's cow. "Commander Kim" berates him severely: "This is not a Japanese cow! This is a cow we must save, the cow of a Korean farmer!" When the young partisan realizes the full depth of his moral degradation and prepares himself for immediate death for marauding, Kim Il Sung shows him mercy and orders him to find the victim and compensate him for the damage.[350] Chŏng Ryul accused Cho of plagiarism because the same moralizing stories about stolen cows, pigs, and other peasant property, along with righteous commanders protecting the peasants' interests, could be found in a number of Soviet partisan's novels such as Fadeev's *The*

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[345] Ibid., 79.

[346] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 153.

[347] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn* , 503-508.

[348] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[349] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 167.

[350] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, vol.1: 74-84.

Last of Udege, *The Devastation* and others.[351] According to Chŏng Ryul, Cho felt embarrassed and convinced his friend that he had never come across these particular episodes in Soviet fiction.[352]

Another objection, raised by a Soviet official at the preliminary readings of the epic in the Soviet embassy, has been taken into account. At that meeting, where the poem was read and immediately translated into Russian, an official noticed that Cho constantly called Korea "my native land" (Kor.: Kohyang). His politically motivated pique was expressed immediately: "Comrade Cho was born in the USSR. That is in fact his native land, Korea is not". This was a serious ideological reprimand, which reminded all of the ambiguous status of the Soviet Koreans. Cho had no choice but to follow the prescription of the all-powerful Soviet Embassy.[353] In the *Paektusan* edition of 1952, Korea is referred to as "the land of the ancestors" ("Chosang-ŭi ttang"). [354]

The poem is saturated with Soviet allusions, beginning on the very first page. The poem is dedicated to "the glorious Soviet Army that liberated Korea".[355] It is hard to agree with the authors of *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa* who argued regarding *Paektusan*: "It was in fact asserted that neither the Soviet Union nor the USA liberated Korea, but the heroic anti-Japanese partisans".[356] *Paektusan* was anything but a piece of nationalistic Korean propaganda and Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, being a Soviet officer himself, could not write otherwise.

The public reaction to the poem was mixed. Many young people praised the poem as an exciting breakthrough in Korean literary style. Cho's approach was indeed new for Korean poetry, and thus attracted public attention. In addition, the obvious Soviet cultural background of the poem attracted many leftist writers who were curious to learn more about the Communist culture. Even Pak Nam-su, hardly an admirer of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, mentions the public interest created by the poem in his memoirs.[357]

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[351] A. Fadeev, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works], Moscow: Pravda, 1987, Vol. 1, 2. Take, for instance, the episode of a peasant's melons which were stolen by the careless young partisan Morozko in Fadeev's *Razgrom* [Devastation] (1927). The righteous commander Levinson uses the same tactic as Commander Kim – first, he raises the anger of the guerilla collective towards the criminal. Comrades berate the offender and threaten him with exile or even something worse, causing the young partisan to feel deeply ashamed of himself. Then the commander and comrades show mercy and make a decision to help the peasants, and the victim of the robbery in particular, working together in the fields. See: A. Fadeev, *Razgrom* [Devastation], Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1972, 44-53.

[352] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[353] Ibid.

[354] *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip*. Vol.1: 10, 29.

[355] Cho Ki-chŏn, "Paektusan" [Paektusan], in *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip*, Vol. 1: 6.

[356] Yim Yŏng-t'ae, Ko Yu-hwan, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa*, Vol. 1: 144.

[357] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 91.

Yet a significant part of the North Korea literary establishment was annoyed by *Paektusan*.[358] The subsequent discussion reflected both the political rivalry and a clash of literary tastes. Pak Nam-su and Chŏng Ryul reflect the heated discussions over *Paektusan* from contrary viewpoints. The dispute eventually developed into a confrontation with the critic An Ham-kwan, a member of the rival ex-KAPF faction. This incident deserves special attention.

The formal subject of the polemic between An and Cho was the poem's archaic and exalted style which differed from the customary style of contemporary Korean writers. The frequent use of archaic images and outdated expressions irritated some Korean readers. For example, Cho depicts Kim Il Sung in the following manner:

"O, Kim, you commander of Korean partisans!
The Japanese pirates of Three Provinces tremble when they hear your name!
O, you, ruler of Changpaek!
You hold mountains in your bare hands!
Mysterious rumors spread about your glorious name.
They say you can cross a thousand miles in an instant
Because you know the secret of shrinking the earth to move like lightning!
They say that you, a glorified commander, were born
When Venus had risen in the North,
Above the waves of the Amnokkang, and shone mysteriously over the earth.
O, you, Marshal Kim, you sovereign of Paektusan!"[359]

This depiction owed much to the contemporary Soviet poetry, in which the portrayal of the Communist leader as a legendary hero of epic proportions had become an established practice. This tendency is particularly traceable particularly in the poetry of the non-Russian republics. There, the regional minstrels of Stalin's cult, such as Dzambul Dzhabaev, Suleiman Stal'sky, Leonidze, etc. used to invent colourful designations for the Great Leader: "hero of the heroes, son of lightening and thunder", "Stalin who spawns thunderstorms in the sea", "the hope and light of humanity", etc. [360] These epithets mostly referred to Stalin, but the same elevated mode can be found in the poetic images of Lenin and other lesser Communist leaders, such as Ezhov, for instance.[361] This particular influence on Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's literary style may be ascribed to the Kazakh poet Dzhambul Dzhambaev, widely known as one of the major and most servile eulogists of the Soviet leaders, who used particularly aggrandized hyperbole and intentional archaisms in his songs. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn lived and worked in Kazakhstan when Dzhambul Dzhambaev was a local celebrity, and his long poems were widely translated

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[358] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[359] Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. "Paektusan", 23-24.

[360] G. Cheremnin, *Obraz Stalina v sovetskoi hudozhestvennoi literature* [The Image of Stalin in Soviet Fiction], Moscow: Pravda, 1950.

[361] There is a very characteristic poem of Dzhambul Dzhambaev about "People's Commissar Ezhov" (1937), where Ezhov, the chief of the NKVD secret police during the "Great Purge" of 1937-1938, is referred to as "a stern sword", an "eye of the country, which is clearer than a diamond", etc. (See: http://cray.onego.ru/~solvio/gostinaya/albom/literatura/ezhov.html)

and studied across this Soviet republic. Cho himself translated Dzhambul's poetry (from Russian, not from the Kazakh original). The style might have been familiar to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, brought up in the traditions of Soviet literature, but it appeared quite foreign to many of his Korean colleagues.

On the other hand, Pak Nam-su derided the literary genre of *Paektusan*, which Cho Ki-ch'ŏn defined as "sŏjŏng sŏsasi", or "lyrical epic". Pak insisted that Cho, being non-professional, was simply unable to write properly within the established borders of accepted genres and in order to justify his own inadequacy invented this "eccentric style".[362]

The question of the inappropriateness of the poetical form of *Paektusan* was first raised at a discussion of the poem by Korean writers and critics. According to Chŏng Ryul, it was a meeting of Korean writers in the office of Kim Ch'ang-man, the then head of the KWP Central Committee's Department of Propaganda in 1947 or 1948. This department controlled and "guided" the entire cultural life of the country. The meeting began with a reading of *Paektusan*, followed by a discussion. Pak Nam-su recollects that An Ham-gwang, a member of the ex-KAPF faction, sharply criticized the poem. He described the poem's style as "wooden" and "unnatural" and added that he saw no difference between this so-called poem and ordinary prose. An Ham-gwang also mentioned that there was a lack of interesting and engaging protagonists, except for Kim Il Sung, in the epic and concluded that the whole result could be called a fiasco.[363]

Chŏng Ryul states that An's attack on the poem took place after Kim Ch'ang-man had praised *Paektusan* in front of other writers. Chŏng Ryul recollects that An Ham-kwan was not the first to compare the poem with prose – *Paektusan*, indeed, did not keep to the traditional rules of Korean versification. Chŏng cites a characteristically sarcastic remark by the prosaic Yu Hang-rim. During a presentation of the poem in 1948 in a restaurant on the banks of the Taedonggang river, Yu proposed a toast to the "good prose of Cho Ki-ch'ŏng", since, he explained, being a prosaic he preferred the non-verse style and felt happy to meet another prosaic colleague.

As Chŏng Ryul notes, the biting remark of Yu, a jester in the North Korean literary world, has been ignored.[364] But the assault of An Ham-gwang was different from the usual sarcasm of a colleague, since An Ham-gwang represented the ex-KAPF members, whose faction was determined to fight off its competitors. Hence, his challenge could not go unanswered and the answer was immediately forthcoming. Pak Nam-su recalls how Cho Ki-ch'ŏn retaliated. "You think that the poem is bad, do you? But they read it at the Headquarters of the Soviet Army, in the Council of the People's Commissar of North Korea, in the Labor Party, and everybody said it was good. How dare you contradict such high opinions? You, comrade, are not right. If you are against the opinion of the Headquarters of the Soviet Army, it means you are anti-Soviet. And

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[362] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 96.

[363] Ibid., 86.

[364] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

if you are against the Council of the People's Commissar of North Korea, you are anti-government. Moreover, if you are against the opinion of the Labor Party, you are an anti-Party element".[365]

Pak's quotation may not be completely reliable (Chŏng Ryul, for instance, does not remember this retort by Cho Ki-ch'ŏn), but the core of the conversation and the style of the arguments seem very plausible. The line of argument was typical of the so-called discussions in Soviet literary circles at the time where the real or imaginary support of authorities was decisive. We can encounter this same trend in North Korea, for example, during the discussion over Yi T'ae-jun's novel "The First Fight" ("Ch'ŏt ch'ŏnt'u"). Protecting the novel from the attacks of Han Hyo, another critic of the ex-KAPF faction, "a certain writer" cites the following words of Han Hyo: "had I worked in the department of publishing affairs, this novel would never had been allowed to pass" and proceeds to give a political (or rather demagogic) interpretation of these words: "Does this mean that comrade Han Hyo is not satisfied with the management of the department? It sounds like he is against the Party's opinion".[366]

Yet no matter how elaborate Cho's polemical skills were, without senior endorsement they would not count for much. At the meeting Cho received strong support from Kim Ch'ang-man who upheld *Paektusan* unconditionally as "a new harvest of North Korean literature"[367] and accused An Ham-gwang of acting rudely towards his colleague.[368] Both Chŏng Ryul and Pak Nam-su affirm that An's behavior was indeed quite aggressive and arrogant (as we shall see in later chapters, An Ham-gwang was often very rude to his victims). But this was not the main reason behind Kim Ch'ang-man's support. Chŏng Ryul recalls another episode in this discussion. He says that An Ham-kwan called the exalted style of Cho's poem "non-Korean" and "non-national". The aim of these accusations was obvious—An wanted to show that his rival lacked national identity and was a stranger to the authentic Korean culture. To some extent this was true, but the political situation in the country which still remained under Soviet control made such suggestions politically risky. Thus, Kim Ch'ang-man rushed to the rescue of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and said that the poem's main protagonist Marshal Kim deserved the highest and most exultant style possible. He stressed that Cho used a very appropriate style to depict the Korean leader and his lofty deeds, thus establishing a new tradition that the other Korean writers should follow and emulate. Kim Ch'ang-man, a loyal acolyte of Kim Il Sung, knew how to please his boss and, being no admirer of Moscow himself, he also understood that it was not a good time to alienate North Korea's Soviet sponsors and supervisors. He was fully aware that Kim Il Sung, being the protagonist in the poem, was quite impressed by *Paektusan*. The future "Sun of the Nation" seemed embarrassed by neither its style nor the lofty epithets with which it addressed him. After Kim Il Sung read the poem, he made Cho Ki-ch'ŏn one

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[365] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 87.

[366] Ibid.,117.

[367] Sin Hyŏng-gi and O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa,* 29.

[368] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, p.87

of his personal friends and even began to visit the poet's home.[369] Soon after the discussion An Ham-gwang lost his important official positions, including the post of first secretary of the NKFLA and only the intercession of Han Sŏr-ya and Yi Ki-yŏng (both fellow ex-KAPF cadres) helped him later to be restored to the post of chairman of the Writers' Union and an editor of "Literature and Art", the organ of the NKFLA.[370]

After this discussion and the subsequent official endorsement of the poem, the standing of *Paektusan* and its author became unshakable. The poem was announced as a "new classic", an exemplary work to be studied and emulated. Bryan Myers mentions that in 1947 the author received the first Festival Prize for the poem.[371] According to Soviet sources, Cho received this prize in 1948.[372] The latter date sounds more convincing since *Paektusan* was first published in 1948 in *Nodong sinmun*. The poem was later staged at the State Theatre by dramatist Han T'ae-ch'ŏn, and Kim Il Sung personally approved the performance.[373]

Nevertheless, the brief debate over the poem was an crucial event. It stands as an early example of the ideological campaigns that tore apart the North Korean literary world in the years 1953-1960. The arguments opponents used in 1948, while not causing the same devastating effects, were still of quite a demagogic nature. The participants resorted to political accusation: An Ham-gwang accused his competitor of using "non Korean" and "non-national" motives while Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in turn accused his opponent of harboring "anti-Party", "anti-government" and "anti-Soviet" sentiments. Kim Ch'ang-man in turn hinted that An did not show enough deference to Marshal Kim, and so on.

Paektusan brought not only new form, but also new images into the North Korean literary tradition. Kim Il Sung, for instance, was depicted in accordance with the established Soviet patterns. Like Stalin in the contemporary Soviet literature, Kim is pictured vigilant at night while ordinary partisans rested serenely. Stern and authoritative, Kim Il Sung took his wisdom and encouragement from books about the heroic deeds of Soviet partisans.[374] All these traits meanwhile reflected the actual behavior of Stalin who indeed suffered from insomnia and was an avid reader. But they did not reflect Kim Il Sung's character. Kim was much younger and was never particularly fond of books. The manner in which Cho Ki-ch'ŏn depicted the North Korean leader accommodated the aesthetic standards of the new socialist world which were designed to be a replica of the Soviet system. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in fact worshiped Kim Il Sung as a national hero and portrayed him with genuine veneration. Yet he depicted Kim as a "Korean Stalin" who acted bravely and skillfully, but always under the wise protective shadow of the "big Stalin" in Moscow.

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[369] Interview with Cho Yurii.

[370] Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 762.

[371] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature*, 51.

[372] L.K.Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki'ch'ŏna",147.

[373] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[374] Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, "Paektusan", 3-153.

The image of Kim Il Sung produced by Cho Ki-ch'ŏn played a meaningful artistic role, inspiring the numerous eulogists of the North Korean leader to depict him as an intelligent, persistent, and unbending hero. Nevertheless, this initial approach was gradually modified by the new image created by Han Sŏr-ya, Hŏng Sun-ch'ŏl, and the other ex-KAPF members. Their portrayal of Kim Il Sung as a naïve, spontaneous, passive figure, endowed with slightly feminine traits, has been perceptively analyzed by Brian Myers in his book on Han Sŏr-ya.[375] In the words of Chŏng Ryul, the Soviet Koreans working at the time in Pyongyang were indignant at the newly emerging image of the Korean leader. For them, it appeared almost comical and disrespectful.[376]

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn after Paektusan: "proletarian poet" or "hidden lyricist?"

Between 1945 and 1950 Cho Ki-ch'ŏn composed a number of poems: "Tumangang" (1946) about the suffering of Koreans under the Japanese colonial rule, "Uri-ŭi kil" ("Our way") (1949) which glorified the Soviet-Korean friendship and "Hangjaeng-ŭi yŏsu" ("Resistance in Yosu") (1950) about the South Korean communist underground, among others.[377]

All of these works were praised as pioneering and exemplary. So too was the lyrical epic "Ttang" ("Land"), written in response to the Party's order to extol the recent land reform of 1946. For most North Korean writers such demands were something new and strange, and they felt perplexed and bewildered. But Cho, equipped with his Soviet experience, immediately produced the required work.[378] These propaganda poems were far from being literary masterpieces but still they were the beginning of a new literary tradition that Cho strove to establish in Korea. For this reason he ignored the frequent ridicule which native Korean writers poured on the genre that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chose for the poem – the "lyrical epic" (Kor: sŏjŏng sŏsasi). According to Pak Nam-su, Korean writers, accustomed to either "lyrical" or "epic" poems, found it absurd to mix these seemingly different styles in the one poem. But Cho, brought up in a more diverse literary tradition, stubbornly held his line.[379]

Fulfilling the Party's order to "immerse [oneself] in the masses", Cho Ki-ch'ŏn traveled around the country visiting farms and factories. In the summer of 1949 he went to the Hamhŭng plant where he "participated in the assembly of tools and machines and acquainted himself intimately with work and the everyday life of the workers".[380] This was yet another exemplary action since many Korean authors "immersed themselves in the masses" rather reluctantly. Han Sŏr-ya, for instance, spent "just one day in the

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[375] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 135-142.

[376] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[377] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 942-943.

[378] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 59-60.

[379] Ibid., 60.

[380] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 147.

industrial zone of Sadong. He did not seek contacts with the workers, choosing instead to join students of the local engineering school on a class excursion to an adjacent mine".[381]

As a result of those trips, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn wrote poems glorifying socialist construction and industrialization. Some representative lines from Cho's long epic "Saengea-ŭi Norae" ("The Song of Life") (June, 1950), written after his visit to the Hamhŭng plant illustrate the style of these writings:[382]

"Steelworker Kim Yŏng-su is coming to the plant,
(...)
Smoke billows in front of him,
The smoke is colored by the morning sunshine.
It is the proud smoke of reconstruction.
A creative energy is blazing there
Pounding hearts,
Hot breath,
Developing muscles,
The fire of patriotism is blazing there.
It is the proud smoke of success."[383]

The poem tells about the struggle of progressive workers striving to fulfill the production plan ahead of schedule. Needless to say, they have to overcome sabotage by "class enemies" – a very common topic in Stalinist fiction. The backward worker Tŏk-po is manipulated by a vicious former landlord and destroys the electric furnace in order to outstrip the opposing brigade in socialist competition. At the end of the poem Tŏk-po "unbends his crushed soul",[384] regrets his unforgivable behavior, and is rectified.

Like *Paektusan,* "The Song of Life" and other works by Cho were saturated with exalted intonation and hyperbolic images that were indeed reminiscent of Maiakovskii, and at the same time were quite foreign to the Korean literary tradition. The alien intonation could not help but estrange Cho from the more conservative authors. Pak Nam-su also mentions other exotic traits of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, such as his steady manner of speaking, his unusual "Soviet" manner of declaring verse with his head tilted backwards etc.[385] The ideological background of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poems, his open obsequiousness to Kim Il Sung, and his panegyrics to the Red Army, especially irritated Pak Nam-su. Pak wrote with indignation that the explicit propagandistic motif of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's verses "never embarrassed" the poet who, repeating his famous Soviet dictum, insisted that "literature must be national in form and democratic (read

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[381] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 44,54.

[382] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, Vol.1: 153-360.

[383] Ibid., 161-163.

[384] Ibid., 235.

[385] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 78.

Communist) in content".[386] However, Pak's righteous exasperation can be taken at face value only if we choose to ignore the North Korean biography of Pak Nam-su himself. Like most of Cho's critics and factional rivals, Pak once wrote verse on the same topics and with similar political fervor, but for some reason with less success.

There are important remarks in Pak Nam-su's memoirs regarding Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's perception by the local Korean writers. Pak reports that the native writers were shocked by Cho's negative view of Dostoevskii, a traditional icon of Korean intellectuals. According to Pak, at the meetings with the Korean writers Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, in answer to a question by a member of the public, described the famous Russian novelist as a "reactionary".[387] This is no surprise since Cho's response was in accordance with the official Stalinist view of Dostoevskii. At the same time Pak Nam-su points to the high intellectual level of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's public speeches and of his substantial knowledge of contemporary Soviet and foreign literature. Pak noticed that the Korean writers listened to Cho with great attention. "Everything he said was so exiting and interesting; he seemed like a visitor from some strange and mystical place. He gave the impression of being a very erudite person".[388]

The perception of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as erudite by local Koreans was not accidental. Most of his audience consisted of leftist intellectuals who, before Liberation, gravitated towards the KAPF and other pro-Communist organizations. Although the general educational level of these people was above that of the average Korean, it was still quite low. In contrast to the early Russian Bolsheviks and their supporters, often graduates of the best universities, most Korean leftist writers attended Japanese universities only briefly, and left them in the first or second year without completing their courses. Their education thus tended to be rather superficial and fragmentary.[389] It is no wonder then that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, who had received a profound philological education in two languages, became somewhat of an authority figure.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's works were permeated by politics and ideology, while lyrical themes were rare and secondary. It is also noteworthy that the descriptions of landscapes or romantic relationships in Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poems are always supposed to convey some propagandistic message; nature approves or disapproves of the protagonists' actions which are essentially political. Depending on the situation, mountains and rivers "cry" or "laugh". One could refer to Cho's poem "Hŭin Pauie Anjaso" ("Sitting on the White Rock"), written on July 1947 in the Kŭmgansan People's resort, for example.[390] The protagonist is sitting on a white rock above a fast-flowing spring and "talking with the water". At first glance this is a bucolic picture, quite common and in tune with the Korean literary tradition. But we come to realize almost immediately that the protagonist is not simply enjoying his leisure. He puts his

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[386] Ibid., 81, 84.

[387] Ibid., 81.

[388] Ibid., 83.

[389] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 20, interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[390] *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip,* Vol. 2: 52-54.

time to excellent use honoring his revolutionary spirit since he is learning to be as swift and tenacious as the flowing water and intends to break his enemies into pieces.

The love relationships in "Saengae-ŭi" norae serve as another example of this tendency. According to the Stalinist tradition, love is supposed to help the heroes fulfill production plans and fight enemies more successfully. Look at the way the author describes the passion of the two protagonists, the advanced workers Kŭm-sun and Yŏng-su.

"It is not just a "sweet love",
Which poets eulogize in their "songs of passion".
It is a relationship where both lovers stand hand in hand
For the construction of democracy,
For the creation of the Motherland.
It is a exalted love of the new Korea and one which we must applaud.
(...)
Love is not about a supple bosom or starry eyes.
Exalted love is a fight for the spring of a free Korea."[391]

This notion is strongly reminiscent of the early Soviet philosophy of love, reflected in the famous poems of Maiakovskii, such as "A Letter to Comrade Kostrov from Paris on the Essence of Love" (1929) ("To love does not mean simply to boil with passion. Love leaps over the mountains of bosoms and jungles of hair. To love means to rush into the backyard and chop the wood for the fire with the spackling axe enjoying your strength") or "A Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva" (1929) ("The red color of my republics must shine even in my kissing, and hugging, and the trembling of the body that I love").[392]

As we have mentioned above, Cho's once indisputable reputation as a 'proletarian poet' has recently begun to fade in South Korean scholarship. He is increasingly perceived as the author of lyrical, seemingly non-political poems such as "Hŭip'aram" ("Whistle"), "Suyang pŏtŭl" ("Willow"), or "Kŭne" ("Swing"), which became the texts of songs, popular among leftist students in the South. This approach is even reflected in the titles of recent South Korean publications about the poet ("The poet of the Whistle" etc[393]). Some South Korean scholars have used these verses as grounds for asserting that the 'real' Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was not a political 'proletarian poet' at all, but a soft lyricist who has to be 're-discovered' today.

In the light of today's rapprochement between South and North Korea, the desire of South Korean intellectuals to find allies among former enemies and for this reason to "domesticate" Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's legacy is understandable. However, this "re-discovery" should not be done at the price of a distortion of facts, which is often the case. In fact,

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[391] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip,* Vol. 1: 308-309.

[392] Vladimir Maiakovskii, "Pis'mo tovarishchu Kostrovu o sushchnosti liubvi" [A Letter to Comrade Kostrov from Paris About the Essence of Love], "Pis'mo Tatianie Iakovlevoi" [A Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva], in *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works], Moscow: Pravda, 1973, Vol. 6: 150-157.

[393] Yi Ch'ang-ju, "Puk-ŭi huip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn", 21.

neither "Whistle", nor "Swing" contradicts the conventional image of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as an overtly politicized "Communist poet". Both Chŏng Ryul and Pak Nam-su (i.e. both friend and foe) perceive Cho's lyrical poems, not as a protest against official ideology, but as reflections of particular tendencies in the Korean literature of the period.

Pak Nam-su represents Cho's "Whistle" and "Swing" as the emulation of the lyrical poems written by the Soviet poet Isakovskii (1900-1973) who was very popular at the time in the USSR and widely translated in other Communist countries. According to Pak, the "quick-witted" Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sensed a new social trend and rushed to use it. It was approximately at this time that the Soviet poet Grinachev came to Korea and wondered why Korean poets wrote only about politics and did not extol such eternal objects as, say, the moon or flowers. This opinion led to a wave of lyrical poems in Korea in 1947-48, such as "The First Snow" by Kim Sang-o, "Pine Tree" by Kim Sun-sŏk, and others.[394]

Chŏng Ryul generally agrees with such a perception. At first Korean writers wrote only "political" verse since they believed that socialist realist literature must be rigid and overtly ideological. According to Chŏng the situation changed slightly after a group of Russian artists came to Korea and began to sing Russian romances in front of their Korean hosts. Chŏng Ryul recollects this performance as a shock to many Korean intellectuals. At the time many of them came to their Soviet Korean colleagues and asked: "Is it permitted to sing such sweet love songs in a Communist country?" The Soviet Koreans laughed and explained that love songs were an important part of Russian culture and that a lot of new poems and songs on romantic themes were being created in the Soviet Union every day. Taking this as a green light, Korean intellectuals such as Min Pyŏn-gyun, Kim Cho-gyu, Pak Se-yŏng and others started to produce lyrical poems in abundance. In addition, translations of many Soviet lyrical verses appeared in Korea at this time as well. Some of these, such as Isakovskii's "Katyusha", Simonov's "Wait for Me" etc., have become especially popular as the lyrics of pop-songs. All these events changed the atmosphere in Pyongyang literary circles, rendering North Korean poetry more tender and eminently more readable.[395] However, they had nothing to do with resistance to the regime. On the contrary, this was just another manifestation of their eagerness to follow the line, which at that time meant the closest possible imitation of the current Moscow trends.

And, of course, we should not overestimate the degree of political freedom expressed in these verses. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's lyrical poems were anything but a concession to "pure art" like the essay of the director of Pukpang yŏngusŏ (Research institute on North Korea), Yi Ch'ang-ju[396] and the above-mentioned article in *Hanguk ilbo* asserted.[397] Like the verses of Isakovskii, with which they have a lot of textual similarities, Cho's love songs faithfully reflect the current political demands. For

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[394] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 129-130.

[395] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[396] Yi Ch'ang-ju, "Puk-ŭi huip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn", 21.

[397] "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng", 4.

instance, the protagonists of "Whistle" are not ordinary sweethearts but exemplary workers who, needless to say, over-fulfill labor norms threefold and stay up late every night looking through study materials.[398]

"Today you again smiled purely,
And said that you have over- fulfilled the production plan threefold,
But I do not envy your achievement,
I can do even better,
But I like your smile.
Why is it so pure?"[399]

The poem "Swing" depicts the spring folk festival Tano and the traditional entertainment of Korean girls being lifted up on a swing. But even this idyllic picture is saturated with propaganda. One of the swinging girls dreams of a distant Pyongyang where the national flag is waving in the wind and of Kim Il Sung University, where her boyfriend, yesterday's farmhand, is now studying.[400] The poem "Willow" is less politicized. It depicts a beautiful spring morning, the young willow growing up under the window of the young protagonist and the rejuvenating mood he feels on watching the growing tree. But the author does not fail to notice that the spring mood is fruitful, since it fills the hero with a new invigorating strength, which, of course, helps him work productively all day.[401]

These poems vividly remind one of Isakovskii whose verses always described the "useful" relationships of "good", "advanced" boys and girls.[402] Cho Ki-ch'ŏn borrowed not only the form of Isakovskii's poems, but also used the imagery of his verses, and this is one of the possible reasons why nowadays South Korean readers often misunderstand the message of Cho's poems. For instance, in recent Seoul newspaper articles "Whistle" is described as "a song of unrequited love"[403] while the truth is precisely to the contrary: both protagonists are in love and the girl invitingly smiles at the boy, but he is too shy to open his heart. He simply sighs secretly, which in Korean eyes probably represents a picture of unhappy love. The very images of the poem point

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[398] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip,* Vol.2: 69.

[399] Ibid., 70.

[400] Ibid., 49; L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna",154.

[401] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip,* Vol. 2: 47.

[402] See, for instance, the poem of Mikhail Isakovskii "Ya ne klala v pechku drov" [I Did not Put Wood into the Stove"] (1927). The poem is about a girl's separation from her boyfriend. The girl who initiates the break-up explains that "it is more fun to love a teacher" rather than waste time "lazily singing songs". (See Mihail Isakovskii, *Stihi, poemy i pesni* [Verses, Poems and Songs], Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951, Vol.1: 74-75). The protagonist of the famous song *Katyusha*, a young girl, is waiting for her boyfriend while he is serving in the army "far away". Not surprisingly, the boy is not a simple country lad but an advanced frontier-guard, who is protecting the great Soviet land while Katyusha is "guarding their love" (See: Ibid., 217).

[403] See, for instance, the article "Chchaksarang naeyong-ŭi ch'oedae hit'ŭ kok Hŭi p'aram" [The Great Hit "Whistle", a Song of Unrequited Love], *Chungang ilbo,* 15 January 1995, 17.

to their derivation from a popular Soviet song, with lyrics by Isakovskii "At Sunset I See a Boy Near My House" ("At sunset I see a boy near my house. He just sighs and does not say a word. And I don't know why he sighs").[404] Like Isakovskii, Cho depicts his female protagonist as a resolute and active figure in contrast to the timid boy. Both characters act in accordance with the Russian, not Korean, code of behavior, which might mislead Korean readers.

Thus the ideological constituent of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's lyrical poems is undeniable. It has to be mentioned, however, that the inseparable political component of Cho's lyrical songs did not prevent them from being popular among the Korean public. The assertion of the South Korean *Taehan maeil* newspaper that since North Korean art is strictly politicized "there are no popular songs in North Korea", sounds over-simplistic.[405] There definitely are popular songs in North Korea, and TV singer contests remain a favorite entertainment among North Korean audiences. The North Korean public, as the Soviet one before, simply manages to ignore the political content of a lyrical song and enjoy it as it is.[406]

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn during the Korean War

On the 25th of June, 1950 the North Korean army invaded the South. Soon after the outbreak of war, Cho sent his family to Moscow while remaining in Pyongyang himself. The Soviet writer Chakovskii, cited in an article by L.K.Kim, claims that "from the beginning of the Korean War Cho rushed to fight, but was not allowed. He was needed in Pyongyang. The fighting people of Korea wanted his poetic voice, transmitted by radio and newspapers. But Cho eventually got his way and went to the front. So, for the first half of his journey he traveled as a civilian, and for the second half as an officer of the People's Army".[407] We can find similar claims in some North Korean materials, such as a memorial article on Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in *Munhak yesul*, #7, 1953. The article affirms that the poet "died, heroically fighting for the freedom and independence of Korea".[408] In the second volume of *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip ("Cho Ki-*

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[404] Mihail Isakovskii, "Na zakate hodit paren'" [At Sunset I See a Boy Near My House], in *Stihi, poemy i pesni*, Vol.1: 215-216.

[405] "Ch'oegŭn yuhaeng taejung kayo ŏttŏnge inna" [Which Modern Pop Songs Exist (in North Korea)?], *Taehan maeil*, 23 January 1995, 13.

[406] Probably the best example is the popular Soviet song "Lullaby" with words written by Isakovskii in 1940. Several generations of Russian mothers have sung it to rock their babies to sleep and still enjoy it. It is not widely known, however, that the last lines of Isakovskii's *Lullaby* are actually: "Sleep, my baby. Stalin will give you strength and show your way with his hand" (See Mihail Isakovskii, "Kolybel'naia" [Lullaby], in *Stihi, poemy i pesni* [Verses, poems and songs], Vol.1: 241). Russians simply chose to forget the initial "political content" of the song and dropped the final, politically charged, lines.

[407] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 147.

[408] "Aeguk siin ko Cho Ki-ch'ŏn-ŭl ch'umohayŏ yugo 'pihaenggi sanyangkkun-ŭl' naemyŏnsŏ" [In Memory of the Late Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, the Patriotic Poet: His Unpublished Poem "Enemy Plane Hunters"], *Munhak yesul*, #7, 1953, 78.

ch'ŏn's Anthology") published in 1953 there is a remark that the poem "Korean Mother" was written in September 1950 in his "frontline notebook",[409] which implies that the author was in the fighting line while writing the poem. The above-cited North Korean author of Cho's biography Yi Ch'ŏng-gu also states explicitly that Cho engaged directly in the fighting. According to his testimony, when the Korean War started, "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, who had always fought against American imperialism and reactionaries, wore the Army uniform and went to the front line on the Naktongan river in August 1950".[410] The recently published KCNA articles confirm that this same version of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's activities is still officially upheld in Pyongyang. In the article "Famous Korean Poet" we find the following statement: "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn wrote his wartime poems while following the army during the Korean war, encouraging all the soldiers of the Korean People's Army to win".[411]

Some recent South Korean publications also imply that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn met a heroic death on the front line. We can refer for instance to an article published in 1999 in *Hanguk ilbo*.[412] The South Korean journalist here is probably uncritically relying on North Korean sources.

It is noteworthy that the North Korean authors do not specify either the exact place of combat in which Cho Ki-ch'ŏn allegedly took part or his military duties. Such information would not be concealed for security reasons, since the movements of Korean War front correspondents, such as Kim Sa-ryang, were widely reported in the North Korean media.[413] None of the experts who affirm Cho Ki'chŏn's frontline activity are able to explain why the allegedly fighting poet indeed died in his Pyongyang office on the 31st of July, 1951.[414] The information was probably intended to embellish Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's image, yet is not corroborated by factual materials.

Chŏng Ryul and Cho Yuri both deny Cho's involvement in any military activity during the War.

Chŏng Ryul claims that Cho spent the war in Pyongyang continuing his administrative duties, which included Cho's work in the *Nodong Sinmun* daily, and in the Korean Federation of Literature and Art, KFLA, whose vice-president he became in March of 1951.[415] Cho was also producing new verse, such as "Chosŏnŭn Ssaunda" ("Korea is Fighting") (February 1951), "Chosŏn-ŭi ŏmŏni" ("Korean Mother") (September 1950), "Pult'anŭn Kŏriesŏ" ("On the Burning Street") (August 1950), "Na-ŭi koji" ("My Heights") (June 1951), "Urinŭn Chosŏn Ch'ŏngnyŏnida" ("We are

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[409] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip,* Vol.2: 95.

[410] Yi Ch'ŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏnron*, 12.

[411] "Famous Korean poet" distributed by KCNA. 5 July, 2001.

[412] Ko Ŭn "Koŭnŭi si" [The Poems of Ko Ŭn], *Hankuk ilbo*, 24 August, 1999, 33.

[413] Kim Sa-ryang, "Zapiski voennogo korrespondenta" [Notes of a War Correspondent], in *Koreia boretsia* [Korea is Struggling], Moscow: Isdatelstvo inostrannoi literatury, 1952, 137-150; Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 73.

[414] "Famous Korean Poet" distributed by the KCNA. 05 July, 2001.

[415] L.K.Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 147.

Korean Youth") (April 1951), "Chugŏmŭn Wŏnsu-ege" ("Death to the Enemies") (December 1950), "Ch'ŏtsaebyŏk-ŭl Matmyonsŏ" ("Greeting the New Dawn") (1950 New Year's Eve), "Nunkil" ("Snowy Path") (January 1951), and "Pomnorae" ("Spring Song") (February 1951), among others.[416] All these poems are essentially wartime propaganda, obviously meant to encourage North Korean soldiers; they are permeated with fervent patriotic rhetoric and preach righteous hatred against the enemies. In accordance with the general political line, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn represents the Korean War as a heroic fight by the entire Korean people against the nasty American occupants, as essentially a "National Liberation" struggle. The life of antebellum North Korea is depicted as a cloudless bliss. Here is how he describes it in "We are Korean Youth":

"We did not do a chore without a song
We did not start a day without a smile.
We stayed wide awake on spring nights,
Thinking about newly flourishing flowers,
All inside our beautiful dreams".[417]

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn contrasted this paradise, full of flowers, love, and cheers, with today's tragedy of Pyongyang, comparing the nightmarish American beasts with virtuous Korean patriots. It is a telltale sign that the enemies in his wartime poems are invariably Americans, sadistic "Yankees". Their local South Korean allies never make an appearance. Like the previous verses of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, his wartime poems are full of hyperbole, exaltation and images of blood-thirsty enemies who are shown as the embodiment of cruelty and evil incarnate.[418]

"A child who lost his mother,
A child who is crawling along the street in tears,
Both children were pierced
With a hundred bullets
Which were targeted at them
By the blood-loving Yankees!
[...]
The animals were laughing madly
While poking people's eyes out and tearing out their nails!
The animals carved [pictures of] atomic bombs
With their bayonets on people's chests!"[419]

In 1950-1951 Cho Ki'ch'ŏn remained very prominent in the official circles of the Pyongyang bureaucracy. In a letter to his wife he mentions that he is very busy "checking the innumerable works of other writers".[420] For his "special services to the country" in 1951 he was decorated with the Order of the State Banner in the second

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[416] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip* Vol. 2.

[417] Ibid., 137.

[418] L.K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 162.

[419] *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip.* Vol. 2: 132-133.

[420] The last letter of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn to his wife, kept in the family archive. Copy of the letter is now in the author's personal archive.

degree.[421] In March of 1951 he became a vice-chairman of the KFLA.[422] In spite of the assertion of Professor Yi Ch'ang-ju that Cho accepted this appointment unwillingly, for "he had no choice",[423] the new senior post made Cho Ki-ch'ŏn very proud and happy. In a letter to his family in Moscow Cho wrote: "Now I am working in the Korean Federation of Literature and Art as a vice-chairman. KFLA is a very influential organization, which determines the artistic life of all Korea. I had to take that position because the resolution on my assignment came from the very Central Committee of the Party. My responsibilities are very complex, but interesting. This is just the work for me!" [...] "You love my verse and can imagine what a high position I will gain in the future!" [...] "Every day when I return home from the KFLA office they send me a car. This is because I have a lot of work and have made a huge amount of progress".

Cho's excitement about his new appointment is obvious here. As for the phrase "I had to take the position because it was the Central Committee's resolution", which caused Yi Ch'ang-ju to assert that the assignment ran contrary to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's desire, we might cite the comments of Cho Yurii, the poet's son. According to him, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn here found it necessary to console his wife Kim Hae-sŏn, who was always anxious that her husband did not receive the distinction he supposedly deserved as the leading poet of North Korea. For that reason Cho Ki-ch'ŏn explained his new additional responsibilities as an honorable burden hailing from the highest reaches of power. The rather strange reference to the car, which they allegedly sent him at the Federation has the same roots. Cho Yurii recollects that his ambitious mother used to worry about her husband who instead of riding in his own personal car had to walk like an ordinary mortal. Yurii even supposes his father could have invented the fact about the car to comfort his wife.[424]

Neither Cho Yurii nor Chŏng Ryul had doubts that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was very pleased by his promotion. Both informants dispute the above-noted opinion of the alleged conflict between Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and the North Korean regime, and Cho's desire to escape. The grounds for this dubious assertion come from the above-cited final letter of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, which, according to Yi Ch'ang-ju's reading "was filled with repugnance towards the North Korean system".[425] This interpretation leans on one particular part of the letter, which constitutes the following direction to Kim Hae-sŏn: "Do not live in the Korean embassy again. Try to get an apartment through the Soviet Writer's Union. Do not bother the Korean embassy". Yi Ch'ang-ju reads this phrase as a hint of distrust towards North Korean officialdom. Adding this to Cho's alleged unwillingness to fulfill the duties of vice-chairman of KFLA, Yi drew a conclusion of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's secret hostility towards the North Korean regime. However, Cho Yurii is sure that the prohibition on living in the Korean embassy, which Cho advised his

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[421] L.K. Kim, "Poesiia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 147.

[422] Ibid.,147

[423] Yi Chang-ju, "Puk-ŭi hui p'aram siin Cho Ki'ch'ŏn", 21.

[424] Interview with Cho Yurii.

[425] Yi Ch'ang-ju, "Puk-ŭi huip'aram siin Chi Ki-ch'ŏn", 21.

wife, bears a completely different meaning and was connected to an embarrassing family situation.

According to Yuri, his mother Kim Hae-sŏn, a very practical-minded person, when finding herself in Moscow with a child and with no help, acted in a way which Cho Ki-ch'ŏn could never have allowed himself to act: instead of independently trying to find a place to live, she went to the North Korean embassy and loudly demanded they provide her with a house since her husband was at the moment "exhaustedly drudging for Korea". The embassy officials had no choice but to let her live in the embassy for a while. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn judged the situation to be awkward and this is the reason why he asked his wife to seek support not from Korea but the Soviet Writers Union.[426]

Thus the prohibition on approaching the Korean embassy is explained by the family circumstances and bore no political implications. In the letter there are no credible signs of any alleged "animosity towards the Kim Il Sung dictatorship". In Pyongyang in 1951 the position of Soviet Koreans, and of Cho in particular, was favorable; and Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personal relationship with the North Korean leader was quite friendly. The only person in Cho's acquaintance who indeed detested Kim Il Sung was the poet's wife, but her negative feelings were explained not by political but by material considerations: Kim Hae-sŏng was sure that the Korean leader, like the other bosses of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, underestimated her grand husband and did not render him all the rewards she thought he deserved.[427]

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was killed on the 31st of July, 1951 by a direct hit from a bomb while he was in his office on the banks of the Taedong-gang river.[428] Chŏng Ryul, along with other top officials, attended his funeral in Pyongyang. Thus ended the life of one of the most influential Soviet-Korean figures of the early North Korean literary scene.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's legacy

When the Soviet authorities decided to send Cho Ki-chŏn to North Korea in 1945, they hardly anticipated his future role as the founding father of socialist realist poetry in that country. Nonetheless, they expected that Cho, like his fellow Soviet Koreans, would contribute towards the growth of the Soviet influence in the country. Time ultimately proved that he was an ideal choice for this purpose. Though Cho Ki-ch'ŏn himself had experienced the forcible resettlement of Soviet Koreans as well as ethnic discrimination, he obviously did not draw any general political conclusions from this personal encounter with Stalinism. At the very least, any such conclusions he might have drawn failed to influence his literary, administrative, and political activities. Like millions of his contemporaries who were enthusiastic supporters of Stalin, he probably explained the tragedy of the Soviet Koreans as "mistakes" or the shortsightedness of

[426] Interview with Cho Yurii.

[427] Ibid.

[428] Interview with Chŏng Ryul; Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 943.

some members of the Great Leader's entourage rather than blame The Father of the Peoples and the Stalinist system as a whole. Being brought up inside the Soviet reality he still perceived Communist ideology as the only correct and progressive way to live, and was eager to share his knowledge with his Korean colleagues. For this reason all his North Korean works are saturated with explicit ideological motifs. Cho's aspiration to follow the examples of Maiakovskii, Isakovskii, and the other official Soviet authors must be explained by his sincere desire to create a new, supposedly "progressive" Korean literature.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn took up his duties with great success. The ideas, style, and imagery that he first introduced into Korea strongly influenced North Korean literature. Suffice it to mention that his "sŏjŏng sŏsasi" poetry style, once the object of Pak Nam-su's ridicule and attacks has become common in contemporary North Korean poetry.[429]

His North Korean official career was successful as well. Cho quickly rose to prominence in the Pyongyang literary world and, unlike many fellow Soviet Koreans, did not lose his official recognition after his death. Perhaps, had he survived until the large-scale persecution of the Soviet Koreans in the mid-1950s, his name and his works would have suffered greatly. However, the poet was killed in 1951, well before the relations with Moscow began to deteriorate, and he remained in the official North Korean history as a trusted co-worker of the Great Leader and one of his early eulogizers. The wartime death prevented him from being associated with purged politicians many of whom used to be his close friends and protectors. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's name is still honored in North Korea. However, in his lifetime the unequivocal support of the Soviet authorities played a major role in his career success. Cho was careful to present *Paektusan* (and perhaps other major works of his) for Soviet approval, and followed the Soviet advice in editing the poem. The powerful Soviet presence also protected him against any attack attempted by the writers from other literary factions. By the time of his death he occupied a high official position and exercised a powerful influence over the North Korean literary world.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's activity as a translator of the Soviet experience for North Korea lasted for a mere six years but had far-reaching and ambivalent consequences. In one sense the Soviet cultural influence enriched the Korean intellectual atmosphere. Through the activity of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and other Soviet Koreans, the North Koreans came to know the Soviet intellectual and cultural tradition that stemmed from its Russian cultural roots but also mingled with diverse cultural traditions of the non-Russian Soviet republics.

However, the potentially positive results of Cho's North Korean activities were eclipsed by the shadow of Stalinist ideology, which at that time shaped Soviet culture and the worldview of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn himself. Cho became one of the first eulogists of the North Korean Great Leader and one of the profound sculptors of the future cult of Kim Il Sung. Cho's literary and administrative activities helped to subjugate the North Korean arts to the contemporary political demands. Cho came from a USSR which saw

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[429] See, for instance, the above-cited anthology *Yŏngyŏnhan Noŭl* published in Pyongyang in 1998.

the ideal writer as, first and foremost, a political propagandist and loyal interpreter of the current directions of the authorities. He did his best to establish this same perception in Korea as well. Though Cho Ki-ch'ŏn himself had never initiated political campaigns against his competitors, he was in fact one of the first writers to introduce the Stalinist demagogy into Korean literary circles. His writings, heavily loaded with official rhetoric, also left a lasting impact: the eulogies of the "smoke of construction", "exemplary workers" and, of course, curses of the "wicked Yankees" who "carve pictures of atomic bombs" on their victims" chests still remain in the inventory of North Korean poets.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's activity typified the Stalinist literary tradition in its purest form. Unlike other North Korean writers, he had no need to study the Stalinist approach to literature through reading or meetings with Soviet writers. He came to the North as a product of the Soviet Stalinist literature even though his writings were executed exclusively in Korean. Together with the translated Soviet texts, his works were presented as examples to emulate and served as a Stalinist prototype in the North Korean literary culture. The path of other North Korean writers was, however, less straightforward.

Chapter 3

YI KI-YŎNG: A SUCCESSFUL LITERARY CADRE

Scholarly perceptions of Yi Ki-yŏng

Before discussing Yi Ki-yŏng and his activity it is necessary to critically re-assess some widely held scholarly assumptions about this writer. While positive references to Yi Ki-yŏng as the "founding father of North Korean fiction", and, by implication, a great literary talent in the DPRK are not a surprise, it is remarkable how strongly the established position of Yi Ki-yŏng in North Korea influenced the overseas perception of this figure. Many South Korean critics today seem to share the view of Yi Ki-yŏng as a prominent creative talent. *Who's Who In Korean Literature*, the contemporary South Korean English-language encyclopedia which targets a foreign readership, praises Yi's *Native Land (Kohyang)* (1933-1934) as "one of the most outstanding achievements in Korean proletarian literature" and "a fine specimen of a proletarian novel".[430] South Korean critic Chŏng Hye-gyŏng describes Yi's post-Liberation novel *Tumangang* as "a big success in the depiction of an old reality".[431] Yi Sang-gyŏng, the author of an extensive research monograph on Yi Ki-yŏng, proclaims the "outstanding literary success" of *Native Land.*[432] These tributes might stem from too trusting an approach to the North Korean official perspective on the subject. In my opinion, however, even the model works of Yi Ki-yŏng can hardly be defined as literary masterpieces. All his novels are marked by an apparent lack of originality. Japanese, Russian, Soviet, and, in one case, even Spanish[433] literary patterns constantly emerge in Yi's works, and these influences in fact often border on plagiarism. Even ethnocentric North Korean critics admit that many images in Yi Ki-yŏng's works, and his classic *Native Land* in particular, constitute direct borrowings from Gorky and Sholokhov's novels.[434] It is notable that the emulation occurred before Liberation when no one

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[430] *Who's Who in Korean literature*, published by Korean culture and arts foundation, Seoul: Hollym, 1998, 500-501.

[431] Chŏng Hye-gyŏng, "Inmin-ŭi sahoejuŭi chŏngch'esŏng kŏnsŏl-kwa 'kosanghan' riŏllijŭm" [Construction of People's Socialism and "'High" Realism'], in *Nambukhan hyŏndae munhaksa* [History of Contemporary North and South Korean Literature], edited by Choe Tong-ho, Seoul: Nanam ch'ulp'ansa, 1995, 193.

[432] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak* [Yi Ki-yŏng: His Era and His Literature]. Seoul: P'ulpit', 1994, 6.

[433] Yi Ki-yŏng himself admitted that his *Ingan Suŏp (Human Lesson)* (1936) was written under the strong influence of Cervantes' *Don Quijote.* See V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 50.

[434] As an example of the North Korean critical approach see Pak Chŏng-sik, "Chosŏn-ŭi munhak-e issŏsŏŭi soryŏn munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 424-425. The South Korean case can be represented by the work of Mun Sŏk-u, "Tturŭgenep'ŭ-wa korikki munhak-ŭi kyŏngu" [Cases

forced the writer to follow the examples of Korea's future "elder brother". Thus, even if Yi deserved applause for his "outstanding achievements", he should not be the first to be praised.[435]

The monotonous stiffness of the language and images in Yi's fiction and the paucity of psychological penetration which even his most compassionate critics have been compelled to recognize leave further doubt about the artistic value of Yi Ki-yŏng's writings. To borrow the words of the generally sympathetic Kim Sang-sŏn, "Yi Ki-yŏng's writings just pass through you, they don't touch your heart. The story does not move smoothly, it is too coarse".[436] Even Soviet critics like Ivanova, Perventsev or Li who were officially required to treat Yi Ki-yŏng positively, acknowledged this weakness in his writings. While they incessantly praise Yi's "proper" Communist worldview, his "progressive characters", his "truthful representation of the people's spirit" and so on, the Soviet critics, while analyzing the formal side of Yi's writings, could not help but make cautious comments such as "overly simplistic", "a strong didactic tendency", "a touch of bucolic sentimentalism", "a certain implausibility", "some superficiality",[437] "some schematization",[438] "excessive use of folk motives",[439] or "excessively detailed" etc.[440]

I would agree with these critical estimations. Indeed, the artistic arsenal of Yi Ki-yŏng is quite meager. Pretty girls in his writings are invariably compared with beautiful flowers, which "open" when happy and "wither" when sad.[441] A reserved and industrious male character predictably resembles an ox, which in Korean is a nickname for a mute workaholic.[442] The lyrical moods of his protagonists are repeatedly accompanied by a nightingale singing in willow branches on a spring night, an easily recognizable allusion to the classical Korean novel *Story About Ch'unghyang*

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of Turgenev and Gorky], in Yi Poyŏng, Chin Sang-pop etc. (ed.), *Hangukmunhak sokŭi segye munhak* [World literature in Korean literature]. Seoul: Kyujanggak, 1998, 312-316.

[435] We should not forget, of course, the historical context here. The problem of plagiarism had deep roots in the Korean tradition – in classical Korean literature, for instance, paraphrasing famous Chinese examples was traditionally regarded as a virtue. At the beginning of the 20th century the copying of respected foreign examples was completely justifiable and even welcomed in Korea. By and large, the so-called "new novels" (*sinsosŏl* in Korean) were based on retelling the storylines of contemporary popular Japanese novels with only the protagonists' names changed. (See V.I. Ivanova, *Novaia proza Korei,* 121-133).

[436] Kim Sang-sŏn, *Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng munhak yŏngu* [A Study of Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng's literature], Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1999, 4.

[437] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 22, 31,71,80.

[438] V.N. Li, *Sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreaiskoi literature* [Socialist Realism in Korean Literature], Tashkent: Fan, 1971, 73.

[439] Ibid.,79.

[440] Li Gien, *Zemlya* [Land], Moscow: Isdatel'stvo inostrannoi literatury, 1953, 10.

[441] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kohyang* [Native Land], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1955, 77.

[442] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang* [Land], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1955, 4.

(Ch'unhyangjŏn) [443], while a frustrated hero predictably struggles with stormy weather. [444] Often even these dusty clichés are repeated – like, for example, the proverbial Korean contrast between white herons and black crows which can be found in both "Story about Mice" and "Paper Factory Village". [445] Instead of defining a hero by some personal feature or particular action, Yi Ki-yŏng often explicitly describes them simplistically as "good" or "bad". Similarly, he regularly has positive protagonists deliver lengthy righteous speeches in the wooden idiom of the leftist jargon of the day, a trait typical of Yi's "ideological" works such as "Paper Factory Village", "Story About Mice" or "Wŏn-bo".

Notably, until around 1953 even the North Korean critics admitted the aesthetic deficiency of Yi Ki-yŏng's novels. North Korean critic Han Hyo, while stressing the positive ideological content of the initial KAPF works (which included Yi Ki-yŏng's writings) frankly acknowledged that it was "a literature of extremely low artistic quality". [446] This fact was no secret to Yi Ki-yŏng himself. He candidly admitted the lack of sophistication of his pre-Liberation novels, but justified it because of the pressing historical circumstances, which allegedly made the literary quality of his writings a less significant factor. In one of his later theoretical works "About the Creative Method" (1957), Yi Ki-yŏng explained his attitude during the KAPF era: "We had no time to decorate the handles of our knives when the enemy was fiercely attacking [us]. Our first task was to sharpen the blade so as to strike the enemy in the very heart". [447] Yi Ki-yŏng's inference is quite clear here: he does not care unduly for quality because he considers it to be less important than the political message of a novel. This alleged dilemma was quite common among those KAPF writers who felt obliged to explain away the obvious deficiencies in the quality of their writing. [448]

One might dismiss the conflict between blade and handle, or the content and the form of a literary piece, as rather artificial. It may be argued, for example, that the inclusion of a political message in a literary work does not necessarily mean an automatic disregard for aesthetics – suffice it to mention the international success of such unabashedly political writers as Gorky or Orwell. Yet we must admit that Yi's

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[443] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kohyang*, 80.

[444] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Kananhan saram" [Poor People], in *Hyŏndae chosŏn munhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of contemporary Korean literature], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1958, Vol 3: 56-58.

[445] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Chwi iyagi" [Story About Mice], in *Hyŏndae chosŏn munhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of contemporary Korean literature], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1958, Vol 3: 63; "Cheji kongjang ch'on" [Paper Factory Village], in *Hyŏndae chosŏn munhaksŏnjip*, Vol.3: 199.

[446] Han Hyo, "Sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-kwa chosŏn munhak" [Socialist Realism and Korean Literature], in *Ch'ŏngnyŏntŭl wihan munhakron* [Literary Theory for the Youth], Pyongyang: Minju ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 1952, 170.

[447] Quoted in: V.N. Li, *Koreiskaia proletarskaia literatura. Proza 20-30-h godov* [Korean Proletarian Literature. Fiction of the 1920-1930s], Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1967, 11

[448] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 27, 32.

readership perceived his writings in much the same manner as he so colourfully described. Yi's pre-Liberation recognition was in fact a public acknowledgement of a specific political agenda, of the topicality of his novels, rather than their artistic quality. This was what his KAPF colleague Kim Nam-ch'ŏn lamented in one of his articles published soon after Liberation.[449] So I would deem Yi Ki-yŏng a typical "topical" writer, not an artistic genius—even though, I must stress, this approach by no means diminishes his historical significance.

This, then, raises the question: what indeed was this attractive topicality? While Yi Ki-yŏng is customarily depicted as a Communist proletarian writer, a vocalist for the revolutionary class struggle[450], a representative of socialist values[451] etc., Brian Myers has remarked that the KAPF writers "never evinced a real understanding of Marxist ideology",[452] and this observation is totally apposite in the case of Yi Ki-yŏng. Although in the 1920s and 1930s Yi undoubtedly sympathized with what may be defined as "popular socialism" in its egalitarian and humanistic manifestation, the writer was no different from his profoundly ignorant colleagues in respect of his actual knowledge of basic Marxian doctrines. His writings are indeed permeated with a fashionable revolutionary rhetoric which is often of Marxian pedigree; however, the proletariat-centered approach to the world and society, ideas of class struggle or the concept of Communist revolution etc. are barely discernible in the pre-Liberation works of Yi Ki-yŏng. Any leftist motives contained in his novels appear secondary and insignificant to what must be described as the leitmotif of his literature – that is his support of the traditional Korean peasants' attitudes and values. This was the real topicality which won Yi Ki-yŏng the wide acclaim of his contemporaries.

The success of the traditional peasant perspective in literature and art was quite predictable in the intellectual atmosphere of colonial Korea with its popular myth of "unspoiled village life" and strong anti-urban, anti-modern tendencies among even the most educated.[453] Korea was not unique in this regard: the same trends were prominent among intellectuals in many other colonial or underdeveloped societies. Samuel L. Popkin, a student of Vietnamese rural society, has made an insightful remark: "Pre-capitalist village is seen as a unique form attributable to special virtues of the race or culture… A way of life that may have existed only for lack of alternatives is extolled as a virtue. Peasants who had little or nothing to eat are assumed to have had a rich

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[449] Kim Yun-sik, *Haebang kongganŭi munhak saron* [A Study of the Literature of the Liberation Period], Seoul: Taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1989, 177.

[450] For the North Korean accounts see An Ham-gwang, *Chosŏn munhaksa* [History of Korean Literature], Pyŏngyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1956, 602-634; *Chosŏn munhaksa (1926-1945)* [History of Korean Literature (1926-1945)], P'yŏngyang: Kwahak, paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1981, 378-379, 435-448.

[451] Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, *Munhak-ŭi ihae* [Understanding Literature], Seoul: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1995, 307-311.

[452] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 27.

[453] For a good sketch of the anti-urban feelings expressed by the Korean intellectuals, see: Im Hŏn-yŏng, "The Meaning of the City in Korean Literature", *Korea Journal* 27 (5.1987), 24-25.

spiritual life. Sons who may have stayed with their fathers only in order to survive are credited with filial piety... Somehow what might only have been the necessities or oppressions of one era come to be interpreted as traditional values during the next".[454] In Korea this tendency was also strengthened by the strong spiritual influence of Russian culture which itself exhibited a persistent "peasant myth" propagated, most notably, by Tolstoy.[455]

Thus many Korean intellectuals were ready to hail the voice of an authentic peasant, a supposed repository of the national essence – and Yi was welcomed as such a peasant who found a way to articulate himself.[456] Even readers accustomed to high literary standards chose to turn a blind eye to the imperfections in his writings, which they perceived as truly "national" and thus sorely needed. Notably, many South Korean intellectuals still portray Yi Ki-yŏng along similar lines. A prominent South Korean writer Kim Nam-il admits that "frankly speaking, Yi Ki-yŏng belongs to the most boring writers of his contemporaries, incomparable with Yŏm Sang-sŏp, Chae Man-sik and the others". Yet Kim Nam-il extols the value of Yi Ki-yŏng on the basis of the fact that "in the dark period of Japanese colonization Yi Ki-yŏng carefully observed our people's life and engendered a hope for the future" and for this reason alone he can be "of much help to us".[457]

The other characteristics, which attracted readers to Yi's writings, were the enlightenment motives: protests against prejudice and superstition, general anti-clericalism and calls for modern education, eulogies to personal freedom, etc. A special place was reserved for the theme of women's liberation, including a critique of the Confucian system of early marriage, calls for women's education and the promotion of the principle of free love etc. These themes were quite popular in Korean literature from its *sinsosŏl* or "new novel" period of the early 1900s.

These tendencies were not necessarily incompatible with the Marxist or, more broadly, socialist ideas, yet they do not give us sufficient grounds to describe Yi's works as "revolutionary" or "Communist". It is significant that after Liberation these subjects, albeit laced with official Pyongyang rhetoric, still remained dominant in Yi Ki-yŏng's works. Considering the fact that Yi's writings formed the basic canon of North Korean literature, it is important to investigate the ideological core of his works and question the widespread perception of Yi Ki-yŏng as the founding father of an alleged proletarian/Marxian fiction in Korea.

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[454] Samuel L. Popkin, *The rational Peasant. The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam,* London: University of California Press, 1979, 3.

[455] Mun Sŏk-u, "Rŏsia sasiljŭi munhak-ŭi suyong-kwa kŭ hakmunjŏk pyŏnyong, tolŭsŭtoi chungsimŭro", 207-255.

[456] Im Hŏn-yŏng, "The Meaning of the City in Korean Literature", 24-25.

[457] Kim Nam-il, "Ije nuga Yi Ki-yŏng-ŭl ilgŭl gosinga?" [Who Will Read Yi Ki-yŏng Today?], *Silch'ŏn munhak,* 1999, Autumn, 79-85.

Childhood and youth

Yi Ki-yŏng was born on May 29 1895, in Hwaryong village, Paeban township, Asan county, Southern Ch'ungch'ŏng province. Most of his childhood was spent in Chungŏmri village, Pukmyŏn township, Ch'ŏnan county in the same province.[458] In 1898 the writer's family moved to Chungŏmri village to live closer to relatives who were small-scale tenants in the area.

The soil was extremely barren and the village was deemed to be a "minch'on" village, meaning that only poor peasants inhibited the area, and that no *yangban* lived there permanently.[459] Yi's penname of "Minch'on" was taken from the description of his village.[460] The writer used many autobiographical details in his works and depicted his native village many times in his novels and short stories, including *Native Land (Kohyang), Spring (Pom),* and "The Peasant's House" ("Nongbu-ŭi chip").

The childhood of the novelist was miserable and poor. His family consisted of a grandmother, mother (Pak of Milyang lineage, 1869-1905), a younger brother and Yi Ki-yŏng himself. His father Yi Min-ch'ang (1873-1918)[461] did not play a significant role in the family's life.

The domestic environment was typical of the modernizing Korea of the early 20th century, when the clash between new realities and longstanding traditions gave rise to countless personal tragedies. One such tradition was *ch'ohon* or early marriage where a boy in his early teens was impelled to marry a slightly older girl. After marriage the boy, if his family had the means, could be sent to study in Seoul or abroad where he often acquired new Western ideas and refused to return home to his "unsophisticated and rustic" wife. The wife had no choice but to remain with her in-laws and raise children, frequently without her husband's support.

This had been the case with Yi Ki-yŏng's parents. Though not officially divorced, they lived separately. At the age of 20 Yi's father passed the official military examinations, which made him eligible for a military commission. However, the number of applicants greatly exceeded the number of available commissions, and one had to try hard to get one. Thus, Yi Min-ch'ang subsequently moved to Seoul in search of a suitable job while the family remained in the countryside, working the land. The father's attempts to find a decent job were disappointing. Furthermore, he was more interested in politics and socializing rather than in providing for his family. Yi Min-ch'ang visited his family once a year and provided them with little support. Yi's mother shouldered all responsibility for the family. [462]

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[458] Yi Ki-yong and Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk* [Ideas and labour], Pyongyang: Minch'ŏng ch'ulp'ansa, 1958, 6-7; Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 5.

[459] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng", in *Hyŏndae chakka ron* [Study on contemporary writers], P'yŏngyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1960, Vol.2: 91.

[460] Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk*, 8.

[461] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak*, 44.

[462] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng", 91.

When Yi Ki-yŏng was 11 years old, the whole family caught typhus and Yi's mother died. Yi's father had no choice but to remain with the family and even before the official mourning period for his recently deceased wife had ended he married again.[463] Being a *kaehwa sasangga* or disciple of the enlightenment ideas himself, Yi Min-ch'ang introduced his son to some popular concepts of the period including the quest for freedom along with dissent at early marriage and other patriarchal traditions of Korean society.[464] These concepts made a strong and lasting impression on the young Yi Ki-yŏng.

Unfortunately, the "civilizing ideas" which his father propounded contrasted with the life around Yi Ki-yŏng. Yi Min-ch'ang, captivated by the contemporary politics and fashionable ideas, would spend all his money on impractical projects while the family suffered under the weight of mounting debt.[465] Despite his enlightenment rhetoric, the father failed to help Yi Ki-yŏng gain a decent education.[466] Yi Ki-yŏng later recalled that his family was so poor they could not afford to buy paper for his schooling and that he had to practice writing on cinnamon leaves.[467] The schools Yi visited following his seventh birthday were quite inferior and the writer remembers them with disgust. Learning Chinese characters did not come easily to Yi Ki-yŏng and the boy was irritated by the traditional teaching practices, the use of ancient Chinese texts and by the absence of modern textbooks.[468] It would appear that a strong dislike for the Chinese writing system remained characteristic of Yi Ki-yong all his life. In the 1940s he was very prominent in the movement against the use of Chinese characters, a fact which some Soviet scholars noted approvingly.[469]

For financial reasons Yi Ki-yŏng discontinued his education at the primary school level and joined the family in agricultural work. In spite of Yi Min-ch'ang frequent harangues against early marriages, he forced his son into such a marriage when the boy was just 14 years old. This decision was supposedly to please Yi's grandmother who at the time was approaching her 60th birthday and could not wait to see her first great-grandson. Yet the union proved to be a disaster. Yi Ki-yŏng never managed to overcome his feelings of unease towards his first wife Cho Pyŏng-gi (1891-1957), an uneducated peasant woman.[470] The mixture of physical disgust and guilt which he felt he later passionately described in many of his works and in *Native Land (Kohyang)* in particular.

Immediately following his marriage Yi ran away from home to wander across the Korean countryside. This life as a vagabond lasted for five years. Soviet and North

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[463] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 50.

[464] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 367.

[465] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng", 93.

[466] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 367.

[467] Yi Sang-yŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak*, 45.

[468] Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk*, 8-10.

[469] Arkadii Perventsev, *V Koree* [In Korea], Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1950, 25.

[470] Yi Sang-yŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak*, 50

Korean scholars explained Yi's meanderings as the writer's desire for new life experiences or to get closer to the suffering Korean people, etc.[471] Sin Gu-hyŏn called this period of Yi Ki-yŏng's biography "Yi's universities of life" which is an obvious allusion to Gorky's autobiographical book about his own wanderings around Russia (Gorky's book bore the title *Moi Universitety (My Universities))*. However, it is much more likely that Yi just wanted to escape the life where he was forced to deal with a wife whom he loathed, hard labor and hopeless poverty.

The sudden death of his father and grandmother in 1918 prompted Yi Ki-yŏng to return home and assume the role of breadwinner to the rest of his family. At this time Yi Ki-yŏng, while teaching at Yŏnghwa women's school in Ronsan, became temporarily absorbed by Christian ideas.[472] Christianity was a rapidly growing religion in Korea in the 1910s. It was strongly associated with the new Western way of life, education and enlightenment and was especially attractive to the young teacher.[473] Yi Ki-yŏng's fascination with Christian beliefs was so strong that under their influence he refused to perform the traditional sacrificial rites or *chesa* in honor of his deceased father and grandmother. Indeed, he burned their funeral tablets or *hŭnpaek*, much to the horror and outrage of his relatives.

A closer personal acquaintance with Christian missionaries whom Yi later called "wolves in sheep's clothing," led him to disappointment not only with Christian ideas but religion in general. Loathing of Buddhism, shamanism and Christianity became another recurring theme in Yi's novels which frequently refer to the discrepancy between the lofty words of sermons and the real behavior of clergymen.

After 1918 Yi Ki-yŏng changed jobs several times and took part in the activities of the local youth group. He also read a lot of books and magazines which he acquired from Japan.[474] In 1922 Yi made a decision to continue his education. Despite the resistance of his relatives, he once again abandoned the family and traveled to Tokyo where he studied at the School of English Language and Politics for a year.[475] This was a very active period in his life, full of hardships and important experiences. In order to earn some money for his studies, Yi was forced to take a number of odd jobs in Japan. In the process he became acquainted with the life of Tokyo's poor and fell under the influence of the then popular socialist ideas. In Japan Yi read Russian and early Soviet literature for the first time and became close friends with the famous Korean literary

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[471] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 7-8; Sin Ku-hyŏn, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak*, 95-96.

[472] Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk,* 19.

[473] For an analysis of the social functions of Christianity in Korea see: Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation. Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1896-1937*, Sydney: Allen&Unwin, 1990.

[474] Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk*, 25.

[475] Yi Myŏng-jae. *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 367.

personality Cho Myŏng-hŭi.[476] Unfortunately Yi Ki-yŏng was again unable to complete his studies. The Tokyo earthquake of 1923 led to a bloody massacre of Koreans resident in Japan and Yi, like many other Korean students, chose to return home.

This short stay in Tokyo had a profound influence on Yi Ki-yŏng's life. He finally abandoned his long-cherished hope of continuing with his formal education. He also turned his back on the advice of his family to find a proper job.[477] What he now strove for was to express his new thoughts and experiences through literature.

Yi Ki-yŏng's pre-Liberation experience was quite typical of the period: young and enthusiastic yet impoverished, he was undereducated yet inspired by the new ideas of his age. However, his close acquaintance with the grinding poverty of village life and the desperation of the urban poor made Yi Ki-yŏng special among his contemporary writers.

Yi's pre-KAPF Writings

The first work of this future "pillar of socialist realism" dealt with a topic which was quite popular in the Korean literature of the 1920s: the sentimental motif of separated or doomed love.

Yi Ki-yŏng's first unpublished novel "Darkness" ("Amhŭk") (1924) described an unhappy love affair between a Japanese girl and a Korean student in Japan. The novel also bore the cumbersome title of "White Herons Flying Under the Shade of Death" ("Chukŭm-ŭi Kŭrimjae Narŭnŭn Paekrotte"), in keeping with the recently established tradition of the "new novel". This work, as Yi Ki-yŏng himself admitted, was strongly influenced by the Japanese novel "Growing Up In the Red Kaolin" (1921) by Nakanishi Inoshuke. Nakanishi became the first Japanese writer to mention the presence of Koreans in Japan in his writings, which made them very popular among Korean youth at the time.[478]

In later years Yi Ki-yŏng defined his first novel as a "failure".[479] In 1957 he joked in an article about his first literary experience: "I was like a toothless baby trying to munch on beans and rice".[480]

Following this initial failure Yi Ki-yŏng abandoned novels for a while. His first published work was a short story entitled "Elder Brother's Secret Letter" ("Oppa-ŭi Pimil P'yŏngji") (March, 1924), the storyline of which is as follows:

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[476] V.I. Ivanova, "Li Gien i ego roman "Zemlia" [Yi Ki-yŏng and his novel "Land"], in *Kratkie soobscheniia instituta vostokovedeniia* [Short Reports of the Oriental Studies Institute], Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1955, 29.

[477] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak*, 78.

[478] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Silp'aehan ch'ŏnyŏ changp'yŏng" [My First Story as a Failure], *Chogwang*, 1939, #12, 35.

[479] Yi Ki-yŏng, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk* , 42.

[480] Yi Ki-yŏng, "KAPF sidae-ŭi hoesanggi" [Recollections of the KAPF], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1957, #8, 85.

The protagonist, the 20 year-old Maria, feels unwanted and is constantly humiliated by her arrogant and spoiled elder brother. Despite his obvious insolence, her brother receives everybody's respect as a man while she is invariably treated as a worthless female. In her heart Maria protests against this injustice and disgrace. "The only weapon my brother uses as an argument with me is: "What on earth can you, a woman, understand?!"[481] she muses. Maria easily sees through her brother's hypocritical religiosity, which other people accept at face value. Thus it comes as no surprise to find that her brother turns out to be a womanizer who betrays many innocent young girls in the town including her close friend Yŏng-sun.

The story touches a sensitive issue – the inequality of the sexes in Korean society. This theme was not itself a novelty since the traditional Confucian disregard for women had been discussed since at least 1906 in the "new novels" (*sinsosŏl*)[482] and was particularly prominent in the works of Yi Kwang-su, a future political opponent of Yi Ki-yŏng.[483] Yi Ki-yŏng wrote the story in one week in order to participate in a literary contest sponsored by *Kaebyŏk* magazine[484]and won third prize in April 1924.[485]

In an ideological sense Yi's debut is hardly reconcilable with the officially approved North Korean image of Yi Ki-yŏng as the unflinching representative of the Marxist approach, a protector of the poor. No "poor" appear in the story. Despite the attempts of North Korean scholarship to ascribe a "class position" to the author of "Secret Letter",[486] the story was in fact written in accordance with the common liberal conventions of the age.[487] It is no accident that Soviet scholarship, while eulogizing Yi's "true proletarian" novels of the 1920s and early 1930s, tends to pass over his first work, or refer to it only briefly.[488]

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[481] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Oppa-ŭi pimil p'yŏnji" [Elder Brother's Secret Letter], in *Hyŏndae chosŏn munhak sŏnjip,* [Anthology of Contemporary Korean Literature], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ul'p'ansa, 1958, 3.

[482] Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron*, 13.

[483] One may refer here, for instance, to Yi Kwang-su's famous novel *Heartlessness (Mujŏng)* printed for the first time in 1917. (See Yi Kwang-su, *Mujŏng* [Heartlessness], Seoul: Sŏ mundang, 1997).

[484] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 81.

[485] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 15; Yi Myo:ng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 367.

[486] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng", 99.

[487] Concerning liberal conventions see Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron,* 15.

[488] V.N. Li, "Koreiskaia assotsiazhija proletarskih pisatelei i proza 20-30 godov" [The KAPF and the fiction of the 1920-1930s], in *Naztional'nye traditsii i genesis sotsialisticheskogo realizma* [National Traditions and the Genesis of Socialist Realism], Moscow: Vostochnaja literatura, 1965, 589; V.I. Ivanova, "Poiski polozhitel'nogo geroia v rannem tvorchestve Li Giena" [Searching for the Positive Hero in the Early Works of Yi Ki-yŏng], in *Koreiskaia literatura* [Korean Literature], Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1959, 95; V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,*15.

After the publication of *Secret Letter* Yi Ki-yŏng broke completely with his family and moved to Seoul to earn a living through professional writing. In 1924 Yi Ki-yŏng met the famous leftist writer Cho Myŏng-hŭi who had just returned from Tokyo. They both began to work as correspondents for the *Chosŏn chigwan* where Yi Ki-yŏng also made the acquaintance of Ch'oe Sŏ-hae, Song Yŏng, Yi Ik-sang, Yi Chŏk-hyo and other leftist writers. Around this time Yi Ki-yŏng also remarried. Though his choice was a so-called "new woman" (that is, a woman who had received a touch of Western education or *sin yŏsŏng*) named Hong Ŭl-sun (1905-?),[489] we should not overestimate the extent of Hong's emancipation in the contemporary feminist sense. From the recollections of Chŏng Ryul who often visited Yi Ki-yŏng at home, Hong was a quite traditional, mild and shy Korean housewife who shared all of the hardships of life with her husband without complaint. Yi Ki-yŏng appeared to be happy with their relationship.

Yi's First KAPF Period (1925-1927)

The period from the publication of "Elder Brother's Secret Letter" to the late 1920s was a remarkable period in Yi Ki-yŏng's literary activity. It was a time when Yi was relatively free of political responsibilities, peer pressure and other external constraints and was guided largely by his own views and convictions. Yi joined the Korean Proletarian Art Federation (KAPF) when it was established in 1925. Up to 1927 the KAPF remained a rather amorphous organization. The Japanese censorship at the time was relatively mild, and Yi Ki-yŏng had an unparalleled opportunity to express himself fully and sincerely.

On the whole, his ideas at the time were synchronous with those of the so-called "new tendency" literature or *sin kyŏnghyang*, which most North and South Korean scholars now refer to as the forerunner or even the initial stage of "proletarian literature" in Korea.[490]

The "New Tendency" literature[491] emerged as a response by the Korean intellectuals to the challenges of colonial modernity and the impoverishment of the masses of the Korean people - the peasantry. These were considered to be the negative effects of a foreign cultural and economic invasion. While the "new tendency" architect Yim Chŏng-jae proclaimed a socialist bias to this new literary trend, it was in fact a rather naïve leftist project which promoted conservative anti-industrialism and anti-urbanism along with "simplicity" (Kor: *sobakham*) as "truly Korean" virtues. On this

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[489] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 130.

[490] As an example of South Korean scholarship's view see Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron,* 17-18. The North Korean view is represented by Han Hyo, "Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t'ujaeng-e issŏsŏŭi chosŏn munhak" [Korean Literature in Struggle with Naturalism] (1953), in *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng charyo chip (ibukp'uŏn) 2* [Anthology of Contemporary North Korean Critical Works], Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1993, 391-522.

[491] This term was first used in an article by Yim Chŏng-jae, "Munsa chegune yohanun ilmun" [One Sentence to Men of Intelligence], published in *Kaebyŏk* #7, 1923. (Cited in Mun Sŏk-u, "Tturŭgenepŭ-wa Gorikki munhak-ŭi kyŏngu", 297).

point, as Brian Myers has noted, the "new tendency" writers differed little from the contemporary Korean "bourgeois" nationalists.[492] Both groups decried the same mythical "pure village life" as having been cruelly spoiled by the arrival of modernity.

But the "new tendency" literature did not confine itself to mere lamentations over the lost virtues of a simpler lifestyle. Many representatives of this literature, such as Ch'oe Sŏ-hae (1901-1932), Yi Ik-sang (1895-1930), and the poet Yi Sang-hwa (1901-1943) attempted to approach the miserable situation of the contemporary countryside from a more active leftist, anti-bourgeois position. Their protagonists express their protest through acts of violence, which are both misguided and energetic at the same time. The writings of Ch'oe Sŏ-hae were especially typical in this regard.[493]

As we have mentioned already, Gorky and his images of romantic paupers, with all their implications of struggle and revolt, had a strong influence on the "new tendency" writers. Yet the rebellious actions of the protagonists in Gorky and the "new tendency" novels had different connotations. Gorky, who was openly hostile towards the Russian traditional village culture and its values, never supported the "myth of the village". He described the tantrums of his characters sympathetically but with no illusion, as the unavoidable result of poverty, illiteracy and misery rather than as a kind of heroism.[494] His revolting heroes are asked to be tamed and civilized in order to be socially productive– be it by the positive influence of sympathetic city intelligentsia ("Suprugi Orlovy" ("The Orlov Spouses"), or by the ideological authority of the Communist Party (*Mat' (Mother)).*

On the contrary, the Korean leftist authors, as Myers puts it, "saw the way to overcome injustice not in tempering the spontaneity of Korean people – through political organization and the infusion of "consciousness" – but in unleashing it, in allowing it to erupt with a purging force.... The authors indicated their approval by describing the violence with palpable relish – although they were careful to appease censors by ending their stories with the hero in jail".[495]

Yi Ki-yŏng, being on friendly terms with the "new tendency" writers and sharing many of their values, appeared however less radical than most of the fellow writers of this group. While the exploitation, social discontent and misery of his characters was quite in tune with many of the leftist literary conventions, Yi's early writings were remarkably free of descriptions of spontaneous rebellion.

Let us have a look, for example, at Yi Ki-yŏng's most representative work of this period, the novel "Poor Village" ("Minch'ŏn") (November 1925). The South Korean scholar Yi Sang-gyŏng describes it as "the most prominent work of Yi's early period" –

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[492] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 17.

[493] *Who's Who in Korean Literature,* 47-48.

[494] M. Gorky, "Konovalov", "Foma Gordeev", "Na dne" [The Low Depths], in Maxim Gorky *Izbrannye proisvedenija v treh tomah* [Collected Works in Three Volumes], Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951, Vol. 2: 81-130, 144-408, 524-591.

[495] Brian Myers. *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 19.

and I would agree with this assessment.[496] Yet his following statement that "...in this novel Yi Ki-yŏng mirrored the class struggle between landlords and tenants" sounds rather unconvincing. Let us have a look at the story, the plot of which reads as follows:

> All the inhabitants of a poor village or *minch'ŏn*[497] live hard and miserable lives except for the rich *yangban* gentry family, the Paks, whose son indulges himself in buying new concubines. His next target is Chŏm-sun, the young and beautiful daughter of the poor peasant Kim. The girl is in love with an intelligent and well-mannered student who had recently returned from Seoul after completing his studies and who is known among the peasants by the respected nickname of "Seoul taek" which means "a person from Seoul", or a "Seoulite." While his young peasant friends work, Seoulite preaches ideas of social equality to them ("there is no actual difference between a small merchant and a noble man"[498], "everybody must work")[499] and entertains the country girls with copious tales of the "beautiful life that could be had on this land had the bad guys not grasped power".
>
> "Imagine us living here in these beautiful mountain surroundings, in clean houses. We would live here without a concern for food or clothing. Our parents would work in the fields and we would go to school for study and fun. In the evenings after returning home from school we would help our parents in the fields or go for a walk in the mountains. How beautiful our life would be!
>
> If only all the people would work together and were not separated into rich and poor! How pleasant it is to love and respect your neighbor! One day we would gather in your house, the next day you could come to mine. How joyful it would be! The birds would sing about the happiness of mankind and the flowers would reflect people's joy. Everything in the world would be for the edification of man. We would be happy even watching the moon!
>
> But look at us. In childhood we are unable to study. Our aged parents slave away day and night in the fields yet remain living in poverty. Women's hands are swollen because of grinding grain. Young people, no matter whether boys or girls, cannot love freely of their own choice. We are hungry and poorly dressed; we live in meager huts, suffering from fleas and bedbugs. And it is all because bad people have stolen our wealth and forced many who work loyally and tirelessly into the abyss of poverty. Thus, beautiful moonlight or pleasant currents of air do not matter to us for our hearts are always suffering".[500]

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[496] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 105.

[497] "Minch'ŏn" in Korean means "a poor village where no noble people live, or a village where all people live on small merchandising".

[498] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Minch'on" [Poor Village], in *Hyŏndae chosŏnmunhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of contemporary Korean literature], Pyongyang: Cho sŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1958, Vol. 3: 76.

[499] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Minch'on", 83.

[500] Ibid., 87.

The girls are touched by Seoulite's speeches. They cry, "dreaming about the beautiful life" ... "because their new friend" ... "has awakened a sadness in their hearts that they had never known before".[501]

Meanwhile *yangban* Pak helps the poor Kim family, lending them two straw-bags of rice - and proposes that Chŏm-sun be his concubine. Though his proposal is delivered quite politely and nobody tries to take the girl against her or her parents' will, Chŏm-sun's father reacts with fury. "Grinding his teeth" and "clenching his fists" he berates his wife for being too passive while talking with Pak.

"I would rather die of hunger! How dare he! In fact he suggested that we sell our daughter for rice - to give her to him to be his third or fourth concubine! And what was your answer? You just listened to him? But you should have spat in his filthy face! This man is not a human! Go to him! Tell him that we'd rather give our daughter to dogs than to him, this putrid son of a yangban! He deserves to be spat in the very face!"[502]

After this Chŏm-sun's father collapses and becomes seriously ill, and to pay for his treatment the family resorts to the very means which led Chŏm-sun's father to his deathbed – they send Ch'ŏm-sun to Pak's house as a concubine. Ch'ŏm-sun herself initiates the marriage, asking her father's permission – just like the exemplary selfless heroine of the classical Korean novel *The Tale of Simch'on (Simch'onjŏn)* who sacrifices her life to cure her father from disease.

Another bold speech is delivered before the marriage. Ch'ŏm-sun's brother's tirade affirms that "he would rather be in jail then give his sister to Pak" and that "to give him a body is worse than death".[503] However he is also totally daunted by the obstacles, like the other family members, who spend the final days before the despised marriage helplessly crying and lamenting about "how cruel is today's world where it is impossible to find really noble people" or "today's world, where nobody wants to help each other".[504] The descriptions of the family weeping, emotional outbursts and another collapse (now of the grief- stricken mother) occupy some six pages of the text.[505]

When Chŏm-sun is about to leave her parents' house in preparation to ride the marriage palanquin, Seoulite approaches the girl with the following "quiet words": "Chŏm-sun, do not despair! Think over your situation. There must be a path to the new life!"

In the final scene of the novel Chŏm-sun rides the marriage palanquin:

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[501] Ibid., 88.

[502] Ibid., 90.

[503] Ibid., 92.

[504] Ibid., 93.

[505] Ibid., 93-99.

"The last words of Seoulite echoed in her ears like a drum, again and again: "Chŏm-sun, do not despair! Think over your situation! There must be a path to the new life!" Those words gave her great inspiration. Over and over she pondered: "Well! Whose fault was it that I was sold? Poverty is not a fault. Until this debt is paid I would rather live like a slave, but I will never be a concubine! Never! I would rather die!" Chŏm-sun had made a firm resolution. She bit her lips and her eyes filled with tears". [506]

In fact the novel fails to glorify struggle of any kind. The writer's endeavors to place expressions of protest into the mouths of his protagonists turn these quite traditional suffering personages, the embodiment of *han*, into unintentionally comical figures because their righteous words are in such striking contrast to their actions. The girl's "firm resolution" to "rather die than be a concubine" is made when she is already seated on the palanquin. Her father's zealous diatribes against Pak and his "firm decision" that it is "better to die of hunger" than to offer his daughter as a concubine is followed by the marriage of Chŏm-sun. Seoulite's sermons about heaven on Earth are ardently delivered while his listeners work and he remains idle. His farewell words are awash with empty "encouraging" rhetoric rather than any kind of real help for the girl he supposedly "so innocently loves". In the frequent invectives we can again see the influence of the classical literature with its sentimental style of heroic behavior and lengthy poetic laments (see, for example *Story of Ch'unhyang (Ch'unhyangjŏn)*).

The denunciatory tirades in "Poor Village" do not rise above complaints about the cruelty of "today's world", where money and decay allegedly rule. It is significant that "today's world" in the novel is presented as a symbol of all things evil which, as the author obviously assumes, did not exist in the idealized "world of the past", an alleged era of bucolic harmony. Only in "today's world" is "money so important", where "sly misers have their pride" and "people have no nobility", [507] while in "yesterday's world" "yangbans could not live if they had money since they valued their inner pride very highly". [508]

It is difficult to agree with the South Korean scholar Yi Sang-gyŏng who insists that "poor peasants in the novel though suffering are not passive and spiritless". [509] In effect the characters in "Poor Village" are utterly submissive and inert. Not one character in the novel attempts any act of protest – at least in Ch'oe Sŏ-hae's style. Yi Sang-gyŏng prefers to explain it in a quite complimentary manner: "The story does not finish with an abstract slogan or idealistic act of revenge, like the stories of the fashionable "new tendency" literature. The reason Yi Ki-yŏng concludes his novel with complete failure is because he understands the seriousness of the social discord much more deeply than the other "new tendency" writers. [510] In fact, "Poor Village" does

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[506] Ibid., 100.

[507] Ibid., 70, 89.

[508] Ibid., 71.

[509] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 106.

[510] Ibid., 108.

finish with an "abstract slogan" – the "invigorating" farewell of Seoulite. Secondly, the sole reason for the contemporary state of social discord which the the author is able to offer us is, in fact, "the greediness" of the "bad guys," an approach which does not render Yi Ki-yŏng the title of an insightful social analyst.

Soviet scholars found it difficult to reconcile the submissiveness of the "Poor Village" characters with the officially required image of Yi Ki-yŏng as an unbending proletarian writer who was supposed to have a clear-cut class perspective based on the Marxist vision of the world and society. In order to rationalize Yi's novel they strived to display the discrepancy between the words and deeds of the heroes of "Poor Village", especially the final fervent words of Seoulite and his actual passivity, as the deliberate intention of the author to "instill righteous indignation in the reader".[511] However, the author's notion that Seoulite's words "gave great inspiration" to the weeping heroine robs this interpretation of any sense. V.N. Li, true to the trivializing tenor of Soviet Marxist philology, explains the protagonist's behavior by the basic insufficiency of his class position. Regurgitating the regular clichés of Soviet literary critics, V.N. Li defines Seoulite as a "worthless hero" who is a "representative of a degenerating gentry".[512] This explanation will not stand up to criticism either, since Yi Ki-yŏng portrays Seoulite as a definitely positive character.

Indeed, to understand this or any other of Yi's work of that period a scholar has no choice but to reject the conventional view on Yi Ki-yŏng as a radically revolutionary figure. In fact, nothing in his novels of the period suggests much deviation from the values of the social stratum from which he originated – the traditional impoverished peasantry. The immanent values of "Poor Village" are loyalty to one's elders, conservatism and passive endurance – indeed, the very traditional virtues which were also considered positive in classical Korean literature.

The Utopian ideal depicted by Seoulite as an allegedly "new life" is, like his "words of protest", a rather antiquated one. His visions of an ideal society originate from traditional Korean rural community values which include harmonious and moderate manual labor, education for one's children (a particularly Confucian ideal), and equality and mutual respect amongst the village community members.

The perspectives of the other early stories of Yi Ki-yŏng of this period do not differ much from that of "Poor Village". Even the allegory "Story About Mice" (1925),[513] which in Soviet scholarship was treated as "an appeal for the socialist reconstruction of society",[514] is no exception in this regard.

The allegory describes the family of mice named Kwak which is moving from the house of the poor peasant Sudol to the rich house of the Kims. The mouse family compares the two ways of life and reaches the conclusion that the human order of

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[511] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 21; V.N. Li, "Koreiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskih pisatelei i prosa 20-30-h godov", 590.

[512] V.N. Li, "Koreiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskih pisatelei i prosa 20-30-h godov", 590.

[513] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Chwi iyagi", 59-66.

[514] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 21.

things is unfair because those who work hard cannot live well. Here are some of their observations: "People's money is just like the devil's hat which enchants people"[515];"Those who steal live well"; "Rich people are as greedy as pigs".[516] Kwak, the mouse, draws the following conclusion: "Sudol has the right to demand the return of the land which they took away from him. He must stick together with the other peasants because if you submit, things only get worse... To wait for mercy from the rich is just as senseless as to wait for a black crow to turn into a white heron".[517]

As a practical step towards the realization of their resolute yet vague social program, the mice decide to seek revenge on the ill-spirited daughter-in-law of the rich family who refused to help a poor neighbor's family by lending them rice. The brave mice urinate on her "ugly face" while she is sleeping. Kwak the mouse then steals a wad of money from the rich Kim and carries his loot to the simple hut of the Sudol family. The story concludes with the final admonition of Kwak the mouse:

"There are good and evil forces in this world. The good force comes from the unity of people, and the bad one comes from individual violence. Good people must unite their good souls. And we should always use our strength to help the good people".

Despite the fact that it was the only story of the period in which Yi suggests any kind of resolute projects for social change, this work could hardly be interpreted as an "appeal for socialist reconstruction." Instead, "Story About Mice" evokes the traditional pattern of Hong Gil-dong, a Korean Robin Hood who robs the rich to feed the poor – in accordance with a centuries-old pattern of rebel peasant behavior. Rather than change society, peasant riots tend to conserve and stabilize it, "consolidating the traditional political system by purging it. They never challenge more than the abuses of the traditional regimes".[518] In fact "Story About Mice" once again sticks to the egalitarian ethic of the patriarchal Korean peasantry with its condemnation of more fortunate members who do not help their less fortunate brethren.

These and the other stories by Yi Ki-yŏng from the period, such as "Nongbu Chŏng To-ryŏng" ("Peasant Chŏng To-ryŏng") (1925), "Kananhan Saramdŭl" ("Poor People") (1925), "Onammae tun abŏji" ("The Father of the Five") (1926), "Nongbu-ŭi chip" ("The House of the Peasant") (1927), etc deal mostly with rural life. And it is difficult to agree with the South Korean scholar Kim Chae-yong who claims that Yi Ki-yŏng "contrary to common peasant writers, observed rural life from the perspective of a worker".[519] Indeed, Yi Ki-yŏng in his perspectives did not deviate from the discourse of

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[515] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Chwi iyagi", 62.

[516] Ibid., 62, 63.

[517] Ibid., 63.

[518] Jean Chesneaux, *Peasant revolts in China 1840-1949,* translated by C.A. Curwen, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, 21.

[519] Kim Chae-yong, "Iljeha nonch'on-ŭi hwangp'yehwa-wa nongmin-ŭi chuch'ejŏk kaksŏng" [The Devastation of the Peasants Under Japanese Colonial Rule and Awakening of Their National Consciousness] , in *Yi Ki-yŏng sŏnjip* [Collected Works of Yi Ki-yŏng], Seoul: P'ulpit', 1989, Vol.1:568.

the traditional village community. His "inner hero" of the period can be defined as an enlightened peasant who is infuriated by the arrival of capitalist modernity in his stable world. The only counterbalance to the harshness of the new life he can see is a return to an imagined social harmony of the past. He is not inclined to protect the traditional ways unconditionally, however. With some basic education he comes to perceive some aspects of traditional rural life as annoying, with the long-established institution of enforced early marriage a major evil.[520]

Yi's second KAPF period (1927-1934)

The next period of activity in Yi Ki-yŏng's career is closely connected to the "Bolshevization" of the KAPF. This process was initiated by the militants in the Tokyo branch of the KAPF (Yim Hwa, Yi Pung-man etc) who, "dissatisfied with the group's general aimlessness and the poor quality of its literature, began pushing in 1927 for its transformation from a small gathering of artistically inclined intellectuals into a mass organization with an openly revolutionary character".[521] The result of their endeavors was a new program of the KAPF which outlined drastic changes in the organization's activity. It stated: "In our class struggle we stand on the side of a Marxist understanding of the historical process. Considering proletarian literature as one of the frontiers of proletarian struggle we design our missions as follows: 1) a decisive struggle against feudal-bourgeois ideology; 2) the struggle against barbarian regimes and despotism; 3) the struggle for the creation of conscious class activists".[522] By 1930 the radical wing took over complete control of the KAPF.[523]

It would appear as if Yi Ki-yŏng accepted the new KAPF "struggle" policy wholeheartedly. Not only did he profess his support of "bolshevization" by publishing a set of articles in *Chosŏn chigwang* magazine,[524] but he also started to fashion his writings according to the new political requirements. Yet, these new tendencies failed to substitute completely his old visions.

Let's have a look at two of his most tendentious short stories of the period, "Wŏn-bo" (1928) and "Paper Factory Village" (1930).

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[520] One should not overestimate, however, the degree of Yi Ki-yŏng's devotion to the theme of women's liberation in general. Ken Wells convincingly argues that in his articles Yi Ki-yŏng in fact dismissed a feminist gender position. See Kenneth Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement, 1927-1931", in Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (eds.), *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1999, 191-221.

[521] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 22.

[522] "Koreiskaia literatura" [Korean Literature], in *Literaturnaia entsiklopedia* [Literary Encyclopaedia], Moscow: Academia nauk, 1931, Vol. 5: 460-470.

[523] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 26

[524] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 450.

"Wŏn-bo"[525] describes an accidental meeting between the poor peasant Wŏn-bo and his wife and the worker Sŏk-pong in a Seoul doss-house. Wŏn-bo, an old man whose legs had been crippled in an automobile accident, came to Seoul in a desperate search for medical help, which he failed to receive because of a lack of money. It also happened to be his first visit to a big city. He is a typical *sobakhan* character who observes life through innocent, childish eyes. Sŏk-pong, an out-of-work miner who is the other guest at the simple inn, explains to the elderly couple why they, a worker and a peasant who have both worked all their lives, are now completely destitute. "Those who only play and eat stole the wealth of the peasants and the workers," he explains.[526] The only way out, Sŏk-pong insists, is to "struggle against the ruling class". Wŏn-bo is completely convinced and thrilled at Sŏk-pong's words of wisdom. His deathbed desire is to deliver these sage words to his grandson so that he too might come to know the truth about life.

The South Korean scholar Kim Sang-sŏn has characterized "Wŏn-bo" as "a story about the unity of the aspirations of workers and peasants",[527] while the North Korean scholar Sin Gu-Hyŏn praises it highly as a story about "the awakening of class consciousness" in Wŏn-bo, a peasant with a soul which is "as pure and clean as a white piece of paper".[528] These were probably the actual intentions of the author. The question is, however, how did Yi Ki-yŏng realize these politically-motivated intentions?

Initially, the instant "awakening of class consciousness" in a peasant hero with a mind literally as clean "as a piece of paper" would not appear too implausible. But Yi Ki-yŏng describes Wŏn-bo as a totally ignorant man who has spent all his life in a remote rural area. Wŏn-bo does not even know what city dwellers do in their everyday life; he is surprised when he fails to find the familiar fields and vegetable plots in the city. How could such a childishly innocent soul grasp in a single day complicated social theory which is narrated in such politicized terms as "exploitation", "the ruling class" etc.? What is even more incredible is that he internalizes these new ideas so completely that his life-long obedience to his superiors is instantly replaced by an eagerness to join the "class struggle".

In my opinion, the source of the general implausibility of the story lay in Yi Ki-yŏng's uncritical "borrowing" from foreign literary models – largely from the works of Gorky. Many scholars have highlighted the common points between "Wŏn-bo" and Gorky's drama "The Low Depths".[529] Although some of the similarities suggested by

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[525] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Wŏn-bo", in *Hyŏndae chosŏn munhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of Contemporary Korean Literature], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1958, vol.3: 182-194.

[526] Ibid., 189.

[527] Kim Sang-sŏn, *Minch'on Yi Ki-yŏng munhak yŏngu* [A Study of the Literature of Minch'ŏn Yi Ki-yŏng], Seoul: Kukhakcharyowŏn, 1999, 508.

[528] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'on Yi Ki-yŏng", 115-116.

[529] See, for instance, Mun Sŏk-u, "Tturŭgenep'ŭ-wa Korikki munhak-ŭi kyŏngu", 312-316; V.I. Ivanova,"Sovetskaia voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree 40-50-h godov", 126-127.

Soviet scholars appear dubious,[530] on the whole the parallels between "The Low Depths" and "Wŏn-bo" are undeniable. The settings of both works are quite similar – a humble doss-house where an enlightened hero declaims his "progressive" world-views before a group of pathetic and miserable yet sympathetic listeners. But "The Low Depths" deals with the search for the meaning of life rather than merely propagating political slogans. Yi Ki-yŏng's story contains more blatant political statements and thus resembles another of Gorky's work more closely – his novel *Mother (Mat')*.[531] In both works a young and "politically mature" activist successfully enlightens an elderly, uneducated person, infusing him or her with "class consciousness". Yet one must admit that the "regeneration" of the old woman in *Mother* appears more convincing. Unlike Yi Ki-yŏng, Gorky introduced his heroine to revolutionary ideas gradually and naturally, through her love for her son and sympathy for his friends rather than through some sophisticated intellectual argument.

Despite being steeped in leftist jargon, "Wŏn-bo"'s Marxian credentials appear quite doubtful. It is noteworthy that the main malefactors in Sŏk-pong's social denunciations are not "capitalists" *per se* but vicious "Seoul folks". The allegedly Marxist worker Sŏk-pong is infuriated by "city dwellers who took all our possessions and now enjoy life", "Seoul residents who do not work in the fields yet are always well-fed and amused, who do not weave but wear beautiful dresses".[532] Such an anti-urban, anti-industrial view can hardly be defined as Marxist – which is why the statement of the South Korean scholar Yi Po-yŏng concerning the allegedly "clear socialist tendency" of "Wŏn-bo"[533] sounds unconvincing. I would rather tend to agree with the remark of Brian Myers that, "The crude country mouse/city mouse antimony of Yi Ki-yŏng's short story "Wŏn-bo" (1928), which tells of a benevolently naive farmer's disastrous excursion to decadent Seoul, can hardly be regarded as an ideological advance over Ch'oe Sŏ-hae's fiction".[534] Indeed, the desired "proletarian motives" in the story failed to supplant the usual traditionalist perspective of Yi Ki-yŏng's novels.

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[530] As an indisputable example of Gorky's influence on "Wŏn-bo" V.I. Ivanova points to the similarity of the proverbial phrase of Gorky's hero Satin "Man – that sounds proud" (Maxim Gorky,"Na dne", 585) and the words of Yi Ki-yŏng's exemplary worker hero Sŏk-pong "There is nothing more precious in this world than a man. Yet nowadays men despise men, and the poor are treated like animals." (Yi Ki-yŏng, "Wŏn-bo", 190). In my opinion, Gorky's influence on this particular phrase of Sŏkbong is dubious. In his "Story About Mice" Yi Ki-yŏng had already used the expression "among all the creatures in this world a human being is the most precious" (Yi Ki-yŏng, "Chwi iyagi", 65) paraphrasing an ancient Chinese saying widely recognized in Korea. In all probability, the genuine origins of Sŏkbong's phrase lies in the Chinese maxim rather than in Satin's phrase.

[531] Maxim Gorky, *Mat'* [Mother], in *Izbrannye proizvedenija v treh tomah* [Collected works in Three Volumes]. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951, Vol.2: 410-729.

[532] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Wŏn-bo", 189,190.

[533] Mun Sŏk-u, "Tturŭgenepŭ-wa Korikki munhak-ŭi kyŏngu", 314.

[534] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 25.

This same tendency clearly revealed itself in his most "proletarian" story, "Paper Factory Village" ("Cheji kongjangch'on") (1930),[535] which describes a workers' strike, a common setting in the literature of socialist realism. The plot of the story can be summarized as follows:

> The workers of the paper factory are driven to desperation by the greediness of their master and decide to go on strike. The idea is in fact that of one of the workers – a slight intellectual who came to the factory in order "to be baptized by labor". Initially this bookish creature received the mocking nickname Saennim ("Know-it-all", "Smartie Pants" or "Egg-head") from his co-workers, but eventually he gains their trust and succeeds in persuading them to struggle for their rights and dignity. The strike ends in failure. Saennim, who turns out to be a writer named Hwang-un in disguise, is imprisoned and petty rivalries tear apart the workers' ranks. However, Hwang-un is happy since he feels that "the seeds which he planted are growing day and night".[536]

Once again, in this allegedly "proletarian" story the workers are practically invisible. The workmen in "Paper Factory Village" appear not as active force, but rather as a dark mass of wretches who have been crippled by harsh labor. Like Gorky's *Mother,* Yi Ki-yŏng's story starts with a gloomy description of the factory, including the same comparisons of the workers to hellish "machines" or "slaves of machines", the factory reality with "a nightmare", where alcohol and prostitutes are the only known forms of relaxation etc.[537] However, unlike *Mother* with its bright "truly proletarian" protagonists, Yi Ki-yŏng's story includes no vivid personalities among the workmen. The only personal trait of the worker activist Chang which Yi Ki-yŏng mentioned was that "he [was] famous for his industriousness". In contrast, the author lavished lengthy passages of description on the main character, a delicate and sophisticated intellectual who is clearly reminiscent of common characters in Korean prose at the time, with their immanent weakness and doomed refinement.[538] Yi Ki-yŏng verbosely described the sweet love of a factory girl for the main hero, the appearance of a female servant,[539] etc, but while conveying Saennim's "progressive" thoughts and motivation he turned to a stultified prose which was lifted directly from the Communist propaganda of the era.

"Saennim was a person who abandoned bourgeois prejudices, who stood on the path of the fight for the proletariat. From the very beginning he understood the full danger of his fight. But he determined to fight nevertheless from the very moment he entered the factory village. His very arrival at the factory was the first step in a new and sincere life. He made the decision in order to thwart his cowardly ego which was filled with petty bourgeois consciousness. He wanted to become a proletarian, to become a

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[535] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Cheji kongjang ch'on", 195-213.

[536] Ibid., 213.

[537] Gorky, *Mat'*, 410-413; Yi Ki-yŏng, "Cheji kongjang ch'on", 195-196.

[538] Yi Ki-yŏng, "Cheji kongjangch'on", 196.

[539] Ibid.,198, 210.

"proper" person. That is why he threw away his writing brush and inkbottle. He wanted to become a worker who constructs life.

Alas, the life he lived before! He spent twenty-five years in a feudal patriarchal environment! But he could break out of it, he could enter into a new life! It demanded courage; he could not imagine that such a weak person as himself could handle physical labor. But he threw away all bourgeois superstitions, cowardice and idleness, and stepped onto the bloody path of struggle!"[540]

Notably, this eulogy appears completely out of the blue and unrelated to the other parts of the story. The reader can only guess what prompted the intellectual to abandon his previous life or what exactly he did to impress and indoctrinate his simple-minded and initially hostile co-workers.

As we can see, "Won-bo" and "Paper Factory Village" can hardly be defined as thoroughly "Marxian" or "proletarian". Even though they contained huge doses of leftist rhetoric, at his core the author remained true to his earlier traditionalist visions. The stories are filled with Yi's favorite pathetic characters– poor country girls, victims of domestic violence, wretched elderly peasants, and fragile intellectuals. These characters are described with much more authenticity and sympathy than the faceless "progressive" workers or revolutionary activists. The obligatory revolutionary conversions of his traditional heroes remained schematic and largely unmotivated.

Kohyang (Native Land) (1933-1934)

The contradiction between Yi Ki-yŏng's essentially peasant worldview and the alien, borrowed "proletarian" motifs appears fully fledged in his most popular work – the novel *Native Land (Kohyang)* (1933-1934).

The critics generally agreed that the novel was written under the strong influence of Sholokhov 's major "agrarian" novels *Quiet Flows the Don (Tihii Don)* and *Virgin Land Under the Plough (Podniataia tselina).*[541] The North Korean scholar Pak Chong-sik, citing his personal interview with Yi Ki-yŏng, stated: "the month after the first reading of *Quiet Flows the Don* in Japanese translation, Yi Ki-yŏng started to write *Native Land.* He set the goal of maintaining the same perspective on contemporary Korean village life as Sholokhov did on the rural life of the Don region. This was the reason for the strong similarity between the images in both novels".[542] *Native Land*, like *Quiet Flows the Don,* attempted to constitute a broad panorama of the Korean village in the 1920s and 1930s. The main story-line of the novel can be summarised as follows:

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[540] Ibid., 210.

[541] See *Samch'ŏlli*, 1936, #4, 319. Quoted in V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 21; Pak Chong-sik, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ-ŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 432.

[542] Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenia (formirovanie i stanovlenie sotsrealisma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena,* 141.

The protagonist Kim Hŭi-jun, a progressive student, returns from Japan to his native village which has been rapidly changing under the influence of colonial modernization. He sees that a majority of the honest peasants have been impoverished while the less scrupulous ones, like the cunning pro-Japanese village administrator An Sŭng-hak, have prospered. Many villagers have lost their land and are forced to slave away in the hellish world of the local textile factory. The mentality of the villagers remains backward. They still follow the old traditions of forced early marriage and polygamy, worship the old Confucian norms of total obedience to one's parents' will and so forth. Traditional religious beliefs of Shamanism and Buddhism and superstition occupy their minds side by side with the new Christian tenets.

Kim Hŭi-jun feels obliged to improve the life of the people around him. Following his disappointment with Christianity and a local youth organization, he resolves to restore the traditional rural system of *ture* or neighborhood mutual help groups, which not only help the peasants materially but also unite and enlighten them. In the long run the idea proves worthwhile. Under the leadership of Kim Hŭi-jun the unified peasants are able to attain a desirable goal – they are afforded the privilege of not paying rent after floods destroy their fields.

The social activity of the progressive student is intertwined with a love theme. Kim Hŭi-jun, once unhappily married to an ignorant older woman, falls in love with the young and well-educated Kap-suk (Yŏng-hŭi), who had foresaken her rich family, changed her name and become a factory worker. However, in order to maintain his loyalty to his family and "serve society", Kim Hŭi-jun decides to suppress his true feelings and remains Kap-suk's comrade-in-arms. The story ends on a very optimistic note – both of the protagonists greet the morning of a new day, which presumably symbolizes their anticipation of a new life.

In North Korea *Native Land* is invariably presented as a profoundly proletarian work, centered around the story of a workers' union.[543] South Korean scholar Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl insists that *Native Land* is an example of "socialist realism" (which he understands as "literature written by a writer with a socialist worldview").[544] Some Soviet scholars went even further, insisting that the main hero is "a revolutionary" and the novel on the whole is devoted to the theme of the "revolutionary actions of the masses".[545] A.M. Tan calls the main protagonist Kim Hŭi-jun "a typical Korean Communist and revolutionary of the preparatory period of the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution in Korea".[546] However, these interpretations are questionable. In my

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[543] Sin Ku-hyŏn, "Minch'on Yi Ki-yŏng", 130.

[544] Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, *Munhaŭi ihae,* 301. For Na's definition of socialist realism see: Ibid., 268 and Na Pyŏng-ch'ŏl, *Sosŏl-ŭi ihae* [Understanding the Novel], Seoul: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1998, 271.

[545] V.N. Li, *Sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature*, 46, 47.

[546] A.N. Taen, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury. Demokraticheskie natsional'nye tendentsii i sotsialisticheskie realii v koreiskoi literature,* 322.

understanding what the above-cited authors are missing is the contradiction between the explicit leftist rhetoric, which occasionally occurs in the novel, and the actual traditionalist, anti-modernist essence of *Native Land*.

First of all, the "worker's union" in the novel is mentioned only briefly (a single episode in the novel describes a strike at the textile factory). The practical effects of the factory strike followed by unrest in the village remain unclear since the strike led to no visible results. The peasants in fact were able to secure the cancellation of their rent payments but not through "fighting" or any "union" action. They simply blackmailed the village administrator by threatening to spread gossip about an amorous relationship between his daughter and a young man. This threat of blackmail is not exactly a "revolutionary" means of solving social conflicts.

According to the standard Marxist doctrine of the "vanguard role" and intrinsic "fighting spirit" of the proletariat, the author, indeed, delivered a number of eulogies to the working masses: "female workers are marked by a belief in their comrades, enthusiasm, hatred for injustice, self-confidence and an independent spirit"[547], "a worker is the child of a peasant. He is like a newly hatched chicken which looks at the world around him with clear, wide-open eyes. Looking at the workers, peasants understand that the dawn of their life will come someday"[548], or "all we see around us is the result of the labor of the workers and peasants".[549] Yet it is difficult to overlook the fact that all these panegyrics are barely connected with the narration. None of Yi's important characters are workers – at the very best they, like Kap-suk, simply experience factory life temporarily. Apart from the above-mentioned "politically correct" commendation of the proletariat, the "workers" theme in the novel is largely conveyed in a similar manner to that of "Paper Factory Village" – through depressing images of workers' misery and portraits of pale-faced and wretched factory girls, etc. Despite the rhetoric of the "vanguard role" of the workers, Yi Ki-yŏng depicts the proletariat in his favorite way – as a suffering mass to be saved and led by virtuous and sophisticated intellectuals. It is worth noting that in his allegedly "proletarian works", modern industry and technology are mostly depicted as evil forces tearing apart the beautiful world of the traditional village. In general, Yi's favorite peasant themes still constitute the core of the narration.

The "revolutionary" credentials of *Native Land*'s protagonists are also dubious. The activity of Kim Hŭi-jun, e.g. his revival of the traditional peasant *ture* mutual-help leagues with ritualistic songs and dances, can hardly be described as "revolutionary" or "proletarian". In fact this constitutes a return to the past which the author describes once again as a paradise lost: "In the old days our peasants lived another, better life, a life full of poetry…Peasants could sit free of care under a tree and drink unrefined rice wine, makkŏlli, or play cards. Women would wash in the river and itinerant conjurers

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[547] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kohyang,* 320-321.

[548] Ibid., 223.

[549] Ibid., 268.

entertained the people".[550] The author obviously does not associate the "good old days" with those traditional customs which are particularly appalling to him, such as early and forced marriage, the enslavement of women, deep-rooted religious superstitions, etc. In fact, he somehow manages to associate these evils with the contemporary order of things, as if it was capitalization and colonization which brought these problems to a once virtuous Korean soil. "Nowadays there are stupidity, greediness, and ignorance everywhere".[551] The restoration of *ture* in the novel is represented as a revival of a lost paradise for the peasants. "The villagers were as happy as if they were attending some feast… The restoration of ture unified the peasants. Even the mothers of Paekryong and Soetŭk forgot their old enmity."[552]

Another "revolutionary" heroine An Yŏng-hŭi (Kap-suk), indeed, indulges in "progressive" declarations ("first of all we must fight for our common freedom, not for our personal happiness"; "we must fight for freedom and win"; "we should not live for the physical only"; "happiness is not just the simple enjoyment of your own life. Happiness is offering your life for the sake of others"[553]), but the nature of her actions remains vague. Kap-suk's "revolutionary fight" for the workers' rights at the factory ends in a rather predictable (and, for a change, plausible) manner – her male boss yells at her and the girl, feeling that she "has no other choice" dutifully returns to her work-place.[554]

Many "non-traditional" sections of the novel consider topics, which though socially important are unrelated to the Marxist perspective. They are in fact a repetition of the familiar themes of the "new tendency" literature which Yi Ki-yŏng had already promoted in his earlier short stories: the impoverishment of the village, the inhumane conditions in factories, the corruption of the clergy, early marriage, polygamy and so forth.

Some of the themes in the novel, being indeed innovative for Korean literature, bore the clear marks of a foreign origin. For instance, the love theme in the novel is developed in a manner quite unusual for Korean literature of the time. The decision of the main hero to forgo his feelings for the sake of the social good is taken with the following consideration, "It is better when a man and a woman, hand in hand like loyal and devoted friends, fight for their common ideals … A comrade's love is nobler than an intimate relationship. It is so good to go forward together, side by side, as comrades".[555] We can see here an apparent affinity with the early Soviet literature in which characters often choose to sacrifice their personal happiness and sexual gratification for the sake of "revolutionary struggle" (*Mother* is a good example of this tendency) and with the earlier Russian liberal literary tradition according to which a

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[550] Ibid.,114-117.

[551] Ibid.,110-113.

[552] Ibid., 193.

[553] Ibid., 228, 407.

[554] Ibid., 403.

[555] Ibid., 469.

protagonist is often forced to choose between the "social" and the "personal" like Turgenev's *On the Eve* (Insarov) or Chernyshevsky's *What is To Be Done* (Rahmetov), etc.[556] Also, the North Korean scholar Pak Chong-sik draws parallels between certain heroes of *Native Land* and *Quiet Flows the Don* (Kwŏn Kyŏn-ho – Grigorii Melihov, Kim Hŭi-jun – Mihail Koshevoi and so forth).[557] The final chapter of the story, including the speech and the final cheery phrase of Kim Hŭi-jun, "Let's prepare for the next bright day," vividly reminds us of the "revolutionary optimism" which was traceable in many Soviet "patristic texts".[558]

Most of *Native Land*'s critics concurred that these borrowed traits did not work well in Yi's novel and agreed on the implausibility of the love theme and "progressive" female characters in *Native Land.*[559] Indeed, Yi Ki-yŏng failed to show what prompted Kap-suk to attain her high level of political consciousness and transform her from the shy heiress of a wealthy family into a determined social activist. The writer himself later admitted that Kap-suk, though conceptually a "correct" character, nonetheless "contradicts the sense of reality".[560] This implausibility of both the characters and the context is especially visible in the depiction of the rural girl, Pan-gae, who bore a striking affinity to Sholokhov's Aksinia, the leading female character of *Quiet Flows the Don.* The critics of *Native Land* claim that Pan-gae's provocative sexuality and boldness in the relationship with her loved one are definitely atypical for a 1930s Korean rural girl.[561]

Nevertheless, all these borrowed traits as well as the use of leftist jargon did not obliterate Yi's favorite "peasant" and "enlightenment" themes which continued to constitute the basis of the worldview expressed in the novel. These essential themes proved to be appealing to the vast majority of contemporary Koreans and ensured a wide popularity for the novel. Even Korean literary magazines of the "pure art" persuasion, such as *Chosŏn mundan* and *Samch'ŏnri*, greeted *Native Land* as "the pride of modern Korean literature"[562] and stressed such common social themes in the novel

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[556] E.M. Tsoi, *Otrazhenie velikih peremen v koreiskoi derevne v romanah Li Giena*, 73.

[557] Pak Chong-sik. "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏŭi ssobet'ŭ munhak-ŭi yŏnghyang", 432.

[558] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual,* 3.

[559] As an example of South Korean scholarship see Kim Chae-yong, "Ilcheha nonch'onŭi hwangp'yehwawa nonminŭi chuch'ejŏk kaksŏng", 580. As an example of Soviet scholarship see V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 43. As an example of North Korean scholarship (published in Russian) see Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenija. Formirovanie i stanovlnie sotrealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena,* 184.

[560] Yi Ki-yŏng's article on the topic named "Ideal Heroine" was published in 1939 in *Chonggwang* magazine, #4, 152. Quoted in V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 43.

[561] V.N. Li, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature", 50, 51; Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia. Formirovanie i stanovelnie sotsrealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena,* 178.

[562] *Samch'ŏnri,* 1936, #4, 319. Quoted in: V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 43

as "spring hunger in the village", "peasants' suffering after a flood", "the indecent activity of clergymen" and more.[563]

It is noteworthy that Yi Ki-yŏng – unlike most KAPF writers – did not become an object of politically-motivated harangue in South Korea during the decades of military rule and obligatory Communist-bashing. The South Korean *Dictionary of Korean Literature* in 1973, at the height of the anti-Communist hysteria just after the Yusin *coup*, described *Native Land* as "a work of powerful life force", as a "humanistic" novel whose main topic is allegedly "a search for compromise between landlords and tenants and the possibility of finding this through the reasonable consideration of peasants' needs".[564] This latter statement might have been a result of political pressures on the South Korean academic, but it still demonstrates that *Native Land*'s vague political message leaves room for mutually contradicting interpretations. *Native Land* could occupy a respectable place in the right-wing nationalist cannon of Korean literature while at the same time being treated as a specimen of "truly proletarian literature". The North Korean scholar Sin Ku-hyŏn even insisted that *Native Land* "was written under the direct influence of the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle of Kim Il Sung".[565]

Though Yi Ki-yŏng himself perceived his novel as a serious ideological attack, the Japanese colonial power hardly perceived it as such. The novel was republished five times before Liberation, and in 1937 when the Japanese censorship turned especially harsh, *Native Land* was translated into Japanese and published in the Japanese literary magazine *Bungaku annai*.[566]

Decline of the leftist motifs (1934-1945)

In the early 1930s the leftist trends in Yi Ki-yŏng's writings began to decline. This was the inevitable result of the increasingly strict anti-Communist regulations imposed by the colonial administration from 1932 onwards. In 1934 the colonial police raided the KAPF office and arrested more than eighty of its members, including Yi Ki-yŏng. He was accused of subversive activity and spent about a year and a half in jail. In all probability his arrest and trial were due to his support of the general revolutionary line of the KAPF rather than his own personal problems with the colonial authorities. Notably, *Native Land* was serialized daily in *Chosŏn ilbo* during Yi's imprisonment.[567] On May 21, 1935 the dissolution of the KAPF was officially announced and the

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[563] *Chosŏn mundan,* 1935, #3, 124. Quoted in *Hanguk munhak taesajŏn* [Encyclopedia of Korean Literature], Seoul: Munwŏngak, 1973, 452.

[564] *Hanguk munhak taesajŏn*, 452.

[565] Sin Ku-hyŏn. *Minch'on Yi Ki-yŏng*, 127

[566] Yi Sang-kyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 452.

[567] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 46.

colonial administration began to press writers to join the pro-Japanese Korean Writers' Society.[568]

Brian Myers claims that in these circumstances "all KAPF veterans had renounced the revolutionary cause, either in their literary works or in formal declarations to their probation officers". As for Yi Ki-yŏng, Brian Myers and most South Korean scholars claim that he "held the posts of executive secretary of Yi Kwang-su's notorious Writers Society in 1939 and in the equally treasonous Patriotic Society of Korean Writers".[569] Soviet scholars assert that the writer rejected the posts under the pretext of bad health.[570]

Under these new circumstances Yi Ki-yŏng saw no choice but to adjust to the mounting pressure in his writings. His "conversion" was articulated in the form of so-called "industrial novels" ("Son of Earth" ("Taeji-ŭi adŭl") (1939), "The Life Line" ("Saengmyŏngsŏn") (1942), "Miners' Village" ("Kwangsan-ch'on") (1943), or "Virgin Land" ("Ch'onyŏji") (1944). In these novels the author "concentrated more on praising physical labor and the industrial development of the country."[571] Yet, these works leave room for very diverse interpretations. The South Korean scholar Yi Sang-gyŏng stresses that the pro-Japanese motifs in Yi Ki-yŏng's "industrial novels" should be analyzed "with caution" for those novels could be equally seen as signs of the author's "belief in the creativity of the Korean people", and as works that "encouraged the inventiveness of Korean workmen". [572] In Soviet scholarship, for instance, the protagonist of the "pro-Japanese" "The Life Line" was treated as a progressive intellectual who could not stand a merciless Seoul full of arrogant Japanese and leaves to live in a village.[573]

During the 1940s campaign to change Korean names to Japanese (ch'angssi kaemyŏng) Yi Ki-yŏng, according to most sources, refused to abandon his Korean name. He also refused to write in Japanese, offering the excuse that he did not know the language well enough. In 1944 the writer left Seoul for a rural district in Kangwondo province to support his family by working on the land as a tenant farmer.[574]

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[568] Ibid., 47.

[569] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean literature*, 38.

[570] A.Gitovich, V. Bursov, *My videli Koreiu* [We Have Seen Korea], Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1948, 86; V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 48.

[571] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 244.

[572] Ibid., 296.

[573] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 66.

[574] Yi Ki-yong, Han Sŏr-ya, *Yisang-kwa noryŏk*, 38; Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 453; A. Gitovich, V. Bursov, *Mu videli Koreyu,* 86; A.N. Taen, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury (demokraticheskie tendentsii i sotsialisticheskii realizm v koreiskoi literature),* 259.

After Liberation

Considering Yi Ki-yŏng's pre-Liberation experiences, it comes as no surprise that after 1945 his life was connected with the Communist North. Immediately after Liberation Yi Ki-yŏng became involved in North Korean politics. He took part in the organization of the People's Committee in the town of Naegŭmgang and participated in various rallies which were quite common in those troubled times. From October 1945 the writer headed the Department of People's Education in Kangwŏndo province.[575]

With his former KAPF colleague Han Sŏr-ya, Yi Ki-yŏng also contributed to the establishment of the new artistic organization called "Chosŏn P'ŭrolletaria Yesul Tongmaeng" or the Korean Proletarian Art Federation, founded on 17 September 1945.[576] Some critics believe that this organization was deliberately set up as counter to the "Chosŏn munhak kŏnsŏl ponbu" or the Center for the Construction of Korean Literature which had been established earlier in August by Han's long-term enemies Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn.[577] South Korean scholar Yi Myŏn-jae sees no confirmation of such a conclusion.[578] In any case both groups, along with many other early artistic associations in North Korea, proved to be short- lived. In 1946[579] all of these disparate groups were unified as the "Pukchosŏn Munhak Yesul Tongmaeng" or North Korean Federation of Literature and Art (henceforth NKFLA), under the wing of the Party's Department of Agitation and Propaganda. This was done to establish ideological control over intellectuals, an important requirement for any Stalinist regime.

Yi Ki-yŏng, as the oldest and most prominent "proletarian" writer, immediately found himself in this new organization. In March 1946 he was granted a personal meeting with Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang, during which the North Korean leader encouraged the writer to remain in the North and even helped him to find accommodation for his family who at the time still lived in Kangwondo.[580] Soon afterwards Yi Ki-yŏng was appointed to the post of KAPF chairman. His chairmanship did not last long, however, and in 1948 Yi Ki-yŏng was replaced by Han Sŏr-ya who was widely seen as "the more keen political brain".[581] Nonetheless, Yi's lofty position in the North Korean literary and official world had already been secured. After April

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[575] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 68.

[576] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 36.

[577] U Tae-sik, "Haebang hu pukhan mundane koch'al" [Study of Post-Liberation North Korean Literary Circles]. Introduction to Pak Nam-su, *Ch'ŏkch'i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan,* 9-14.

[578] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 368.

[579] The scholars who agree that the NKFLA was established in 1946 claim contradictory dates of the month. Brian Myers writes that it occurred in September-October (see Brian Myers, 38). V.I. Ivanova insists that it was created in March (see V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 67). U Dae-sik names "the beginning of the year" (see U Tae-sik, "Haebang hu pukhan mundane koch'al", 14).

[580] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 454.

[581] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏk-ch'i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan,* 54.

1946 the writer was promoted to the important position of Chairman of the Central Committee of the Soviet-North Korean Friendship Association or Chssoch'insŏn hyŏphoe chungang uiw:onhoe uiw:onjang, a post which he retained for the rest of his life. In November 1946 he became a deputy of the People's Assembly for Hoeyang town and was later made a member of the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea. Politically, his membership in these "legislative bodies" of the regime did not mean much, but it was a sign of the special trust bestowed on the writer by the authorities. From August, 1948 Yi Ki-yŏng became a member of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly.[582] In 1957 Yi Ki-yŏng became the Assembly's Vice-chairman, a post which carried no political significance but was still very respected.[583]

At the NKFLA's official ceremony on 25 March 1946 the goals of the new organization and North Korean literature as a whole were formulated in the following manner:

1) The establishment of a national art and culture based on the principles of progressive democracy.

2) The promotion of the national unification of all Korean literary and artistic movements.

3) The extirpation of all anti-democratic and reactionary artistic forces and concepts be they Japanese imperialist, feudal, treasonous, or fascist.

4) The implementation of a large-scale enlightenment movement for the cultural, creative and artistic development of the masses.

5) The suitable appraisal and appropriation of the nation's cultural heritage.

6) The exchange of our national culture with international culture.[584]

Note that, unlike the KAPF program with its references to "Marxist ideology" and "proletarian struggle", the NKFLA's platform sounded more nationalist than militant Marxist. This can be explained by the official adherence to the so-called "theory of the people's democratic revolution" which formed a dogmatic, prescriptive background to the Communist policies in the Soviet-controlled societies of post-war Eastern Europe and Korea. This theory stated that the nascent Communist regimes were to deal, first and foremost, with the "general democratic tasks", including land reform, liquidation of hereditary privilege and the like. Only after these goals had been achieved was it possible to move further, towards full-scale Communist revolution. This strategy was not necessarily followed in real life, but it was certainly reflected in the official rhetoric and various kinds of program statements.[585]

Yi Ki-yŏng seemed to be inspired by the new order. The nationalistic and enlightenment implications of the Party's demands resonated well with the views and

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[582] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 68.

[583] Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 797-799.

[584] Cited in Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 42.

[585] Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung. The Formation of North Korea 1945-1960*, 8-9.

ideals of his pre-Liberation novels. Nor was the urge to imitate the "advanced cultures" too foreign to the writer who had been a zealous student and emulator of the Soviet literary patterns long before it was officially demanded. However, despite the sincere desire to follow the Party's line, the fate of the first big novel Yi Ki-yŏng wrote in North Korea on a contemporary topic, *Ttang (Land)* (1948-1949), was not trouble-free.

Ttang (Land) (1948-1949) – the Troublesome Fate of a "patristic text"

Land was written as a direct response to the Party's request to reflect the 'tremendous transformation' in the villages in the course of the recent land reform. It was meant to be an embodiment of all the above-cited Party principles and a continuation of *Native Land*'s themes.[586] From the very beginning, the novel had been regarded as the pride and a classic of North Korean literature. At the same time *Land* became the object of sustained critical attacks which, although they did not affect the reputation of the novel, resulted in a serious rewriting of the text.

The plot of *Land* can be summarized in the following manner:[587]

> Life in the remote village of Pŏlmaŭl, which had been full of hardship and suffering under the Japanese colonial rule, was transformed into complete bliss following Liberation, land reform and the establishment of the new people's government. The new authorities are represented by the chairman of the town committee, Kang Gyŭn, a wise, intelligent and "all-round good guy" hero. Kang had come up with the idea of draining the marshes on the outskirts of Pŏlmaŭl and turning the area into rice fields. An overwhelming majority of the village people enthusiastically supported the idea, shouting "Long Life to the Great Leader Kim Il Sung", and the vision was gloriously realized.
>
> The main protagonist, Kwak Pa-ui, who had been a poor and uneducated tenant in the past who once unfairly suffered in a Japanese jail, is especially zealous. After receiving his share of land, the hard working and socially active Kwak Pa-ui is transformed into a respectable member of the local community. His personal life also improves under the "sunshine" of the new order. In the past Kwak had been betrayed by his wife who had left him for another man while he was in jail. But now he had married the beautiful Chŏn Sun-ŏk who in the hellish past had been sold as a concubine to the rich landowner Yun Sang-yŏl to repay her father's debts. The girl was now freed from her shameful past and had become an active member of the new society. The reactionary camp in the village community is represented by a few ex-landowners like Yun Sang-yŏl, Chu T'ae-ro or Ko Pyong-sang. These "all-round bad guys" try to obstruct the new development of the village by organizing subversive acts, but are easily identified, seized and sent to prison. Several of their earlier supporters, such as the greedy middle-class merchant, referred to as Sun-Ŭi's mother, eventually

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[586] Sin Ku-hyŏn, *Koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia* [Korean Literature After Liberation], Pyongyang: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannuh jazukah, 1957, 12.

[587] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang* [Land], Pyongyang: Chosŏnchakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1955.

come to recognize their villainous nature, mend their own anti-social ways and join the positive majority of the villagers.

At the end of the novel Kwak Pa-ui is chosen as a member of the People's Assembly and goes to Pyongyang for the Assembly meeting. In Pyongyang he meets the Great Leader Kim Il Sung. At the Congress he also listens to the speeches of several deputies who had visited the Soviet Union – the Promised Land where "there are no jobless or hungry and where Man is the most precious thing". The novel concludes with a panegyric to Kim Il Sung and the new people's government who have brought long—awaited happiness to the Korean land.

The novel can certainly be referred to as an example of the declared tendency of "absorption of the Soviet culture". To begin with, *Land* bristles with frequent eulogies to the Soviet Army, Soviet culture, and the Soviet way of life. Most of the information about the latter leans heavily on Yi Ki-yŏng's personal encounters with the Soviet Union during his several guided tours to that country in 1946-47, and for this reason it contains a lot of propagandistic falsities. As an example, one can mention the notion that in Soviet maternity homes there are allegedly personal telephones near each bed of the recently confined women and that every room is decorated in a different merry colour such as pink or blue.[588] These claims are a far cry from the harsh reality of life in post-war Soviet Russia. Yi was obviously simply repeating what he was told by his Soviet minders.

"The absorption of the Soviet culture" is especially detectable in the artistic form of the novel. As has been mentioned before, many critics admit the strong influence of Sholokhov 's *Virgin Land Under the Plough (Podniataia tselina)* (1932)[589] on Yi Ki-yŏng's work. Both are farming novels glorifying the alleged "new village construction", and many *Virgin Land Under the Plough* characters have their analogues in *Land* (Iakov Lukich and Ko Pyŏng-sang, Varia and Sun-ok, Grandpa Shchukar' and Kang Sa-gwa, etc).

The similarities between David Molchun and Yi's protagonist Kwak Pa-ui are especially remarkable. Like Sholokhov, Yi Ki-yŏng approvingly depicts his main hero as a silent, industrious man – undereducated but imbued with an extraordinary will and physical power. Yi Ki-yŏng admiringly compares his hero to an ox; the very protagonist's name Pa-ui means "a rock" in Korean.[590] These traits, indeed, have positive connotations in the Russian mentality and culture, but not so in a Korea with its Confucian disregard for physical labor and people engaged in it. (It is noteworthy

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[588] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 437-442.

[589] M. Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina* [Virgin Land Under the Plough], Moscow: Prosveshenie, 1973.

[590] M. Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina,* 52; Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 4.

that in the Korean tradition the strong ox served as a symbol of ignorance and stupidity).[591]

Yet another interesting detail in the image of Kwak Pa-ŭi is that, like Sholokhov's peasant, the Korean hero is healthy and eats copiously and with gusto.[592] Yi Ki-yŏng portrays this aspect of his character approvingly, which is remarkable in light of the fact that the majority of Yi Ki-yŏng's positive pre-Liberation personages had refined manners.

There are also undeniable affinities in the general artistic technique and approaches of *Land* and *Virgin Land*. In both the authors visibly try to "enliven" the ideologically imposed storylines with comical episodes and the use of colourful dialectical and colloquial expressions: in *Land* Yi Ki-yŏng uses more than 70 (!) folk songs and legends, often repeating himself (the popular pattern of an old Korean fairytale *Ŏndal and the Princess* which is a Korean variant of *Beauty and the Beast,* for instance, was used in both his pre-Liberation *Native Land* as well as in *Land*). However, there are profound conceptual disparities between Sholokhov's and Yi Ki-yŏng's novels.

First of all, the Soviet and North Korean novels differ in their emphasis on the political aspect. *Virgin Land Under the Plough* is often considered a patristic text of Soviet socialist realism, but it can hardly be defined as simple propaganda. While the novel's perspective remains most definitely Communist, even Stalinist, no single character serves any narrow moralizing goal. The author makes it clear that his heroes are not ideal, that "everyone has his own "eccentricity"".[593] For instance, Sholokhov's upright Communists are often depicted as quite lazy, unskilled and clumsy peasants who cannot properly manage their own households. On the other hand, the enemies or "kulaks" are depicted as workaholics, good family heads and often physically attractive.[594] The positive heroes fail to demonstrate the reputed "revolutionary humanism" of the proletariat. The semi-literate yet zealous Communist Nagulnov openly proclaims his readiness "to kill women, children, or old men for the sake of Revolution" (and this statement is reproduced with obvious disdain).[595] The whole process of reform in Sholokhov 's village is shown as extremely difficult and painful, accompanied by cruelty, bloody fights and the suffering of the innocent. Not

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[591] A typical example of this tendency is the autobiographical novel of the contemporary South Korean writer Kim Chu-yŏng, *Kogichabinŭn kadtaerŭl kkŏkkchi annŭnda (A Fisherman Does Not Pluck a Reed)* about the Korean village of the 1950s. Its central personage, Samsŏng, who, like Yi Ki-yŏng's hero, is a physically strong, silent and ignorant man, is despised by the whole village. While depicting his hero Kim Chu-yŏng also often resorts to the image of an ox, but with opposite connotations. (See Kim Chu-yŏng, *Kogichabinŭn kadtaerŭl kkŏkkchi annŭnda* [A Fisherman Does Not Pluck a Reed], Seoul: Midŭmsa, 1997).

[592] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang*, 96-100.

[593] Mihail Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina,* 367.

[594] Ibid., 17, 41-42, 57, 447.

[595] Ibid., 60.

accidentally the original title of the novel was *By Sweat And Blood (Potom I krovju).*[596] It is important that the slain enemies are here described as sympathetically as are the fallen positive heroes.[597] Also, Sholokhov (like Yi, himself a peasant's son) does not embellish the general environment of the village. His most sympathetic peasant protagonists are by no means saints in their private lives – they are simple-minded, uneducated people, who beat their wives, kill pets, spread ugly gossip, quarrel and fight with each other over petty problems, and at times indulge in drinking and womanizing.[598]

In comparison, Yi Ki-yŏng's *Land* appears to be an extraordinarily didactic novel. In general, Yi's work is permeated with the stiff dualism of Good versus Evil, which is more typical of a parable than a supposedly realistic novel. In fact the two contrasting groups of heroes in *Land* call to mind an old Korean fairytale about two brothers *Hŭngbu-wa Nolbu (Hŭngbu and Nolbu)* and allusion to this tale appears at one point in the novel.[599] In this tale the angelic Hŭngbu receives rewards from the good spirit while his devilish brother Nolbu is severely punished for his wrongdoings. Like Hŭnbu, the positive heroes of *Land* are flawless and imbued with all the virtues imaginable – they are modest, beautiful and industrious, socially active and selfless, etc. The few negative ones, such as Nolbu, are the embodiment of every imaginable evil: they are all ugly, lazy, greedy, selfish, lusting, deceitful and so forth.

Such cartoon-like villains do not pose a serious threat to the "all-round good guys". Unlike Sholokhov's convinced and well-motivated "enemies", in *Land* the negative heroes, in addition to all their evils, are also weak and cowardly. With their laughable greed, comical mutual conflicts and complete inadequacy Yi Ki-yŏng's ex-landowners serve more to enliven the narration than to create any sense of conflict.

Indeed, the conflict between the two camps appears so insignificant that some critics even failed to take it into account. While analyzing the role of Kwak Pa-ui, the North Korean critic Han Hyo pointed out that the character was an example of "the struggle to increase crop output and the struggle for the respect of the new power" etc. but did not mention any kind of struggle *against* a real enemy – obviously there was none.[600] In general, the world of *Land* exemplifies Yi Ki-yŏng's life-long inclination to deal with sweet, bucolic images.

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[596] A.A. Durdin, *Etiudy o Mihaile Sholokhove: Tvorchestvo pisatelja klassika v duhovnoi kulture Rossii* [Essays About Mikhail Sholokhov: His Activity in Russian Spiritual Culture]. Ulyanovsk: Ul GTU, 1999, 17-28.

[597] Mihail Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina*, 447, 646-647.

[598] I. Konovalova, "Mihail Sholokhov kak zerkalo russkoi kollektivizatsii" [Mikhail Sholokhov as a Mirror of Russian Collectivization], *Ogonek* #25, 1999, 26-29.

[599] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 46-61.

[600] Han Hyo, "Chosŏn munhak-e issŏsŏ sahoejuŭi realijŭm-ŭi palsaeng chokŏn-kwa kŭ paljŏn-e issŏsŏŭi che t'ŭkching" [The Emergence of Socialist Realism in Korean Literature and the Specifics of its Development], *Munhak yesul,*1952, #6, 92.

The conflict between the negative and the positive unfolds in a different sphere – in the black-and-white juxtapositions of the hellish colonial past and the joyful Communist present. One of the most typical is an episode of celebration in the family of peasant Pak who had received his parcel following the distribution of land by the new regime.[601] Though no extra rice had yet appeared on the table of the always-hungry family, all the family members are consumed with exultation. While the old mother cries as she recollects the cheerless past, the youngsters dance and begin to invent a new song about the happy life of the peasants in North Korea. The scenes of the courtship and marriage of Kwak Pa-ui and Chŏn Sun-ok are contrived in a similar way.[602] Seeking the girl's hand, Kwak declares to her that the country is now free and land reform has been completed, so now is the time to enjoy their lives. Party secretary Kang Gyun, who acts as a matchmaker for the couple, persuades the girl to believe in the possibility of happiness under the new social conditions. Sun-ok hesitates and cries recollecting the awful past, which has ruined her life but in the end she succumbs to the persuasion. The village women strongly encourage the couple to marry because "life is so beautiful today that it is precisely the time to have babies". At the marriage ceremony the guests, the bride and the groom are unanimous in their disgust at the previous life and their delight at how happy Koreans are now. The party is moved to dance and sing but discover that there are no merry songs about marriage in Korea since all the marriages in the past were unhappy. Thus, they try to compose a new wedding song. Alone at night the bride and groom cannot believe their bliss which, they stress, could happen only in the new Korea. In the morning after their first night they lie in bed, once again recollecting the hellish colonial past, only to launch into another cycle of praise for their new life, *ad infinitum*.

This roundabout of "bitter recollections about the awful past and euphoric exaltation over their new and happy life", "tears and laughter" runs non-stop through the quite lengthy novel. In addition to the "Japanese imperialists" of the past, the "American imperialists, who occupy South Korea' in the present, also occasionally perform the role of enemy. On the whole, the "Bad Guys" are invariably distant outsiders, while the life of "authentic" Koreans under Kim Il Sung's rule is associated exclusively with virtue, joy and happiness. Brian Myers called *Land* "a product of ethnocentric pastoralism".[603] Actually, unlike Sholokhov's *Virgin Land* where the reality of the Soviet village in the early 1930s is portrayed with ambivalence and antagonism, in *Land*, like in Han Sŏr-ya's "Growing Village",[604] the present is depicted as a cloudless harmony even though a mere three years had passed since Liberation. The new regime, like Jesus Christ, brings smiles to the faces of everyone and heals even the most seriously ill people. For instance, after the agrarian reform the paralyzed Old Ko begins to feel better and rises from his deathbed to have a look at the new rice

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[601] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang*, 46-52.

[602] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 231-243.

[603] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 64.

[604] Ibid., 60-67.

fields and a performance staged by the village youth.[605] *Virgin Land Under the Plough* frequently depicts murder or illness, and it concludes with the death of the two main Communist heroes. In contrast, in *Land* none of the heroes suffer even minor physical discomfort.

In many respects the idealized present in *Land* reiterates the images of a mythologized Korean past, widely exploited in the earlier works of Yi Ki-yŏng.[606] Again, Yi Ki-yŏng refers to the *ture* leagues as an ideal form of typically Korean mutual help.[607] *Land's* "evil" characters are depicted as the violators of the traditional moral norms of rural community – they, as typical villains in the Confucian mould, do not help each other and even cheat on their own brothers.[608]

The interaction between the past and the present is especially interesting in the image of Kang Sa-gwa. A positive representative of "the old generation of poor but honest intellectuals", he, despite his age, supports the new regime.[609] Old Kang resolutely rejects the traditional principles of filial obedience, male polygamy, expensive mourning ceremonies and Confucian scholastics.[610] His speech bristles with anti-Confucian rhetoric: "Chinese characters are useless relics", "democracy is a kingdom of the workers" and so forth. These notions of the resolute elder are generally reminiscent of the pro-Communist stance of Sholokhov's Grandpa Shchukar, only taken at face value; *Land* lacks the comical component of the latter – Sholokhov's Grandpa Shchukar is a comic figure.

Kang's proselytising negativism towards the Confucian past is not uniform, however. On the one hand, Kang Sa-gwa abhors the Confucian tradition – because of this rejection he had long since refused to become a scholar-official.[611] Yet in another scene in the novel Kang refers to this same post of scholar-official as the ultimate prize for a talented youth.[612] Describing the appearance of Kang Sa-gwa, the author notes with reverence: "The old man was so nobly beautiful that you could take him for an aristocrat"[613] – a notion which would be impossible in Soviet literature with its "popular spirit". The Confucian maxims in the novel are also presented ambivalently – when ex-landowner Ko Pyŏn-sang uses them to justify his points ("wealth and poverty are an expression of the natural order of things") the author is mocking his traditional

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[605] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 384-389.

[606] Brian Myers spotted the same trait in the work of Han Sŏr-ya "Growing Village" (See: Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 60-67).

[607] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 298-320.

[608] Ibid., 132-142.

[609] Ibid., 121-124.

[610] Ibid., 124-125.

[611] Ibid., 124.

[612] Ibid., 130-132.

[613] Ibid., 124.

reasoning,[614] but when Kang Sa-gwa resorts to the same idiom "The current political events are the expression of the natural order of things," the statement is treated as a sign of his high intelligence and deep wisdom.[615]

In respect to female theme, Yi Ki-yŏng's outrage against Confucian morality was inconsistent as well. For instance, Yi approvingly wrote about the behavior of Kang's obedient daughter-in-law who, "sitting at a distance, listened in reverent silence to the conversation of the elders". The younger woman knew her place – and this was very praiseworthy.[616] Through the lips of Kang Sang-kwa the writer expressed his approval of Sun-ok's attempt at suicide, which was a traditional means for a Korean woman to protect her dignity and chastity. Still, in general the theme of the "new Korean woman" is probably the most radical in the novel.

As we have mentioned before, the idea of gender equality represented, in a sense, the quintessence of enlightenment for Yi Ki-yŏng, and he apparently tried to present the "progressive" vision of a new Korean woman who was free from the restraints of the old society and was now joyfully following the new path. With respect to ideological transformation and adherence to "Communist novelty," one may say that the image of Sun-ok certainly outshines Sholokhov's more realistic images of rural women.

In Sholokhov's novel the rural Cossack women are shown infinitely more backward and conservative than the males. They may be independent-spirited, bright or smart, but by no stretch of the imagination are they vanguard revolutionary fighters. Very often it was the women in *Virgin Land Under the Plough* who start to rebel against the new regime and physically attack the Communists.[617] The main female protagonist of the novel, the sensual beauty Lushka, easily manipulates the Communist males and for a while even manages to lead some of them astray. Yet the author depicts this village *femme fatale* with a warm humor and veiled admiration.[618] The most "progressive" female character Varya who engaged the Communist protagonist Davudov, is modest, loving and kind. Yet her decision to study in an agrarian college in order to help her collective farm is not a result of her conscious political choice but the very traditional desire to please her fiancée ("I will follow him anywhere"; "I'll do everything he says").[619]

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[614] Ibid., 43-46.

[615] Ibid., 122-123.

[616] Indeed Yi Ki-yŏng's views on gender issues were quite inconsistent. Sŏng Hye-rang, a sister of one of Yi Ki-yŏng's daughters-in-law, recollects that 'the feminist' Yi Ki-yŏng was an extremely conservative father-in-law who treated his female family members in a very traditional Confucian way (See Sŏng Hye-rang, *Tŭngnamu chip*, 366-367). This information is confirmed by the interview with Chŏng Ryul who also stresses that Yi Ki-yŏng's house and way of life was, indeed, "very traditional".

[617] M. Sholokhov, *Podniataia tselina*, 261-268.

[618] Ibid., 442-444, 453.

[619] Ibid., 567

In contrast, *Land*'s positive female protagonists, and especially Sun-ok, though having been oppressed much more severely in their previous lives than their Cossack counterparts, are shown as miraculously transformed into staunch Communist "new women" under the influence of "the people's rule" within a mere few years. The quiet and modest rural Korean woman Chŏn Sun-ok, who once allowed her father to sell her as a concubine and, like a model Confucian heroine, attempted suicide after hearing malicious gossip about herself, in a twinkling becomes the politically active chairwoman of the village Women's Union. She is also the first in the village to join the Workers' Party and "help to mobilize people to accomplish the sowing campaign ahead of schedule teach illiterate girls etc". In the evening she reads newspapers to her illiterate husband "choosing the most important political news and explaining the Party line to him".[620] At night the newlyweds have long talks about the happiness of the Korean people and the terrible Japanese colonial past (or, for a change, the nightmarish South Korean life under American rule), or discuss political events.

Take for example, one of their typical discussions about "voluntary rice taxes" (which were not so voluntary at all). The husband asks Sun-ok: "Are you sure that you give this rice with all your heart? If there is even a bit of sorrow in your soul it would not be a real expression of your gratitude towards the State." Needless to say Sun-ok is a genuine volunteer. In addition to the "voluntary tax" the spouses decided to donate an extra 10 bags as "patriotic rice".[621] On the rare occasions when this politically conscious heroine happens to occupy herself with ordinary household chores, she feels inappropriately earthy and guilty. For example, one evening after Sun-ok has listened to the politically inspired reasoning of her husband, she suddenly feels "deeply ashamed because a philistine love of comfort and decency has become rooted in her soul. While her husband is so lofty, she thinks too much about hygiene, forces him to wash himself regularly and dress neatly… What petty bourgeois thoughts!" Sun-ok falls on her knees and begs her husband's forgiveness for her imperfections.[622] As was the case with his pre-Liberation revolutionary female protagonists, Yi Ki-yŏng failed to show the process of the development of his heroine: her change is just taken for granted.

Nevertheless, Sun-ok's image, however stilted and sickly "correct", met with a range of negative critical responses in North Korean literary circles – superficially, for its ideological insufficiencies. In the opinion of Pak Chŏn-sik, Sun-ok's life "lacks social activity".[623] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, while singling out *Land* as a positive "example of patriotism" in general, condemns the relationship between Kwak Pa-ui and Chon Sun-ok as "too sensual": "Just as a reader of the *Story about Ch'unhyang (Ch'unhangjŏn)*[624] could only see the love relationship between Ch'unhyang and Yi Mong-nyong instead

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[620] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 264.

[621] Ibid., 405-410.

[622] Ibid., 348.

[623] Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenija,* 220.

[624] Classical Korean novel.

of the objective historical picture, so in *Land* the reader can only see the love between Kwak Pa-ui and Sun-ok".[625] Considering the total absence of love scenes in the novel this accusation appears completely unfounded. E.M. Tsoi, a Soviet-Korean critic, articulated another improbable claim: "Some critics and readers seriously disapproved of the image of Chŏn Sun-ok. Its flaws appear especially visible in comparison to the irreproachable Kwak Pa-ui. Such a negative attitude is quite natural if we consider Sun-ok's past when she was a member of a landowning family and lived as a concubine – i.e. not by her own labor".[626] Justifying such accusations Tsoi, however, attempts to excuse the "sinner": "We must take into account the fact that Yi Ki-yŏng's heroine has only just started to be reclaimed".[627]

The reason for all this unfounded quibbling was simple – the highest arbitrator in North Korea, Kim Il Sung had already cast his judgment on Sun-ok's image and thus had decided the fate of this important character in later, re-worked, versions of *Land*. During one of his meetings with Korean writers, the Great Leader expressed his dissatisfaction at the fact that the companion of the exemplary hero of the novel was a "former mistress": "Everybody needs pure water. I should like to give this tenant farmer, who has slaved and hungered so long in darkness and tyranny, *pure water* (italics added – T.G.)".[628] Of course this remark has nothing to do with Sun-ok's alleged membership of the class of exploiters, or her "social passivity". Brian Myers wittily remarks that Kim Il Sung certainly did not believe that "the tenant-hero's own failed marriage should prevent him from marrying another virgin. All may want "pure water", but in Kim's DPRK, it would seem, only men have a right to it".[629]

Needless to say, the obedient critics quickly picked up the attitude of the Great Leader and busied themselves finding new and newer deficiencies in Sun-ok's image. Nobody cared that the patriarchal approach to gender relationships, which was articulated by the highest Pyongyang authority, contradicted both the written requirement of the NKFLA "to extirpate feudal concepts" and the usual visions of Soviet literature which was supposed to be an unquestioned model for North Korean writers. Indeed, though a purist Soviet dictator would by no means tolerate the propagation of lechery and promiscuity in art, in the canons of Soviet literature, the loss of a heroine's virginity because of a previous marriage or rape has never been regarded as an indelible stain on her reputation.[630]

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[625] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, *Munye kibon* [The Basis of Literature and the Arts], P'yŏngyang: Kunnip ch'ulp'ansa, 1952, 64.

[626] E.M. Tsoi, *Otrazhenie velikih peremen v koreiskoi derevne v romanah Li Giena*,143.

[627] Ibid.,146.

[628] Cited in Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 84.

[629] Ibid., 84

[630] One of the earliest examples of this tendency in Soviet literature is a characteristic episode in the exemplary work of socialist realism, Ostrovskii's *How the Steel was Tempered* (1932-1934). When a male hero in the novel expresses his discontent with a "female comrade" who had supposedly lost her virginity during a rape, he was immediately chastised by his other comrades as a backward, possessive, even reactionary person. (See N. Ostrovskii, *Kak*

Yi Ki-yŏng himself saw nothing wrong in the status of his heroine as an ex-concubine: firstly, the institution of concubinage was regarded as a special form of marriage in old Korea, and secondly, in Sun-ok's case this marriage was involuntary. Yi Ki-yŏng explained his understanding of the situation through Kang Sa-gwa's lips: "There is nothing wrong with the second marriage—the tradition of concubinage is to blame".[631] Yet he had to readjust his work according to the demands of the Great Leader and rewrite it several times, with an especially thorough reworking taking place in 1973. In the later version Sun-ok was transformed into a virgin and Kwak's wife did not betray him but died of hunger. In the 1960 and later versions, the eulogies to the "Soviet liberators" and the Soviet way of life were edited out: the relations between Moscow and Pyongyang had soured.

In 1974 in his article "Having Only Loyalty in Mind" ("Ojik ch'ungsŏng-ŭi han maŭm-ŭro") Yi Ki-yŏng humbly admitted his "mistake": "How could I marry such a perfect hero to a woman who had been the concubine of a landowner? That was of course a mistake which I committed because I did not understand the new reality of a liberated village. Kwak Pa-ŭi was a new hero who could marry only a virgin... I am grateful to the Great Leader who expressly mentioned this fault of mine".[632]

Yi Ki-yŏng's "mistake" clearly demonstrated that the officially proclaimed doctrine of "socialist realism" in the DPRK, like in the Soviet Union, was little more than a set of shallow and mutually contradictinary declarations which could be easily reinterpreted or neglected according to the current Party needs or the caprice of a top official. What Yi Ki-yŏng, in fact, missed were the real implications of new literary policy which, despite all the rhetoric about "progressive democracy", "extirpation of feudal concepts" or "absorption of advance cultures", demanded first of all the promotion of unconditional ethnocentrism. In the light of this unofficial demand which openly emerged in 1955 in Kim Il Sung's above-mentioned speech on *chuch'e*, Yi Ki-yŏng's novel, indeed, was not "correct": a "truly Korean heroine should be a virgin at her marriage, a "truly Korean" wife should never appear as a traitor, but rather die as a martyr at the hands of the bestial Japanese, and any praise for a foreign innovation represented an offence to the "national cultural heritage".

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zakalyalas' stal' [How the steel was Tempered], Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo detskoi literatury, 1948, 140). The Soviet tradition steadily maintained this stance even in times when the notions of sexual freedom popular in the early Soviet period were gradually substituted with a more patriarchal approach to gender issues. It is notable that even the most conservative Stalinist literature demonstrated a proclivity to defend and commiserate, rather than to accuse a heroine who participates in extra-marital relationships. One may recall a typical episode in the above-mentioned Trifonov's *Studenty* [Students] (1950).The female personage Valia loses her virginity in a relationship with the protagonist Sergei. Though both are adults and the relationship is completely voluntary, she is presented as a victim of a lecher, not as a responsible participant in the affair. (See Yurii Trifonov, *Studenty,* 23-406).

[631] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang,* 122-124.

[632] Quoted in Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 352.

The rewritten *Land* [633] represents a curious "ideal picture". This picture was a far cry not only from the Soviet patterns of fiction with their emphasis on class struggle and "iron will" characters *a la* Korchagin, Pavel Nilin or Davidov, but also from the realistic images of suffering peasants, unremitting toil and a desperate struggle for survival which had filled the earlier writings of Yi Ki-yŏng. *Land* corresponds much more with the conventions of fairytales: it presents the reader with mild conflicts where the "good guys" always win, where there is an absence of harsh scenes and where unrealistically perfect harmony reigns supreme. A peaceful bunch of positive heroes in the mould of the fable Hŭngbu are tied to each other by traditional Confucian values. They playfully subdue several unsavory Nolbus who are totally non-Confucian and pro-Japanese and who make stupid and completely inept attempts to harm this lovely "truly Korean" community. Occasionally some members of the positive group may also act out of character. They may demonstrate childish selfishness or stubbornness, like, for instance, Sun-ŭi's mother. Yet under the positive influence of the community they are quickly put straight and feel ashamed of themselves like badly behaved children after being placed in a time-out area. The rest of their lives the positive heroes devote to the enthusiastic service of the Communist state, collecting "patriotic rice" and reading official newspapers, thus acting completely "nicely". To stress the exemplary nicety of this assemblage, the author from time to time recalls a hellish past under ill-spirited foreign rulers or muses over the other ill-willed foreign power which is allegedly torturing the distant South – all of these are more like fairy story monsters than real-life enemies.

This troop of happy and loyal children is wisely ruled by omnipresent and omnipotent father figures. In the first instance this figure is the chairman of the town committee, Kang Gyŭn, and high above stands the perfect and infallible Great Leader. In general, the rewritten *Land* represented a realized ethnocentric peasant paradise once proposed by Seoulite in *Minch'ŏn*, and supplemented by some new propagandistic notions. This was what the new regime actually required from the writer.

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Land proved to be the only major novel which Yi Ki-yŏng wrote on contemporary themes. Soon afterwards the writer began his lengthy epic *Tumangang,* the first sections of which were published in 1954-1957. This novel was devoted to the past, and the writer could once again safely resort to his familiar tearful – and realistic – images of suppressed women, injustice and the hard life of the Korean peasantry. In all probability this return to history was Yi Ki-yŏng's means of seeking refuge in the past, much like Gorky in the later years of his life.

Yi's few later works on contemporary themes were short, terse and in an artistic sense represented a remarkable decline in quality which the South Korean scholar Yi Sang-gyŏng was quick to point out.[634] If in *Tumangang* Yi still occasionally indulged

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[633] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Ttang* [Land], Pyongyang: Minch'ŏng ch'ulp'ansa,1973.

[634] Yi Sang-gyŏng, *Yi Ki-yŏng sidae-wa munhak,* 42.

in his favorite rural maxims and folk images, his writings about the present such as *Pulgŭn such'ŏp (Red Block Note)* (1961)[635] which described an enthusiastic bunch of North Korean youths who initiated the "Ch'ŏnlima" movement at a railroad construction site, completely lost these folklorist colors and are astonishingly blunt in both imagery and language. This tendency was especially characteristic of his novel *The Fate of a Woman (Han yŏsŏng-ŭi unmyŏng),* written in the early 1960s and which presented a black-and-white didactic contrast between the pre- and post-Liberation lives of the female protagonist P'illye.[636] The writing style of the novel and the language the heroine uses reminds one of the dry articles from *Nodong Sinmun* rather than a literary piece. Indeed, in the early 1960s Yi Ki-yŏng's artistic arsenal became visibly impoverished where both the plots and the characters were narrowed to complete utilitarianism.

In all probability, these changes were not accidental. After the long process of accommodation of *Land* to the ever-changing demands of the new regime, which, in fact, insisted on a further and further simplification of the novel, Yi Ki-yŏng may have found it unnecessary to use elaborate artistic technique. And besides, his jealous boss Han Sŏr-ya, being unpopular among the public, would not tolerate any competition[637] and Yi Ki-yŏng preferred not to irritate him. Yi Ki-yŏng died at the age of 90, on the 9th of August, 1984, at the height of his official recognition and privilege. As for the actual popularity of his novels among the North Korean reading public, that was a matter of no concern in the DPRK.

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Such was the life of a person who was proclaimed a living classic of Korean "proletarian" literature, whose work was included in the official canon and whose name is still widely celebrated in the DPRK. As we have seen, Yi Ki-yŏng demonstrated neither a clear-cut Communist/proletarian worldview nor a particularly brilliant literary talent. The ideology of his pre-Liberation works, often presented as the earliest examples of the "socialist realism" in Korean literature, was hardly Marxist. His views could be better described as "peasant utopianism" with strong anti-modernist tendencies, occasionally spiced with leftist rhetoric.

Still, Yi turned out to be the very figure that the Pyongyang cultural establishment required in the late 1940s – for several reasons. First, Yi's traditional peasant perspectives were quite useful in claiming "authentic" roots for the nascent North Korean culture and thus proving its legitimacy. These perspectives also resonated well with the values of the North Korean regime which, from the very

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[635] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Pulgŭn such'ŏp* [Red Block Note], Pyongyang: Minch'ŏng ch'ulp'ansa, 1961.

[636] Yi Ki-yŏng, *Han nyŏsŏng-ŭi unmyŏng.*

[637] The conflict between Han Sŏr-ya and Yim Hwa, who was a much more popular literary figure than Han, led to the disappearance of Yim from literary scene. The episode, as well as the role of Han Sŏr-ya in the North Korean literary world, is discussed in the final chapter of the present thesis.

beginning, placed great emphasis on the promotion of nationalistic ideas. The ordinariness of Yi's literary abilities was of assistance when it came to the actual participation of the writer in the propagandistic activity of the post-Liberation era. And, of course, the readiness of the writer to follow the current orders of the regime and not to question its authority in literary matters was very helpful under the circumstances. Thus, Yi Ki-yŏng's figure fitted perfectly into Pyongyang's official design.

Yet, anyone familiar with the turbulent situation in North Korean literary circles in 1945-1960 might pose a question: if Yi Ki-yŏng made "political mistakes" serious enough to provoke displeasure of Kim Il Sung himself and necessitate the rewriting of some 60% of his major novel, how could he not only survive, but even score a remarkable success within the official literary bureaucracy? While we have no full access to the documents of the period, we may only speculate on the reasons, and should not rule out the fact that luck played some role. However, interviews with the people who knew Yi personally as well as an investigation of his life-long attitudinal patterns have given me reason to conclude that to a significant degree Yi's long and safe North Korean career was made possible by his ability to maintain good but relatively distant relationships with people in power, no matter who they were. This, in its turn, was the result of Yi's personal attributes such as his ability to get along with people easily, his lack of personal political and administrative ambition, and his remarkable talent for avoiding conflict, morally compromising situations and potentially dangerous contacts.

All my informants recall Yi Ki-yŏng with genuine sympathy, as a gentle person who was never spoiled by success or corrupted by power. V.I. Ivanova, the Soviet author of a monograph on Yi Ki-yŏng, who worked with the writer in P'yŏngyang in 1949 and then met with him several times in Moscow, recalls that in those days the Russian personnel liked to work with Yi Ki-yŏng. He was a modest client and kind to his staff, and this presented a great contrast with his arrogant and capricious boss Han Sŏr-ya, also a frequent Moscow visitor at the time.[638] Pak Myŏn-sun (Elena Pak), a Korean-Russian translator of Russian and Korean literature in Pyongyang, remembered Yi as a very placid man who always kept away from politics and personal clashes.[639] Yi's KAPF and then North Korean colleague, the prose-writer Song Yŏng recalls that Yi Ki-yŏng's ability to remain silent in the most heated discussions earned him the nickname of the "speechless/silent writer" ("muŏn-ŭi in", or "mal ŏmnŭn chakka") from his KAPF colleagues.[640] Chŏng Ryul, once a close personal friend of Yi Ki-yŏng, reports that when Yi's colleagues in private conversation happened to berate their absent peers and asked for Yi's opinion about a particular person, Yi always answered unwillingly: "I do not know the man well enough, how can I judge him?" Chŏng Ryul could not remember Yi ever criticizing anybody in private and claims that he "had never had enemies".[641]Indeed, even political adversaries were remarkably soft on Yi

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[638] Interview by telephone with V.I. Ivanova.

[639] Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova (Pak Myŏng-sun).

[640] Song Yŏng, "Chakka minch'ŏn", *Munhak sinmun*, #5, 1960, 27.

[641] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

Ki-yŏng. Pak Nam-su in his negative recollections omitted Yi's name while chastising almost all of his colleagues. He mentioned Yi Ki-yŏng a mere handful of times and in a surprisingly neutral tone.

These qualities earned Yi Ki-yŏng a special reputation among North Korean writers. Most of them treated him as a quiet, courteous old man, slightly eccentric and essentially harmless. Chŏng Ryul recollects a remarkable anecdote about Yi. One day Yi Ki-yŏng reported his eagerness to enter the Labor Party. The Party group leader asked the writer about his motives, expecting to hear some lofty phrases, but Yi Ki-yŏng answered naively: "It is so fashionable now. Everybody is in the Party, and I want to too". The Party officials laughed and said: "No, *harabŏji* (grandfather in Korean - TG). You'd better remain out-of-fashion".[642] It is significant that Yi's careless notion, which would certainly entail serious consequences for anybody else in a Stalinist world, was simply chuckled at. We can therefore surmise that his other political "mistakes" were probably treated much with the same leniency.

Yi's relationships with the mighty Han Sŏr-ya, an associate of Yi Ki-yŏng from before Liberation and then his boss in North Korea after 1945, were especially significant in this regard. Brian Myers, relying on an open letter written by Han Sŏr-ya to Yi Ki-yŏng in 1936, asserts that Han "seems to have admired him (Yi Ki-yŏng) greatly".[643] I suspect, however, that Myers took at face value a simple compliment which Han who was at the time an unremarkable second-rate novelist, employed to please his already famous senior colleague. After Liberation when Han rose to the dizzy heights of administrative power, his references to Yi became much less favorable. Chŏng Ryul recollects that in private Han Sŏr-ya used to speak about him with irony, treating Yi Ki-yŏng as a good-for-nothing old scribbler who did not even deserve the name of writer when compared to himself – while Han continued to be known as an imitator of Yi's works from the very beginning of the KAPF activity.[644] It is no secret, for instance, that Han's pre-Liberation novel "Dusk" ("Hwanghon") (1936), highly praised during Han's "golden age" (1956-1961) as an "immortal masterpiece of progressive literature", was written under the strong influence of Yi's *Native Land (Kohyang)* (1933-34).[645] After Han established control over the North Korean literary bureaucracy, the official versions of previous events were changed. From the early 1950s onwards Han was presented as the leader of the entire "proletarian literature" movement, whereas Yi Ki-yŏng was relegated to Han's shadow.

Yi Ki-yŏng appears not to have been overly concerned about the misrepresentation of his pre-1945 role. He simply accepted the new order of things and began to pay the required tribute to Han's alleged "historic significance".[646] Such tactics successfully neutralized Han's ever-jealous attitude to his professionally more

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[642] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[643] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 32.

[644] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[645] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 368.

[646] See, for instance, Yi Ki-yŏng, "K'ap'ŭ sidae-ŭi hoesanggi", 81-86.

prominent colleague. While Han Sŏr-ya relentlessly destroyed all possible rivals, he let Yi hold the position of "number two" in the literary scene. In 1958 both "Dusk" and *Native Land* were touted as twin pillars of Korean socialist realism.[647]

Being respectful towards his boss, Yi Ki-yŏng, however, managed to keep a reasonable distance from him in his daily and social life. In spite of their shared KAPF background, Yi had never been a part of the inner circle of Han Sŏr-ya, nor had he sought his special patronage.[648] These tactics turned out to be especially rewarding later when Yi survived the purge of many ex-KAPF members which followed Han's fall in 1962.[649] He was similarly pleasant and distant to the Soviet Koreans, and at the moments of sharpest conflicts between ex-KAPF associates and the Soviet faction Yi managed to maintain good relationships with both groups.[650] This was why Yi, in spite of his KAPF legacy in 1946, was appointed to head the central committee of the Soviet-Korean friendship association, a position which he held until 1982.[651] And probably even more astonishing was Yi Ki-yŏng's friendship with Yi T'ae-jun which developed soon after Liberation. Despite the fact, that before Liberation both writers belonged to ideologically and personally conflicting groups (a fact which most ex-KAPF writers were not inclined to forget), after Yi T'ae-jun came to the North Yi Ki-yŏng started to communicate with him regularly, having long talks about literature and the arts, etc.[652]

Yi Ki-yŏng's ability to maintain a broad public air of geniality with a reasonable degree of reserve, a reserve which automatically disabled too close association of his figure with any particular political group or person, proved to be very helpful in times of political turmoil when power fluctuated constantly between different factions. Of course it is difficult for us to distinguish between cunning scheming or manipulation and a natural conviviality in Yi Ki-yŏng's attitude. Some circumstances, however, give us reason to assume that Yi Ki-yŏng was not a fully rational opportunist whose only goal was to survive and prosper by any means. Yi's KAPF colleague, Song Yŏng, paraphrasing a Korean proverb once called Yi Ki-yŏng a "person of outer tenderness and inner steel" ("naegang oeyu" in Korean).[653] Indeed, along his challenging life journey Yi Ki-yŏng, a seemingly feeble and irresolute person, often demonstrated this "inner steel". During the purges of 1953-1956 Yi had the courage not to join the slander campaigns against his doomed colleagues. He dared not challenge the accusations against the "unmasked enemies of the people" openly, but discovered his own way of evading "duties" which he patently disliked. Yi often managed to slip away from political meetings held to "unmask" and "condemn" a recently discovered

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[647] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 119.

[648] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[649] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 191.

[650] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[651] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 369.

[652] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[653] Song Yŏng, "Chakka minch'ŏn", 27.

"reactionary" or "spy" under the common excuse of a "sick stomach", an alleged chronic disease which by some coincidence always worsened just before the start of a new defamation campaign. On the rare occasions when Yi Ki-yŏng was forced to take part in such public events, he remained silent.[654] Scholars also refer to this tactic when they describe Yi's pre-Liberation activity. In order to avoid participation in the activity of pro-colonial bodies such as the notorious Korean Writers' Society in 1939, Yi Ki-yŏng also frequently claimed an alleged stomach illness.[655]

Characteristically, Yi Ki-yŏng always avoided noisy political activism. The obligatory eulogies to the Great Leader in Yi's books and articles did not exceed the level which was commonly required at the time. This does not mean that Yi harbored any political dissent or animosity towards Kim Il Sung, but rather testifies to the fact that Yi did not strive for political success.[656]

Chŏng Ryul recollects with gratitude that at the harshest moments of the witch-hunting campaigns against the Soviet Koreans, Yi Ki-yŏng was one of the very few NKFLA colleagues who did not change his friendly attitude towards the scapegoats. He continued to meet with the Soviet Koreans, visit them in their homes, etc. This immutable friendliness became a precious moral support to his doomed colleagues. And it was another sure expression not only of Yi Ki-yŏng's "outer tenderness" but his "inner steel" as well.

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[654] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[655] V.I. Ivanova, *Li Gien: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo,* 48; A. Gitovitch, B. Bursov, *My videli Koreju,* 86.

[656] Details of the interview with Pak Sang-ho, Leningrad, November 1989 have been kindly provided by Andrei Lankov.

Chapter 4

YI T'AE-JUN: THE FAILURE OF A "SOLDIER ON THE CULTURAL FRONT"

Over recent decades Yi T'ae-jun's tragic fate has remained a popular subject of study in the South Korean academic world and attracted the attention of the most distinguished scholars. However, the majority of them tend to approach the issue from essentially the same angle. They discuss how it was that Yi T'ae-jun, a member of the apolitical Nine Members Club and an implacable enemy of the KAPF before Liberation, eventually chose the Communist North? Why did the "pure writer", "the most unadulterated *sŏnbi* ("learned gentleman")"[657] of Korean literature, "the extoller of pure art"[658] etc who had been so passionately attached to the traditional Confucian culture and so averse to any violence, suddenly change his ways and begin to eulogize bloody scenes of "class struggle" and Communist virtues?

The most popular explanation is that Yi T'ae-jun's move to North Korea was the naïve and tragic mistake of a fragile intellectual whose alienation from real life blinded him to the true nature of Stalinism. According to the proponents of this view, Yi T'ae-jun strove to find an ideal world in the Stalinist DPRK and by the time he discovered that he could not fit into the Communist mould, it was too late. The fragile and otherworldly intellectual fell victim to his short-lived illusions.[659] As Yi Pyŏng-ryŏl puts it, " Yi T'ae-jun could not turn into a full Kim Il Sungist and for that reason could not survive in the North", thus implying ideological divergences between the great writer and the omnipotent North Korean leader.[660]

These theories are advanced by a majority of South Korean scholars even though the accents and shades of interpretation may vary. Some theorists, who are no doubt influenced by psychoanalysis, search for the roots of Yi's post- 1945 "ideological shift" in his unhappy childhood, his experience as an orphan and his desire "to reunite himself with his dead father", a leftist sympathizer who had died when the future writer was only five years old.[661] Others, while acknowledging the impact of his orphaned

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[657] Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin*, 203.

[658] Yi Pyŏng-ryŏl, "Ch'ŏtchŏnt'u-wa kohyang kilŭi ŭimi" [The Meaning of the [Novels] "The First Fight" and "The Way to My Native Land", in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip*, Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 2000, Vol. 3: 377.

[659] See for instance: Chŏng Hyŏn-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'iro chukki, chakkaro sŏgi* [Yi T'ae-jun: Killed by Politics but Survived as a Writer], Seoul: Kŏnmin taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1994; Min Ch'un-hwan, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi chŏngijŏk koch'al" [A Biographical Study of Yi T'ae-jun], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu* [Study of Yi T'ae-jun's Literature], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1993, 33-54; Yi Ki-pong *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin,* 198-207; *Who's who in Korean literature*. Seoul: Hollym, 522.

[660] Yi Pyŏng-ryŏl, "Ch'ŏtchŏnt'u-wa kohyang kilŭi ŭimi", 390.

[661] Wada Tomomi, "Aeguk munhagŭrosŏŭi Yi T'ae-jun munhak" [The Literature of Yi T'ae-jun as Patriotic Literature], in *Kŭndae munhak-kwa Yi T'ae-jun* [Contemporary Literature and

childhood, prefer to stress "the motif of the lost home" which permeated Yi Ki-yŏng's pre-Liberation works and which allegedly prompted the writer to seek happiness elsewhere.[662] Sin Hyŏng-gi searches for the reason for the eventual turning of this "apolitical writer" to politics in the "grammar of his narrative" since "grammar is an established institution" which "he could not make – it makes the writer".[663] The North Korean defector, Pak Nam-su, in his above-cited memoirs explains Yi T'ae-jun's choice as a result of the cunning strategy of the Soviets who lured the writer to North Korea with special privileges.[664]

Whilst not denying that a grain of truth might be present in each of these speculations, I however doubt that the above-cited reasons played a decisive role in Yi T'ae-jun's choice. The orphaned childhood and "lost home" experiences were not uncommon in early colonial Korea when life expectancy at birth stood at the mid-20s. Indeed Yi Kwang-su, a rigid anti-Communist writer and publicist, had a similar childhood experience.[665] As for the alleged desire to follow in his father's footsteps, Yi T'ae-jun was too young to be profoundly influenced by his father's personality let alone by his political worldview. The very representation of Yi's choice as unconscious or imposed on him against his will, no matter whether by an "unhappy childhood," the "grammar of narrative" or by "cunning Soviets" appears too simplistic. In my understanding, these attempts stem from a basic misconception about the alleged "purity" of the writer's early activity[666] and thus his immanent incompatibility with Communist ideology.[667] In fact the portrayal of Yi T'ae-jun as a "pure writer" who was incompatible with "Communist ideology" reflects the official Pyongyang interpretation of Yi T'ae-jun. According to the official North Korean version, "Yi T'ae-jun conducted subversive activity against the 'progressive Communist North Korean literature' and the Great Leader personally and he was punished for that".[668] It is noteworthy that this scenario in fact equates Communist ideology in North Korean literature with the KAPF

Yi T'ae-jun], Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 2000, 83-119; Pak Hŏn-ho, *Yi T'ae-jun-kwa hanguk kŭndae sosŏl-ŭi sŏnggyŏk* [Yi T'ae-jun and the Essence of Modern Korean Literature], Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 1999, 34-39.

[662] Min Ch'un-hwan, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi chŏngijŏk koch'al", 46-47; Chŏng Hyŏn-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkki, chakka-ro sŏgi,* 96-97.

[663] Sin Hyŏng-gi, "Haebang ihu-ŭi Yi T'ae-jun" [Yi T'ae-jun After Liberation], in *Kŭndae munhak-kwa Yi T'ae-jun,* 63-83.

[664] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 122-123.

[665] Han Sŭng-ok, *Yi Kwang-su, pigŭkjŏk segye insikkwa ch'owŏr ŭji* [Yi Kwang-su, a Tragic Perception of the World and an Extraordinary Will], Seoul: Kŏnguk taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1995, 14-16.

[666] Chang Yŏng-u, *Yi T'ae-jun sosŏl yŏngu* [A Study of Yi T'ae-jun's Novels], Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1996, 260.

[667] Yi Pyŏng-ryŏl, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhaksajŏk uisang" [Yi T'ae-jun's Period in Literary History], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu* [A Study of the Literature of Yi T'ae-jun], Seoul: Kip'ŭn saem, 1993, 13-26; Chang Yŏng-u, *Yi T'ae-jun sosŏl yŏngu*, 260-261.

[668] Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova.

– the organization for which, indeed, Yi T'ae-jun never concealed his most negative feelings.

Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the works of one of the most distinguished KAPF writers Yi Ki-yŏng failed to evince a clear understanding of the Marxian doctrine. On the other hand, if we have a close look at Yi T'ae-jun's figure, we shall see that neither personality nor the early activity of Yi T'ae-jun was irreconcilably antagonistic with Communist ideas *per se*. His incompatibility with the KAPF and the KAPF-derived North Korean literary bureaucracy is a different story, however.

To comprehend the logic of Yi's choice and his subsequent failure, we should trace the evolution of his worldview as reflected in his writings. We shall examine three main periods of Yi's professional life: 1) his pre-Liberation activity, 2) his activity in South Korea in 1945-47, and 3) his activity in North Korea and the campaigns launched against him in Pyongyang. In the process I also think it is useful to compare Yi T'ae-jun as a "loser" with Yi Ki-yŏng as a "winner" in the North Korean "socialist realist" world with respect to their writing and their worldviews.

Yi T'ae-jun before Liberation

Yi was born in 1904 in Kangwŏndo province, in the town of Ch'ŏlwŏn. He lost both his parents in early childhood. His father Yi Mun-gyo, a teacher at a local school and a very educated person by the standards of the day, was an active supporter of the Independence Club and other reformist groups.[669] After the failure of their reformist projects, he decided to emigrate to Japan. The whole family moved with him, but having traveled to Vladivostok in August 1909, the father suddenly died. His widow An Sun-hŭng returned to Korea and tried to support her three children through running a small eatery. She sent Yi T'ae-jun to school where the future writer from the very beginning demonstrated a great interest in learning and was very successful academically.

Unfortunately An Sun-hŭng died in 1912 when Yi T'ae-jun was 8 years old.[670] From that time onwards all the children, ranging from 12 to 4 years old, were forced to rely on the charity of their relatives. The writer later recollected this period of his life as an extremely sad and humiliating experience. The talented boy continued to display great achievement at school, but no-one was interested in his achievements or encouraged him.[671] In 1918 Yi's uncle pushed the boy to enter an agricultural college,

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[669] A group of scholar officials who urged reform and modernisation from 1870 onwards (See: Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt *Korea, A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, 187).

[670] Chŏng Hyŏng-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkiwa chakka-ro sŏgi*, 16.

[671] The writer especially recalls how in 1918 he graduated brilliantly from Pongmyŏng school and received, as the best student, various awards – but no relative came to congratulate him. Returning home, the boy threw himself on the ground and started to cry: "Why do I not have a mother!" (Ibid.,17).

but Yi T'ae-jun quit after one month of study and ran away from home, led by the romantic craving "to construct his own world with his own hands".[672]

Wandering around the country, Yi reached Wŏnsan and found a job in a *kaekchuchip*, a kind of merchants' inn which also doubled as a money-lender's office. While in Wŏnsan he met his maternal grandmother, a small-time shopkeeper, who began to support the boy with great enthusiasm and selflessness. With her aid, Yi could spend more time on his education and read many books, including his favorite Tolstoy in particular.[673] Several times Yi T'ae-jun made plans to travel abroad to China, but every time he was discouraged by the lack of funds. He finally decided to move to Seoul to study, and in 1920 entered Paejae College but could not manage to find the money to pay the enrollment fee. Soon he again received help. This time on a Seoul street he accidentally ran into an old Wŏnsan acquaintance – a merchant, who gave Yi a job in his company so Yi could work in the daytime and study in the evenings at the Ch'ŏngnyŏn hoegwan or Youth Center.

In 1921 Yi entered Huimun College. Again he had difficulty with the enrollment fee, but his grades were so high that the rector of the college offered him a special favor – he granted Yi T'ae-jun an exemption from the fee on the condition that the boy cleaned the rector's office. It was a lucky break, yet Yi T'ae-jun was not able to fully capitalize on the opportunity. In 1924 he took an active part in a student strike, protesting against the oppression and irrationality of the educational process, and was expelled from the college in June 1924 as one of the ringleaders. However his luck (and the goodwill of the people whom he met) did not run out. With the financial support of a college friend, Yi T'ae-jun travelled to Japan to study. In April 1926 he entered a preparatory Jŏchi University in Tokyo, but again he failed to complete his course. Despite the active support of his American teacher in Tokyo, Yi could not bear the material suffering and loneliness of his life overseas. Once again he quit his studies and returned home on November 1927.

All these desperate and seemingly ineffectual perturbations had, however, an important outcome. Around this time Yi T'ae-jun, always an avid reader, started to write his own prose and from that moment until the end of his life this activity constituted the center of Yi's personal universe. Yi T'ae-jun's determination to become a writer strengthened during his years at Huimun college, but his first story *Omongnŏ* was written in Tokyo and published in the *Sidae ilbo* newspaper on the 13th of July 1925 when Yi was 21 years old. After returning home from Tokyo, Yi T'ae-jun chose the path of a literary man and clung to it with great persistence for the rest of his life. He began to work at the *Kaebyŏk* publishing house and cooperate with a number of literary magazines.[674]

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[672] *Hanguk myŏngjak tanp'yŏn sosŏl* [Famous Korean Short Stories], Seoul: Chiphyŏnchŏn, 1992, Vol.1: 262.

[673] Chŏng Hyŏng-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkiwa chakka-ro sŏgi*, 17.

[674] Ibid.,18-20.

Yi T'ae-jun's literary endeavors proved to be successful from the very beginning. In a matter of years he became one of Korea's most popular writers. His aesthetically appealing prose made him authoritative enough to be employed in 1932 as a professor of literary composition in Ewha Womens College (Yihwa yŏjŏn), despite the fact that Yi T'ae-jun had never completed even undergraduate studies.[675]

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As we can see, there are many similarities in the early biographies of Yi T'ae-jun and Yi Ki-yŏng. They both lost parents at an early age, suffered poverty and wandered around the country in search of happiness. Both were socially conscious – indeed, Yi T'ae-jun, who once participated directly in a student strike and suffered the consequences, had even more experience of political activity. Both loved reading and strove to seek a profound modern education but could not overcome the obstacles which they faced and accomplish their ambitions. So, there is no surprise that the attitudes and worldviews of both writers had much in common. Indeed, the perspectives of Yi T'ae-jun's early novels, which were later condemned as "reactionary" in North Korea, and the outlook of the early works of Yi Ki-yŏng, which were later granted a prominent place in Pyongyang's official canon, were surprisingly similar. Though Yi T'ae-jun, unlike the KAPF members, did not proclaim the "promotion of social reform, national liberation, the abolition of poverty, etc"[676] as the primary goals of his literature, his early writings often demonstrated *more* social awareness than the contemporary works of Yi Ki-yŏng. And let us not forget the fact that these stories were written when the censorship of the Japanese colonial administration was quite strict, even though much worse times lay ahead. Let us have a closer look at his early writings.

The plot of Yi T'ae-jun's first work "Omongnyŏ" (1925)[677] is roughly as follows:

> Omongnyŏ, a young woman and a licentious and selfish person, is cheating on her poor and elderly blind husband. She has an affair with the young but impoverished fisherman Kŭm-dol. Her sensuous beauty attracts another man, a policeman called Nam who kills Omongnyŏ's husband in order to take over his house and his wife as a concubine. Yet the woman rejects Nam and runs away with her young lover.

At first glance what we see here fails to venture beyond the conventions of a banal love story, with its usual "love triangle" or, for that matter, even a "love square". Yet the social component of the story is too important to be ignored. The miserable, hopeless realities of Korea's "low depths" are expressed with brutal frankness. The regular tyranny of police officers who "when drunk beat the poor people without exception, curse men who are old enough to be their fathers and consider the street to

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[675] Ibid., 107.

[676] Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron,* 19.

[677] *Wŏlbuk chakkaŭi taep'yo munhak sŏnjip, Pak T'ae-wŏn, Yi T'ae-jun* [A Collection of Representative Literary Works of the Writers Who Went to the North], Seoul: Munhakkwa hyŏnsil sa, 1994, 388-402.

be their private property"[678] distances this story of the 21 year old Yi T'ae-jun from the usual empty romances. It is important that the young writer, while disapproving of the story's heroine, tries to analyze her motives from a social perspective. The young girl, ignorant and uneducated but full of vigor, raw energy and a zest for life, was sold like an animal, to an old blind man whom she was supposed to serve as her husband. There is no surprise therefore that she rebels against her predicament, striving not just for material well-being, but for her own human freedom as well. Her choice is a poor young fisherman, not a relatively rich and powerful police officer. The same can be said of the fisherman who, being hopelessly poor, cannot afford a normal wedding and falls into the temptation of seducing his neighbor's wife. On the other hand, the policeman Nam was not depicted as evil incarnate either. He is presented as yet another example of how people unwillingly succumb to the pressure of social circumstance. Nam is not vicious by nature. In fact he is more tolerant of people than his merciless predecessor Pang-ga. But, entering the policeman's world where brutality to commoners is the norm, Nam must play by these rules.

Rather than being a sensual love story, "Omongnyŏ" is a sorrowful depiction of the moral degradation and decay of Korea's social order. If we compare "Omongnyŏ" with Yi Ki-yŏng's "Elder Brother's Secret Letter", we must admit that the social dimension of Yi T'ae-jun's first work is not only deeper, it is also politically more risky and daring: after all, Yi T'ae-jun did not simply preach women's equality as Yi Ki-yŏng did, but criticized the police brutality and the desperate poverty of Korean society. Deliberate or not, Yi T'ae-jun's first short story remained closer to the leftist worldview than the first story of the would-be "pillar of socialist realism".

This sharp social criticism remained characteristic of the subsequent writings of Yi T'ae-jun. His works of the late 1920s were devoted to various themes. The long-awaited reunion of the poor father and his son is ruined by a sly and vicious policeman in "Happiness" ("Haengbok") (1929)[679]; the promising student hero is too weak to liberate his first love, a beautiful girl who had lost both her parents and saw no choice but to sell herself to a brothel in "The Shadow" ("Kŭrimja") (1929)[680]; in the double-standards of Korean society, an aging *kisaeng* suffers from poverty and is despised by the very people who had once exploited her ("Kisaeng Sanqŏri" (1930),[681] etc. Through the melancholic mood of the narrative and a genuine sympathy for the losers who are often powerless intellectuals, the social aspects of the problems clearly emerge in Yi's stories.

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[678] Ibid., 394.

[679] Yi T'ae-jun, "Haengbok" [Happiness], in *Pukŭro kan chakka sŏnjip* [Anthology of Writers Who Went to the North], Seoul: Ŭryu munhwa sa, 1988, Vol. 4 "Yi T'ae-jun, Poktŏkpang". 5-15.

[680] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kŭrimja" [The Shadow], in Ibid., Vol. 4: 15-35.

[681] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kisaeng Sandori", in Ibid., Vol. 4: 35-44.

Some South Korean scholars specifically stress the "nationalistic themes" in Yi T'ae-jun's early writings.[682] Indeed, the motif of a deprived Korean people and an oppressed national pride frequently made its appearance in his stories. In this regard they were not very different from the above-cited works of Yi Ki-yŏng. Yet unlike Yi Ki-yŏng with his anti-urbanism and idealization of pre-industrial, pre-colonial Korea, Yi T'ae-jun did not consistently equate virtue and truth with the norms, real or imagined, of the traditional rural Korean community. Though he, like Yi Ki-yŏng, portrayed the reality of contemporary Korea as a national disgrace and expressed compassion towards the victims of colonial modernization (poor *kisaeng*, wretched peasants, jobless Confucian scholars etc), Yi T'ae-jun does not offer us clear-cut answers to the questions "who is to blame" and "what is to be done". His interpretation is complicated and multi-dimensional. Let us examine a few examples of Yi T'ae-jun's view of the national problem.

In 1931 Yi T'ae-jun wrote a short story entitled "The Curse of Marriage" ("Kyŏrhon-ŭi Anmasŏng") (1931).[683]

> The heroine S, an educated heiress of a rich family, is besieged with young men eager to become her husband. But none of them please her. The educated girl is waiting for an honest, noble, principled person, while what she sees around her is only the scum of a wildly capitalizing Korean society: "The son of a prime minister! Those Korean ministers who are all covered in faeces and whose honour is so dishonourable!"; "Today the Korean people are throwing away their human pride like useless old shoes".[684] Finally the girl meets the poor yet noble man of letters, T., and marries him – only to find out that they need the very money she had cursed as the root of all things evil. After several unsuccessful attempts to earn an income through honest labor T. unwillingly considers an offer which both view as dishonourable – service in some administrative body which "though not the police, treats the Korean people in a similar way".[685] The couple understands that it would be a betrayal of their principles and S. sadly contemplates the situation. Why do Korean people always have to choose between poverty and disgrace when Westerners simply enjoy their living?
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> "She compared the lives of Korean people and Westerners. There are no barricades in the Westerners' way. When it is cold, they use steam heaters. When it is hot they use fans. At night they can enjoy watching the beautiful stars and lying in comfortable beds. In the morning ham or sausages are waiting for them, prepared for them many miles away in New York or Paris. Wherever they go there is no place in the world where they face personal or national humiliation.

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[682] Chang Yŏng-u, *Yi T'ae-jun sosŏl yŏngu,* 260.

[683] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kyŏrhonŭi anmasŏng" [The Curse of Marriage], in *Pukŭro kan chakka sŏnjip,* Vol. 4: 44-61.

[684] Ibid., 47, 54.

[685] Ibid., 58.

When their children are born schools and work-places are ready for them. God did not spread His blessings evenly. What blessings do Korean people have?"[686]

Despite her chagrin, the girl decides to overcome "the curse of marriage", fight for an honest family life side by side with her husband and not to fall into the trap of material temptation.

Interestingly, although "The Curse of Marriage" contained sharp criticism and lamentations over the loss of national and personal pride of Koreans under the pressure of an emerging capitalism and a repressive colonial regime, the idea of a "blessing" in the story was associated with steam heaters, comfortable beds and delicious sausages – the products of the very capitalism whose arrival in her country the heroine (and, perhaps, the author) condemned. The author, like Yi Ki-yŏng, obviously did not see the connection between the Korean capitalist fortunes made by "bad people" who "are all covered in faeces" and the idea of the desirable and much coveted "progress' which allowed Westerners to live in prosperity, enjoying freedom and modern luxuries.

Another of Yi's storied from this era bears a title which is quite reminiscent of his contemporary Yi Ki-yŏng's works, namely "Native Land" ("Kohyang") (1931).[687]

A young Korean man Kim Yun-gŏn had recently returned home after spending six years studying in Tokyo. All these years the enthusiastic boy had devoted himself to the rigors of study and was eager to invest his newly acquired knowledge and talent in the development of his native country. Yet now he feels deeply disappointed in Korea "which had changed beyond all recognition". The Korean people whom Kim met in the boat were miserable workers returning home from Japan where they had slaved for a pittance. They were Korean peasants who had lost their lands – a frightened, pitiful and helpless crowd of people in 'ugly national costumes which do not fit them at all'. Observing them Kim thinks, "Is this really the attire of a people with a brilliant national culture and history?"[688] Kim is distressed by the gloomy and suspicious policemen who are 'watching you as if you have done something wrong", the barren Korean hills deprived of forests and the whole "atmosphere of tears and anxiety, which is the atmosphere of the land of Korea".[689] His schoolteacher colleagues are apathetic and not particularly willing to socialize with him. One of his schoolmates who had once been a school activist is in prison, accused of a political crime. Upset about what he sees around him, Kim gets drunk and embarks on a night of wild debauchery — only to end up in a police station.

The depiction of a Korean student who returned from Japan only to find disillusionment at home was quite popular in the contemporary Korean literature. We can find this theme in Yi Ki-yŏng's "Poor People", *Native Land,* "Poor Village" and many other writings of the period. Most of Yi Ki-yŏng's stories describe the shameful

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[686] Ibid., 59.

[687] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kohyang" [Native Land], in *Pukŭro kan chakka sŏnjip,* Vol. 4:61-83.

[688] Ibid., 68.

[689] Ibid., 69-71.

present of a country which is presented as a result of the rejection of the traditional Korean culture and its values. The protagonist of Yi Ki-yŏng's *Native Land* found remedy for the social ills of his native village in the restoration of its lost traditional past, and the *ture* leagues in particular. In contrast, Yi T'ae-jun's novel did not suggest any tried and true social recipes. While the protagonist was not inspired by the social changes in the country, he also does not harbor any illusions about Korea's old culture. He perceived the traditional Korean costumes as something awkward and incompatible with modern times and as another expression of Korean backwardness.

"Planting Flowers" ("Kkoch' namu-nŭn simŏ nohko") (1933) is a third story which deserves analysis in this short review of Yi T'ae-jun's early work.[690] The plot of the story is as follows:

> The peasant Pang family had moved to a city after they lost their land which had been confiscated by a Japanese company. The Pangs are naive peasants who are frustrated and helpless in the new hostile environment. The big city is full of insidious and cold people and the unsophisticated rustics are immediately snared by their barbs. Pang's wife falls victim to a treacherous pimp and his sickly little daughter who has lost her mother dies in Pang's arms. Pang has no choice but to watch her helplessly since he has no money to pay for his daughter's medical treatment. Pang curses the cruel world and seeks relief in bouts of heavy drinking.

The author recalls the Pangs in the past, in their native village. In their so-called "natural state" the Pang family was confident and skilful, hard-working and trustworthy. Their former Korean landlord was kind and intelligent, so "the peasants had never felt the land had not been their own". The final scene in the story is symbolic and has been often cited by critics. Wandering the streets of the city in spring, a devastated Pang sees a young delicate Japanese girl admiring a flowering tree, the same kind of tree he had planted in his village before he had left it. Though the tree is beautiful, Pang feels a deep sadness. He no longer has a right to the beauty of nature – the refined Japanese "city girl" now owns it.

The main thrust of the story did not differ much from the traditionalist views of Yi Ki-yŏng. The bucolic depiction of the rural past of the hero is especially recognizable – the whole scene is vividly reminiscent of the imagined paradise of Seoulite in Yi Ki-yŏng's "Poor Village". The depiction of the good-hearted Korean landlord in Yi T'ae-jun's story is particularly significant. It appears as a symbol of an uncorrupted, pure Korean life and a vanishing golden past – a Utopia which contradicts the widely acknowledged realities of pre-modern Korean village life. Once again, this "good landlord" is reminiscent of Yi Ki-yŏng's kind and sophisticated "*yangban* of the olden days". In this story Yi T'ae-jun obviously fell victim to the idealization of the past *à la* Yi Ki-yŏng even though he expressed different views elsewhere.

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[690] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kkoch' namunŭn simŏ nohko" [Planting Flowers], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip* [Anthology of Yi T'ae-jun's Works], Seoul: Kuiinsa, 1988, 76-87.

Nonetheless, these occasional bouts of traditionalism proved atypical for Yi T'ae-jun. In "Country Bumpkin" ("Ch'onttŭgi") (1934), another story which depicted a poor peasant in the merciless city, the old days are much less idealized. The protagonist recollects his past life in a small mountain village where people, because of a lack of suitable land, were traditionally forced to rely on odd jobs to feed their families. The protagonist describes this life as "extremely poor". Yet he stresses that in the past "nobody in his village died of hunger, nobody begged".[691] This judgment at least appears a little more balanced.

As we can see, the social analysis of the so-called "national problem" in Yi T'ae-jun's stories is far from complete and consistent. Given the wide range in the social status of his heroes it is quite natural. A returned student from Japan, a poor peasant and the educated daughter of a rich family all see the social situation from different angles and perceive it differently. Yet all of them are frustrated and concerned about the future of the modernizing Korea, and this could be perceived as the position of the author. The critical social messages of these stories leave no doubt about the deep engagement of Yi T'ae-jun in the social problems of his country.

Here we approach the main paradox of Yi T'ae-jun's pre-Liberation biography. "Planting Flowers", "Country Bumpkin" and his other socially critical works were written at a time when Yi T'ae-jun was involved with the so-called "Nine Member Club" – a literary group which is invariably presented as the epitome of "pure art" in Korea. By definition the "pure art" tendency implies the complete emancipation of a writer from the social and political issues of his day and an exclusive concentration on the refinement of aesthetic aspects of his work.[692] How can we reconcile the palpable social criticism of Yi T'ae-jun's writings with the supposed demands of his leanings towards pure art? To clarify this we should take a closer look at Yi's "Nine Members Club" period.

The most widely cited version of events maintains that in August 1933 the thirty year old Yi T'ae-jun, together with Pak T'ae-wŏn, Yi Hyo-sŏk, Yi Sang and a few other writers, established the so-called "Nine Members Club" or *Kuinhoe* in order to protect the true artistic values of Korean literature from the claims of leftist activists. The KAPF is known to be the primary target of the "Nine Members Club".[693]

However, the memoirs of one of the members of the "Nine Members Club", Cho Yong-man, shatters this theory. According to Cho, the significance of the group and the consistency of its program was grossly exaggerated after Liberation. What is now called the "Nine Members Club" in fact represented a loose group of intellectuals who occasionally spent some time together chatting about literary matters. Yi T'ae-jun as the most authoritative figure in this circle, used to preside over the gatherings but the

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[691] Yi T'ae-jun, "Ch'onttŭgi" [Country Bumpkin], in *Wŏlbuk chakkaŭi taep'yo munhak sŏnjip, Pak T'ae-wŏn, Yi T'ae-jun,* 436.

[692] For materials on Korea's "pure art" movement read Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron,* 18-20.

[693] Min Ch'un-hwan, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi chŏngijŏk koch'al", 45; Chong Hyong-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkiwa chakka-ro sŏgi*, 19.

most active member was the poet Yi Sang, who, being unemployed at the time, used the group activity to promote himself in the literary world. Cho claims that the group had no fixed program and that its determination "to protect literature from the arrogant political intruders" found its expression only in the occasional verbal outbursts of its members. "Nine Members" indeed exhibited a tendency to despise particular members of the KAPF whose literary accomplishments were quite modest in comparison with their loud political declarations. This is not surprising since the KAPF's ambitions which were supported by extremely minimal artistic credentials, irritated many contemporary intellectuals regardless of their political persuasion. Yi T'ae-jun, a distinguished and wholly devoted writer, used to treat the majority of KAPF writers with open contempt as good-for-nothing impostors. On the other hand, the KAPF activists and Han Sŏr-ya in particular, greatly envied the successful Yi T'ae-jun.[694]

It is worth noting that in the famous confrontation between the KAPF and the "Nine Members Club", ideological considerations were less significant than interpersonal relationships. Cho confirms that despite a formal adherence to different political groups, Yi T'ae-jun invariably supported his friend Yim Hwa, a founding father and the main ideologist of the KAPF. At the same time Yi T'ae-jun refused to cooperate with Yi Kwang-su and Yŏm Sang-sŏp, writers with similar views on literature and also self-proclaimed proponents of "pure art". Cho Young-man explains this rejection by the professional jealousy Yi T'ae-jun felt to his more popular colleagues and a fear of falling in their shade.[695]

Thus there is reason to assume that the activity of the "Nine Members Club", being much less significant and ideologically coherent than it is often described nowadays, was mostly inspired by personal and factional issues rather than by a steady political program – just like the personal antipathy towards Yi Kwang-su was the early incentive for many KAPF writers.[696] Though both sides, both the "Nine Members Club" and the KAPF, tended to wrap their mutual animosity in particular political/aesthetic terms, the actual bone of contention might have lay in the personal mutual dislike of their respective members.

Indeed, no matter how the writers formulated their artistic credos, the actual ideological discrepancies between Yi T'ae-jun and the KAPF writers remained minor as we can see in the example of Yi Ki-yŏng. Apart from some occasional "progressive" passages, filled with dull Communist rhetoric which appeared in the three most militant works of Yi Ki-yŏng: "Wŏn-bo", "Young Daughter-in-Law" and "Paper Factory Village", the general picture and intonation of Yi Ki-yŏng's supposedly "proletarian" writings did not differ much from those of the "purist" Yi T'ae-jun. Both filled their narratives with the same pathetic, helpless characters (fragile intellectuals, wretched old peasants, poor country girls etc) who felt unhappy or uncomfortable in the changing

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[694] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[695] Cho Yong-man, "Ch'ago chajonsim kanghan sosŏlga" [Cold and Dignified Literary Man], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu,* 409-415.

[696] Yun Pyŏng-no, *Hanguk kŭn hyŏndae chakka chakp'umron,* 17.

world of a modernizing Korea, but failed to find any escape. This picture was in fact equally divorced from both the Marxian and purist worlviews.

Yet despite all the volatility of their real ideological disparities, the mutual hatred between Yi T'ae-jun and the KAPF proved to have very real and long-lasting consequences. Unfortunately for Yi T'ae-jun it was Han Sŏr-ya, the ambitious and opportunistic leader of the KAPF, who would become the supreme boss of North Korean literature in the early 1950s. Thus the old animosity would resurface and destroy Yi T'ae-jun years later.[697]

In the previous chapter we have already mentioned that the late 1930s brought strict censorship regulations of the Japanese colonial regime to Korean literature. Though Yi T'ae-jun did not suffer any personal persecution, he, like the "proletarian writers" of the period, had to adjust to the new demands and downplay the political messages in his writings. In the 1930s, the social criticism in Yi's works was greatly reduced. His writings took a more inward orientation, being largely devoted to a gloomy psychological soul-searching, with the leitmotif of a fragile human being trapped in a ruthless materialistic world – again, rather similar to the dismal mood of Yi Ki-yŏng's writings of the period. We can also trace a strong autobiographical tendency in Yi T'ae-jun's novels of the late 1930s. Here are two examples:

"Raven" ("Kkamakui") (1936). [698] The protagonist of this story, a desperately poor writer, lives in a friend's cottage in the countryside, surrounded by beautiful scenery. He had been lonely until a pretty young girl, an admirer of his novels, begins to visit him. The girl is clever and delicate, and for the old writer she becomes the only soulmate in the whole world. Unfortunately, the girl is terminally ill. Sensing her approaching death, she estranges herself from the living world and her healthy boyfriend in particular. The girl is suffering from a phobia of ravens, the symbols of death. She feels as if their black bodies contain something awful. The old writer is the only person who understands the girl's fear. He decides to kill a raven to prove that there is nothing special inside the black body of the ugly bird. But it is too late, for the girl has died.

"Story About Rabbits" ("T'okki iyagi") (1941).[699] The protagonist of this story is again a poor writer who is too weak and indecisive to find a way to improve the life of his large family - a pregnant wife and three children. Feeling worthless, the writer simply drinks heavily. His kind and caring wife does not complain but tries to find ways to help the family survive. She suggests that they raise rabbits. The family succeeds at first, but when the rabbits are fully grown, a problem emerges: somebody must slaughter the cute and helpless animals. The writer hates to even think about it, but as the "man of the family" he feels it is his duty to save his pregnant wife from participating in the cruel act. Still he

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[697] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 13, 19.

[698] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kkamakui" [Raven], in *Hanguk myŏngjak tanp'yŏn sosŏl,* Vol.1: 247-261.

[699] Yi T'ae-jun, "T'okki iyagi" [Story About Rabbits], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip*, Seoul: Kuiinsa, 1988, 225-237.

procrastinates until his wife, a timid and delicate woman who once studied in a women's school, loved foreign poems and dreamed of a beautiful and refined life,[700] does it herself. In the final scene she appears with trembling hands soiled with blood, endeavouring to smile in order to console her embarrassed husband.

Though in an artistic style the stories differ a great deal ("Raven" has a strong touch of mysticism while "Story About Rabbits" is quite realistic) the issue they raise is in fact similar: the alienation between the delicate idealist and the crude material world in which he lives. In fact, the motif of the aesthetically appealing but helpless person emerges constantly in Yi T'ae-jun's writings. Yet "Story About Rabbits" is probably the first work in which the writer clearly pronounces an accusatory verdict on his favorite non-violent intellectual hero. A gentle idealist perhaps, even a spiritually superior human being, but he is worthless when it comes to action. He fails to save his loved ones from the unpleasant challenges of life—be they fear, death or the necessity to kill.

The profound passion of this message is particularly impressive if we take into account the fact that the story is autobiographical. In the image of the protagonist's wife, Yi T'ae-jun depicted his wife Yi Sun-ok, a gentle, well-educated, peaceful person, who tolerated her husband's deficiencies and accepted all the changeableness in their life without complaint. To this woman, mother to their five children, Yi always felt gratitude and a sense of guilt.[701]

These stories offer us some clues as to why Yi T'ae-jun who had never been known as a devotee of Communist methodology began enthusiastically to eulogize "revolutionary violence" after Liberation. In all probability, Yi had solved the moral dilemma of admitting the necessity for "violence in order to protect virtue" long before publishing his controversial pro-Communist story "The First Fight" (1948) with its physically strong, self-confident and cruel guerilla characters.

We must now discuss another contradictory facet of Yi T'ae-jun's biography – his pro-Japanese activity in the late 1930s to early 1940s. Was Yi T'ae-jun indeed a "traitor to the national interest" as was later claimed by North Korea? This question cannot be answered unambiguously.

The history of literature in colonial Korea has left us no upright anti-Japanese literary heroes who would openly stood up against the colonial regime or at the very least, "broke their brushes" in the early 1940s. Indeed, virtually all prominent Korean writers who lived in the country in the late 1930s and early 1940s collaborated with the colonial authorities and published some pro-Japanese texts – a fact which often makes Korean scholars uncomfortable and thus is seldom stated openly and unequivocally. Regardless of their earlier political propensities, "virtually all established writers wrote

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[700] The prototype of this heroine is considered to be Yi T'ae-jun's wife Yi Sun-ok whom he married in 1930 (See: Chong Hyong-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkiwa chakka-ro sŏgi*, 107).

[701] Interview with Chŏng Ryul; Kim Hong-gyun, "Wŏlbuk chakka Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi t'onggok-ŭi kajŏksa" [The tragic Family History of Yi T'ae-jun, a Writer Went to the North], *Wolgan Chungang,* #300, November 2000.

steadily on, adjusting their literature to the demands of the age. Leftist writers showed no more fortitude than their bourgeois and nationalist rivals".[702] We can say Yi T'ae-jun's pro-Japanese activity was of a moderate level. He rarely produced an open and whole-hearted piece of pro-Japanese propaganda in Yi Kwang-su's mould. Probably the only example where Yi T'ae-jun noticeably backed the colonial regime is his pro-war propagandist article "One Day in the Support Army Training Camp" ("Chiwŏnbyŏng hunlyŏnso-ŭi ilil") which was published in the pro-Japanese magazine *Munjang* in December 1941.[703] Yet this was not typical of Yi. Generally, his "apostasy novels" bore another kind of pro-Japanese message which is easily detectable in "Moonlight Night of Ideas" ("Sasang-ŭi wŏrya"), an autobiographical "newspaper novel", published in *Meil Shinbo* in 1941.

"Moonlight Night of Ideas"[704] is a story about the moral searching of young Song Bin (Yi himself was the prototype), who is studying abroad at a Japanese university. The critic Yang Mun-gyu called the work "a novel of education" or *bildungsroman* which has clear didactic functions.[705] This long novel relates the family history of Song Bin which is strongly reminiscent of Yi's own childhood: the early death of his parents, his suffering and his search for his own path in life. After much spiritual turmoil Song Bin at last discovers the one true course. This is the path of civilization and enlightenment which in the novel are embodied by Japan. In contrast, Korean society and Korean students are generally portrayed as ignorant and backward, though this motif appears not as a central idea but as a rather oblique background pattern in the novel.

In a sense, Yi T'ae-jun's call for the modernization of his country reminds the similar motive of the "industrial novels" of Yi Ki-yŏng, which, as we have mentioned, leave room for differing interpretations. The pro-Japanese leitmotif of "Moonlight Night of Ideas" can be equally construed as the sincere belief of the author in Korea's future or as a desire for the progressive and idealistic Korean intellectual to improve the world around him. However, like the works of Yi Ki-yŏng, Yi T'ae-jun's novels presuppose that the industrial development of Korea would be conducted, by definition, under "positive Japanese influence", and this point cannot be omitted. Yi T'ae-jun himself did not fail to realize this. In the opinion of some South Korean critics he was ashamed of this occasional support of the colonial regime and this is why the pro-Japanese tendency in his novels proved to be rather short-lived (1939-1941).[706] In 1943 Yi ceased all literary activity and moved to his hometown where he remained until Liberation, thus becoming one of the few Korean writers who came close to "breaking

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[702] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 29.

[703] Yi Myŏng-hŭi, *Sanghŏ Yi T'ae-jun munhak segye* [The Literary World of SanghoYi T'ae-jun], Seoul: Kukhak ch'aryowŏn, 1994, 35.

[704] Yi T'ae-jun, "Sasangŭi worya" [Moonlight Night of Ideas], in Yi T'ae-jun, *Munhak chŏnjip,* vol. 7.

[705] Yi T'ae-jun, *Munhak chŏnjip*, Vol. 7, 281.

[706] Yi Myŏng-hŭi, *Sanghŏ Yi T'ae-jun munhak segye*, 37; *Hanguk myŏngjak tanp'yŏn sosŏl,* 263.

their brushes" in the era of greatest repression. The critic Yi Myŏng-hŭi explains this by Yi's desire to write only in Korean, not Japanese, and to "preserve the Korean language".[707]

It is notable that this pro-Japanese activity, being unenthusiastic, did not bring Yi T'ae-jun much material benefit. In the late 1930s to early 1940s the lifestyle of this established writer indeed reminds one of the lifestyle of a "pure Confucian scholar". Yi T'ae-jun lived in poverty, and his only luxury was books which he collected for his entire life and never sold – even in the most desperate of circumstances.[708]

Concluding the examination of the initial period of Yi T'ae-jun's literary activity we are able to say that despite the self-perception of the writer as a "purist" and "apolitical", his writings were characterized by strong social concerns and sharp criticism which set them apart from "pure art" as it is normally understood. The comparison with the writings of Yi Ki-yŏng, a typical representative of the KAPF, shows that the imagery and intonation of Yi T'ae-jun's short stories brought them extremely close to the actual conventions of what passed for Korean "proletarian" literature. This similarity remained palpable during the most politically challenging period for Korean intellectuals – the mid- and late 1930s. Yet the mutual personal animosity between Yi T'ae-jun and the most "proletarian" of writers, which began in pre-Liberation times, placed an impenetrable barrier between them.

Yi T'ae-jun after liberation: 1945-46

The brief period 1945-46 is of singular importance in the history of Korean literature and thought. It was a period of unprecedented political and creative freedom. Old colonial restrictions had been removed while a new set of politically motivated restrictions (Stalinist in the North, "anti-Communist" and right-nationalist in the South) had not yet been imposed on literature. This freedom did have some limitations, especially in the North, but it was still an unprecedented phenomenon, not to be repeated again until the late 1980s with the political liberalization of South Korea. After Liberation Yi, like many other Korean authors, felt a freedom to express his real thoughts, so his writings of this period reveal more about his worldview than his pre-1945 or post-1946 works and partly explain the reasons why Yi eventually chose the North over the South.

A very characteristic novel by Yi in this period is the autobiographic "Around Liberation" ("Haebang chŏnhu") (August 1946)[709] published first in the South Korean *Munhak* monthly. After Yi moved to North Korea, he immediately received a special literary prize for the book as a "novel of socialist realism".[710] Some South Korean

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[707] Ibid., 37.

[708] Interview with Chŏng Ryul; *Hanguk myŏngjak tanp'yŏn sosŏl,* Vol 1: 264.

[709] Yi T'ae-jun, "Haebang chŏnhu" [Around Liberation], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip*, Vol.3, Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1995, 13-52.

[710] *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu*, 421.

critics also call “Around Liberation” "a proletarian novel" and describe its plot as a "story… about a young man, who is desperately looking forward to Liberation... After Liberation… the young man subscribes to a radical ideology and becomes a leader in the socialist literature movement".[711] In reality, “Around Liberation”, one of the best and perhaps the most honest book ever written by Yi T'ae-jun, has little to do with “socialist realism” or “radical ideology”. Instead this is a confessional novel where Yi admits his pro-Japanese activity (though very unwillingly and hesitantly) and his passivity during the colonial period. In this book he also analyses the dilemmas Korean intellectuals faced in the turbulent months which followed the collapse of colonialism. The prototype of the protagonist Hyŏn is Yi T'ae-jun himself.

Hyŏn, an artist who has been pressed to collaborate with the Japanese, feels unhappy and guilty. Once Korea is supposedly free, Hyŏn tries to find truth in the new world around him. Yet he remains frustrated. During conversations with his close friend Kim, an old-fashioned Confucian scholar, Hyŏn figures out the main source of his anxiety. Hyŏn does not really want any foreign political system (capitalism or socialism) to be imposed on Korea. He wants his country to be free and able to choose its own unique path. However he understands that this is impossible under the circumstances where Korea is poor and backward. Hence, there is no choice for Korea but to follow a particular foreign course. As to Yi's (=Hyŏn's) personal attitude, he considers it immoral to remain aloof from real life. Hence there is also no choice for him but to join one side. Hyŏn chooses the Soviet side and joins a pro-Communist literary group, not because he is really "red" (he denies rumors that he "has gone red" when his friend Kim asks him directly about this). It is rather a choice of the lesser evil. Hyŏn chooses the Soviets because the communists, as protectors of the poor and oppressed, are supposed to be closer to the traditional Korean spirit, to its egalitarian principles. Hyŏn hopes that the Soviets will offer the Korean poor more freedom and help, and to prove it he quotes Lenin's words about communist support for all national liberation movements. In comparison, the capitalist Americans in Korea in Hyŏn’s opinion behave just like the Japanese in the past and so capitalism offers no hope for a better life for ordinary Koreans. Thus Hyŏn prefers the Soviets because their policy, he believes, will be less harmful to Korean independence. In the final scene Hyŏn casts away his doubts and immerses himself in the new activity of the communist literature union, just as the real Yi did at the time.

The evolution of the fictional Hyŏn mirrored the realities of Yi T'ae-jun’s life. He became increasingly involved with Communist front organizations in literature. Yi T’ae-jun was known to have played a vital role in the South Korean Communist movement. Scalapino and Lee in their account of North Korean communism mention Yi T’ae-jun’s name as the head of the cultural Department of the KCP immediately after Liberation,[712] and later as serving in the temporary Party headquarters under Pak Hŏng-yŏng in Haeju.[713]

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[711] *Who’s Who in Korean Literature*, 522.

[712] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 282.

[713] Ibid., 295.

In late 1946 Yi T'ae-jun moved to the Communist North. Some visiting Soviet journalists provided the following explanation for this move: "Yi crossed the 38-th parallel in order to have an opportunity to finish his novel about Korean students who had been forcibly mobilized into the Japanese army. The patriotic theme of the novel certainly irritates the South Korean publishers". [714] Even considering all the propagandistic implications of this statement we cannot deny the grain of truth in it. Indeed, Yi T'ae-jun's conscious choice of the North can be, first of all, explained by his discomfort with the emerging policies of the Syngman Rhee regime.

Yi T'ae-jun in the North: a political transformation.

After moving to the North Yi T'ae-jun, like many other contemporary writers, immediately found himself in a whirlpool of severe factional struggle between three major groups (ex-KAPF members, Soviet Koreans and non-KAPF Southerners) which fought for domination over the North Korean cultural life.

Given Yi T'ae-jun's post-Liberation teamwork with the Southerners and their political sponsors in the country's leadership (and especially Pak Hŏn-yŏng) and his long term animosity towards the KAPF, the possibility of Yi joining the dominant ex-KAPF faction was ruled out. These same factors made him a logical recruit for the block of Southerners and Soviet Koreans, and this fact had long-lasting consequences for Yi's life and career.

The Soviet Koreans, who, as we have mentioned above, were often perceived as aliens by indigenous Koreans, also required Yi's authority to infiltrate the local intellectual community and win their long battle with the ex-KAPF group. So they helped Yi with the NKFLA (North Korean Federation of Literature and Art) vice-chairmanship in 1948,[715] and this promotion made Yi, who had scarcely ever been efficient in a bureaucratic environment, into an instant high-ranking writer-bureaucrat and a Stalinist apparatchick. As the NKFLA second vice-chairman he enjoyed very substantial power in distributing benefits to his fellow writers. What was even more important, Yi T'ae-jun from the very beginning was constantly encouraged and indulged by the Soviets, who boosted his self-esteem in every possible way. Yi T'ae-jun was immediately nicknamed the "Korean Guy de Maupassant" and this flattering title quickly spread through the North Korean media; his Soviet Korean friends also moved to establish a "society for the study of the works of Yi T'ae-jun", etc.[716] Yi T'ae-jun, who had always been known as a proud person, responded to this pandering to his ego in a most predictable way. He enthusiastically took on the ideas, values and mentality of his new friends and admirers.

Yet we must stress that the Soviet veneration and support of Yi T'ae-jun was more than just a trick of cunning politicians. Chŏng Ryul, in his interview, recalls Yi T'ae-jun with sincere admiration. Chŏng Ryul mentions an instant sympathy he felt for

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[714] A.Gitovich and V. Bursov, *My videli Koreiu*, 90.

[715] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 50.

[716] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

the writer, and refers to Yi's great talent, his elevated intellectual stature and his more "Westernized" manners which set him apart from his fellow North Korean intellectuals. We may presume that Yi T'ae-jun also shared these same feelings towards his new friends. As we have mentioned before, in the DPRK Soviet Koreans were generally perceived as people of a higher educational level and diverse life experience, and Yi T'ae-jun, being a rather bookish person himself, no doubt appreciated these qualities in his Soviet colleagues.

It is significant that Chŏng finds nothing peculiar in Yi T'ae-jun's choice of the North. In his opinion this decision was the logical choice for a socially concerned Korean intellectual. The South Korean regime did not enjoy much support among the critical intellectuals of the day. The nascent South Korean government was seen as corrupt and eager to employ former Japanese collaborators, while the North was associated with romantic images of the brave guerilla leader Kim Il Sung, Yan'an exiles and exotic Soviets whose culture had been popular in Korea long before Liberation. Also, in Chŏng's opinion, Yi T'ae-jun was greatly influenced in his choice of the North by a similar decision of the famous Korean writer and his elderly friend, Hong Myŏng-hŭi.

Chŏng Ryul gives us an interesting account of Yi T'ae-jun's personal attitude to the Communist ideology. In his opinion, Yi was attracted to Communism for purely idealistic reasons. He was never interested in the political or economic viewpoints of Marxism but perceived it rather as a desirable moral code. "I like Communism. There is nothing wrong in it. People strive to live by strict moral rules, and I cannot help but respect this desire".[717] Also, he found particularly appealing some aspects of the Communist program like the equality of people and the liberation of oppressed nations. At the same time Yi, at least orally, insisted on his previous principles of "pure art". In Chŏng Ryul's estimation, by the term "pure art" Yi T'ae-jun understood not an actual aloofness of a writer from reality, but his obligation to concentrate, first and foremost, on the aesthetic quality of his writing, not distracting himself with any practical or politically popular considerations. It was, Chŏng claims, Yi's understandable and praiseworthy desire to do his job in a qualitative and professional manner which led him to stress his "pure art" concept. However, Chŏng Ryul found it necessary to "reeducate" his new friend in a more appropriate Stalinist spirit, to point out to him the long-standing "reactionary" implications of this purist approach to literature. In these discussions with his friend, Chŏng often cited Lenin's classic saying, known to every Soviet schoolchild: "You cannot live in a society and be free from it". Yet, despite these minor theoretical disparities (which, moreover, faded quickly the more time Yi T'ae-jun spent with his new friends), Chŏng Ryul did not find Yi's works and behavior to be in contradiction with Communism.

The active "re-education" of Yi T'ae-jun was conducted not only through his personal friendship with the Soviet Koreans but also through the above-mentioned Moscow-sponsored "educational trip" to the Soviet Union in 1946 and Yi T'ae-jun's exposure to Soviet literature and arts. In 1946-1947 Yi, who had always been an avid

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[717] Ibid.

reader, extensively read the "socialist realist" Soviet literature which was at the time being translated into Korean in huge amounts. The influence of this literature soon became palpable in Yi T'ae-jun's writings.

All these factors contributed to the transformation of this socially concerned yet politically unattached Korean intellectual into a staunch "soldier on the cultural front" eager to serve the new regime. The new role gave Yi T'ae-jun not only material affluence and recognition, but also a sense of purpose and a sturdy system of cohesive spiritual values. Yi T'ae-jun was very prolific at the time, and his writings of the period clearly reflected this new worldview. I will mention some of the more significant examples.

"Father's Ramie Clothes" ("Abŏji mosi ot") (August 1946).[718] The protagonist of this story, a young girl named Ch'ang-ok who lives in the newly liberated Seoul with her mother, desperately awaits her father's arrival. Some 20 years earlier her father, a Korean patriot who fought for the independence of Korea, was forced to flee overseas. Now that Korea was free he was expected to return. However, the father fails to arrive – instead he sends a letter in which he tells his family that he will continue his struggle until the country is "truly and completely independent". The father assures his family that this will certainly happen in the very near future since "we have got a lot of friends and all the people are on our side". The letter is an eye-opener. Suddenly Ch'ang-ok realizes that Seoul is indeed not really free: the Americans care more about the well-being of the Japanese than the Koreans; the Korean patriots are discriminated against while the national traitors enjoy social respect and the interests of Korea are not taken care of. Her own family was impoverished to the extent that the father's best ramie clothes had been taken by a moneylender. The girl feels betrayed, angry and determined to resist.

The political message of the story (anti-Americanism, harangues against South Korean policy, etc) is expressed in relatively moderate terms. In all probability, rather than fulfilling a particular propagandistic task, Yi T'ae-jun here is simply expressing his sincere summation of the current situation. As we are aware, the Seoul administration was unpopular among left-leaning intellectuals for the very reasons outlined in "Father's Ramie Clothes". The work preserves the best features of Yi T'ae-jun's previous works – bright images, detailed depictions of scenery, and a well developed story line. The characters are portrayed realistically: neither super-heroes nor jet-black villains can yet be found in "Father's Ramie Clothes". Still, all this is not surprising given the time when the story was written – just a month after Yi T'ae-jun chose the North and moved there.

His next novel, however, "The First Fight" ("Ch'ŏt ch'ŏnt'u") (1948), displays a dramatic change in his style and perspective.

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[718] Yi T'ae-jun, "Abŏji mosi ot" [Father's Ramie Clothes], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip*, Vol.3: 53-57.

A small Communist guerilla band operates somewhere in South Korea. The band includes eight guerrillas led by Kwon P'an-dol, a former railway worker from Ch'unch'ŏn factory who joined the guerrilla movement after the so-called "October Struggle" – a wave of Communist-inspired strikes and riots in 1946. One particularly zealous fighter who follows Kwon everywhere and listens to his every word is called "The Third". "The Third" is a young brother of Kwon's fallen comrade Kyŏng-su who was shot while trying to escape from prison. The group fights a certain ill-defined assortment of "dirty bastards" who had "sold the country to the Syngman Rhee clique" as well as the perennial "American bastards". The fighters do not hesitate and are determined to kill the wicked enemies. The only person who at times expresses doubts about the success of their enterprise is doctor Yun, the lone intellectual in the novel. However Yun's perplexities soon fade away when the proletarian commander Kwon reminds him of the exemplary bravery which was demonstrated by "Marshal Kim [Il Sung]" while fighting the "Japanese bastards". Though the guerrillas are small in number and this is their first fight, they win easily and without losses. Only "The Third", young and impatient, is wounded slightly because of his brave but reckless actions. The victorious guerrillas organize a "people's trial" of the "dog-shit bastards". The victims try to appeal to the nationalistic feelings of the guerrillas "as Koreans", but their pleading makes our heroes only laugh because they, like communists and the exploited, are free from such "reactionary" feelings. Revolutionary justice is served and the guerrillas move on to new battles and, presumably, new victories.[719]

"The First Fight" is vastly different from anything ever produced by Yi T'ae-jun previously. Only a few formal traits of Yi T'ae-jun's earlier writings are traceable in the novel – an attention to scenery and a detailed depiction of the nature and psychological state of the heroes. On the whole, however, "The First Fight" is a far cry from the earlier works of Yi T'ae-jun. It represents a typical "iron-style" "partisan novel" of the socialist realist vein, with tough heroes who are free from doubt in their pursuit of victory. The characteristic trait of this new style is an abundance of expletives which is certainly anomalous to the elaborate and subtle writing style of Yi T'ae-jun's earlier works. This style is no doubt an expression of the writer's explicit intention to "stay close to the masses" and "promote popular spirit" as his Soviet colleagues once recommended.

Unlike the hesitatant and soul-searching protagonists of Yi's pre-Liberation stories, the positive heroes of "The First Fight" kill easily and eagerly – and their victims are no rabbits. In many respects "The First Fight" is visibly reminiscent of the source of Yi's inspiration—the novel of the Soviet writer Fadeev *Devastation (Rasgrom),*[720] which also depicted the tribulations of a guerilla band. The similarity is palpable not only in the story line, but in the general formula as well. Just like in

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[719] Yi T'ae-jun, "Ch'ŏt chŏnt'u" [The First Fight], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip,* Vol. 3: 59-103.

[720] Fadeev, *Razgrom* [Devastation], Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972.

Fadeev's work, in "The First Fight" the leader is an experienced party cadre, while his young subordinates are enthusiastic and impatient. Like *Devastation*'s protagonists, Yi's positive heroes justify their actions by "revolutionary humanism", which in fact sees brutality as a necessary measure to deal with one's enemies for the sake of revolution/liberation. The depiction of intellectuals is also very similar and characteristic. Yi T'ae-jun here follows the convention of "class view" in Soviet literature according to which an intellectual can never possess "true revolutionary consciousness". Yi T'ae-jun depicts the only intellectual in the novel, the doctor, as a comrade with good intentions but lacking due political awareness such that the superior proletarian leader has to correct him – just like Fadeev's novel where the Communist commander Levinson also has to set the hesitating and uncertain doctor right.

One can easily understand the frustration and confusion some South Korean scholars feel about the sudden turn in Yi T'ae-jun's imagery and intonation. Scholarly opinions fluctuate between righteous condemnation[721] to bewilderment and regret at Yi's transformation. Chang Yŏng-u, for example, claims that only outside pressure could have made Yi write "The First Fight": "It was a work of inertia, written not by the author's choice, but under outside pressure".[722]

This sounds too simplistic. "The First Fight" became the first visible result of Yi's "reformation", his conversion to the Communist spirit as understood in that time and place. This process would hardly have been successful without Yi T'ae-jun's own active participation, favorable predisposition and aspiration to be "reformed". After all, this was still a time when one could still take a step backwards. While not denying the existence of external pressures (for example the prescribed themes which we have mentioned in the previous chapter), we have reason to suspect that Yi T'ae-jun succumbed to these without much protest.

Indeed, his writings of the late 1940s seem to confirm that Yi tried hard to adjust to the new requirements and to realize them in his works as best as he could.

"Tiger Grandma" ("Horangi halmoni") (1949)[723] is a short story about the illiteracy eradication movement in a small and remote Korean village.

> The story's protagonist is a conservative old woman who had received the nickname Tiger Grandma for her tough, grumpy and outspoken personality. Tiger Grandma is an influential figure among the village women, so her strong opposition to adult education at first frustrates the young and inexperienced communist educator Sang-gŭni who conducts the village study program. Tiger Grandma discourages other women from participating in the study courses, and Sang-gŭni worries that the study program will not be successfully completed. Yet Tiger Grandma is not as conservative as she pretends to be. She is, in fact, quite

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[721] Chong Hyong-gi, *Yi T'ae-jun, chŏngch'i-ro chukkiwa chakka-ro sŏgi*, 100-101.

[722] Chang Yŏng-u. *Yi T'ae-jun's sosŏl yŏngu*, 307.

[723] Yi T'ae-jun, "Horangi halmŏni" [Tiger Grandma], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip,* Vol.3: 105-120.

curious about the new realities but is too proud to reveal her interest. So the young communist makes a psychologically convincing decision – he allows this informal leader to officially head the women's study group and in this way he eventually wins her enthusiastic support. At the end of the story the strong-headed woman becomes literate enough to write a letter to her grandson Yŏng-dol who is serving in the People's Army. She asks her grandson to perform his duties diligently and relay her greetings to Marshal Kim.

The bucolic sweetness of this story, with its naïve simple-minded heroes and unsophisticated folk humor, is also atypical of Yi T'ae-jun. In all probability, all these changes constitute once again an attempt to implement "popular spirit" in literature. In general, the naïve rural image of Tiger Grandma is strongly reminiscent of the image of Grandpa Shchukar in Sholokhov's *Virgin Land* – a work about the agrarian reform in the Soviet Union, which, as we have mentioned earlier, was deemed exemplary in the North Korean literary world. Like Grandpa Shchukar, Tiger Grandma represents the syrupy image of a humorous rural elder who, despite her age, zealously supports the new regime.

Another story of the same period is "Somewhere Near the 38th Parallel" ("38 sŏn ŏnŭ chigu-esŏ") (October 1949).[724]

Simple peasants living near the 38th parallel experience turmoil caused by the "American bastards" and the "South Korean clique". These "bandits" constantly organize raids and burn the forests in an attempt to obstruct the happy and peaceful life of the newly liberated North Korean people. However the Korean people enjoy the robust protection of the Communist border guards. One of these guards, comrade Yu Kyŏng-hwan, though wounded in battle did not lose his nerve and managed to cut off the head of the enemy (the latter is yet again quite imprecisely described as a "bastard"). In the final scenes the hero slides into unconsciousness as visions of "the faces of his mother, his father, the portrait of Premier Kim Il Sung and the fluttering banners of the Republic" pass through his mind. His last thought is: "Where is my rifle?"

It is obvious that the author does not care about the psychological persuasiveness of his narrative – this is why the hero visualizes the face of the "great leader" and the "fluttering banners of the Republic" at the most crucial moment of his life. This story marks the beginning of a series of the purely propagandistic writings by Yi T'ae-jun. Short and terse and filled with rude expletives which are addressed at the "enemies" along with an uncritical adulation of Communist heroes, these black-and-white stories lack completely the sophistication of the pre-Liberation works of Yi T'ae-jun. The new works are reminiscent of propaganda leaflets, written with the all too obvious intention of igniting hatred of the enemy. Here are a few more examples of this tendency:

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[724] Yi T'ae-jun, "38 sŏn ŏnŭ chigu-esŏ" [Somewhere Near the 38th Parallel], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip,* Vol. 3: 121-129.

"One Hundred Times, One Thousand Times" ("Paekpae ch'ŏnpae-ro") (April 1951)[725] describes the fight of the heroic North Korean soldiers against the cowardly American and South Korean "bastards". One of the heroes, the young O Ki-ho, dies in battle. When his comrades return to pick up his body, they find the deceased O lying among numerous dead Americans. His hands still grasp his rifle, which means that the hero bravely fought to the very last moment. His comrades pledge to avenge the hero: "for one hundred times, we'll pay one thousand times".

"Let's See Who Will Surrender" ("Nuga Kulbokhanŭnga poja") (April 1951)[726] describes a young truck driver who has no war experience and is frightened during his first battle. Yet, under the positive influence of his commander Kim Yŏng-min, an experienced and confident Communist officer, the driver gathers up his courage and fulfils his battle task. In the end the officer gives the happy young soldier a hug "as if to an old battle comrade".

"American Embassy" ("Miguk taesagwan") (1951)[727] is especially interesting as a typical example of the war-time anti-American propaganda which often reached a hysterical pitch.

After an American aircraft is shot down, two American "bastards", a pilot and a gunner, appear amongst the North Korean positions. They carry a letter in several languages with the request to give them food and deliver them to the nearest American embassy. The North Korean soldiers are appalled at the arrogance of the intruders who expect to receive humane treatment after all the atrocities they have committed on Korean soil. Still, the North Koreans feel they must obey the international rules, so they call to divisional headquarters asking what to do with the unwanted guests. After receiving an order to hold them properly until the special servicemen come and pick them up, the Korean soldiers put the Americans in a cell of a former prison where the family members of Korean patriots had been tormented at the hands of the "American and South Korean clique bastards" and which the North Korean soldiers had not yet cleaned. Finding themselves faced with a room full of dead and mutilated bodies, the two "bastards" are scared to death. With trembling lips they ask: "What is this?" to which the ironic answer is: "This is your bloody American embassy!" The cowardly Americans, sure that they will also be tormented, kneel, whine and try to bribe the Korean soldiers with wads of dollar bills only to receive a cold and sturdy rejection: "This is not your bloody America. You can buy your president but not a Korean". The Americans are told that they would not be killed "because

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[725]Yi T'ae-jun, "Paekpae ch'ŏnbae-ro" [One Hundred Times, One thousand times], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip,* Vol.3: 131-134.

[726]Yi T'ae-jun, "Nuga kulbok hanŭnga poja" [Let's See, Who Will Surrender], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip,* Vol.3: 35-140.

[727]Yi T'ae-jun, "Miguk taesagwan" [American Embassy], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak sŏnjip,* Vol.3: 141-146.

Koreans respect international law". But the prisoners are still locked in the awful cell with the words: "Look, what you have done, American butchers. Here is your American embassy. A very typical embassy ..."

Yi Ch'ŏl-ju states that this wartime propaganda piece received the highest praise of the Great Leader himself.[728]

Yi T'ae-jun's writings of the period, crammed with propagandistic messages, have lost their psychological ambiguity and are impoverished in an artistic sense. The last traces of aesthetic refinement can be seen in "The First Fight" where the characters and scenery are still imbued with some visualisable traits (for which the writer would be severely criticized later). His subsequent works are greatly simplified in language and composition and marked by a disregard for the inner development of his characters.[729] Though Yi T'ae-jun's stories were still marked with a higher artistic quality than most of the writings of his colleagues who were largely ex-KAPF members (and the contemporary critics routinely mention this strong side of Yi's works),[730] Yi's post-1945 stories were grossly inferior to his earlier writings if judged purely on their artistic qualities. The complicated interpersonal relations and emotionally charged worlds of Yi T'ae-jun's heroes are narrowed to serve political utilitarianism. Probably the most illustrative in this regard is "The Road to My Native Land" ("Kohyang kil") (1950), another novel about guerillas. A protagonist in the novel, a guerrilla returning to his native village as an intelligence agent, silently witnesses the sufferings of his family at the hands of the "bastards". In order to accomplish his mission the agent does not dare reveal his identity and do anything for his family. The hero turns this tragic personal experience into a positive stimulus for further struggle: "He felt he should be enraged at the larger things, should avenge the more important things."[731]

This utilitarian approach and propagandistic functionalism of Yi T'ae-jun's prose was the very thing that the writer was expected to demonstrate. The single attempt of Yi T'ae-jun to deviate from this common line and add a touch of personality to the obligatory propagandistic utterances was quickly spotted and rebuked by the critics. This occurred when he wrote the short story "Dear People" ("Kogwihan saramdŭl") (1951)[732] which dealt with the officially strongly encouraged topic of Chinese-Korean friendship. In this story Yi T'ae-jun tried to flavor the usual political plot with a hint of romance, but it immediately became an object of criticism.

The seriously wounded Chinese volunteer Chin P'yŏng-su is saved by a beautiful Korean nurse named Kim Ok-sil. The girl applies all her knowledge and

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[728] Yi Ch'ŏl-ju, *Puk-ŭi yesurin,* 235.

[729] As we have mentioned in the previous chapter, the same is applicable to the post- Liberation works of Yi Ki-yŏng.

[730] Interview with Chŏng Ryul; Om Ho-sŏk, *Munye kibon*, 190, 195.

[731] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kohyang kil" [The Road to My Native Land], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip,* Vol.3: 197-198.

[732] Yi T'ae-jun, "Kogwihan saramdŭl" [Dear People], in *Yi T'ae-jun munhak chŏnjip,* Vol.3: 147-159.

devotion to caring for the young soldier – she gives him her own blood, remains vigilant at his bedside all night singing Chinese songs, etc. Some romantic feelings begin to develop between them, but unfortunately the girl dies in the subsequent battle trying to save another wounded soldier. After recovering, Chin P'yŏng-su has a long sentimental talk with the Korean commander Pak O-chŏl who tells him of the heroic life and death of the girl. Chin P'yŏng-su is deeply impressed. He proclaims that the image of the Korean girl Kim Ok-sil "...helped him to understand his own Chinese Liberation Army and Chinese Communist Party better" and to understand "how nobly a person can live". Chinese and Korean soldiers contemplate together the "noble internationalism" which connects their nations and the future life of their generation which will certainly be peaceful and happy. During the conversation the soldiers take inspiration while looking at a wall which boasts the portraits of their "dearest people". These are... the leaders of China and North Korea, together with Generalissimo Stalin, of course.

Though in general the story remains sickly "correct" (indeed, it was a supreme Party leader, not a beautiful girl, who claimed the name of "dearest person" in the story) the minor concession to romance did not go unnoticed. The author of "Dear People" immediately received a polite and respectful yet critical reprimand:

"The appearance of this story devoted to the high ideal of Korean-Chinese friendship is a happy event in our literature. But unfortunately the theme of internationalism was expressed through the romantic relationship of the heroes. Of course there is nothing wrong with love itself ... But in this way this urgent political task is turned into a casual melodrama. Despite the perfect artistic quality of this story, we have to stress that romance is not suitable while depicting a lofty political subject".[733]

Given that, except for "lofty political subjects", nothing else is deemed worthy of depiction in the North Korean literature of the time, the demagogy of this critical assumption is obvious. While Ŏm admits that "there is nothing wrong with love itself" in fact he attacks the slightest hint of romantic feelings in otherwise impeccable Communist heroes. Yi T'ae-jun correctly read the real implications of the critical notion. In his subsequent works he did not permit any romantic frivolity whatsoever.

In any case, in the period between 1946 and 1953, criticism of Yi T'ae-jun was extremely rare. As we have seen, in general the writings of this alleged "purist" fitted perfectly into the propagandistic discourse of the DPRK, and Yi' s prolific endeavors were highly appreciated.[734]

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[733] Om Ho-sŏk, *Munye kibon*, 193-195.

[734] For positive critical accounts of Yi T'ae-jun see: An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kinŭng-kwa ponjil" [The Capacity and Meaning of Literature], in *Ch'ŏngnyŏntŭlŭl wihan munhakron* [Literary Theory for the Youth], Pyongyang: Minju ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 36-38; Han Hyo "Sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-kwa chosŏn munhak", 189. Yi Ki-yŏng in his article "About North Korean Literature" published in the Soviet literary magazine *Zvezda* in 1949 mentions Yi T'ae-jun's

Yi T'ae-jun after 1953: the purge and rejection

For all this initial success however, Yi T'ae-jun's fame and prosperity did not last long. After 1953 he found himself subjected to increasingly severe critical campaigns, conducted by the very same people who had consistently praised him just a few years earlier. Moreover, the works of the writer which had been fervently eulogized, now became objects of harsh criticism. So what was the reason behind this abrupt shift of attitude?

As has been mentioned above, some South Korean scholars are inclined to explain Yi's tragic fate by his immanent incompatibility with Communist ideology. Yet, as we have just seen, the propagandistic works of the writer show no disparity with the official line. These writings do not demonstrate even the slightest trace of dissent or skepticism towards the official values. In my understanding, the real incompatibility which mattered here was of a different nature. While Yi T'ae-jun was eager to follow the official conventions of North Korean literature, he profoundly misunderstood the unofficial, unspoken rules of the Pyongyang literary world, and that became the reason for his eventual failure.

All informants unanimously recollect Yi T'ae-jun as a person who was deeply immersed in his professional activity and paid scant attention either to his political promotion or to the twists and turns of the factional struggle that engulfed the Pyongyang literary world.[735] Being fully focused on his writings and considering these to be of primary importance, Yi T'ae-jun ignored and even openly mocked the political games which constituted an essential part of a writer's life in the DPRK of the 1950s.[736]

The Soviet journalist Arkadii Perventsev who visited Pyongyang in 1950 recalls one remarkable episode. During his meeting with the members of the newly created NKFLA, Perventsev became acquainted with Yi T'ae-jun who complained that in North Korea writers had to spend too much time on political and propagandistic activities such as meetings and rallies. This activity, Yi T'ae-jun claimed, became so time-consuming that Korean writers had no time to pursue their professional goals. Yi T'ae-jun presupposed that "in the Soviet Union the situation must be better in this regard". Predictably, the Soviet journalist rigorously rebuffed the Korean writer and showered him with bombastic Stalinist cliches. He stresses that Yi T'ae-jun underestimated the importance of political activity for a "truly progressive" writer and that it was his honorable duty to be involved in ideological work, etc.[737]

One can only wonder how the 46 year old Yi T'ae-jun who had spent four years in the upper reaches of the Stalinist literary bureaucracy could be naïve enough to share

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prose among the "progressive" works created by writers of "new Korea". (See: Yi Ki-yŏng "O koreiskoi literature" [About Korean literature], *Zvezda*, 1949, #12, 147-148).

[735] Interview with Elena Pak; interview with Chong Ryul, Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 122-123.

[736] Yi Ch'ŏl-ju, *Pukhan yesurin,* 190-191.

[737] A. Perventsev, *V Koree*, 23.

his politically incorrect, not to say dangerous, views with a visiting Soviet journalist. This might be an indication that Yi did not properly understand the actual politics of the Pyongyang literary world.

Yi T'ae-jun's daughter recollects another interesting episode.[738] When Yi T'ae-jun was exiled, he rejected his family's suggestion that he promote himself by concocting another novel about the Great Leader. Yi T'ae-jun refused to follow this path of unabashed flattery. He said that he could not compromise his dignity as a writer and that, not knowing Kim Il Sung close enough personally, he could not write a novel about him. This statement did not imply any hostility towards the Great Leader, but certainly testified to a total absence of political flexibility in Yi T'ae-jun – a proud professional and a bad strategist, this is one trait which he did not change even after being purged.

Neither was he good at maintaining politically safe interpersonal relationships or choosing the right side to join. Though Yi T'ae-jun belonged to the Soviet Korean faction and remained close to the Southerners, this was a consequence in the first instance of his personal sympathies rather than any politically astute choice of the most beneficial alliance. Yi T'ae-jun was known as a reserved person who would avoid noisy parties, did not drink much and had polite and restrained manners. He was generous and kind to his close friends (mostly Soviet Koreans and Southerners) whom he liked to entertain in his house, and with whom he liked to enjoy delicious food together and share long pleasant conversations. Yet this circle was rather narrow. Unlike some of his luckier colleagues such as Yi Ki-yŏng or Min Pyŏng-gyun,[739] Yi did not successfully interact with the wider community and thus could not strike a balance between the fighting factions on the North Korean literary scene.

Considering literary activity to be the basic measure of a writer's worth, Yi T'ae-jun continued to ridicule his old foe Han Sŏr-ya for being a dysfunctional writer. Yi obviously missed the point that the political position of the artistically mediocre but ambitious Han was becoming stronger year by year.[740] At the same time Yi T'ae-jun openly expressed his sympathy for Yi Ki-yŏng, who though being formal member of the KAPF faction lacked real political weight and therefore would be worthless as an ally or sponsor. According to the recollections of Chŏng Ryul, Yi T'ae-jun sincerely respected this "old man" of the North Korean literary world and loved to talk with him about life and literature.

In short, Yi T'ae-jun underestimated the significance of unofficial connections and petty politicking inside the Pyongyang literary world. Thus his fall from grace was pre-ordained by the failure of the factions which initially protected his political fortunes and represented his interests – the South Koreans and the Soviet Koreans. The ascent of

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[738] Kim Hong-gyun, "Wŏlbuk chakka Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi t'onggok-ŭi kajŏksa", 12.

[739] Min Pyŏng-gyun, a poet belonging to the Soviet faction, managed to maintain a good relationship with Han Sŏr-ya. He enjoyed a stable position in the Pyongyang literary world even after the Soviets left Korea. (Interview with Chŏng Ryul).

[740] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

the faction of his long term enemy Han Sŏr-ya after 1953 and the weakening of the positions of his friends, the Southerners and Soviet Koreans, made the shift in Yi T'ae-jun's fortunes just a question of time.

In the next chapter we will analyze the factional struggle in the North Korean literary world in greater detail. For the moment I would like to touch on the particulars of the formal accusations which led to the eventual purge of Yi T'ae-jun.

A noisy accusatory campaign against Yi T'ae-jun began in 1953. It was conducted by critics who constituted Han's close friends and political allies – Ŏm Ho-sŏk, Han Hyo, An Ham-gwang, Hong Sun-ch'ŏl and other representatives of the ex-KAPF faction. Earlier these critics had already contemplated attacks on Yi T'ae-jun and his removal from the literary scene,[741] but these early unsuccessful attempts were largely limited to backstage intrigues. In each instance the Soviet backers managed to protect Yi T'ae-jun. By 1953 the situation had changed considerably and the long-term rivals managed to produce a torrent of defamatory articles against Yi T'ae-jun aimed at destroying the writer.

To comprehend the spirit of this campaign we might look at an article by Yi T'ae-jun's primary "literary executioner" Ŏm Ho-sŏk entitled "The reactionary in Yi T'ae-jun's literature" (Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk ponjil). The article was first published in 1956 and then reprinted in 1961 in *Literature and the Spirit of Modernity (Munhak-kwa hyŏndae chŏngsin).*[742] This work represents a typical example of Stalinist political criticism in its North Korean incarnation – personally abusive, unsubstantiated, illogical and often plainly hysterical. Here are a few quotations from the work.

> "From the very first day when Yi T'ae-jun crawled into North Korea he never missed a chance to establish himself in the North Korean Federation of Literature and Art where he began to search for henchmen. He conspired with Pak Ch'ang-ok, Ki Sŏk-pok, Ch:on Tong-hyŏk, Chŏng Ryul (all of whom were Soviet Koreans and who were once prominent in literary politics – T.G.) and others and indecently engaged in subversive activity within the NKFLA." [743]
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> "In the past Yi has written many novels about love – that is, pornographic novels. How could he consider himself to be a "pure artist"?" [744]
>
> "Coming to the North, Yi took off the mask of " pureness" and took on the mask of realism instead. He camouflaged himself as a progressive writer. But his essence was the same under the mask of "pureness" or realism. His true character is ugly naturalism and this has never changed. When he wrote wearing the mask of "pureness", his literature was naturalistic. And when after Liberation *he*

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[741] Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan,* 117.

[742] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, " Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk ponjil" [The Reactionary in Yi T'ae-jun's Literature], in *Munhak-kwa hyŏndae chŏngsin* [Literature and the Spirit of Modernity], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1961, 436-477.

[743] Ibid., 443.

[744] Ibid., 444.

switched to the mask of realism, his ugly face under this new mask was that of a naturalist who continued to frown and grin."[745]

Accusations against Yi fell into two broad categories. The first group included indictments connected with his pre-1945 literary activities. Note how Yi's past is presented in the articles of Hong Sun-ch'ŏl and An Ham-gwang:

"All the pre-Liberation activity of Yi T'ae-jun is simply artificial rubbish... Yi T'ae-jun viciously strove to prove that the perfect works of the KAPF writers were worthless... Bourgeois ideology permeated all the works of Yi T'ae-jun before Liberation. They all aimed at one goal – distracting the Korean people from the anti-Japanese struggle... Hysterically striving to repudiate the political and ideological content of art, Yi T'ae-jun countered the traditions of true realism of the KAPF, madly and wildly propagating the ideas of "pure art". The heroes of his literature became bourgeois intellectuals, lechers, dirty kisaeng and other useless people... The heroes of his first story "Omonnyŏ" are deeply licentious people. Through their images the author represents the Korean nation as immoral".[746]

"Yi T'ae-jun chose to depict only lowly subjects—depraved people or dreamy youth driven by desperation ... He is certainly nothing but a reactionary bourgeois writer who insisted on the separation of form from content in literature. He organized the reactionary Nine Members Club in order to fight with the KAPF which produced healthy people's literature and he tried to destroy the development of such literature. In fact he is a totally ignorant person..." [747]

Note how easily the critics resort to personal denunciations such as "totally ignorant person", "wildly propagating", "hysterically striving" etc, how they mount accusations without bothering to present any proof. What was even more important, the critics demonstrated a stunning double standard. While attacking Yi for his collaboration with the Japanese,[748] the critics did not mention the fact that virtually every major Korean writer, including all the ex-KAPF members, in the early 1940s collaborated with the colonial authorities to various degrees and occasionally published pro-Japanese works. Even those who had professed radical pro-Communist ideas before the mid-1930s could not resist the Japanese oppression when the pressure began to mount after 1937, and some of them in the later colonial era, like Han Sŏr-ya for example, were notorious for their sycophantic zeal. [749]

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[745] Ibid., 453.

[746] Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, "Munhak-e issŏsŏ tangsŏng-kwa kyegŭpsŏng" [Party Spirit and Class Consciousness in Literature], *Chosŏn munhak,* 1953, #10, 86-90.

[747] An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kyegŭpsŏng" [Class Consciousness in Literature], in *Munhak-ŭi chihyang* [Literary tendencies], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa 1954, 3-41.

[748] The accusations presented here were typical. See: Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds) *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng charyŏ chip. Pukhan p'yŏn* [Collection of Contemporary North Korean Literary Critical Materials], Seoul: T'aehak sa, 1995, 24, 63.

[749] Brian Myers. *Han Sor-ya and North Korean Literature*, 143-156.

Accusing Yi of being passive during the Japanese colonial period, the critics again simply ignored the fact that a passive approach was very common among the Korean intellectuals of the period. Indeed, the idea of the passive suffering of noble but helpless protagonists as a vehicle to express an author's dissatisfaction with the world around them was wide-spread in the Korean literature of the colonial period. The KAPF's "healthy people's literature" was no exception either. As excellent examples one will recollect Han Sŏr-ya's "Transition Period" ("Kwadogi") (1929) or Yi Ki-yŏng's "Poor Village" ("Minch'ŏn") (1925) which we have discussed in the previous chapter. These highly praised works of supposedly "progressive" KAPF writers are filled with the same apolitical pastoralism, melancholic lamentations about the good old days, a dislike of modernity and urban life,[750] etc which An condemns in Yi T'ae-jun's works.

In addition, note the demagogic nature of the criticism in respect of "Omonnyŏ" where the licentious behavior of the heroine is presented as no less than national humiliation for *all Koreans* – despite the fact that Yi T'ae-jun clearly and unequivocally expressed his disapproval of the heroine. Again, the double standard is apparent – Yi Ki-yŏng's first piece of fiction also dealt with a womanizing hero, but the story met with no criticism at all and has remained a part of the official North Korean literary canon to this day.

Another set of accusations which was directed at Yi T'ae-jun's post-Liberation works including "The Road to My Native Land", "The First Fight" and "Tiger Grandma" seemed even more groundless and absurd. If one is able to find in Yi's pre-Liberation works (or in the KAPF works of the period) some tendencies or ideas which, indeed, contradicted the North Korean state ideology, then the post-1945 works of Yi failed to demonstrate even a shadow of dissent from the official line. Nevertheless they also became the objects of harsh criticism. Here are a few examples.

A large part of the above-mentioned harangue by Ŏm Ho-sŏk is devoted to the condemnation of Yi T'ae-jun's "Tiger Grandma", a story about the reforms in the North Korean countryside during the early years of Communist rule. Tiger Grandma, as we will recall, was intended to be a comic folkloric character, the embodiment of rural naivete and archaic prejudice, but at the same time it was also meant to symbolize the popular support allegedly enjoyed by the new regime. However, Ŏm reinterpreted her as a vicious enemy, representing "a political opposition to the Party".[751] Ŏm deliberately overlooked the fact that in the final scene of the story this alleged "class enemy" sent her heartfelt greetings to the Great Leader himself. The critic claimed that Yi harboured hidden malicious intent when he depicted how one person's opposition to the collective may threaten the whole study program. According to the accuser, Yi allegedly wanted to convince readers that "one person is stronger than a collective and hence the Communist party has no influence".[752] Ŏm emphasized that Tiger Grandma

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[750] For an account of the works by Han Sŏr-ya and other KAPF writers see: Brian Myers, ibid., 25-26.

[751] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk ponjil", 459, 467-470.

[752] Ibid., 460-461.

leads the women's group not because of her willingness to study but in order to gain more power. Such a stubborn and uneducated person cannot be a leader of the whole village, Ŏm asserted:

"Let us consider the type of person Tiger Grandma is. She is the embodiment of stubbornness, she is an illiterate person, confined to the darkness of superstition. She ensnares the village women with her superstitions, and the author depicts the village women as coming to her on a daily basis to call on her "wisdom". It means that in this village the arbitrator with the wisdom to solve all the difficult problems is Tiger grandma, the embodiment of superstition and illiteracy. Hence the village women who depend upon this superstition are illiterate and superstitious persons themselves, and the entire 20-family village is not only a den of unlettered people, but also a dark coven of superstition. In 1949 after the great success of the Cultural Revolution and land reform, the spirit of our peasants has risen to a high level. They rely in their daily lives upon solid political rights and cast aside even the faintest shadow of demons with hereditary feudal customs. To depict at this time a whole village still soaked in the dark world of superstition is a fabrication .... It is impossible to find such a person in 1949."[753]

Thus, according to Ŏm, Yi's unpardonable sin was that he depicted an illiterate village of 20 families in 1949, while, as Ŏm claims, illiteracy was completely eradicated in 1948 all over North Korea.[754] It is obvious that the claim to have eradicated illiteracy and traditional superstition so quickly was a far cry from the real situation in Korea.

"The First Fight" and "The Road To My Native Land" also received a high appraisal at first, but in the early 1950s they were criticized for alleged "defeatism".[755] Ŏm particularly accentuated one scene in the novel – a scene of a "people's court". The guerrilla leader, acting as an impromptu tribunal chairman, asks villagers whether the defendant is guilty or not. In response, the mother of the criminal shouts loudly: "He is not guilty!" but she is a lone voice. All other villagers fail to join her and initially maintain an awkward silence. They support the accusation and hate the traitor, but feel uneasy at judging their neighbor. Against the backdrop of politicization and "ideological correctness" in the story, this scene is refreshingly vital and psychologically plausible. The villagers behave according to traditional Korean moral norms which require that they be polite and "save the face" of a fallen opponent (especially since the mother of the enemy is crying at the time). Yet the very vitality of this scene became the pretext for a critical attack. Ŏm claimed that by their silence the peasants demonstrated their hidden hostility to the guerrillas and to Communist power and their support for the traitors: "The villagers don't listen to the guerilla leader and by their silence they even support the cries of the reactionary element's mother... In this novel Yi showed that the villagers did not support the guerillas and sympathized with

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[753] Ibid., 460-461.

[754] Ibid., 460-462.

[755] Ibid., 467.

the enemy. The author himself through the reactionary element's mother's cry of "Not guilty!" reveals his own position and claims that the enemy is not guilty".[756] Ŏm did not mention the fact that on virtually the next page Yi describes how the public mood was changing – people look at the traitor with "eyes flashing with anger" and shout in response to the guerilla leader question's as to whether they can forgive the enemy: "No!", "He must be killed!"

Ŏm also found alleged anti-Guerrilla tendencies in another pro-Communist novel, "The Road To My Native Land" ("Kohyang kil") (1952). This time his accusations were aimed at the scene where the guerilla protagonist, while being on a scouting mission in his native village, witnesses the violence of the fiendish US soldiers toward his family whom he is unable to help. The scene was written with an obvious purpose in mind: to show the "enemies" as blood-thirsty torturers, incapable of any human feeling, and demonstrate the determination of the protagonist to fight the "imperialists". Yet Ŏm, again, manages to turn the situation upside down. He declares that Yi's intention was malicious: he wanted to convince the reader that for the family's sake it is safer to keep a distance from the guerrilla movement and lay down one's arms.[757] By depicting the violence of the enemy, Yi intended to terrify the reader and distract him from the revolutionary path: "Yi T'ae-jun used this scene to suggest to the reader that the family had fallen victim to the guerilla's fight, so it was better to keep away from the guerillas".[758]

In another article Ŏm found other political blunders in this scene in "The Road To My Native Land".

"In this story Yi T'ae-jun depicts unrealistic contradictions... The author describes the scene without any emotion – in order to distort the Party's notion of discipline. The Party's discipline comes from a deep love of the native land. But this love cannot contradict one's love for one's family. Who would sacrifice one's loved ones for the sake of one's native land? In real life the duty of the fighter to protect the country from the American intruders cannot contradict one's love for one's family! ... The writer's intention was to stress that the discipline of our warriors comes not from high morale, but is based on fear and violence".[759]

The demagogy of these accusations appears especially remarkable if we remember that in 1952 this very Ŏm Ho-sŏk referred to the pre-Liberation works of Yi T'ae-jun as "progressive", along with the works of the KAPF's writers, and extolled "The First Fight" and "The Road To My Native Land" as "perfect works, created by fervent patriotic feelings".[760] Adulating "The First Fight" as a "perfect patriotic story"

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[756] Ibid., 468.

[757] Ibid., 469-469.

[758] Ibid., 469.

[759] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Munhak ch'angjake issŏsŏŭi chŏnhyangsŏngŭi munje" [The Problem of Revisionism in Literary Matters], in *Munhak-ŭi chihyang* [Literary Tendencies], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa. 1953, 152-153.

[760]Om Ho-sŏk, *Munye kibon*, 178, 210, 214-215.

Ŏm extols the scene as "revolutionary justice" – the very scene he berates just one year later as "reactionary". He lavishes Yi T'ae-jun's guerilla characters with the following dubious yet supposed positive "compliment": "These heroes know neither romantic feelings nor fear of death. When the enemy removes a comrade from their ranks they do not feel any sentimentalism. Instead these positive heroes fill their hearts with revenge, with a striving for future victory. They step over the cold corpses of their dead comrades and move forward to victory!".[761]

The accusations of Ŏm Ho-sŏk constituted only part of a large-scale campaign which was unfolding against the writer after the collapse of the South Korean faction in 1952-1953. Virtually all the works of Yi T'ae-jun written after Liberation which had initially been highly praised became the subject of similarly frenzied attacks after 1953. Here are a few other examples:

About "After Liberation" An Ham-gwang, another prominent member of Han Sŏr-ya's coterie, wrote: "The novel definitely promotes anti-Soviet ideas. It is filled with bourgeois nationalism".[762] Indeed this was the time when the Soviet Union had to be extolled and eventually, in the late 1950s, An would play an active part in the struggle against Soviet influences.

Regarding "One Hundred Times, One Thousand Times", An Ham-gwang wrote:

"The author looks at the situation from a physiological point of view. The dead bodies of our patriots and the corpses of the American bastards are depicted similarly ... Thus Yi T'ae-jun defiles the sacrifice of our soldiers, propagates the idea of the vanity of fighting, of the devotion of their lives".[763]

This accusation was developed by another critic Hŏ Kyŏng in a more emotional manner:

"In the work 'One hundred times, one thousand times' Yi depicts the dead bodies of the soldiers of our People's Army and the dead bodies of the enemies, the American bastards, in the same manner. He situates these corpses together. If Yi had any feelings for the modern Korean people he could not observe equally the dead bodies of the soldiers of our People's Army who were victims in the sacred fight for the freedom and independence of the country and the disgraceful corpses of the American cannibals who were hired by the American monopolists to take part in a war to conquer our nation only to be roundly punished by our people."[764]

Hŏ Kyŏng, another member of the Han Sol-ya coterie, continued the tirade:

"In 'The First Fight' Yi compares the enemy's cannons which were shooting at our side with the shining moon. If Yi T'ae-jun felt the same hostility towards the enemy as the Korean nation did he would never depict the enemy's cannons so

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[761] Ibid., 255-256.

[762] An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-e kyegŭpsŏng", 29.

[763] Ibid., 29.

[764] Hŏ Kyŏng, *Munhak yesul punya-esŏŭi kyegŭp t'ujaeng* [Class Struggle in Literature and the Arts], Pyongyang: Munhaksŏnjŏnsŏng, 1953, 35.

beautifully – like the shining moon … All these faults are not accidental. Yi T'ae-jun is stubborn in his bourgeois views. He did not wish to notice the drastic economic and cultural changes in our country. The reason why he turned from the people's side could be explained by the fact that he did not want to acknowledge the great success of our socialist literature and art, but instead has been obsessed with the rotten West European literature".[765]

It is significant that the critic focuses on the single rare bright image in Yi T'ae-jun's prose as inappropriate.

An Ham-gwang wrote about "American Embassy": "The author in fact supports the vicious propaganda of our enemies about our army. Our enemies falsely claim that the Korean Army is cruel, it does not follow international law and the norms of humanity, and Yi T'ae-jun in his story repeats this same lie".[766]

This accusation was repeated by Han Sŏr-ya at an "enthusiasts' conference" in Pyongyang in January 1956. He had obviously forgotten the bloody orgies of violence in his own war-fiction, such as the novel "History".[767]

These and other accusations, being parts of a wide political campaign, had nothing to do with literary criticism. They demonstrated a surprising readiness to discard even common sense. The critics did not care about proper substantiation of their argument and simply slung all the mud they could at Yi T'ae-jun. It is symptomatic, however, that the attacks were directed often at the brightest episodes or subject lines in Yi's works. Perspicacious critics did not miss a single spot in which Yi, whilst not retreating a step from his hard-line ideological task, tried to bring some artistic vitality to his work.

From the recollection of Chŏng Ryul, the all too apparent absurdity of these accusations led Yi T'ae-jun initially not to take the situation seriously. For quite a long time he was sure that the dust would eventually settle and the Party would see who was the real writer. Yet it soon became apparent that this was not going to happen. Yi T'ae-jun did not understand that the political situation had changed and as a result of these changes he had lost the political protection which had kept him prominent over the years.

In 1952-1953 all major leaders of the South Korean faction lost their official positions and some of them, including the poet Yi Hwa, faced a show trial. They were accused of being "American spies", "saboteurs" and Japanese police informers", pleaded guilty and were promptly shot or disappeared into the growing ranks of North Korean prison camps. The Soviet faction was also steadily losing its influence and could not scare off Han and his cronies any more. The campaign against Yi T'ae-jun reached its climax in January 1956 when the decision of the KWP (Korean Workers Party) Central Committee castigated Yi as a "reactionary writer" for his long-forgotten participation in the "Nine Members Club". Further condemnation was leveled by Han

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[765] Ibid., 35.

[766] An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kyegŭpsŏng", 29.

[767] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 109.

Sŏr-ya at the "Congress of activists of the Pyongyang KWP city committee's literature and art department" after which Yi T'ae-jun was finally purged.[768] Yet for some time Yi T'ae-jun remained in Pyongyang—at least until October 1957, the moment when his Soviet friend Chŏng Ryul left North Korea. Chŏng Ryul recollects that Yi who came to say goodbye to him, looked very depressed. He repeated: "How happy you are to have an escape hatch. What am I supposed to do now?" Chŏng Ryul tried to encourage his friend but realized that he had nothing to offer.[769]

Information about the subsequent life of Yi T'ae-jun is scarce. According to Min Ch'ung-hwan, Yi's exile from Pyongyang occurred later in 1957, and after this Yi worked as an assistant in the *Nodong Sinmun* office in remote Hamhŭng. In 1958 he was working in a concrete block factory in Hamhŭng. In 1964 Yi was pardoned and for a while worked as a writer attached to the cultural department of the KWP Central Committee. In 1969 he was said to have resided in Kangwondo province, in the working compound of the Kangdong mine and living on meager social benefits.[770] Another source, Elena Davydova (Pak Myŏn-sun), maintains that in exile Yi T'ae-jun worked as a ghost writer, i.e. was forced to write novels which were then published in the official press without mentioning his name (largely as part of the so-called 'creative groups' which began to proliferate in the late 1960s).[771]

The recently published diary of Yi T'ae-jun's daughter provides us with further information. According to this source, Yi T'ae-jun was exiled to Haeju in Hwanghae province where he worked as a pressman in a factory, then in 1964 was ordered to write prose which was then published incognito. In 1967 he received permission to return to Pyongyang where he lived happily with his family for a while. Then in 1974 he was purged again and exiled to Kangwŏn province. Soon after he moved there his wife died of cerebral thrombosis. The date of the writer's death is unknown. The purge and exile of Yi T'ae-jun seriously damaged the careers and personal lives of his five children.[772]

According to Elena Davydova, the figure of Yi T'ae-jun was initially used as the first "scarecrow" of reactionary writers in the North Korean intellectual world. But the situation gradually changed. Yi T'ae-jun, along with other supposedly "dissenting figures" of the time, was simply erased from the official literary history. For example, *Chronology of the history of Korean Literature (Chosŏn munhaksa nyŏndaep'yo)* published in Pyongyang in 1957 omits the name of the writer even from pre-Liberation literary history.[773] As Elena Davydova claims, the average university student in contemporary North Korea has never even heard the name Yi T'ae-jun.

Such was the tragic fate of probably the most promising North Korean writer. A recognized literary talent before Liberation who, despite his formal adherence to "pure

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[768] *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu,* 422.

[769] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[770] *Yi T'ae-jun munhak yŏngu*, 420-422.

[771] Interview with Pak Myŏng-sun.

[772] Kim Hong-gyun, "Wŏlbuk chakka Yi T'ae-jun-ŭi t'onggok-ŭi kajŏksa".

[773] *Chosŏn munhaksa nyŏntap'yo.*

art", had always kept a keen eye on social and national issues, Yi T'ae-jun after 1945 became a sincere sympathizer of Communism which he perceived, primarily, as a set of lofty moral regulations. The writer consciously chose the DPRK over South Korea and from the very outset vigorously immersed himself in Pyongyang's literary activity, eager to serve the new state and new system with his pen. Yi's new works acquired a strong propagandistic flavor, quite in accordance with the imported Soviet maxim that a writer "cannot live in a society and be free from it".

Despite his professional endeavors and initial bureaucratic success, which was a result of his friendly connections with the once mighty Soviet Korean faction and the South Korean Communists, Yi T'ae-jun failed to survive in the world of literary bureaucracy. Obviously, the reasons for Yi's tragic fate lay not in the alleged "dissident inclinations" of the writer, nor in his immanent incompatibility with the Communist idea. At least, such alleged inclinations or incompatibility cannot be traced in his post-1945 works which if anything every year were becoming politically more orthodox and aesthetically dull. This is reason to believe that his sorry fate was determined by a lack of political awareness. Yi T'ae-jun underestimated the importance of politicking and concentrated exclusively on his professional duties. He would establish contacts with people for pleasure or out of mutual sympathy, not for any politically useful connections. In this regard he was not much different from Yi Ki-yŏng, but the latter was careful to avoid unnecessary confrontations with anybody. Yi T'ae-jun was different: he would often express his disdain towards particular individuals simply because of his own personal antipathies or idiosyncrasies and not in order to disassociate himself from unwanted political links or to join the current prominent opposition group. In short, Yi T'ae-jun was no politician, so he was successful only whilst his friends were at the top of the Pyongyang literary world. When the fortunes of his factions turned sour Yi T'ae-jun had no opportunity to improve his personal fate by employing some cunning ruse. He just sank with the losers.

The logical consequence of this campaign was the complete exclusion of Yi T'ae-jun's works from the North Korean literary discourse. If one can doubt the value of Yi's post-Liberation writings in this regard, the elimination of Yi T'ae-jun's pre-Liberation prose from North Korean libraries and bookshops is certainly a matter for regret. Thus the North Korean readership was denied access to one of the brightest pieces of Korean creative writing, to the works which constituted a quintessence of the best Korean literature of the 1920s-1940s

Yet, the campaign against Yi T'ae-jun had another important consequence. It set the real scale of values and priorities for North Korean artists. The fate of this talented and ideologically loyal writer clearly demonstrated to his colleagues that neither professionalism nor eagerness to serve the regime actually guaranteed one's success or survival. North Korean writers came to realize that, as Brian Myers precisely noted, "their careers would depend less on performance than on access to power",[774] and we must add, on one's personal and factional connections.

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[774] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 152.

As we shall see in the next chapter, this became a major pattern of action in the North Korean literary world in the early 1950s, and Yi T'ae-jun was just one of the victims.

Chapter 5

NORTH KOREAN CRITICS AS POLITICAL EXECUTIONERS: "LOOKING UPWARD"

In this chapter we will analyse the specifics of North Korean literary critique in 1945-1960 and its role in the formation of North Korean literature.

The study of available materials gives us good reason to presume that in analysing the patterns of activity of North Korean critics, a scholar should reject the prism of rigid theoretical dictums and search, first of all, for the pragmatic interests behind the official statements. Otherwise a scholar can be trapped in endless contradictions and inconsistencies. Such problems can be traced, for example, in the works of South Korean scholar Chang Sa-sŏn who studied the prolific North Korean critic and literary bureaucrat An Ham-gwang. Analyzing An's post-Liberation activity, Chang emphasizes such trends as An Ham-gwang's "anti-rightist tendency", "anti-ultra-leftist tendency", "absorption of progressive Soviet culture", "Party spirit" etc. As the specific interests of the critic, the scholar stresses his interest in the "problem of personality", the "importance of lyricism", and the "beauty of language". Considering all this, Chang concludes that An Ham-gwang "made attempts to look at literature from a rational, objective point of view, taking into account all aspects, such as worldview, imagery and form".[775]

At first glance this interpretation appears convincing. "Anti-rightist" or "anti-ultra-leftist" rhetoric was indeed at some periods an important part of An Ham-gwang's vocabulary. The problem was, however, that this rhetoric had little to do with the actual essence of the literary policy conducted by An Ham-gwang. An could forget about the necessity to promote "Party spirit" when he venerated as a "model work" the story written by his boss Han Sŏr-ya "Brothers and Sisters" ("Nammae"), even if its characters acted in an extraordinarily passive, tearful, and blatantly non-Communist way. At the same time he could rudely harangue "Kayagŭm" ("The Kaya Harp") of Kim Sa-ryang, an ally of the rival Soviet Korean faction, for the same passivity of the protagonist and thus his violation of the ever-present "Party spirit" – although Kim Sa-ryang's character certainly conducts himself in a more pro-active way than Han's "model" protagonist.[776] Neither the "lyricism" nor the "beauty of language" which An may pronounce as an important quality in literature, protected the talented writers Yi T'ae-jun and Yim Hwa from his wild attacks during the defamation campaigns of 1953-1956. On the contrary, An Ham-gwang *blamed* the writers for these very qualities, treating them as "reactionary", "bourgeois" and "naturalist".[777]

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[775] Chang Sa-sŏn, "An Ham-gwang haebang ihu hwaldong yŏngu" [A Study of An Ham-gwang's Activity After Liberation]. *Kukŏ Munhak #126* , 372-374.

[776] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 49.

[777] An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kyegŭpsŏng", 3-41. Take a look, for instance, at the following statement from this work: "The characteristic trait of the reactionary worldview of Yim Hwa is

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 demagogy, 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.[778] 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"[779]) 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

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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).

[778] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Saenghwalŭi chinsil-kwa sasiljuŭi-rŭl wihayŏ" [For the Truth of Life and Realism], in *Sae hyŏnsilkwa munhak* [New Reality and Literature], Pyongyang: Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa, 1954, 13-19.

[779] Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, "Munhak-e issŏsŏŭi tangsŏng-kwa kyegŭpsŏng" [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, Ŏm 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".[780] 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,[781] 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.[782] While An Ham-gwang was known as quite educated and an ambitious author, his future colleague Ŏm Ho-sŏk was widely treated as quite an ignorant and timid rustic.[783] 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".[784] Contemporaries noted a similar "thirst for

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[780] Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 782.

[781] See Chang Sa-sŏn, "An Ham-gwanggŭi haebang ihu hwaldong yŏngu".

[782] Chang Sa-sŏn, "Han Hyo-ŭi haebang ijŏne pip'yŏng hwaldong yŏngu" [A Study of the Critical Activity of Han Hyo Before Liberation], *Kukŏ kukmunhak* #117 (1996.11), 303-325.

[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.[785] 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).[786] 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".[787]

"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".[788]

"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?"[789]

The bellicose demagogy 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.

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[785] Chang Sa-sŏn, "Han Hyo-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.

[788] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Nodong kyegŭp-ŭi hyŏngsang-kwa mihaksang-ŭi myŏtkaji munje" [Problems of the Images of the Working Class and Aesthetics], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1953, #11, 124.

[789] An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kyegŭpsŏng", 32-35.

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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk berated the traditional Korean novel *Story About Ch'unghyang (Chunghyangjŏn)* for its "excessive eroticism" and its expression of "empty love craving".[790] In 1954, when the nationalistic mood began to dominate Pyongyang's political arena, this same Ŏm Ho-sŏk summoned the North Korean writers "to learn how to depict people's feelings from our glorious classic *Story About Ch'unghyang*".[791] 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."[792] 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.[793] 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 Ki-ch'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".[794]

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[790] See Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Munhak chakp'um-ŭi hyŏngsanghwa-e taehayŏ" [On Imagery in Literary Writings], in *Ch'ŏngnyŏndulŭl wihan munhakron*, 74; Ŏm Ho-sŏk, *Munye kibon,* 64.

[791] Ŏm 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 paljŏn 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 paljŏn kwajŏng" [The Process of the Development of Fiction After 15 August 1945], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng charyo chip 2 (Ibukp'yŏn)* [Collection of Contemporary North Korean Literary Critical Materials], Seoul: T'aehaksa, 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 "Ssaunŭn Chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏtkkaji t'ŭkching" [A Few Important Characteristics of 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 kyegŭpsŏng", 3-41).

[794] For instance, An's article, "Ssaunŭn Chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏtkkaji t'ŭkching" written in August 1951 is steeped in expressions of servility to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn (An Ham-gwang, "Ssaunŭn Chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏtkkaji t'ŭkching",116-143.)

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 "*Ŭnghyang* 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 "Ŭnghyang incident".[795] 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 (Ŭnghyang)* 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.[796] 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,

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[795] Concerning this incident see: Ku Sang, *Siwa salmŭi not'ŭ* [Notes on Poetry and Life], Seoul: Chayu munhaksa, 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".[797] (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) .[798]

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.[799]

All the contributors shared a strong feeling of pride in the anthology.[800] 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.[801] 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.[802] 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.[803] 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".[804]

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".[805]

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".[806] Pak Chong-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*

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[799] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[800] Ku Sang, *Siwa salmŭi not'ŭ,* 145-146; Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[801] Ku Sang *Siwa salmŭi not'ŭ,* 154.

[802] Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 876-878.

[803] Yi Ki-bong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin,*194.

[804] Ku Sang, ibid. Quoted in Yi Ki-bong *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin,* 194.

[805] " Sijip *Ūnghyang* p'irhwa sakkŏn chŏnmalgi" [The Details of *Ūnghang* Incident], in *Ku Sang munhak sŏnjip* (Seoul, 1975) , 404. Quoted in Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 47.

[806] Han Hyo, "Saeroun simunhak-e paljŏn", 79.

American imperialism. They tried to slander the democratic system of North Korea. They craved for the reconstruction of the old capitalist society".[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".[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.[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.[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,

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[807] Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenia (formirovanie i stanovlenie sotsrealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena*, 13.

[808] Sin Ku-hyŏn, *Koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia*, 6.

[809] Ku Sang, *Siwa salmŭi not'ŭ*, 145-155.

[810] E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo,* 48-209.

the seeming incomprehensibility of the "Ŭnhyang 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'ang-man, the then ideological tsar of the regime, to launch a similar campaign in North Korea – tellingly, the North Korean official scholar Pak Chŏng-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.*[811]

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".[812]

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 "Ŭnghyang 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 "Ŭnghyang 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.[813]

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".[814] Indeed, the "inspectors" sent to Wŏnsan despite the disparities in their previous ideological positions and personal inclinations (Song Yŏng was a fervent

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[811] Pak Chong-sik, *Sovremenneja koreiskaja literatura posle osvobozhdenija,* 13.

[812] *O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati* [About Party and Soviet Presses], Collection of documents. Moscow, 1954, 346. Quoted in E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo,* 391.

[813] Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn,* 877.

[814] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 47.

proletarian writer while Ch'oe Myŏng-ik had been known previously as a mild and politically moderate person)[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.[816]

Another trait of North Korean criticism which the "Ŭnghyang 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,[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")[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".[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.[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,

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[815] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[816] E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo,* 388, 390.

[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.

[818] Han Hyo, "Saeroun simunhak-e paljŏn", 79.

[819] Ibid.,79-80.

[820] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 39.

in an "incident" with another collection of poetry, *Munjang Tokpon (Anthology of Writings).* [821]

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.[822]

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 Il 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,[823] 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), *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng 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 *Paektusan* 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'ŏe Sŭng-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 Sŭng-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

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[824] Ch'oe Chae-bong, "Pundan sidae piunŭi p'yŏngnong ka An Ham-gwang" [An Ham-gwang, a North Korean Critic with a Tragic Fate], *Hankyŏrye*, 1998.06.16: 12.

[825] See, for instance, An Ham-gwang, "Munhak-ŭi kyegŭpsŏng", 3-41.

[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.[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".[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'ŏl-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).[829] However, her foes missed the major point – Ch'oe, being a determined, or by Yi Ch'ŏl-ju's definition, "brazen" personality, did not hesitate to ask for protection from Kim Il Sung himself. Kim obliged, and the Soviet Koreans were forced to retreat.

Chŏng 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 Chŏng 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, Chŏng 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 Chŏng 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.

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 Il Sung's grand strategy. Though his suspicions of the Domestic faction were mounting, a direct

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[827] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[828] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 80.

[829] Yi Ch'ŏl-ju, *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 salvoes of the critic Ŏm 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 innŭnya)* (1951). Before analysing Ŏm'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.

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[830] Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung,* 92.

[831] *Sovremennaia koreiskaia poeziia* [Modern Korean Poetry], Moscow: Izdatelstvo inostrannoi literatury, 1950, 10.

[832] An Ham-gwang, "Kosanghan realizŭmŭi nonŭi-wa ch'angchak paljŏn tosang-ŭi munje" [Discussions over 'High Realism' and Questions of the Development of Creative Writing], *Munhak yesul,* 1949, # 10, 13.

[833] Li Gien, "O koreiskoi literature" [On Korean Literature], in Russian translation, *Zvezda,* 1949, #12, 147-148.

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" ("Kayagŭm") (1949) or Han Sŏr-ya's "Soldiers' Farewell" ("Ch'ŏnbuŏl") (1950).[834] 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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk.[835] 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;[836] 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 ŏnŭ gos-e innŭnya") (December 1950), "Carry, Wind!" ("Paramiyŏ chŏnhara") (February 1951), "On My Blood That Coloured the White Snow Red" ("Hŭnnunŭl pulkke multŭrin na-ŭi 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 ŏnŭ gos-e innŭnya)* published in 1951, were also devoted to the war theme.[837] 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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Munhak paljŏn-ŭi 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.

[837] *Yim Hwa chŏnjip* [Anthology of Yim Hwa's Literature], Seoul: Pakijŏng, 2000, Vol.1: 317-323, 332-336, 337-342.

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".[838] The critics, even those belonging to Han Sŏr-ya's inner circle, also praised the anthology highly at first.[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.[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!"[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

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[838] Yi Ch'ŏl-ju, *Puk-ŭi yesurin,* 93.

[839] An Ham-gwang, "Ssaunŭn chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏtkkaji t'ŭkching", 121, 123.

[840] A.N. Taen, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury,* 190-199; V.I. Ivanova," Sovetskaja voenno-patrioticheskaia literatura v Koree 40-50-kh godov", 131, 133.

[841] *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".[842]

"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 ŏpsnŭn 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".[843]

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, Ŏm 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.[844] These notions visibly reflected the Soviet official harangues against "formalism" and "bourgeois tendencies" which increased just prior to Stalin's death. Yet Ŏm'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

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[842] Take, for instance, the popular wartime poem by Olga Berggolts "Pervoe pis'mo na Kamu" [The First Letter to Kama], 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 chŏnjip,* 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 "Ŭnhyang incident", but to contemporary writers who still enjoyed a high official standing.

At first glance, Ŏm'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 *Ŭnhyang* anthology. Then, however, the unusual began – Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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. Ŏm Ho-sŏk, as we have mentioned above, criticised the agrarian novel *Land* by Yi Ki-yŏng for the excessive "love relationships of the heroes"[845] 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". [846] 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"[847], 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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk refered 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, Ŏm 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". Ŏm stressed

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[845] Ŏm 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".[848]

Ŏm'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 Ŏm 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. Ŏm'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).*[849]

As positive examples of completely flawless contemporary works, Om 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 Ŏm, 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 nyŏndo munhak ch'angjo-ŭi sŏnggwa-wa chŏnmang" ("The successes and Prospects of Our Literature in 1951") in *Inmin*, 1952, #1 and Sin Ko-song's "Yŏngŭk-e issŏso hyŏnsikjuŭi mit chayŏnjuŭijŏk chanjaewa-ŭi t'ujaeng" ("The Fight with the Remnants of Formalism and Naturalism in North Korean Drama") in *Munhak yesul,* 1952, #1.[850] Both works were written by critics from the KAPF faction[851] and broached the subject

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[848]Ŏm Ho-Sŏk, *Munye kibon*, 151, 154.

[849] Ibid., 210.

[850] An Ham-gwang, "1951nyŏndo munhak ch'angjoŭi sŏnggwa-wa cho'nmang" [The Successes and Prospects of Our Literature in 1951], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng charyo chip 2*, 143-163; Sin Ko-song, "Yŏngŭk-e issŏsŏ hyŏngsikjuŭi mit chayŏnjuŭijŏk chanjae-waŭi t'ujaeng" [The Fight with the Remnants of Formalism and Naturalism in North Korean Drama], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), *Hyŏndae munhak pip'yŏng charyo chip 2,*164-173.

[851] 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 Ŏm 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'ujaeng"), 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 Ŏm'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. Ŏm 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" Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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, Ŏm 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

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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 Il Sung, Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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 Ŏm's poor knowledge of the relevant terminology. According to Ki Sŏk-pok, Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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 Il Sung himself. Ki stated that Ŏm 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, Ŏm did just the contrary. Though he had the official right to look through literary works before they were published in order to correct them, Ŏm 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. Ŏm'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 invective with numerous examples of the Soviet practice and theory of literary matters.

The logic of Ki Sŏk-pok's commentary differed little from Ŏm 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'ŏl-ju's memoirs. According to his account, most of the contemporary writers supported the position of Ki Sŏk-pok, since all agreed that Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk's unreasonable demands. Ŏm insinuated that by depicting the soldier who abandoned his wounded comrade, Kim Nam-ch'ŏn abused the lofty feeling of fighting comradeship. Of course, Ŏm was just flattering the Party. As for the accusation of the "excessively lyrical thoughts" before death or the "cheap sentimentalism" which, Ŏm claimed, the Communist protagonist should not allow himself, Yi Ch'ŏl-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'ŏl-ju pinpointed the inner motives of Ŏm's attacks: "What Ŏm 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'ŏl-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, Ŏm would probably blame Kim Nam-ch'ŏn for that outcome [as well]".[853]

With respect to the verses of Yim Hwa, Yi Ch'ŏl-ju admitted that he did not read all the poems from the anthology, only some parts of them. Yet Yi Ch'ŏl-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". Ŏm'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'ŏl-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'ŏl-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*, Ŏm Ho Sŏk again cited Yim Hwa among other "patriotic poets". In the article he failed

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[852] Yi Ch'ŏl-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 Ŏm 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 Ŏm'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'ŏngnyŏndŭl-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, Ŏm 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 Ŏm 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 refered to them as the founding fathers of the KAPF and "the most talented writers of our day",[862] Ŏm Ho-sŏk brazenly adulated the very poet whom he had recently subjected to the most severe harangues. Ŏm 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

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[856] Ŏm 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 (ibukp'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 (ibukp'yŏn) 2,* 223-240.

[858] Han Hyo, "Chosŏn munhwa-e issŏso sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-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] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Munhak chakp'um-ŭi hyŏngsanghwa-e taehayŏ", 86, 90.

[861] Han Hyo, "Sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-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.[863] It is hard to believe that the poem, described by Ŏm in such a complimentary way, is the same "Carry, Wind" which had been subjected to Ŏm'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 Ŏm 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 Ŏm included some other writers on his black list 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 Ŏm 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.[864] 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.[865] 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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[863] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Munhak chakp'um-ŭi hyŏngsanghwa-e taehayŏ", 108, 110.

[864] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea,* 438.

[865] 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. Vasiukevich 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 Hŏng-yŏng was arrested, both Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn "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" ("Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t'ujaeng-e issŏsŏŭi chosŏn 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

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[866] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 438.

[867] A. Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung,* 95.

[868] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 85.

[869] Han Hyo, "Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t'ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ŭi chosŏn munhak", 391-522.

[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'ŏn 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 Yŏng-hŭi 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

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[871] Han Hyo, "Sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-kwa chosŏn munhak".

[872] Han Hyo, "Uri munhak-ŭi saeroun songgwa" [The New Successes of Our Literature], *Munhak yesul,* 1952, #8, 34-56.

[873] Han Hyo, "Chosŏn munhwae issŏso sahoejuŭi reallijŭm-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 realijŭm-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 Ŏm 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

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[877] Han Hyo, "Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t'ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ŭi chosŏn munhak", 442.

[878] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[879] Han Hyo, "Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t'ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ŭi chosŏn munhak", 504.

[880] Ibid., 497-498.

[881] Ibid., 467.

machine" Ŏm 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

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[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'ŏn 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'ŏn 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 Ŏm Ho-sŏk'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-yŏng's "Paper Factory", Han Sŏr-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] Ŏm's statements about "villains" are equally false and heavily politicised:

"Before Liberation Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, 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".

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[887] Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, "Munhak-e issŏsŏŭi tangsŏng-kwa kyegŭpsŏng", 86.

[888] Ibid., 88.

[889] Ibid., 92-93.

[890] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Nodong kyegŭp-ŭi hyŏngsang-kwa mihaksang-ŭi myŏtkkaji munjae", 120.

[891] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-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 demeanour 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 Ŏm'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 the Domestic 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,

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[892] Ŏm Ho-sŏk, "Nodong kyegŭp-ŭi hyŏngsang-kwa mihaksang-ŭi myŏtkkaji munjae", 122, 124.

[893] For an account of this development, see Andrei Lankov, "Kim Il Sung's Campaign Against the Soviet Faction in Late 1955 and the Birth of Chuch'e", *Korean studies,* Vol. 23, 1999: 43-67.

[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 Akhmatova 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 Chŏng-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".[895] In late October 1955 Chŏng Ryul and a few other high-ranking Soviet Korean officials (Pak Ch'ang-ok, Chŏng Dong-hyŏlk, Pak Yŏng-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"[896]. 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'ae-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*".[897]

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.[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'ŏn 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".[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, [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".[901]

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[898] Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature,* 70, 100.

[899] Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

[900] Andrei Lankov, "Kim Il Sung's Campaign Against the Soviet Faction in Late 1955 and the Birth of Chuch'e", 49.

[901] Kim Il Sung. *Sasang saŏp-esŏ kyojojuŭi-wa hyŏngsikjuŭir-ŭl t'oejihago chuch'e-rŭl hwangnip hal te taehayŏ*, 4-5.

Unlike Yi Ki-yŏng who, despite being frequently eulogized as a classic KAPF member, kept a low profile during this campaign,[902] 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'ae-jun. 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'ae-jun, 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 Sŭng-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'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, undertook anti-Party actions, attacking writers who were truly loyal to the Party while encouraging Yim Hwa, Yi T'ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn"[903].

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'ae-jun'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 hoeŭi-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 1956[909] 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] Ŏm 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.

[905] An Ham-gwang, "Chosŏn-ŭi hyŏnsilkwa p'yŏnghwaŭi ryŏkryang" [Korean Reality and Potentials for Peace], *Chosŏn munhak,* #3, 1956, 119-139.

[906] Han Sŏr-ya, "Tang-ŭi munye chŏngch'aek-kwa hamkke paljŏnhanŭn uri munhak yesul" [Our literature and Arts Which are Developing According to the Cultural Policy of Our Party], *Chosŏn munhak,*1956, #4, 119.

[907] Yun Si-ch'ŏl, "Inmin-ŭl pibanghan pandong munhak-ŭi tokso (Kim Nam-ch'ŏn 8.15 haebanghu chakp'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 Il Sung against the Soviet Faction", 56.

[909] Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il 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[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 Myŏng-ik which occurred around the same time.[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.[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 officialdom 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

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[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.

[912] Look, for instance, at the article by Kim Myŏng-su, "Purŭjoa ideorrogijŏk chanjae-waŭi t'ujaeng-ŭl wihayŏ" [For the Fight With the Remnants of Bourgeois Ideology], in *Munhak chihyang,* 45-55.

[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 commonalties 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-yŏng 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-yŏng 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".

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 vilifiying 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".[914] 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 Il 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 Il 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'ae-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.[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,[916] but in general these prescriptions were commonly known and usually

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[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 kontrolem* ZK [Writers and Censors. Soviet Literature of the 1940s Under the Political Control of the Central Committee], Moscow: Rossia molodaia, 1994; I. Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*. [People, Years and Life], Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961; K. Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniya*; or E. Bulgakova, *Dnevnik Eleny Bulgakovoi* [Diary of Elena Bulgakova], Moscow: Knizhnaja palata, 1990.

[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 "Ŭnhyang 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

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

[917] R. Medvedev, *O Staline i stalinisme* [On Stalin and Stalinism], Moscow: Progress, 1990, 364-365.

[918] E. Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' i iskusstvo*, 104, 146-159.

[919] D.E. Pollard, "The Short Story in the Cultural Revolution", *China Quarterly*, Issue 73 (Mar.,1978):99-121.

low.[920] 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.[921] 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.[922] 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.[923]

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] *Rezolutziya TsK VKP (b) "O perestroike literaturno hudozhestvennyh organizatzii"* [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

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[924] T.A.Hsia, "Heroes and Hero-Worship in Chinese Communist Fiction", *China Quartely,* Issue 13 (Jan-Mar., 1963): 113-138, 115.

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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