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North Korean Literature:
Margins of Writing Memory, Gender, and Sexuality

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

North Korean Literature:
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by

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This dissertation examines literary works from North Korea from the 1970s and 1980s, paying particular attention to the way writers express their creativity through the discussion in memory, gender, and sex. To think that North Korean writers are conditioned to produce works that only praise Kim Il Sung and the Party may a short-sighted assessment of their literary practices and culture. Ever since the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Committee of the Worker's Party in 1967—where Juche ideology and the monolithic policy were instituted as the guiding principles of every aspect of North Korean life—

literature, film, and artworks changed to adopt the new system of celebrating Kim Il Sung, the Party, and the nation. Indeed, the writing tradition and culture changed for the members of the Writer's Union. What was known as propagandist literature became even more tightly controlled under the new decree of the monolithic policy. This monolithic policy gave rise to a singular voice that dominates and eliminates all other voices that may contend the Kim Il Sung regime. Writers were expected to (and in some cases ordered to) comply with the singular voice that celebrates the nation. However, even amid this radical change in North Korea, writing has the power to subvert, satirize, and disrupt the teleology of the grand narrative of the nation-state. This dissertation engages in the power of writing found in moments where the writers discuss the topics of memory, gender, and sexuality.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Preface

National Security Law of the Republic of Korea
Title 2: Article 7, Section 1
Individuals, who are conscious of the effects of endangering the existence and security of the nation or the basic tenets of the free world democracy and praise, encourage, proliferate or sympathize with antinational groups, their affiliates, or those who receive direct orders from these groups and thereby cause national uprising, will face a sentence of seven years or less.
Title 2: Article 7, Section 5
Individuals, who produce, purchase, copy, possess, exchange, distribute, sell, or acquire documents, art, or any literary writings, will face the appropriate sentence.[1]

I was reading a text in a packed subway in Seoul on my way home after a long afternoon of researching on the fifth floor of the National Library. I couldn't help but notice an elderly glancing over my shoulder. He recognized that the text I was reading was the Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. He let out a guffaw followed by, "My, how times have changed."

Indeed, times have changed in South Korea, where not more than a decade ago, it would have been unimaginable for a South Korean to walk around in public (or sit leisurely in a subway) openly reading a North Korean text. I am not referring to texts about North Korea, but texts from North Korea. Now, the elderly man assumed I was a South Korean citizen because of my appearance, which may have elicited such a response. He did not know I was an American citizen and a Ph.D. student at an American academic institution visiting Korea to conduct research for my dissertation. In fact, I'm

[1] http://likms.assembly.go.kr/law/jsp/law/Law.jsp?WORK_TYPE=LAW_BON&LAW_ID=A1465&PROM_NO=11042&PROM_DT=20110915&HanChk=Y

not sure if his awareness of my background would've changed his perception of how much South Korea has changed over the years; it may reinforce it.

The "times" I was in, at the time I was sitting in the subway, could not have been a more tenuous situation between the two Koreas since the declaration of nuclear weapons in 2003 and nuclear testing in 2006. The Ch'ŏnan ship sank as a result of an alleged North Korean mine, killing forty-six seamen. Later that year, North Korea announced a prospective successor for Kim Jong Il followed by a heavy shelling of missiles to Yŏngp'yŏng island, raising suspicions of an imminent war. Times were certainly not peaceful for Korea in 2010, but how much of those "times" have really changed?

The sinking of the ship and the shelling of missiles saturated news media for weeks, analyzing the events, predicting future events, and preparing for any sort of counter-measures should there be a war. But my greatest shock to all that was happening between the Koreas was the indifferent attitude of most South Koreans, who were more concerned about negotiations with the FTA (Free Trade Agreement) on beef, President Lee Myŏng-bak's soft stance against the U.S., the lawsuit between Apple and Samsung, the popularity of the Korean Wave (*hallyu*), etc. That year, Korea commemorated its sixtieth year since the outbreak of the Korean War, and many South Koreans don't seem to think there will be another one. That is, they feel as though South Korea's economic growth has somehow ended of the war, and that there are now larger problems to deal with than battling over polemical ideologies. Certainly, times have changed.

The elderly man's comment may have derived from his Cold War upbringings, which now has very little leverage in political conversations with the younger generation who couldn't care less about North Korea, unification, or the recent death of Kim Jong Il. It was precisely at this historical moment, where the waxing of "who cares about North Korea" and the waning of the Cold War mentality exist ever so clearly, that I believed another look at North Korean literature would need to find its "place" in academia in both South Korean and American institutions.

My goal is obviously not to restore Cold War sentiments and to view North Korea as an object of inquiry; instead, it is to create a space in which dialogues can emerge so that improved understandings of the seemingly divergent cultures can help shape the changing times to come. Times may have changed for South Koreans, but times must continue to change in a direction that considers North Korean literature a serious academic component to the history of modern Korean literature rather than for it to remain in the margins of consciousness.

Introduction

If North Korea appears to be unchanging, unchangeable actor on the international stage, it is probably because the changes the country is now undergoing are unfamiliar and therefore not easily perceptible to the outside world rather than because North Korea is truly defying change. (Kwon and Chung 2012, 13)

When one worker, in Ha Chŏng-hi's *Chinsim* (Truthfulness, 1981), says, "There aren't too many people here, but all kinds of things happen" to female protagonist Sim Yŏng-hŭi, she responds, "It's because it's undoubtedly the daily life of people" (*Yŏksi ingan saenghwalinikkayo*). The operative word here is "because." It is "because" of the people or it is predicated on the interactions between people that all kinds of contingencies happen. In *Yŏdŏl sigan* (Eight Hours, 1986), author Ri Hŭi-nam uses the word *ttŭt pak'e* which means surprisingly, accidentally, or out of the ordinary to refer to human life or the circumstances. That is to say, human life is unaccountable, uncontrollable, and therefore unpredictable, which is a counterintuitive thought against the state ideology that attempts to control and measure the individual within a collective organization.

There is much to gain from these two North Korean writers. Their worldview of human life and human interactions is predicated on irreducible transformations that take flight beyond the parameters of calculation, identification, and prescription. These two writers, along with others whom I will be examining in this book, demonstrate that literature or the practice of writing is

not a self-contained entity that only reflects or mirrors the state ideology but is a modality through which language diffracts and destabilizes a singular didactic reading, opening up a plurality of readings. The efficacy of the writers' imaginings is not only to reiterate the beautiful world of the DPRK, but, more importantly, to delineate the beauty of complex individuals who struggle to rationalize and to make sense of their identities amid their living conditions. In other words, state ideology pervasive in North Korean narratives is, at best, an ostensible appropriation to secure the writers' livelihood rather than an earnest attempt to educate the masses, and that the practice of writing always gestures beyond itself and into a realm of imaginations.

The overwrought presentation of propaganda may create an insipid reading experience for those outside the system, but this may not only be a symptom for outsiders. Is it possible to think that North Korean readers are wary of their own imposing propaganda and that writers strain to produce such literature? Or that the official image of socialist vanguards in literature and other media representations, who appear to have devoted their entire lives to the socialist cause, have been a discursive construction of didacticism to the masses and that North Koreans have been negotiating the private and public, individual and collective all along, projecting a heterogeneous hope for the nation—one that does not involve communism as the final resting point?

Of course, foreign diplomacy during the George W. Bush era limited the possibilities of open dialogue with North Korea, ossifying the binary of Us and

Them. Thinking otherwise than a barbaric, irrational regime was greatly delimited in scope when North Korea was enlisted as a member of Bush's "axis of evil." Though there have been efforts to demystify these regimes under the "axis of evil," the very claim of "axis" and "evil" already determines binaries that frame a prescribed consciousness. *Words Without Borders*[2] published a collection of stories from countries branded as the "axis of evil." The editor of this collection notes:

> This book was born in conscientious objection to the use of 'axis of evil' rhetoric and to the OFAC's apparent fear of 'free trade' in ideas and literature. [...] Rather, we aim simply to stimulate international conversation through literature, with all its complexity and nuanced insights into the ideas, beliefs, daily lives and articles of reference of people in other cultures, who are thinking and writing in languages other than English.
>
> In the case of North Korea, our initial expectation of finding "samizdat"[3] literature turned out to be naïve; all that we could find was in fact propaganda literature. In North Korea, it seems there are not only things that must not be said, but every work must in the end praise the Great Leader or it never sees the light of day. (xix)

Despite the good intentions of exposing North Korean literature to foreign readers, the editor (knowingly or unknowingly) uses binary metaphors to describe the life of writers and the literature in North Korea: light/dark, public/private,

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[2] *Literature from the "Axis of Evil:" Writing from Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Other Enemy Nations*. Words Without Borders Anthology. (New York: The New Press, 2006).

[3] ***samizdat,*** (from Russian *sam*, "self," and *izdatelstvo*, "publishing"), literature secretly written, copied, and circulated in the former Soviet Union and usually critical of practices of the Soviet government. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/520512/samizdat.

open/secret, and praise/criticize, as if binaries are the only way of writing, reading, and understanding North Korean literature—that if it's not the latter than it must be the former. In fact, the expectation of finding "samizdat" literature in North Korea already frames the binary perception, which then leads to an irresponsible conclusion that "every work must in the end praise the Great Leader or it never sees the light of day."

But no claim by a foreigner has been more reckless than that of Adam Johnson, who teaches creative writing at Stanford University. After his visit to North Korea in 2007, he concludes with unwavering certainty:

> This truly totalitarian narrative is difficult for us to conceive in America. But remember that North Korea is a nation without literary art. If we define art to mean revealing of the truth and speaking to the human condition, there has been no art whatsoever since the nation's founding. […] Imagine a world in which no writer has written a literary novel in sixty years. Imagine a place where not a single person has read a book that is truly about the character at its center.[4]

Johnson's single visit to North Korea seems to have made him an expert in the sixty some odd years of history, politics, economics, and certainly literature and arts of that country. The more surprising element of his statements is the casual imperialistic and racist tone that he somehow feels justified to voice being the only *real* human being touring a society full of non-human puppets. For Johnson to say that North Korea is a nation without literary art implies that he

[4] http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/12/21/adam-johnson-recalls-north-korea-a-country-with-no-books.html

either cannot read Korean proficiently or resists the inherent logic of the construction of the literature that North Korea and other countries share. Johnson's article perpetuates the demonization of North Korea that derives from the lack of willingness to accept a comparative investigation, that to eradicate any presuppositions of North Korea being radically different or mystical on the comparative level are truly unimaginable for Johnson.

In this book, I examine precisely the multiple layers or what Bakhtin refers to as *heteroglossia* that refracts the unitary language, exposing what I call *margins of writing* immanent in the propagandist works that have been published in *Chosŏn Munhak* (Korean Literature)[5] and by one of the major literary publishing houses in North Korea, Munye ch'ulp'ansa. North Korean fiction extends beyond the scope of the ostensible propaganda and reveals the human complexities that may be shared with individuals and cultures outside of its national and ideological borders, or to state it in a Bakhtinian way, "language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world" (1981, 293). That is, it does not require a "samizdat" literature to reveal problems that exist only in North Korea, but the writers' use of their creativity and careful word choices alert sensitive readers to the impending social and political tensions that exist in every culture.

My project is to provide a channel through which multiple voices laden in North Korean literature may surface and conjoin in discussions at the roundtable

[5] This is a literary journal in North Korea published on a monthly basis since 1947.

of other literary works. It is to explicate how these margins of writing in North Korean texts demonstrate the process of *becoming* an identity greater than the prescribed visions of socialist utopia through the way in which language extricates itself from the homogeneous, Kim Il Sung-centric language, or *monolingualism* of the Party to new flights into multiple readings or multilingualism. For Terry Eagleton, the function of criticism is to "install itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to *theorise* it—to explain the ideological necessity of those '*not-saids*' which constitute the very principle of its identity" (1976, 89 author's emphasis). While all narratives in North Korean literature are supposed to generate a singular reading—which I call monolingualism—of the Great Leader's inexhaustible love for his people and the infallibility of the Party's agenda, the self-identity of such literature always already contains its differing voices. That is, the attempt of singularizing a hegemonic voice needs to exclude any opposing or differing voices, and, moreover, singularity can never stand alone as its own self-identity but always presupposes its immanent difference. Thus, my project is not to find differing voices that oppose the Great Leader or the Party but to articulate the differing voices immanently contained in the so-called monolingual literature of the DPRK.

Although I do not doubt that dissident writings exist in North Korea, this book does not delve into those works for obvious reasons—inaccessibility. Instead, my reading of North Korean literature is precisely those that would be categorized as propagandist literature or state sponsored literature from the 1970s

and 1980s that is seemingly devoid of any *impurities* or otherness. I am more concerned with how writing—even within a tightly controlled institution—immanently disrupts, contends, and satirizes the teleology of nation-building. That is, writing in the DPRK conditions its own paradox of subverting and disjointing the very discourse used to erect the nation-state. One of the critical ways in which North Korean literature challenged nation-building in the 1970s and 1980s was re-addressing the woman question and reformulating the role of the family as not simply another cell of the state organism but a contentious site from which patriots were born.

Each family member in North Korean literature has a higher calling for public and national service, but each negotiates his/her relationship to one's immediate family and the family-state. While family members all acquiesce their loyalty to the nation-state in the end of these family-oriented narratives, the process in which this conclusion happens or the development of characters shows a more dynamic and real in*sight* into the complexity of human lives in these narratives. Or to put it in another way, the domestic space (and more particularly the role of the mother) is the potential unit to re-educate, re-think, and re-act to the prevailing discourse of what, how, and why a member of society must behave accordingly. The family unit is not the antithesis of the state but is the immanent component that always puts the state into question.

A discussion on the domestic space inevitably leads to the woman question that challenges the patriarchal state, posing competing visions of

women's fundamental roles in society. While Kim Il Sung takes pride in the DPRK's progressive egalitarian system, the fundamental roles of women are to become patriots, to raise their children to become patriots, and remain dutiful housewives to their husbands. In "On the Tasks of the Women's Union," Kim Il Sung informs the Women's Union the practical objectives of their role as equal participants of building the nation-state of the DPRK. The entire speech teaches the women of the country's famous patriotic generals and scholars who were taught by their respectable mothers. Kim says, "Mothers play a prominent role in the education of children" (1973, 9). The domestic space is supposed to be the grounds on which bearing patriotic and revolutionary citizens occurs.

While literature since the inception of the DPRK has promoted "family revolution" and women's active participation in society and in politics, literature in the 1980s began to show much more irony in the women's both in public and private spaces. If mothers were to take Kim Il Sung's statement that "Mothers play a prominent role in the education of children" seriously, then mothers have the agency to de-program and re-program their children into thinking otherwise than the patriarchal state discourse. The growing disinterestedness of the family in politics and in ideological training needed to be tackled and re-educated so that political power can be legitimized, especially since Kim Il Sung implemented the Juche ideology and monolithic policy (*yu'il ch'egye*) at the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Party Committee held in 1967.

This political shift not only strengthened Kim Il Sung's power, but it also affected the discourse of writing and thinking in literature thereafter, creating a draconian environment for writers to produce literary works beyond their taste and liking. The process of writing became more stringent in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of shifts in the political front. While writers in the 1960s openly debated with each other on the ideal method of writing fiction,[6] starting from the 1970s, these boisterous voices were significantly silenced, and a more lackluster form of criticisms appeared, most of them beginning with: "According to the Great Leader Kim Il Sung…" This change in writing fiction did not happen overnight, but it can be attributed to the result of the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Party Committee. I find the more restrictive and stringent political policies are placed on the writers to voice monolingual narratives the more creative writers become in uttering differences.

Kim Jong Il's proclamation of Kimilsungism followed by the monolithic policy in the early 1970s could not be a more contentious turning point in North Korean history. According to the South Korean scholar Lim Jae-cheon, the

[6] "Tanp'yŏn sosŏl'e taehan saenggak" (Thoughts on Short Stories) is just one of the many examples of writers voicing their artistic opinion about the nature of writing fiction in *Chosŏn Munhak*. These discussions would be under the section called "Chakkadŭl'ui mal" (Writers Speak). In this particular discussion in the October edition of *Chosŏn Munhak* in 1966, renowned writers like Ch'oe Hak-su, Yun Sin-ch'ŏl, Kim Puk-hyang, and Ri Chŏng-suk provide their insight into writing more appealing short stories to the readers. For example, Kim Puk-hyang emphasizes on the *auteur* theory and Ri Chŏng-suk urges to keep the short stories indeed short. Unfortunately, these open discussions on fiction writing decrease by the late 1960s and are hardly visible in editions thereafter. Even if there is some semblance of discussion among writers, it would mostly be reiterating Party instructions and Kim Il Sung's ingenious artistic profundity.

monolithic policy (or the monolithic ideological system) was designed to transfer Kim Il Sung's power to Kim Jong Il (2009, 66). Although the implementation of the monolithic policy had greater implications than what Lim argues as a simple transfer of power, it may be correct to think that there was a discursive transformation of how Kim Il Sung and the nation were to be depicted in literature. Loyalty and unity to the Great Leader are to be the basis of the writer's behavior and attitude as a whole. The monolithic policy heralded a different idealism of the modern state for North Korea, one that essentially called on its writers to overlook the tenets of socialist realism and articulate a monolithic political order.[7] Hope for a perfected socialist/communist world was not completely eradicated from political and literary discourses but justified by the superimposition of Kimilsungism. One of the ways (perhaps the most effective method) for allowing this transition to occur was through the careful insemination of the monolithic-policy language in the politico-social order, or what I've been referring to as *monolingualism*.

[7] "Saenghwal'ui chinsilsŏnggwa chŏnhyŏngsŏng munje" (Problems of Truthfulness and Typicality in Life) is another forum for writers to provide their artistic insight, much like the ones from earlier editions (see note 21). Unlike the other ones, this discussion appears in the April edition of *Chosŏn Munhak*, the month of Kim Il Sung's birthday and the pivotal month when both the Juche ideology and monolithic policy were implemented. Additionally, unlike the lively and, at times, sardonic debates on writing fiction from previous editions, this particular one has a different tone altogether. For example, writer Hwang Kŏn suggests that writers ought to present their narratives as that which truthfully reflects reality, which is one of the fundamental problems in socialist realism. Then, his last paragraph takes a predictable turn: "If our writers equip themselves with the Party and Kim Il Sung's (*susang tongji*) instructions, then they will be able to overcome the impending problem of our era and society and nobly portray reality" (86). Including the Party or Kim Il Sung as artistic muses was hardly imaginable in earlier editions of writers' discussions until April of 1967.

Since the pivotal Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Party Committee in 1967, a new language, a unitary language was to be spoken in every aspect of the North Korean culture: fiction, songs, poetry, newspapers, journals, television and radio programs, artworks, etc. This new language supposedly eliminated differences and other voices that posed threats to or undermine the wholesome and unified society of the DPRK. As much as purging opposing factions was necessary for Kim Il Sung to centralize his partisan group, the need to centralize and normalize a monolithic discourse was equally, if not, more important for controlling and disciplining the masses during the formative years of this transition period. Sonia Ryang says, "During the early 1970s, North Koreans were made to memorize the works of Kim Il Sung (including public speeches, committee reports, and so on) by heart, word-for-word. […] All public self-criticism sessions…were required to be opened with correct and exact quotations from Kim Il Sung's published works" (2012, 25).

It is important to note that the personality cult of Kim Il Sung has not always been a trademark of North Korean literature since the inception of the nation-state in 1948, but rather a discursive development that met with much confusion and contention from writers, poets, journalists, and screenwriters. Although April 15, 1967 marked the signature date for print media (e.g. *Rodong Sinmun, Chosŏn Munhak, Chakka Sinmun*, etc.) to officially initiate the transformation of a new discourse for Kim's personality cult, this effort began

much earlier by writers in the 1950s like Hong Sun-ch'ŏl, Kim Sun-sŏk,[8] and Han Sŏrya, who wrote "two short stories, a novel, a biography of the young Kim for child readers, and a score of newspaper and journal articles" (Myers 1994, 135). My emphasis on the historical context of Kim Il Sung's appearance in literature is to show that such a project was never linear but sporadic even after 1967.

In *Reading North Korea*, Sonia Ryang argues that the 1970s and 1980s were when "Kim Il Sung was transformed from a theoretico-ideological leader into an ethico-spiritual one" (2012, 25). For Ryang, this explains the disappearance of Kim Il Sung in many of the narratives by the time the 1980s came around. Ryang says, "It became more important to sense or feel Kim Il Sung's potency" (2012, 27). As much as I agree with Ryang that Kim Il Sung represented a more spiritual entity in the 1970s and more so in the 1980s, I would like to add that the North Korean society needed to become more bureaucratic with loyal cadres or Party secretaries strategically stationed across the country to support Kim Jong Il's succession and to police the masses in case of any insurgence.[9] In other words, while fiction seems to create a spiritual atmosphere

[8] According to the South Korean scholar Sin Hyŏng-gi, the earliest use of calling Kim Il Sung *suryŏng* (Great Leader) in literature was as early as 1945 in a poem by Min Pyŏng-gyu called *Changgun'ŭl matdŏn nal* (The Day I Welcomed the General). But the term became more common and pervasive during and after the Korean War, according to Sin. For more information on the historical development of Kim Il Sung's personality cult, refer to Sin Hyŏng-gi's *Pukhan Munhaksa: hangilhyŏngmyŏng munhak'e-sŏ chuch'e munhakkaji* (History of North Korean Literature: From Anti-Japanese Literature to Juche Literature) (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000),150.

[9] Refer to Kim Jong Il. "To, si, kun tangwiwŏnhoedŭl ape nasŏnŭn kwaŏp" (The Task of Party Committees in provinces, cities, and districts). Speech delivered on April 3, 1981,

of Kim Il Sung's omnipresence for all of the characters, the relationships and confrontations among workers and local cadres are corporeal, dialectically arriving at the conclusion that the Great Leader, the Party, and the state ought to be supported unquestionably. The 1970s and 1980s officially extended the DPRK's rhetoric of achieving socialist revolution by instating a monarchical-like polity, effacing the sacrifice and collective hope of the masses that have dreamt of communism since the inception of the nation-state in 1948. Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and the other top officials anticipated disinterestedness and disloyalty from the masses with the new political direction. Preemptive tactics and countermeasures were necessary to keep the nation under control. Acquiring a new language, a new discourse on the Kim Family's politics was the utmost priority, which required literature and film to generate, implant, and convert the masses to sing in unison with the new directives.

My interest in fiction of the 1970s and 1980s has largely to do with the juxtaposition of the family problem (or the woman question) with Kim Jong Il's political agendas as stepping blocks to secure his succession. There were two national campaigns—Three Revolutions Movement (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng*) and the Hidden Hero (*sumŭn yŏng'ung*)—that have turned the DPRK into an *uber*-draconian society. The demand to appropriate the monolithic policy as new discourse was fortified through the dispatching of the Three Revolutions Team

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Kim Jong Il Sŏnjip vol. 7 (Kim Jong Il Selected Works) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1996), 57.

Members (*sojowŏn*) during the Three Revolutions Team Member Movement (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng sojowŏn undong*) in 1973, which was followed by the Three Revolutions Red Flag Movement (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng pulgŭnkichaengch'wi undong*) in 1975. During this time, the masses were taught Kim Il Sung's teachings the Juche ideology, which was later known as Kimilsungism, the latest technological skills, and the restructuring of the cultural landscape throughout the DPRK. But South Korean scholar Ch'oe Sŏng argues that the Team Members were sent out to the masses to silence the opposing voices to Kim Jong Il's succession plans (2002, 185).

The Three Revolutions Team Members, who mostly consisted of university students, would represent Kim Il Sung and the Party as they were sent to the various corners of the nation. They served as extensions of the Party's gaze on the masses. In a film called *Ch'ŏngch'un'ui simjang* (Heart of the Youth, 1982) the female team member (*sojowŏn*) says that she is the "eyes and ears" of the Party. Much like the Chinese red guards, these team members were the embodiment of the Party's ideology. *Waving the Red Flag of the Three Revolutions* (1976) is a collection of poems that praise the ardent team members for their efforts to guide the people to the correct path of the revolution. In literature and film, the team members are always esteemed as noble characters, whose unfailing love for the workers compels them to overcome their individualistic ways and pursue the Party's demands. Ri Chong-ryŏl's *Haepitsŭl anko'on ch'ŏngnyŏn* (The Youth Who Brought Sunlight, 1976) and Chŏng

Ch'ang-yun's *Hyŏngmyŏng sojowŏn Kim tongmu* (Revolutionary Team Member Comrade Kim, 1975) are examples that depict the absolute selfless services of the team members to the people.

Although the team members nominally exist in the DPRK today, they have lost significant amount of recognition and power since Kim Jong Il officially succeeded his father in 1994. The urgency to collectivize the people to support Kim Jong Il was accomplished, and, therefore, there was no longer a need for the team members to exert the Party's force on the people. However, they still exist in the North Korean society to help advance the technology that the country direly needs today.

The late 1970s and throughout the 1980s marked the advent of a new national campaign called the Hidden Hero (*sumŭn yŏng'ung*), which celebrated ordinary citizens for their contribution to the building of the nation. One of the first headlines to commemorate a hidden hero was on October 13, 1979 in *Rodong Sinmun* (Worker's Daily) which stated: "Heart for the Party and People." In this article, biologist Paek Sŏl-hŭi is honored with an award from Kim Il Sung for her outstanding achievement in advancing the field of science. Thereafter, three others received an award from Kim Il Sung for their unparalleled achievements: Kim Sang-ryŏn, Pak Yŏng-ch'ŏl, and Chang Chae-san, followed by the headline "Let's learn from the hidden heroes who have shown their passionate devotion." Fictionalized short stories were written about them along with other fictional stories in a three-volume anthology called *Uri sidae'ui yŏng'ungdŭl* (Heroes of

our Era, 1988).[10] The purpose of this collection was to raise the consciousness of the workers to emulate these (non)fictional characters so that the productivity, technology, and Party-mindedness increased. It was also a campaign that congealed the distant past to the uninterested youths of the 1980s.

Unlike the guerrilla martyrs during the Japanese colonial times, there was no longer an imminent threat from foreigners except for the fact that South Korea was advancing its productivity and exposing itself to the international community by hosting the Asian Games (1986) and the Summer Olympics (1988). These may have been one of the major proponents that alerted North Korea of the impending economic growth (and possibly surpassing the North) in South Korea. The Party needed a national campaign such as the Hidden Hero to excite the youths to join efforts in producing highly educated and ardent revolutionaries. Using the four nationally recognized hidden heroes as models for the masses to emulate, the Hidden Hero campaign took large strides to encourage the youths while closely monitoring their every move. A more draconian method of surveillance took place with the justification of finding the "hidden" hero among the people. It was imperative for the Party to single out the ones lacking in nationalism and loyalty to the Great Leader and supplant them with the correct thought.

One of the problems with the Hidden Hero campaign, which allegedly sought ordinary citizens performing extraordinary tasks for the nation, was the

[10] *Uri sidae'ui yŏng'ungdŭl* (Heroes of our Age) vol.1 1988, vol.2 1989, vol.3 1990 (Pyongyang: Kŭllo tanche ch'ulp'ansa).

economic and social class differentiation. Who exactly were these "ordinary" people in the DPRK? The four nationally recognized hidden heroes were no ordinary people but from an intellectual, "middle-class" background: scientists, biologists, and researchers.[11] Of course the idea of the campaign was not for the entire nation to become scientists and researchers, although Kim Il Sung has mentioned the intellectualization (*intelli-hwa*) of the people.[12] Instead, the campaign tried to compel the masses to emulate the passion and loyalty of the four nationally recognized hidden heroes. After these four hidden heroes, there has not been a single *ordinary* citizen from a regional factory, a remote collective farm, or the fishing industry who received national recognition.

The implicit notion of the Hidden Hero campaign is the concretization of binary opposites of the Us and the Them, perpetuated through memorializing Kim

[11] As contentious as this may sound, there is no doubt that North Korea is divided into different socio-economic classes despite the socialist rhetoric of a classless society. The top Party officials live a wealthier lifestyle than the majority of the population. According to Hyŏn Sŏng-il, the monolithic policy selected cadres based on their "revolutionary background" (*sŏngbun*) rather than their history of being loyal to the Party (2007, 178-179). This was a way for Kim Il Sung to weed out the possible suspects who may object to Kim's leadership. Thereafter, cadres received greater benefits than the rest of the population. Defectors have testified that cadre families mostly live in larger (sometimes two-story Western-style houses with front gardens) houses with leather sofas and a television sets. Many narratives in the 1980s depict this so-called intellectual, "middle-class" families such as Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Height of Life* (1982). Many residents in Pyongyang live in two-bedroom apartments, but some residents in the countryside or those who live in collectivized housing projects live in what is called "harmonica" houses that have five compartments, one for each family. The distribution of monthly wages between an ordinary factory worker and the factory researcher is not known, but the researchers carry themselves with much more pride and a sense of accomplishment.

[12] Refer to Kim Il Sung. "Chajujŏkin sae sahoe kŏnsŏl'esŏ intelli'ui yŏkhal" (The Role of the Intellectuals in Constructing a New Society of Freedom). Speech delivered on August 14, 1980. *Kim Il Sung Chŏjakjip* vol. 35 (Kim Il Sung Collected Works) (Pyongyang: Munye rodondang ch'ulp'ansa, 1987), 237.

Il Sung. Elevating and commemorating the hidden heroes is equivalent to honoring the Great Leader, the Party, and the state. The hidden heroes represent the nation, and, therefore, to increase the sentiments of nationalism in the 1980s, the masses are expected to *become* hidden heroes. The selfless achievements of the hidden heroes resemble the unconditional sacrifice Kim Il Sung has made for the building of the nation and the people since the Japanese colonial rule. In as much as collective memory of the Great Leader is state orchestrated, the Hidden Hero is another campaign that sustained the continuity of the past and present. In this sense, memory is a state-run exercise or a ritual that collectivizes disparate individuals in North Korea by the reproduction of sentiments and rhetoric of monolingualism. The boundary that divides the Us from the Them does not only become materialized through the erection of actual national borders, but the political ideology is disseminated, perpetuated, and sustained through a complex network of power dispersal at the local levels of bureaucracy.

Kim Il Sung criticizes the cadres for resorting to bureaucratism (*kwallyojuŭi*), but it is precisely the bureaucrats who keep the systematized political machine running. [13] Propositions of Party legislatives, policies, campaigns, and directives may originate from Pyongyang, but the most crucial aspect of maintaining power over the people is through regulating them at the local levels. It may not be too surprising to know that local cadres and Party

[13] Refer to Hyŏn Sŏng-il's *Pukhan'ui gukkajŏllyak-kwa p'awŏ ellit'ŭ: kanbujŏngch'aek'ŭl chungsimŭro* (North Korea's State Strategy and Power Elites: Focusing on the Politics of Cadres) (Seoul: Sŏn'in, 2007).

secretaries take power into their own hands because of sheer power hunger. Many of the 1980s fiction critique the local cadres for becoming heartless bureaucrats and for lacking the sincerity of a worker's imperative. While defectors take open fire at the DPRK government or the late Kim Jong Il in the safety of residing in South Korea, many of the direct and tangible problems have existed between them and the local officials. North Korean literature, then, functions as allegories of critiquing the state or top officials and also as actual problems that occur among actual people within a tight network of the collective.

These two national campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s redefined the social structure and the cultural/literary mode of production. However, neither of these two campaigns fully addressed nor resolved the woman question. Many of these national campaigns in the DPRK called on what I call the *masculinization* of the masses, where gender equality was not achieved but the homogenization of women and men into a single gender. The DPRK ostensibly offers gender equality to women by lessening their household duties and allowing them to participate alongside men in public, claiming that the women's function in the public sphere is just as significant as the men's. Yet, the dual role of the woman as both patriots and housewives persisted and still persists in North Korea today. Women faced inevitable challenges juggling both the domestic and public spaces, and it isn't until the literature of the 1980s that the woman question is revisited as the Party announces Kim Jong Il as the successor. In other words, the woman question and the function of the domestic space arise alongside Kim Jong Il's

ascension to power in the early 1980s, creating a precarious political atmosphere. The two national campaigns were supposed to indoctrinate families into fully accepting and adhering to Kim Jong Il's succession, but the rise of the woman question—precisely from within the domestic space—put the family's loyalty to the test.

The 1970s and 1980s are the most exciting moments in North Korean literature after the seminal meeting in 1967. Despite the façade of stringent political policies on writing, writers of this period were capable of raising contentious voices through the family problem and the woman question. However, for so long, North Korean literature has been largely marginalized in East Asian and South Korean literary studies. Lack of translations, inefficient distributions, overtly politicized themes, ostensible praising of Kim Il Sung among others may have been reasons for North Korean literature's lack of visibility on the world stage. And despite the similarities it shares with Chinese communist literature, the fact that it appears as transpositions from the Chinese counterpart may have its reasons for being considered second class at best. South Korea's reception of North Korean literature is a different story, heavily burdened by the contentious history both cultures share.

I may not have to remind my readers of the contemporary political tensions between the Koreas that have continued since the Korean War. Bruce Cumings' *Origins of the Korean War* volumes 1 and 2 may still be two of the richest accounts of national division written in English. There are other scholars

from different academic disciplines who have approached these tensions in their own critical and analytical ways, enough to provide a comprehensive (yet never complete) purview of modern Korean history and culture.

Yet a look at how some North Korean literary works have traversed past the DMZ (demilitarization zone) dividing the two Koreas and landed on the shelves of South Korean bookstores may offer another understanding of how South Korea had made attempts to consider North Korean literature seriously—though they may not have been such simple or glamorous efforts. There is no clear information or data on the distributors of North Korean literature to South Korean buyers, collectors, and government organizations. There have been accounts of sellers and donators from China, Japan, Thailand, and even private owners, but much of this information remains undisclosed by the Ministry of Unification.[14] Additionally, I am not referring to writers such as KAPF (Korea Artista Proletaria Federacio) members during the colonial era who fled to the North or those who defected to the South at the outbreak of the Korean War. I am referring to literary works that have been written, published, and read by North Koreans from the 1970s to the present day—those who may be still living within the political system.

South Korea in the late 1980s and early 1990s may have been the most dynamic period for democratization from dictatorship and consequently for North

[14] Professor Kwon Young-min at Seoul National University told me how he and another scholar went to Japan to bring in a large shipment of North Korean books from a private collector to archive in the special collections at SNU Library, but he did not specify the arrangements. Interview in March 2010.

Korean literature to gain visibility among scholars, students, and the public. The end of dictatorship and the success of the student and the wider public democratization movement or minjung movement changed the political and social climate of the 1980s. Protestors shouted freedom (*chaju*), democracy (*minju*), and unification (*t'ongil*) in the face of the existing political discourse of anti-communism and anti-North Koreanism.[15] According to Namhee Lee, "By the late 1980s, the minjung movement at large was under the spell of *chuch'e sansang* (North Korea's Juche ideology) (2007, 139). It was during this time when the "northern wind" of North Korea's Juche ideology swept through university campuses and the minjung movement in the years to come (Lee 2007, 127). This time period was certainly ambivalent for many of the participants of the democratization movement in South Korea. On the one hand, student protestors demanded political change and democratization, but on the other hand, they probably did not anticipate an influx of pro-North Koreanism.

It was during these tumultuous times when a new movement emerged called "On Correctly Understanding North Korea" (*Pukhan paro algi undong*), which was the first time academicians took North Korean studies seriously. Their optimism was based on the increasing popularity of North Korea among university students, reading groups and lectures (O 2008, 13). A few South Korean specialists on North Korean literature like Kim Chae-yong, O Ch'ang-un,

[15] Pak, Se-gil. *Tasi ssŭnŭn hangukhyŏndae'sa* (Rewriting Korean Modern History). (Seoul: Tol Pegae, 1997): 236-237.

Roh Kwi-nam, and Ko In-hwan have hailed North Korean fiction such as Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) and Nam Tae-hyŏn's *Ch'ŏngch'un song'ga* (The Hymn of Youth) as representative works that provide insight into the changing tides and the optimistic purview of literature in North Korea.[16] In 1989, South Korean writer Hwang Sŏk-yŏng visited North Korea and later wrote *Sarami salgo issŏtne* (There Have Been People Living There, 1993). Hwang explains some of the misconceived notions about the way South Koreans have been educated to perceive the North, and in his memoirs he mentions Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend* as an eye-opening novel (1993, 199). The fervent reception of these novels opened up new possibilities of understanding North Korea, creating an optimistic outlook among scholars, students, and the public.

Much of North Korean literature is archived in the Ministry of Unification and in the Information Center on North Korea, which is now on the fifth floor of the National Library. Many of the scholars[17] interested in North Korean literature visited the Ministry of Unification in the late 1980s and were exposed (some for the first time) to a vast collection that has been restricted to and banned from the public during the Park Chung Hee regime. These scholars told me in interviews that some were too good to remain in the archives and that they should be made public. Of those scholars, a few had certain political and academic prestige and

[16] The collection of these optimistic scholars' essays is in *Pukhan Munhak-ui Chihyŏngdo* (Topography of North Korean Literature) (Seoul: Ehwa yŏjadaehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2008).

[17] I have promised these scholars not to disclose their names for political reasons.

were granted permission to photocopy any necessary materials.[18] Others, who were not so privileged, hand-copied novels, novellas, short stories, and poems. In both cases, the illegally copied materials were sent to publishing houses, which were then placed on the bookstore shelves for the public. When I asked these scholars about copyright lawsuits, problems with breaching the National Security Law that restricts any individual from possessing, copying, publishing, and distributing North Korean materials, and whether or not the government cracked down on these scholars during the "On Correctly Understanding North Korea" movement, they collectively circumvented my inquiries and digressed to other topics. But O Ch'ang-ŭn states that the police and the National Security Agency barged into bookstores near university campuses and confiscated any pro-North Korean books, and they closed down publishing companies such as Taedong, Paektu, Him, Sallimt'ŏ, along with others and arrested their affiliates (2008, 13).

It has been certainly an uphill battle for these scholars to make North Korean literature public, despite the fervor of wanting to know more about the country. "On Correctly Understanding North Korea" movement began to wane in the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, according to these scholars. The South Korean general public, students, and scholars—who had been once intrigued by North Korea's socialist structure during this movement—began to lose interest when communism proved to be a

[18] This does not mean that the Ministry of Unification knew the intent of these particular scholars and therefore allowed them to photocopy the materials. The National Security Law explicitly states that no individual can publish and distribute works from antinational countries, most notably North Korea.

futile economic program in the early 1990s. While some of the scholars from this group remained devoted to the task of continuing reading groups and lectures, others saw a dead end as public and academic interests drastically decreased.

It wasn't until the publication of Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i* in Pyongyang by Munhak ch'ulp'ansa—one of North Korea's largest publishing houses—in 2002 and then a reprinting in Seoul by Taehun publishing house in 2004 that the unthinkable happened in the history of South Korean literary circles. Hong Sŏk-jung was awarded the Manhae Literary Award—one of the most prestigious awards in South Korea—for this novel and received much acclaim from South Korean literary critics. To this day, Hong is the only North Korean novelist to receive a literary award from South Korea since national division. This novel was considered a bestseller, enough for the film industry to adapt it into a film, casting South Korea's highly celebrated actors.[19] Unfortunately, since the release of *Hwang Chin-i* in 2004, there has not been a North Korean literary work that received the same amount or any, for that matter, literary recognition in the South.

Part of *Hwang Chin-i*'s wide reception and success in South Korea had to do with the absence of ostensible Party ideology or glorification of Kim Il Sung because the novel takes place in sixteenth century Chosŏn Korea. The heroine is a courtesan who encounters starving masses, corrupt officials, and a governor

[19] *Hwang Chin-i* the film was release in 2007, starring Song Hye-gyo and Yu Chi-t'ae. It was directed by Chang Yun-hyŏn.

"completely immersed in booze and women."[20] Donald Macintyre, journalist for *Time Magazine*, quotes Brian Myers on his response after reading *Hwang Chin-i*: "I read some parts with my jaw hanging open. The parallels to the current political situation are really just too obvious even for the most obtuse, literal-minded reader to miss."[21]

I, too, read the novel with much pleasure, but from a different point of reference than Myers'. According to Myers, the novel's social problems of starving masses and political criticisms against power-hungry government officials could be read as allusions to some of the current problems in North Korea. While this may be a scrupulous reading of the novel, I place greater value on Hong's artistic use of the Korean language, where readers can come to the conclusion that *Hwang Chin-i* is simply an outstanding literary work despite Hong's nationality, ideological training, family background, and any other categories that delimit his artistic production.[22] After all, dialogue between the two nations does not have to begin with criticisms against each other's polemical ideologies but the appreciation of the Korean language.

Scholars in the English-speaking communities around the world have also been examining North Korean literature. Brian Myers' analysis of the life and works of a KAPF member Han Sŏr-ya has been one of the first encounters with

[20] Refer to http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,655483,00.html#ixzz1crBDcg1P

[21] Ibid.

[22] Some South Korean literary critics have attributed Hong's greatness to his grandfather Hong Myŏng-hŭi, who was a well known writer during the colonial period.

the development of North Korean literature and its system during and after the formative years of the DPRK. His early research on North Korean literature certainly pioneered the opening of this field. Tatiana Gabroussenko has been unearthing the dynamic relationship between the Soviet Union and North Korea and the influences it has had on North Korean literature. Her most recent publication *Soldiers on the Cultural Front* (2010) peers into the developments in the early history of North Korean literature and literary policy. Additionally, her examination of "rural fiction"[23] has been insightful in understanding another important aspect to North Korean political and social life during the arduous march (*konan'ui haenggun*). Stephen Epstein's reflections on short stories at the cusp of the new millennium provide the way in which the Party proposes to its people a new direction that the nation will be heading and the valence of power among writers, state, and reader. Sonia Ryang's rethinking of the notion of self-discipline in Foucauldian terms in 1980s novels has offered yet another layer to the reading practices in North Korea. Her most recent publication *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (2012) focuses on the way in which the connection between the people and the Great Leader is secured and found meaningful through narratives of the 1970s and 1980s that deal with love, war, and the self.[24] Alzo David-West's reading of the literary ideas proposed by Kim Il

[23] "Rural fiction" is Gabroussenko's coinage rather than North Korea's categorization. "Rural fiction," thus, derives from Gabroussenko's observations of narratives that occur at the collective farms.

[24] Ryang, Sonia. *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Sung and Kim Jong Il refashions the presuppositions and "fatalistic" readings that scholars in the past have done on North Korean literature, and opens up new possibilities of reading the literature within the strictures of what he calls "intentional fallacies."[25]

Hence, my effort to open up the field of North Korean literature is not a new step on uncharted territory, but rather it is an attempt at a new reading of literary works that takes flight into the uncharted territories otherwise considered a misreading of Party-prescribed analysis. Of course, I am more inclined to understand North Korean literature as what Epstein calls an "implicit contract" between writer, state, and reader, but, at the same time, I try to shift away from this triangular structure and explore difference and repetition from within the Same or the singularity of the state ideological reading. In other words, no single piece of writing in North Korea is identical to the next and in complete harmony with the Party's demands. Many North Korean fictions display a deep sensitivity to literariness and artistic technicity that cannot be overlooked by the ostensibly imposing political ideology. Furthermore, its *literariness* cannot and must not be reduced to the general codification of literature as a didactic tool to raise the political consciousness of the masses in accordance to the Party's directives. Or as Suk-young Kim succinctly puts it, "Researchers need to see through the blunt walls of officially sanctioned narratives and identify the hidden multiple subjects

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[25] For a more in-depth description of the trend in the study of North Korea, refer to Charles Armstrong's article : "Trends in the Study of North Korea." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (2011): 357-371.

and objects of national imagination" (2010, 8). In this sense, I am enamored by Deleuze's explication of repetition as that which transgresses and denounces its nominal or general character in favor of a more profound and more artistic reality.[26]

By "artistic reality" I am neither evoking contentious theories on socialist realism from the Soviet Union that may have influenced the writing practice in North Korea nor engaging in a dialogue among foreign scholars who argue whether or not North Korean literature is indeed compatible with the traditions of socialist realism. Besides, open debates on socialist realism among North Korean writers and critics in *Chosŏn Munhak* have nearly been eliminated once Kim Jong Il decidedly categorized all literature produced from the state as Juche literature.[27] A discussion on socialist realism may not be particularly relevant to any of the short stories and novels of the 1970s and 1980s that I will be analyzing in this book, where I find North Korean writers' engagement with more pressing issues of memory, gender and sexuality in their narratives.

Indeed, as far as my research is concerned, North Korean literature is constantly developing, negotiating, thinking and rethinking, questioning, and even

[26] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.

[27] Up to the mid-1960s, heated discussions about socialist realism, the methodology of writing fiction, the theoretical notion of fiction, particular themes that ought to be addressed, etc. among writers and critics were present in *Chosŏn Munhak*. Starting from the late-1960s to present day, most of these debates were truncated by the imposition of giving credit to the greatest literary critic in the history of humankind Kim Il Sung (and later Kim Jong Il), citing his infinite wisdom as the final say to all literary debates.

resisting the construction of normative values that it is supposed to engender. This should not be surprising at all to scholars who examine North Korea as another modern political nation-state. Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung, in their latest publication called *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (2012) says, "The North Korean political system is just as modern and as much a product of interaction with global modernity as any other political system existing in the world" (2012, 2). That is, for Kwon and Chung, the ability for North Korea to maintain its political control, strengthen its military, and sustain its nationalism is *not* inherently different from any other modern country. Bruce Cumings also agrees in his *North Korea: Another Country* that the "particularities" in North Korea are not so particular on a comparative level:

> "Kim Jong Il's got a gulag the size of Houston!" George Bush exclaimed. […] Meanwhile we have a long-standing, never-ending gulag full of black men in our prisons, incarcerating upward of 25 percent of all black youths. This doesn't excuse North Korea's police state, but perhaps it suggests that Americans should do something about the pathologies of our inner cities—say, in Houston—before pointing the finger. (2004, 176)

Michel Foucault is no stranger to these types of discussions on revealing the inherent logic of socio-political structures. In the last lecture in "Society Must be Defended," he concludes:

> Whenever socialism insists…that the transformation of economic conditions is the precondition…for the transition from capitalist State to the socialist State,…it does not need…racism. Whenever, on the other hand, socialism has been forced to stress the problem of struggle…of the

> elimination of the enemy within capitalist society itself…racism does raise its head, because it is the only way in which socialist thought, which is after all very much bound up with the themes of biopower, can rationalize the murder of its enemies. (2003, 262)

For Foucault, the internal logic of the way socialist states conduct their ideological struggle against capitalist states is no different from the way capitalist states have pursued "containment" policies during the Cold War. Rather than exacting the theoretical tenets of the counterpart's economic conditions, Foucault argues that racism becomes the discourse in which "containing" or eradicating the antagonistic ideology is rationalized and justified. This could not be farther from the truth in North Korea's case, where racist terms are still used to heighten adverse sentiments against the United States,[28] and in the way global media—more particularly media in the United States—creates racist discourses about North Korea. We may already be too familiar with accusations such as "axis of evil," "brainwashed," "rogue," "terrorist," or "inhumane"[29] used against North Korea that have somehow legitimized the rationale of the accuser, who has failed to recognize the logic of his complicit rhetoric. It is, therefore, fruitless to discuss the myriad differences that exist in the North Korean political and social system,

[28] Propaganda posters portray violence and racist terms against the U.S. as methods of agitation. But it is questionable as to how effective these posters are to the general public and how much the general public truly considers Americans as "jackals." During my visit to the DPRK in 2008, I asked my tour guide why North Koreans dislike the U.S. so much (hoping for some insights into the way they were taught in school), but her poignant response made me reevaluate the way I had imagined the DPRK. She replied with a British accent, "All North Koreans?"

[29] Ryang, Sonia. *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), x.

and, for that matter, the differences that exist in the production of literature and the "strangeness" of the personality cult. As much as the internal logic behind the North Korean political system is not so radically different from the logic of other modern political systems, the production of literature, political censorship, self-censorship, and other modalities of writing are not so radically different from, let's say, even capitalist countries.

North Korean writers are inevitably restricted to their socio-political environs, and, therefore, may appear as though they advocate the state wholeheartedly, serving as the docile vessel between the state ideology and the people. Sonia Ryang, in *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry*, says, "Writers are assigned to write certain stories, following designated storylines that are aligned with current policies of the government" (2012, 12). This is particularly evident in poems and short stories published in the monthly literary journal *Chosŏn Munhak* in the months of February and April, which are the birthday months for Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung respectively. There are other national holidays and national campaigns where writers are commissioned to write in accordance to the special event. At other times, the Department of Propaganda and Agitation would "call for literary works," which is a method of collecting thematic works from poets and writers around the country. This would be an opportunity for poets and writers to showcase their talents and make their name known. Well recognized poets and writers from remote parts of the country

would receive approval to move to Pyongyang and join the elite class of the Writer's Union.

Many of these writers from outside of Pyongyang did not begin their writing career from the start but have been writing part-time alongside their work. Of course, not all aspiring writers fulfill their dreams and only a few are chosen. The criteria of selecting aspiring writers may be (but not limited to) the following: unwavering loyalty to the Great Leader and the Party; recommendation from the local editors; outstanding writing skills; a good track record of published materials; and even possibly bribery.[30] Once these privileged few receive permission to come to Pyongyang, many of them are required to attend either Kim Il Sung University or Kim Hyong Jik Liberal Arts College to strengthen their ideological education and to acquire better methods of writing. Paek Nam-ryong and Nam Tae-hyŏn were case in point, where Paek began writing on the side in Hamhŭng Province while working at a steel factory and Nam was working as a school teacher. They were later recommended by local editors to go to Pyongyang. Paek and Nam are now elite novelists, writing for the April 15 Literary Production Unit (*4.15 Munhak ch'angjakdan*).[31]

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[30] Interview with former poet Ch'oe Chin-i in April 2010.

[31] The April 15 Literary Production Unit is a subgroup of the larger Writer's Union that only writes the so-called masterpieces of North Korean literature. Most notably, literature produced by this group consists of *Sea of Blood*, *Flower Girl*, *The Fate of a Self-defense Corps Man*, and the *Immortal History* series, which is a novelization of Kim Il Sung's life. Writers from this group is considered "elite," receiving special privileges and accommodations. Refer to Chapter 1 of this book.

In order for these writers to receive invitation to come to Pyongyang they would not only have to write Party-desired, highly ideological works, but they would also have to possess promising signs of talent. While one may have aspirations of becoming a poet or writer, when the "call for literary works" was assigned, many of these writers would copy off of each other or replicate previous recognized works.[32] These writers were more concerned about creating their own work of art rather than feigning their allegiance to the Party. Therefore, it is difficult to differentiate writers who are wholly devoted to the Party from those who are less ardent simply by reading their works.

There are undoubtedly writers who support the Party and Kim Il Sung unconditionally, but then there are writers who are more pragmatic and more concerned about their livelihood. As North Korean writer Ha Chŏng-hi says in *Chinsim*, "It's because it's undoubtedly the daily life of people" (*Yŏksi ingan saenghwalinikkayo*). It would be doing many of these writers injustice to group them all under devotees of Kim Il Sung and to assume that they all willfully speak *monoligualism*. Indeed, it would be an exaggeration to claim that there are no free writers in North Korea. Writers in North Korea may not have certain privileges as other countries, but this is only a difference in degree rather than difference in kind.

Thus, I am highly suspicious of claims that reduce North Korean writers (or from other communist countries) to lifeless puppets that lack creativity and

[32] Interview with Ch'oe Chin-i in October 2010.

freedom, that are inundated with ideology, and that are unable to think otherwise than the confines of their limited world-view. North Korean writers are certainly products of the system, but that does not disenable them from imagining a world beyond their condition. It is precisely in their imaginings that allow multivalent voices to emerge from the text and to open up a space of thinking other than that which has been prescribed to them. But, as scholars working on Korea's colonial period have shown, pragmatism or "profit" for writers, business owners, and politicians to serve the political order became one of the methods by which their livelihood was preserved in a complex network of Korea's modern industrialization.[33] Thus, to disregard pragmatic writers in North Korea—who publish for survival purposes or for their livelihood—may be overlooking the complexity of the literary scene and oversimplifying the function of the writer in North Korea.

South Korean scholar Kim Chong-hoe, in his essay called "Ek'o'ui munhak" (Echo Literature), says, "At the moment, North Korean literature obsessively (*kangpakchŏk'ŭro*) repeats the Party's guidelines, which I call 'echo literature,' rather than containing a creative voice" (2007, 148). According to Kim (2007), evident changes in North Korean literature that stray from Party-lines are yet to be seen in the current regime. Much like Adam Johnson, for Kim Chong-hoe, North Korea has not yet produced any literary works worth reading or

[33] Refer to Carter Eckert's *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 94, 103, 243.

analyzing, accepting at face value that all North Korean literature is reducible to a monolith. Kim Chong-hoe fails to realize two ironical moments in *his* reductive reading of North Korean literature as "echo literature." First, his criticism that North Korean literature only echoes the Party's instructions falls into the same logic as his "echoing" of South Korea's National Security Laws against North Korean literature. Second, by using the metaphor of "echo literature," he doesn't fully realize the implications of what he's written. That is, the very virtue of an echo is not the same and will never be same as that which produced it. If I may continue with Kim's metaphor, an echo always already detaches itself from its producer, disseminating into unaccountable spaces. Kim Chong-hoe's criticism against North Korean literature, in fact, supports the inexhaustible readings that the notion of literature conditions.

The gesture of writing conditions the possibility of thinking otherwise, overcoming the simplistic forms of dialecticism. North Korean literature can and *must* be read beyond the prescribed methodology of reading set by the Party. My efforts of bringing North Korean literature to a more visible ground are not based on rationalizing or justifying the politics of the nation-state but rather on articulating or enunciating the literary texts as sites of violation or trespassing against the systematized order and epistemology of its own nation-state, or for that matter any nation-state. In other words, texts have something to say beyond scope of the socio-political hegemonic reading practices, and it is its (st)utterance that escapes monolingualism.

If my readers are searching for clues to somehow reveal the minds or psyche of North Korean Party members, policy makers, top-tiered elites, the masses, and even perhaps Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il through sociological or psychological analyses in this book, then I will gravely disappoint them. Likewise, if my readers are expecting a grand narrative of the history of North Korean literature, then I regretfully must inform them to look elsewhere.

This book examines moments of contention and ruptures in literary works of the 1970s and 1980s that offer *different* voices from the grand narrative of the nation-state prescribed by the Party ideology. Difference here does not refer to works that attack or criticize the existing ideology because then it is a mere reformulation of A against B paradigm. Instead, difference examines the paradigm of A and not-A—works that provide more than, other than, otherwise than how literature is "supposed" to be written and read in the North Korean context.

Chapter 1 examines the institutionalizing of Kim Il Sung's personality cult through literary works (most notably the *Immortal History* series), North Korean literary theory, and Kim Jong Il's speeches and notes. I show that the institutionalizing of Kim Il Sung's personality cult was never a smooth process where all the writers from the Union excitedly jumped on the very suggestion of creating a demigod but that it was contentious and questionable to many writers from the beginning. It was no surprise to these writers—especially Ch'oe Sang-sun and his short story *Uri hakkyo* (My School, 1972)—that the historiography of

Kim Il Sung's revolutionary past is a narrative creation, a distortion of any form of truth, but nevertheless a new writing system that was going to unwittingly change the fate of writing.

Chapter 2 re-conceptualizes the function of memory within the grand narrative of the nation-state. In Ri Hŭi-nam's *Yŏdŏl sigan* (Eight Hours, 1986), memory questions the very notion of historicizing the "truthfulness" (*chinsil*) of the nation's past, illuminating the impossibility of correctly rendering or representing the truthfulness of any past. Reading memory in this way opens up a space within the common trope of memory in most North Korean novels that refer to the dignified and nostalgic past of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history, which then enables the thinking subject to unify the nation's glorious past with him/herself. Memory, for Ri Hŭi-nam, on the other hand, is a contestable liminality where the unity of the subject is irreconcilable and disjointed, constantly desiring the *lack*. The more confounding element to memory in this novella is the mother's role of educating her son contrary to what the state desires.

In Chapter 3, I revisit the power struggle between individual and state in Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) to reveal agency in a female individual who evades the enclosure of dialecticism often found in North Korean narratives when individuals confront the state. Through the female protagonist, the woman question is posed against the state representative, contending the prescribed gender politics of motherhood and wifehood in the patriarchal state. Paek's seminal work not only reveals the family as the potential proponent of

social/political disruption but also raises the issue of women as that which resists and marginalizes women from these social norms.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I explore the culturally taboo issues of premarital sex and extra-marital affairs in Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) and Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Saenghwal'ui ŏndŏk* (Height of Life, 1982) as ways of uncovering the carnal desire that resists the state's regulations on the body. Although political agendas try to control the masses through methods of biopolitics, love for the opposite sex and uncontrollable sexual drives leap the boundaries of rules and social/moral codes. Furthermore, the irony is in the state for placing prohibitions on the individuals' sexual drives while creating spaces in which these carnal desires can be fulfilled.

Chapter 1

The New Writing System in North Korea

The picture completely neglected the rules of perception—Ch'oe Sang-sun's My School

In the opening of Ch'oe Sang-sun's *Uri hakkyo* (My School, 1974),[34] Kim Il Sung visits a group of children at school during the Fatherland Liberation War or the Korean War. The Great Leader peruses through some of the sketches that the children drew and comes across U-sŏng's sketch of a female soldier of the People's Army holding a machine gun to an American soldier. Here is the description of the sketch:

> The rest of the class looked at what [the Great Leader] was looking at. However, the picture completely neglected the rules of perception. Compared to the American soldier in the front, who was kneeling with his hands in the air, the female soldier of the People's Army in the back with a machine gun in her hands was much larger. The honorary badges on the female soldier's military uniform and the golden star on her helmet were enormous. The only thing that was large for the American soldier was his beaky nose. (Ch'oe 22)

[34] The word "uri" in Korean can mean either "my" or "our." I took the liberty of translating it as "my" because of the ideological point that the story is trying to make. U-sŏng draws a picture and titles it "My School" because it is the school that he imagines he and the other students will attend. So in a sense, it could be translated as "Our School," considering the collectivity of the students. But in the story, Kim Il Sung takes the drawing titled "My School" and shows it to his soldiers. He tells them that they must fight to materialize U-sŏng's imaginations. Kim Il Sung tells his soldiers to think of U-sŏng's school as their school. In other words, make it personal. The ideological lesson is to personalize the political.

U-sŏng's negligence to the "rules of perception" can be read as new principles of depicting and justifying the discourse of the nation's history, where certain aspects are accentuated over others. The rules of perception in art are distorted, having little or no semblance to the realistic delineation of the historicity of the Great Leader and his imagination of the nation-state. U-sŏng's work of art in Ch'oe Sang-sun's *My School* reveals the adoption of a new mode of production in North Korean literature, that literature as a semblance of socialist realism is a fading tradition among North Korean writers by the early 1970s. It may be, as Brian Myers claims, a "failure" of socialist realism that was already perceptible in literary works of the 1950s and 1960s. Whichever is the case, art in North Korea distorts the reality of the nation's history as is evidenced by Ch'oe Sang-sun's short story.

Ch'oe's *My School* ushers in a new paradigm of writing for writers in the wake of developing the personality cult of Kim Il Sung. U-sŏng deliberately draws a picture that distorts the reality of the Korean War by prioritizing ideological content over the principles of depth perception. This was not the teacher's assignment. Realizing U-sŏng's erroneous picture, the other classmates laugh and bicker at him, anticipating the teacher's reaction. The teacher takes pride in her duty for the nation as an educator, and nothing disappoints her more than a student who fails to abide by the tenets of her instructions. Perhaps the teacher expects the Great Leader to remind U-sŏng and the other students to follow their teacher's lessons so that they can grow up to be valiant socialist

revolutionaries. However, even the Great Leader disappoints the teacher with his response to U-sŏng's drawing. While Kim Il Sung recognizes the imbalance of the two soldiers in the drawing, he compliments U-sŏng for his political insight:

> Hey, child! Your drawing is really good! Of course, the People's Army must be larger than the American soldiers! The honorary badges and the star on the helmet must be this bright and big. It's really good of you to think like this. It's important for artists to know how to use their imaginations and represent them in reality. (Ch'oe 22)

Author Ch'oe Sang-sun informs his readers that the Great Leader himself admits that art must be reconfigured to accentuate the Party's ideology over realism, that artists must "know how to use their imaginations" to reconstruct the nation's history rather than relying on factual knowledge. Facts (whatever these may be) need not only reflect reality, but, more importantly according to Kim Il Sung in this short story, they must stress certain aspects of the truth to display the larger-than-life emblems of the nation's victory. To U-sŏng's teacher, Kim Il Sung says, "Ideology is the most important thing in raising revolutionaries, the future of the socialist construction" (Ch'oe 23). Kim Il Sung conflates socialist revolution with nationalism to justify the implementation of his alleged idea of Juche ideology and monolithic policy (*yu'il ch'aegye*). In order to ossify and secure these principles, Kim Il Sung urges the artists or writers to create imaginative yet highly ideological narratives that glorify the nation's founding father no matter how far they deviate from the *rules of perception* or reality.

The readers soon realize that this story is not about the victory of the war but about the correct ideological education necessary to forge a new generation of revolutionaries who will unconditionally devote their lives to the Great Leader without questioning or doubting the inconsistencies in the nation's history and their leader's hagiography. This is a reflection of the new curriculum that was implemented into education system in 1972. From primary school to tertiary school (or university), students were taught Kimilsungism, which consisted of the history of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary victory against the Japanese and the Americans.[35] Although socialism under the aegis of Marxism-Leninism was still taught, Kimilsungism took the front stage and slowly replaced (or better yet omitted) Marxism-Leninism by 1992.[36] The omission of one of the fundamental tenets of socialism from the DPRK Constitution in 1992 was an indicative sign of North Korea officially declaring what Kim Jong Il would later say "Socialism of our own style," continually reconfiguring the history and the future of the nation to substantiate and impose a truth value to the mythology of the Great Family of the DPRK.

In fact, the enterprise of reconstructing history, simply the telling of past events has never been an innocent endeavor for North Korea (nor in any country). Ueno Chizuko in *Nationalism and Gender* advocates for the recognition of

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[35] *Kimilsung chu'ui kibon* (Basic Principles of Kimilsungism) (Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Press, 2004), 6-13. See Muhammad al Missuri. *Kimilsungism: Theory and Practice* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House), 9-16.

[36] DPRK Constitution in 1992 completely omitted Marxism-Leninism.

differing or silenced voices by the Japanese government when rewriting national history. She states, "History is a constant reconstructing of the past in the present," (2004, 3) that there is no singular narrative in history and that history is fundamentally something rewritten, referring to the need to incorporate differing voices into the grand narrative of the nation.[37] Much of the same can be said about the history-writing in North Korea, where the official records coupled with the interpretations of those records may ineluctably face challenges from Party members, cadres, war veterans who have personal recollections of the personage of Kim Il Sung, the Korean War, and the aftermath. However, these voices are silenced and replaced with the dominant voice of the state, the voice that legitimizes the new strategy, the new methodology of writing and constructing the history or the grand narrative of the nation. This voice demands absolute loyalty from the Party officials, local cadres, writers, and the masses despite the tenuous facts that stultify and debilitate the very foundation of the nation's pride. As Hannah Arendt says in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "Total loyalty is possible only when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content, from which changes of mind might naturally arise" (197, 324), North Koreans' total loyalty is displayed through the ventriloquism of the monolingual voice, and, for writers and artists, their loyalty is materialized through the production and reproduction of the imposed monolithic historicity of the Great Leader.

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[37] Ueno, Chizuko. *Nationalism and Gender*. Translated by Beverly Yamamoto (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004), 3.

This chapter is not concerned with debunking the official history of the revolutionary activity of Kim Il Sung during the Japanese colonial era and the Korean War as recorded by the Party as much as it is concerned with the institutionalization of the personality cult of Kim Il Sung in 1967 after the monumental meeting at the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Party Committee. Of course, the construction of the hagiography of Kim Il Sung did not only begin after this meeting but had already been spearheaded by Han Sŏrya in the 1950s along with other writers.[38] My aim in this chapter is to raise the contentions and problems found in the enterprise of creating the official hagiography of Kim Il Sung novelized in a series called the *Immortal History* that was first published in 1972 under a newly established group *par excellence* called the April 15 Literary Production Unit (4.15 Munhak ch'angjakdan), which still exists today. This group of writers is commissioned to reconstruct the grand narrative of the nation through the life and times of the Great Leader by fictionalizing real events that took place from Japan's colonial dominance in Korea to the day of his death in 1994. While this group is nominally a sub-division of the Writer's Union, the group's sole task of constructing the hagiography of Kim Il Sung places it at an elite position against the rest of the writers in the Union, securing certain privileges such as higher wages, better food rations, and improved living conditions.[39]

[38] Brian Myers. *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asian Series, 1994), 94.

I find this institutionalized group to be unique to North Korea—against its counterparts in the former Soviet Union under Stalin and China under Mao—and the privileged status of this group attracts writers from the Union to become pragmatic advocates of the hagiography in order to secure their own livelihood in the ever increasing crisis in the DPRK. It would be short-sighted to assume, however, that all writers in the Writer's Union and the April 15 Literary Production Unit are blind followers and believers of the legend of Kim Il Sung. Instead, it is important to understand how this group creates an economically driven class system within an already esteemed class of writers in the Writer's Union and how pragmatism becomes the means in which some of these writers achieve their personal ends.

The Legend of the Great Family

Up until 1976, the DPRK celebrated the Korean People's Army Establishment Day (*Chosŏn inmingun ch'anggŏn*) on February 8th, celebrating its twenty-eighth anniversary for the Korean War veterans. On this national holiday, North Koreans received a day off from work to commemorate the valiant soldiers who fended away the American imperialists from re-colonizing Korea into a capitalist machine. However, in 1977, the Party Central Committee declared April

[39] Choe Chin-i. "Chakkawa Chosŏn chakka tongmaeng" (Writers and the North Korean Writer's Union). *Imjingang*, vol. 9 (Seoul: Imjingang Publishing, 2010): 142-181.

25th as this holiday, and celebrated its forty-fifth anniversary, commemorating the revolutionary guerrillas during the colonial period. Why was the date of this holiday changed, and what are the significant implications of this change?

In North Korea, the Korean People's Army was officially inaugurated on February 8, 1948.[40] Ho Chong-suk, the minister for culture and propaganda, spoke of a two-pronged struggle, a "struggle for national construction" in the North and an "armed war of resistance for national salvation" in the South, both of which required a "firmly standing People's Army, police, force, and defense forces."[41] Thus, February 8th commemorated the establishment of the KPA and not the befallen soldiers of the Korean War, which is different from why the United States celebrates Veterans Day. Even in Ch'oe Sang-sun's *My School* (1974), the narrative opens with a war veteran visiting a school on February 8th to retell the glorious victory over the Americans. However, February 8, 1976 was the last time Korean War veterans receive national recognition.

In the following year, KPA Establishment Day officially fell on April 25th. Headlines across *Rodong Sinmun* (Worker's Daily) on April 25, 1977 celebrated the forty-fifth anniversary of the anti-Japanese guerrillas of the colonial era. This meant that Kim Il Sung's guerrilla force was established in 1932, the most significant year that marks the revolutionary movement toward national liberation.

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[40] Armstrong, Charles. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 232.

[41] Ibid., 232.

The year 1932 seems to carry more weight in North Korea than 1945, the year of national liberation from Japanese colonialism. Although August 15, 1945 is an important day for all Koreans (both North and South), the fall and winter of 1932 is to be acknowledged as the *immortal year* for North Koreans, for it is during this period that Kim Il Sung established the one and only *true* national liberators ("the Manchurian faction") who combated against the Japanese colonialists. The year 1932 marks the origins, the birth of the legend of the Great Family of the DPRK, or as Wada Haruki (1992) calls a "guerrilla state." In short, this historical revision declares that the establishment of the nation did not occur in 1948 with soldiers who were prepared to advance to liberate the South from the oppressive chains of the U.S. but in 1932 with Kim Il Sung's Manchurian guerrillas, who were prepared to eliminate the Japanese colonial occupants.

The logic of the historicity of Kim Il Sung that dates back to his guerrilla years legitimizes and authenticates his leadership amid rivaling political factions during the formative years of the nation. From Kim's point of view, the destruction of all factions except his own group of veteran guerrillas was a necessary precondition for gaining unlimited personal power (Lankov 2002, 91). Sonia Ryang says, "By the time the Fifteenth Assembly of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea was held in May 1967, the key posts in the party were occupied by Kim's close battle comrades, all of them Manchurian veterans" (2012, 16-17). In order for Kim Il Sung to solidify his political power, he needed his loyal guerrillas' support.

Otherness was not tolerated by Kim Il Sung, and he took any opportunity he could to eliminate political factions. Thus, purges of political leaders, cadres, intelligentsia, and academicians took place during the late 1950s and into the early 1960s in order to secure Kim's tenuous political power (Lankov 2002). By 1967, another purge befell a group called Kapsan Operation Committee that contested Kim Il Sung's decision on a new successor (Lim 2009). Kim Jong Il gives an account of some of the pressing issues discussed at the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Party Central Committee:

> The meeting exposed and criticized the crimes of the anti-Party, counter-revolutionary elements who had been scheming, lying low, within our Party for a long time, and took the resolute measure of removing the confirmed ringleaders from the Party ranks. However, the struggle against the anti-Party, anti-revolutionary elements is not over merely because several prime movers have been expelled. This struggle has only just started. (Lim 2009, 220)

The single most significant year for Kim Il Sung's establishment of permanent power was in 1967 at the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Committee of the Worker's Party, where he declared his Juche ideology and monolithic policy as the core principles of the DPRK.[42] With Kim Jong Il in office at the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Party in 1964, he began to modify the cultural aspects such as art, literature, music, operas/ dramas, and film in order to use them as tools for ideological education

[42] Kim Jong Il. "On Stamping Out the Ideologically Evil Consequences of the Anti-Party, Counter-Revolutionary Elements and Establishing the Party's Monolithic Ideological System." *Kim Jong Il Selected Works* vol.1, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992), 220.

and as edification of his father's personality cult. In his speech to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation in 1967, Kim Jong Il spells out his demands:

> The Party's ideological work is intended to educate all people to think and act in accordance with the ideas and the will of the Party. Only when the Party's ideological work is conducted with militant vigor will a revolutionary spirit be evident throughout the entire Party and the whole of society…Only when one is fully imbued with the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance and strenuous effort is one able to brave all difficulties with confidence and courage to implement the Party's line to the letter without the slightest vacillation. (1992, 255-256)

For Kim Jong Il, the monolithic policy must be the driving force behind all political, cultural, and ideological activities. When Kim Jong Il explicated the metaphoric use of military vigor, this does not necessary foreshadow his Military First (*sŏn'gun*) policy instated after his father's death in 1994. However, it is possible to imbricate his militant fervor to the draconian group of university students of the Three Revolutions Team Members (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng sojowŏn*) that emerged in 1973. Moreover, the implications of this passage suggest that proper ideological training of the masses must be the responsibility of an institutionalized group of loyal writers of Kim Il Sung's personality cult.

Even before Kim Jong Il was appointed as deputy chief of the Deparmtent of Propaganda and Agitation in 1969, he launched one of the single-most important cultural projects: to strengthen his father's personality cult through art, film and literature. Kim Jong Il says:

> I felt more keenly than ever that the development of a new revolutionary literature with the creation of an artistic image of the leader of the working

> class as its focus and kernel is the most urgent task faced at the moment in the domain of literature and art, a task which will not brook a moment's delay. (1992, 232)

Kim Jong Il's sense of urgency to develop his father's personality cult may have derived from the need to concretize a unified historicity, a grand narrative that describes the origins of the nation, the Great Leader, the Party, and the loyal citizens of the working class. Indeed, it must've been an urgent task for the young Kim to eradicate the dissenting political factions from the historical narrative to create a new one, a revolutionary one that was allegedly spearheaded by his father in 1932.

Inventing the Discourse of *a* Kim Il Sung

As early as 1963, it is safe to say that Kim Jong Il poured a great deal of effort into the personality cult of his father. North Korean writer Ch'ŏn Se-bong (1915-1986) provides an account of how both Kim Senior and Kim Junior have visited him on two separate occasions to convince him to urge his writers to produce the personality cult of Kim Il Sung.[43] Ch'ŏn was the chairman of the Writers Union at the time with a long and respected track record.[44] It wasn't until

[43] Ch'ŏn Se-bong. "Hyangdo'ui pyŏlpit" (The Leader's Radiance). *Hyangdo'ui T'aeyang*. (Pyongyang: Pyongyang ch'ulp'ansa, 1994), 6.

[44] Refer to the Endnotes in Ch'ŏn Se-bong's *An'gae hŭrŭnŭn sae ŏndŏk* (Fog Creeps Over a New Hill, 1966) (Seoul: Sallimt'ŏ, 1996), 688-702. Additionally, according to Brian Myers, "Ch'ŏn Se-bong, the KFLA's new chairman, was denied the degree of

the third visit in 1966 that "convinced" Ch'ŏn to carry out with the Great Leader's personality cult with the Writers Union.[45]

Kim Senior and Kim Junior's visit to Ch'ŏn Se-bong was an appropriate order of conduct because he chaired the entire Writer's Union at the time, and they needed the top official to comply with their demands. However, interestingly enough, Ch'ŏn Se-bong was not favored by Kim Jong Il, who accused him of being a revisionist writer based on the publication of *An'gae hŭrŭnŭn sae ŏndŏk* (Fog Creeps Over a New Hill, 1966).[46] Once Ch'ŏn Se-bong had agreed to head the April 15 Literary Production Unit, Kim Jong Il attacked Ch'ŏn's novel, deeming it anti-revolutionary and lacking in the spirit of the working class.[47]

Ch'ŏn Se-bong's initial refusals to head the April 15 Literary Production Unit imply several speculations: first, it may be a humble gesture of refusing such a position before the leader of the nation, as is customary in the Korean tradition; second, Ch'ŏn perhaps wanted to know if the Kims were sincere in their request, that his position as the chair of the Writer's Union will not be jeopardized and that

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official veneration that Han [Sŏrya] had received, though he remained in the post for almost twice as long" (1994, 149).

[45] Kim Jong Il. "Developing a New Type of Revolutionary Literature." Speech given on February 7, 1966. (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992), 116.

[46] Kim Jong Il. "Creating Realistic Typification of Human Character and Life Thoroughly." Speech made on February 10, 1967. *Kim Jong Il Selected Works volume 1*. (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992), 179-186.

[47] Ch'ŏn's novel was criticized by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and was consequently restricted from further publishing, circulation, and discussion. This novel made its way across the border to South Korea and was reprinted by a South Korean publishing house Sallimt'ŏ in 1996. According to Kim Chae-yong, Ch'ŏn's *Fog Creeps Over a New Hill* is not mentioned in any articles or literary criticisms till this day (1996, 698-701).

he could maintain the prominence of being a superior among his colleagues; and third, Ch'ŏn perhaps really did not feel that institutionalizing a separate group of writers solely for the production of Kim Il Sung's personality cult was the appropriate measure needed to construct a socialist nation, that such a group is conceptually problematic and pragmatically an endeavor that curtails writers' creativity. Unfortunately, we will never know why Ch'ŏn Se-bong initially refused and why he complied with the Great Leader in the end. But one thing for sure, Ch'ŏn's acceptance concretized Kim Jong Il's idea of producing a new system of writing, reading, and thinking about his father and himself as it was the first and necessary step toward the creation of the April 15 Literary Production Unit.

The initial stages of demanding the writers to create a personality cult were not as systematized or institutionalized as the April 15 Literary Unit, but the infrastructural processes and desired outcome were symmetrical. In "Giving Wide Publicity to the Leader's Greatness Among the South Korean People," Kim Jong Il blames the U.S. imperialists for debilitating any form of reverence South Koreans had toward Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il argues that the road to a peaceful unification was truncated by U.S. intervention. As a result, he calls on his writers to reproduce the iconic image of the Great Leader in a form of a biography to "awaken" the South Koreans to the revolutionary cause. Kim Jong Il says, "The leader's biography must be of high quality so as to be commensurate with his great achievements, his uncommon intelligence, outstanding leadership and his

high authority" (1992, 84). For Kim Jong Il, the written work must be as esteemed as Kim Il Sung's life achievement, that the biography ought to be written *in a way* that reflects his greatness instead of his greatness being reflected in the biography.

There were biographies that preceded the ones Kim Jong Il demanded from the writers. On the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the DPRK, the Committee of Translation in Japan produced Kim Il Sung: Biography on September 9, 1969, which was translated from the original Korean edition by Baik Bong called *Minjok'ui t'aeyang: Kim Il Sung chang'gun* (General Kim Il Sung: The Sun of the Nation, 1968).[48] The biography is over 577 pages and covers Kim Il Sung's "revolutionary struggle, his revolutionary family, early revolutionary struggles, 15-year-long arduous anti-Japanese armed struggle, to the following liberation of the fatherland" (1969, 595). Baik's biography of Kim Il Sung fuses both fact and fiction to make each event dramatic. Despite its length and coverage of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary life, it was perhaps not something that Kim Jong Il had in mind. For Kim Jong Il, writing narratives about his father were secondary to the institutionalizing a group of writers whom he can monitor and control.

In this speech, Kim Jong Il explicates the invention of a new system, discourse, style, and rhetoric of writing on Kim Il Sung's hagiography that the writers must adopt. The new system is expected to reveal the "greatness of his

[48] Baik Bong's *Minjok'ui t'aeyang: Kim Il Sung chang'gun* (General Kim Il Sung: The Sun of the Nation) was published by Inmunkwahaksa (Cultural Sciences Publishing House) in February 1968, according to the translator's note at the end of the English version of *Kim Il Sung: Biography*. Baik wrote two more volumes to the biography.

revolutionary activities and his personality in great breadth and depth" (1992, 84). Kim Jong Il's notion of a "new system" of writing is none other than an invention of a discourse on *a* Kim Il Sung rather than portraying his father:

> The great leader's biography should not be written like a tale of a man's military exploits or like a collection of anecdotes which was written just for the sake of interest as is the case with conventional biographies of heroes and great men. (1992, 84)

The biography of Kim Il Sung under the "new system" is not to be a typical biography, but an invention of *a* Kim Il Sung, a saint, a knight in shining armor, or as South Korean scholar Sin Hyŏng-gi says a "shape of a demigod that controls the mysteries of the universe" (*tunkabsŭl'e ch'ŏn'gijohwa-rŭl pu'ri'nŭn sin'in*) (2000, 23). The task of the writers is not to simply recount the revolutionary days of Kim Il Sung, but to create a fairytale-like narrative in the form of a biography. Kim Jong Il continues:

> The leader's biography should be a comprehensive, systematic representation of his energetic, ideological and theoretical activities, his broadmindedness and generosity that has led everyone down the path of revolution together with his warm love for the people, his unbounded loyalty to the revolutionary cause, and also his unassuming, popular personality […] The biography will thus greatly contribute to implanting loyalty to the leader and feelings of trust in him in the heart of everyone and convincing everyone that he will be crowned with victory and glory under his leadership. (Kim 1992, 84)

For Kim Jong Il, the biography must be larger-than-life and certainly larger than Kim Il Sung himself. Kim Jong Il lays emphasis on creating *a* Kim Il Sung rather than on reproducing the verisimilitude of Kim Il Sung's actual life.

Based on this passage above, Kim Jong Il believes that this "new system" of writing will forge loyal members of society in both North and South Korea and that the people will place their trust in Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il expects the discourse of Kim Il Sung to be highly acknowledged and trusted when he clearly delineated the need to invent the biography of his father.

There is a great sense of urgency in Kim Jong Il's speeches to facilitate his father's personality cult. It is as if Kim Jong Il was trying to hide certain truths about his father (and perhaps his own insecurities about succession) with an overload of discourses, paintings, films, and other media. Suh Dae-sook (1988, 322) in *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* says, "Exaggeration and unsubstantiated claims not only obscure his true record but also do disservice to him, for his true record is impressive. Kim can claim a place in the annals of modern Korea for what he has achieved without fabricating spectacular feats."

However, Kim Jong Il recognized that in order to facilitate the efficiency of generating his father's personality cult through literature he needed to systematize and institutionalize a designated group of writers from the Writers Union so that he can closely monitor, correct, and insure the uniformity of form and content of the novels (Kim 1992, 236). In his speech to the senior officials of the Propaganda and Agitation Department in 1967, he announced the formation of the April 15 Literary Production Unit in honor of Kim Il Sung's birthday.[49] This

[49] Prior to the establishment of the April 15 Literary Production Unit in 1967, Kim Jong Il established Mt. Paektu Film Production Team that created films on the personality cult of Kim Il Sung.

group of writers was to become the *engineers* of Kim Il Sung's legend, heralding a new revolutionary era in North Korea's literary world.

April 15 Literary Production Unit

The legend—that which "must be read"—not only functions as a hagiography, treating Kim Il Sung as a sacrosanct icon of the nation, but, more importantly, as an epistemological institution of generating and, therefore, sustaining the legacy of Kim—that which "must be written." In "On Establishing the April 15 Literary Production Unit" speech, Kim Jong Il (1992, 237) says, "Generation after generation we must create outstanding revolutionary works of literature and art depicting the great stature of our revered leader in order to educate people to be revolutionary fighters unfailing in their loyalty to him." This is a two-pronged statement that urges the writers to write—that which must be written—so that the readers can understand the revolutionary cause of the Great Leader—that which must be read. Both prongs insinuate strong ideological justifications of instilling and controlling the monolithic system as the Party's guiding principle over the writers and the people. The legend of Kim Il Sung needs to be bequeathed to the generations to come in written form rather than in oral tradition and in the form of a novel rather than in the form of a biography.[50]

[50] Kim Jong Il. *Chuch'e munhaknon* (Juche Literary Theory) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 8.

The novelization and the serialization of the legend are to be considered the greatest achievement of all other literary art forms in the DPRK. It is to be what South Korean scholar Yu Im-ha (2009, 99) calls the "nation-narrative," where the nation sings an epic narrative and a narrative that sings of the glorious nation.

Kim Jong Il begins his speech to the officials of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation with the urgency to eliminate oppositional elements that have "undermined and debased" the writers' and artists' political and ideological understanding such as: anti-Party, counter-revolutionary, feudal-Confucianism, capitalism, flunkeyism, dogmatism, and the bourgeois way of life (Kim 1992, 232). For Kim, writers in the past who have resorted to the descriptions listed failed to "establish the Party's monolithic ideological system securely in the field of literature and art" (Kim 1992, 233). Kim Jong Il also explicitly blames the "traditions of the KAPF (Korea Artista Proletaria Federacio)" and writers who "mouth phrases about 'artistic freedom'" for deterring the development of literature toward revolution and for not abiding by the creeds of the monolithic policy of the Party (Kim 1992, 233-234). Yu Im-ha (2009, 103) argues that in order for Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to establish the personality cult, the traditions of the KAPF and socialist realism would have to be eliminated in favor of a "new tradition" of Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese era. For Kim Jong Il, even the writers who wrote about the legacy of Kim Il Sung prior to the establishment of April 15 Literary Production Unit have fallen short of

essentializing and accentuating the creeds of the monolithic policy and the manifestation of Juche through the Great Leader.[51]

This methodology of criticizing past writers for their lack of the correct Party orientation is not at all uncommon in many of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's opening statements in their speeches. In fact, as South Korean scholar Sŏ Chae-jin (2004) argues, the blame is always shifted and displaced to the middle-men—in this case, the writers—and never to the leaders. While Sŏ may be correct in explicating this pattern of displacing blame to others, this speech is also Kim Jong Il's tactful gesture of consolidating and homogenizing aberrant writers under the absolute power of the Party: "The task of depicting the leader should become an undertaking totally organized (*ch'ŏljŏhi tang'ui chojik'imyŏ*) and planned by the Party" (Kim 1992, 236).

Kim Jong Il justifies the necessity of the Party's control over the April 15 Literary Production Unit in order to silence other voices that may contradict, undermine, or misconstrue the revolutionary narrative of Kim Il Sung. In other words, the legend and the revolutionary history of the Great Leader must be produced by a designated group of writers under the supervision of a single gaze

[51] South Korean scholar Chŏng Ch'ang-hyŏn (2009, 45) in "Kim Jong Il'ui munye chŏngch'aek'kwa ch'ongsŏ 'Pulmyŏlui ryŏksa'ui sŏngnip" (Kim Jong Il's Literary Policy and the Establishment of *Immortal History* Series) lists writers who have written about the legacy of Kim Il Sung such as Yi Na-yong's *Chosŏn minjok haebang t'ujaengsa* (The History of the Struggle for the Liberation of the People of Korea, 1958); Yim Ch'un-ch'u's *Hangil mujang t'ujaeng sikirul hoesanghayŏ* (Looking Back at the Time of the Anti-Japanese Struggle, 1960); and Pak Tal's *Chogukŭn saengmyŏng podado kwijunghada* (The Fatherland is more Precious than Life, 1960). Chŏng describes the way in which the writers for April 15 Literary Production Unit used these previous works as contextual materials on which to base Kim Il Sung's legacy.

rather than leaving the task to the discretion of the writers, which, in the past, have resulted in "spontaneous and disparate in character" of the leader.

The task of the April 15 Literary Production Unit was not only to recreate, retell, or reinvent the true history of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary activities, but to personify the Juche ideology into a living, organic being with a name attached to it: Kim Il Sung. Thus, the greatest problem the writers faced in undertaking this task was not only mythologizing the tenuous life of Kim Il Sung but breathing life into a political system, an incomprehensible ideology that they were not quite familiar. In short, it is not how the Juche ideology burgeoned from Kim Il Sung but how Kim Il Sung is Juche incarnate—how the ideology became flesh. It is the *becoming of flesh* that needed to be written in a multi-volume series.

On the practical level, Kim Jong Il suggests to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation that well-qualified writers who have a comparatively long record of creative work[52] and a wealth of creative experience, together with well-qualified writers of medium standing should be chosen (Kim 1992, 239). Kim Jong Il claims that since the April 15 Literary Production Unit is the first of its kind compared to the other communist countries, and since the project of depicting the leader is "virtually a virgin territory," the writers must pool their collective wisdom in order to produce a couple of books as model works and

[52] Kim Jong Il may have had Sŏk Yun-gi, Ch'ŏn Se-bong, Ch'oe Hak-su, and Kwon Chŏng-ung in mind for recruiting veteran writers. These three have had a long record of producing "quality" literary works according to the DPRK Almanac. Sŏk Yun-gi's *P'okpung'u* (Tempest, 1962), Ch'ŏn Se-bong's *Sŏkkae'ul'ui sae pom* (New Spring in Sŏkkae'ul, 1961), Ch'oe Hak-su's *Pyonyang sigan* (Pyongyang Time, 1978), and Kwon Chŏng-ung's *Paekilhong* (Zinnia, 1961) are some of the representative literary works that the Almanac lauds.

acquire experience of the work (Kim 1992).[53] Maurice Meisner (1982, 165) in *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* traces the historical development of Mao's cult-building immediately after the Cultural Revolution, where it was "a patently manufactured product, deliberately contrived for immediate political ends;" and Katerina Clark (2000) in *The Soviet Novel* analyzes the Stalinist myth of the Great Family through works like Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. However, they do not mention an institutionalized group of writers who were delegated the responsibility of producing the cult of both Mao and Stalin as there is for Kim Il Sung. The Kim cult would go well beyond Stalinism and Maoism in its pervasiveness, longevity, and extension beyond the individual to the family of the Great Leader himself (Armstrong 2003, 222). Therefore, rather than simply reproducing a biographical account of Kim's life or inventing his "original" philosophical treatises, the April 15 Literary Production Unit was initiated with the purpose of novelizing the revolutionary breadth of the myth of Kim Il Sung's activities. Furthermore, Kim Jong Il expects every novel written by this group to be "masterpieces" and "enduring classics" that function as a "textbook of life" for the people.

Kim Jong Il advises the writers to accomplish two tasks: first, portray the other revolutionary family members in the narrative; and second, use the writings of the leader as contextual material for their novels. Kim says, "The April 15

[53] Although there is no concrete evidence of writers "pooling" their ideas, there are two novels that have co-authorship: Ch'oe Hak-su and Hyŏn Sung-gŏl's *Foot of Mt. Paektu*(1978) and Paek Po-hŭm and Song Sang-wŏn's *Eternal Life* (1997).

Literary Production Unit should use material about the struggle and life of the leader's revolutionary family to write a great many excellent novels to assist the revolutionary education of our people" (1992, 240). The advice pertains to the construction and depiction of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary family, which includes his father (Kim Hyŏng-jik), mother (Kang Pan-sŏk), his wife (Kim Chŏng-suk), and later his son (Kim Jong Il). According to South Korean scholar Kim Yong-jik (2008, 226), the inclusion of the other revolutionary family members show that Kim Il Sung's revolutionary activities were not performed alone. This rather keen observation suggests that the teleological history of the socialist revolution advances from within a single family, that the history of North Korea is essentially a story about a monarchical succession from Kim Hyŏng-jik to Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il, and now Kim Jong Un.[54] However, the actual role of the other revolutionary family members in the novels appear as secondary, side characters, supporting Kim Il Sung who is the true bearer of the revolutionary torch.

Kim Jong Il's second advice is a more problematic one for writers. For Kim Jong Il, the act of novelizing the leader's life relates to the comprehensive breadth of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary struggle against the Japanese in an artistic fashion. It is the writers' imperative duty to transfer Kim Il Sung's autobiography, writings, and other documents into a novel form. Kim Yong-jik (2008, 227)

[54] Kim Hyŏng-jik, of course, never ran the country, but his symbolic presence and the iconic gift of two pistols to Kim Il Sung are accountable as North Korea's progenitor of the revolution.

suggests that transferring Kim Il Sung's works into a novel form means that works such as *Sŏnghwangdang* (Shrine), *P'ibada* (Sea of Blood), and *Han chawidanwŏnui unmyŏng* (Fate of a Self-defense Corps Man) are to become novelized. While this may be one of the projects in transferring the leader's alleged writings into novel forms, the more pressing issue for Kim Jong Il is to transfer and thus transform his father's guerrilla years into the *only* lasting legacy of the DPRK. However, Kim Jong Il poses the single-most problematic moment for the writers:

> In describing the revolutionary history of the great leader, even if a work includes some great historic event or significant incident and depicts reality on a grand scale, it will have no value as a revolutionary masterpiece if it provides no profound artistic motivation for events and no aesthetic insights into new human problems. (Kim 1992, 241)

Kim Jong Il's expectation from the writers is to portray historical moments *as* truth in a fictitious form of a novel with the highest aesthetic standards while remaining within the rubric of the monolithic policy. The combination of historical fact and creative surge of powerful emotions, empirical writing with a proportionate amount of aesthetic hyperbole, problematizes the genre of this project, where it is neither simply a creative novel nor a history textbook, neither a biographical account nor a historical novel (in North Korean genre standards).[55]

[55] To label the *Immortal History* series as historical novels is inaccurate according to North Korean literary standards. The so called historical novels are usually set during the

This may have led North Korean writer and critic Ha Chŏng-hi to confess: "*How* to write [a novel] is a problem, but, more importantly, *what* to write is a growing problem" (1975, 76) [my emphasis I.K.]. In other words, for Ha, writing a contentless narrative of Kim Il Sung is not only an arduous task but nearly an impossibility, where the neglecting of the "rules of perception" is a requirement. The ramifications of writing such a narrative is nothing less of inventing and adding colorful signifiers to an empty signified. However, for Ha, the formulaic answer to this dilemma dwells in the writers' "political insight and discernment," which is also the title of her essay. She claims that once writers have keen political insight and discernment, writing will come naturally—as though the Party and the Great Leader are inspirational muses.

Even Kim Jong Il admits that the form of the novel representing the leader and how they should be written are inquiries that require further study (1992, 241). At the same time, Kim reminds his writers that the only source of inspiration comes from the Party. Kim asserts that "only under the monolithic guidance of the Party can the task of writing literary works representing the great leader be addressed energetically" (1992, 241-242). Kim calls on a diverse group of experienced writers who can artistically delineate the leader's revolutionary struggle against the Japanese, and, more importantly, this group must align their artistry with the monolithic policy, which sings of the gloriousness and

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Chosŏn Dynasty or before, several centuries ago. Some of the novels that the Party has deemed as "classics" are *Nopsaeparam* (Hong Sŏk-jung, 1983), *Mang'i* (Kim Chŏng-min, 1989), and *Hwang Chin-i* (Hong Sŏk-jung, 2002).

unparalleled heroism of the founding father. The writers' creativity must exude from within the limitations of the Party's strictures, that a single, controlled, patriarchal/patriotic, and ideological voice must thread the contents of the novel and its series.

The very idea of allowing the Party to be the muse to the writers and the countless amount of anecdotes of how Kim Jong Il personally guided the writers to carry out this burdensome duty do nothing more than displace the writers' real hardships to the centrifugal force of the typical rhetoric that all writers must ostensibly articulate. After shedding away the layers upon layers of praising Kim Jong Il for his infinite wisdom and sacrificial effort to his writers, we see a glimpse of the writers' struggles and compensation for their work. In 1992, a nameless writer wrote an article called "April 15 Literary Production Unit Establishment" celebrating the twenty-fourth anniversary of its establishment. In this article, he states how the writers were incapable of resolving (*haegyŏl*) the problem with the monolithic policy in the literary work (1992, 40). This honest confession elucidates the pervasive problem among the writers in this group, which required "resolving" or "neglecting the rules of perception" in their creativity as artists by fixating on the political demands. But he adds how the Dear General provided the writers with great wisdom and monetary security (*saenghwal pojang*) to continue with this task.[56] It is interesting how the Dear

[56] "4.15 Munhak ch'angchakdan ch'angnip" (April 15 Literary Production Unit Establishment). *Chosŏn Munhak* vol.2 (1992): 41.

General's wisdom is juxtaposed with monetary security. This not only implies Kim Jong Il's benevolence but also his ability to *take care* of his writers. Likewise, in another article, writer Kim Chŏng-nam also recalls how the Dear General provided suitable living conditions (*saenghwal chokŏn*) and many awards for the writers to endure the hardships of inventing Kim Il Sung's mythology.[57] For example, Kim Jong Il liked Ch'oe Hak-su so much that 250,000 copies of his novel *Pyongyang sigan* (Pyongyang Time, 1977) was granted, where typically 5,000-100,000 copies are printed for novels. According to an entry in North Korea's *Munhak taesajŏn* (Literature Encyclopedia), *Pyongyang Time* was published on December 13, 1977, and on January 15, 1978 and April 13, 1978, Kim Il Sung highly praised the novel for its excellence (2000, 224). When Ch'oe Hak-su published *Paektusan kisŭk* (Foothills of Mt. Paektu) through the April 15 Literary Production Unit in 1978, Kim Il Sung praised and thanked Ch'oe for another excellent work, and Kim Jong Il also highly commended the work and showed much care (*pae'ryŏ*) (2000, 224). From that point on, Ch'oe received much coveted recognition from the nation's leaders: Ch'oe received the Kim Il Sung Award in April 1982, which is the highest literary award given to any writer in North Korea; he personally met Kim Il Sung in 1992 and in 1993; in 1997, he received a certificate of excellence from Kim Jong Il followed by a handsome gift for Ch'oe's sixtieth birthday (2000, 224).

[57] Kim Chŏng-nam. "Suryŏng hyŏngsang munhak'ui sae ryŏksaga p'yŏlch'yŏjin yŏngkwangui 40 nyŏn" (Forty glorious years of the unfolding of the new history of the Great Leader's personality literature). *Chosŏn Munhak* vol. 6 (2007): 25.

In 2007, Ch'oe Hak-su wrote an essay (*sup'il*) titled "P'yŏnsaengŭl ma'ŭmsok'e t'aeyang'ŭi yŏngsang'ŭl mosigo" (Cherishing the Image of the Sun in My Heart Forever), thanking the Great Leader and the Dear Leader for their generosity and unending love that have enabled him to become the writer of their liking. The title of the essay is rather obvious of Ch'oe's obsequious testimony of the leaders' greatness, but another look also provides insight into Ch'oe's difficulty in writing these novels. Ch'oe says that he resumed a piece that one writer had begun but could not complete it. Ch'oe admits, "How was I supposed to complete this? No matter how hard I tried, nothing came to my mind" (2007, 27). Ch'oe is given credit for writing *Paektusan kisŭk* (Foothills of Mount Paektu, 1978), which the Party claims to be the most vivid depiction of the personage of Kim Il Sung.[58] Ch'oe offers his eternal gratitude and loyalty to Kim Jong Il for assisting him throughout the writing. But it is noteworthy to indicate the difficulty Ch'oe faced in inventing such a character, where *nothing came to his mind*.

The April 15 Literary Production Unit created a novel series called *Immortal History* with *The Year 1932* (1972) as the first novel of the series. The author was not identified in the first edition but only as a member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit. It wasn't until the third edition in 1989 that the author of *The Year 1932* was identified as Kwon Chŏng-ung.[59] Unfortunately, it is

[58] DPRK Almanac (1979): 285.

[59] Initially, each of the novels in the series were published under April 15 Literary Production Unit until 1985. Thereafter, the novels were published with the author's name printed on the front cover. Additional changes occurred in the early 1980s. Up until 1980, Kim Il Sung was referred to General Kum-sŏng. Starting in 1981, Kum-sŏng was

unclear (as it is with many of North Korea's documents) as to why Kwon was identified only after the first edition. South Korean scholar Nam Wŏn-jin (2009, 207) speculates that these changes occurred in the 1980s after Kim Jong Il was determined to be the successor of Kim Il Sung.[60] In 2007, on the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the April 15 Literary Production Unit, Kwon wrote an article about his experience with the group for the first time titled: "Ch'ongsŏ *Pulmyŏlui Ryŏksa* chung changp'yŏnsosŏl *1932*-i naogikkaji" (Up to the point of publishing *Immortal History* series, particularly *The Year 1932*). Kwon confesses:

> One day in January of 1968, we began to write about the revolutionary work of the Great Leader for his sixtieth birthday celebration…How are we to write this? We debated over and over again, and in the end, we decided to ask Kim Jong Il for advice. After writing the plot of the novel, we showed it to him…For me to write *The Year 1932*, I had to do research and explore the history before I could begin. I completed the novel in the summer of 1971 and gave it to the Dear General. He came back to me and asked me to change the dialogue between the son (Kim Il Sung) and his

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changed to Kim Il Sung. In the novels that trace Kim's childhood, the name Kim Sŏng-ju was used, which was his birth name. For more information, see to Nam Wŏn-jin's "Hyŏngmyŏngjŏk taejak'ui isangkwa ch'ongsŏ'ui kŭndaejŏk munpŏp" (Idealism of the masterpiece and the modernist grammar of the Series). *Pukhanui munhwachŏngchŏn ch'ongsŏ pulmyŏlui ryŏksa'rŭl iknŭnda* (North Korea's Cultural Canon: Reading the Immortal History series), edited by Kang Chin-ho. (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'ansa, 2009), 178-213.

[60] Nam Wŏn-jin bases his speculations on Kim Jong Il's succession. Prior to the succession decision, characters' true identities were not disclosed in fear of Party partisanship. But once Kim Jong Il was decided, he ordered the April 15 Literary Production Unit to revise the early publications and change the names of the fictional characters to their corresponding real characters. Nam continues to say that the revision strengthened and secured Kim's power (2009, 178-213).

> mother (Kang Pan-sŏk) because this was to be the central theme of the novel. (*Chosŏn Munhak* 2007, 26)

Kwon Chŏng-ung was a prolific writer in North Korea, publishing an array of short stories, novels, essays, and criticisms inside and outside of the April 15 Literary Production Unit. He began his writing career in 1958 and continued to produce works till 2004 with *Pukuro kanŭn kil* (The Road Leading to the North, 2004). He was awarded the Kim Il Sung Award in 1982, the same year Ch'oe Hak-su received his.[61] He was a well-respected writer in the Writer's Union, but when he was recruited to write for the April 15 Literary Production Unit and produced *The Year 1932* (among others), his fame within the Writer's Union escalated.[62]

Kwon's anecdote provides additional insight into the processes of writing for members of the April 15 Literary Production Unit. First, Kwon uses the plural pronoun "we" to suggest that the initial stages of writing involved a collective effort rather than an individual undertaking, which Kim Jong Il advised writers to do. Second, Kwon had sought consultation and confirmation from Kim Jong Il (the Dear General) on numerous occasions, which alludes to either Kim Jong Il taking it upon himself to edit each novel produced by this group or Kwon

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[61] *Chosŏn Munhak Yesul Nyŏn'gam* (DPRK Literary Arts Almanac). Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, (2000): 565.

[62] Interview with Mr. Han (pseudonym) a North Korean defector, whose older brother was a former writer of the Writer's Union, in February 2010. He recalls how writers of the April 15 Literary Production Unit were likened to celebrities with special treatment. Also refer to North Korean defector journal *Imjingang* vol.9, (Seoul: Imjingang Publishing, 2010), 142-181.

reiterating the common rhetoric of stating that the wisdom of Kim Jong Il proved to be unfathomable. Since *The Year 1932* was the first of the series, Kim Jong Il most certainly would have closely examined the novel personally. Third, Kwon admits that the task of writing a novelized version of Kim Il Sung's life proved to be difficult. *How are we to write this?* was the pervasive question that dwelled in each of the writers of the group. And fourth, the difficulty of this task is reflected by the amount of years it took to write the first draft. Kwon and his colleagues were given this assignment in winter of 1968 (nearly ten months after Baik Bong had published his biography on Kim Il Sung in February of 1968) and finished in summer of 1971, which means it took nearly three and a half years to draft the novel. The writers had a deadline: April 15, 1972, which was the sixtieth anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth. The Korean culture celebrates one's sixtieth birthday as a sign of longevity and a prosperous life, and 1972 was to be a birthday celebration of unparalleled magnitude. Kim Jong Il's gift to his father was to be the novelization of the revolutionary years, the personality cult pressed and bound in material form. In Kwon's account, he expresses the sense of urgency as the deadline drew nearer, that the creation of Kim's cult was predicated on time and on a showcase of the institutionalization of the April 15 Literary Production Unit—that which "must to be written." In 1972, *The Year 1932* was printed and distributed, giving birth to the *Immortal History* series.

Kwon Chŏng-ung's struggles with the novel must not be overlooked. Kwon's *The Year 1932* is 778 pages long. It is supposed to cover the events that

happened from March of 1932 to February of 1933. Baik Bong also covers this time period, but he only writes about it in about eight pages.[63] Although Kwon speaks of his struggles only to show that these struggles were overcome with the ingenious support of Kim Jong Il, it also reveals Kwon's real struggles with having to extend a period that could be mentioned in about eight pages to a novel of 778 pages. It goes without saying that Kwon may have had to wrestle with his co-writers to come up with dramatic plots within the larger plot of the novel to create a literary work of its magnitude. *The Year 1932* set a precedent for other novels in the *Immortal History* series to follow. Most of the other novels in the series also range anywhere from 500 to 800 pages and cover events that took place within a year.[64]

Immortal History Series and *The Year 1932*

The *Immortal History* series is not written in a chronological order. The first novel, *The Year 1932*, begins twenty years after the birth of Kim Il Sung in 1912. The series should've begun with Kim Chŏng's *Tach'ŭn ollatta* (The Anchor is Drawn), which focuses on Kim Il Sung's student activism years

[63] Baik, Bong. *Kim Il Sung: Biography*, translated by the Committee of Translation, Tokyo: Miraisha, 147-154.

[64] This should not surprise many readers outside of the Korean peninsula. Both Koreas have a tradition of writing lengthy novels that would be equivalent to the *Harry Potter* series, for example. Many South Koreans have enjoyed reading novel series such as Pak Kyŏng-ni's *T'oji* (Land) (over twenty-one volumes), Cho Chŏng-nae's *T'aebaek sanmaek* (The T'aebaek Mountains) (ten volumes) and *Arirang* (Arirang) (twelve volumes).

between 1925 and 1926. However, this work did not appear until 1982. Shortly after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, the *Immortal History* series should've ended with Paek Po-hŭm and Song Sang-wŏn's *Yŏngsaeng* (Eternal Life) written in 1997, which immortalizes Kim Il Sung's reign over North Korea and implies the advancement toward nuclear missile testing. Instead, ten more novels are published to fill in the "empty spaces" of Kim Il Sung's life with Kim Sam-bok's *Ch'ŏngsanpŏl* (Plains of Ch'ŏngsan) written in 2007 as the last novel in the series thus far. Of course, no one expected Kim Il Sung to pass away rather untimely, but a closer examination of the few novels produced prior to his death does not indicate that the writers were writing chronologically.

The last novel elaborates on Kim Il Sung's legendary thought called the Ch'ŏngsan'ni Method, which was devised in 1959-1960. This method called on the ruling officials and the people to work with the same kind of fervency as the farmers of Ch'ŏngsan District, which may have been influenced by Mao's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. South Korean scholar Sin Hyŏng-gi (2009, 81) in "Ch'ongsŏ 'pulmyŏlui ryŏksa'rŭl ŏttŏke ilgŭl kŏsinga" (How to Read 'Immortal History' Series) states that each writer was given or could choose a historical segment. It is unclear as to how Sin was able to obtain this information without making any citations or references to North Korean sources in his article. While it may sound logical that writers are given the material or have chosen it, this speculation still does not account for the discontinuous and inconsecutive chronology. Sin continues by saying that the unique style of each writer may have

altered the congruity of the characters, but the entirety of the series is supposed to be one large story (2009, 82).

Indeed, the *Immortal History* series is undoubtedly a comprehensive collection of a single personage. There are seventeen volumes that comprise of the anti-Japanese struggle and sixteen volumes that comprise of post-liberation.[65] A total of thirty-three volumes narrate the life of Kim Il Sung, and another series called *Pulmyŏlui Hyangdo* (Immortal Leadership) emerges to eulogize the leadership roles of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. North Korean literary critic Yun Ki-dŏk says that no one author could ever write the entirety of Kim Il Sung's life with such breadth and depth, and that the project of immortalizing the Great Leader will be an endless endeavor (1991, 19). The *Immortal History* series may have ended but the *Immortal Leadership* series continued and it still continues to this day. Seen in this way, the novelization of Kim Il Sung is seen as a canonization project of decorating the shelves for the purposes of showcasing the magnitude of the writers' literary greatness. Below is a table that shows the order in which the *Immortal History* series was written and another table that describes the historical significance and context to which each novel pertains.

[65] Kang Chin-ho."'Ch'ongsŏ' ranŭn kŏdesŏsa hokŭn hŏwi'uisik" (Series' an Immense Narrative or False Consciousness). *Pukhanui munhwa chŏngjŏn ch'ongsŏ 'Pulmyŏlui Ryŏksa'rŭl iknŭnda* (Reading North Korea's Literary Canon *Immortal History),* edited by Kang Chin-ho, (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'ansa, 2009), 17-39.

Table 1. *Immortal History* Series: Anti-Japanese Revolutionary Period

Novel	Writer	Year of Publication
1. The Year 1932	Kwon Chŏng-ung	1972
2. Dawn of Revolution (Hyŏngmyŏngui ryŏ'myŏng)	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1973
3. Arduous March (Konanui haenggun)	Sŏk Yun-gi	1976
4. Foothills of Mt. Paektu (Paektusan kisŭk)	Ch'oe Hak-su/ Hyŏn Sung-gŏl	1978
5. District of Tumen River (Tumangang chigu)	Sŏk Yun-gi	1980
6. Severe Battlefield (Chunŏmhan chŏngu)	Kim Byŏng-hun	1981
7. Spring at the Base (Kŭngoji'ui pom)	Ri Chong-ryŏl	1981
8. The Great Land is Verdant (Taejinŭn p'urŭda)	Sŏk Yun-gi	1981
9. The Anchor is Drawn (Tach'ŭn ollatta)	Kim Chŏng	1982
10. The Milky Way Galaxy (Ŭnhasu)	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1982
11. Apnok River (Apnokgang)	Ch'oe Hak-su	1983
12. Unforgettable Winter (Itchi mothal kyŏ'ul)	Chin Chae-hwan	1984
13. Spring Thunder (Pom'ure)	Sŏk Yun-gi	1985
14. Noble Love (Widaehan sarang)	Ch'oe Ch'ang-hak	1987
15. Difficult Escape (Hyŏllo)	Pak Yu-hak	1988
16. Red Mountain Range (Pulgŭn sanchulgi)	Ri Chong-ryŏl	2000
17. Heaven and Earth (Ch'ŏnji)	Hŏ Ch'un-sik	2000

Table 2. *Immortal History* Series: Post-Liberation

Novel	Writer	Year of Publication
1. Radiant Morning (Pitnanŭn ach'im)	Kwon Chŏng-ung	1988
2. Summer of 1950 (50 Nyŏn yŏrŭm)	An Tong-ch'un	1990
3. Spring of Korea	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1991

(Chosŏnui pom)		
4. Power of Korea (Chosŏnui him)	Chŏng Ki-jong	1992
5. Victory (Sŭngni)	Kim Su-gyŏng	1994
6. Eternal Life (Yŏngsaeng)	Paek Po-hŭm/ Song Sang-wŏn	1997
7. Legend of the Great Land (Taejiui chŏnsŏl)	Kim Sam-bok	1998
8. Beautiful Land of Korea (Samch'ŏlli kangsan)	Kim Su-gyŏng	2000
9. Square of Military Parade (Yŏlpyŏngkwangjang)	Chŏng Ki-jong	2001
10. Road to Prosperity (Pŏnyŏngui kil)	Pak Ryong-un	2001
11. Reform (Kaesŏn)	Ch'oe Hak-su	2002
12. Verdurous Mountains (P'urŭn sanak)	An Tong-ch'un	2002
13. Song of Man (In'ganui nore)	Kim Sam-bok	2003
14. Anthem of the Sun (T'aeyang ch'an'ga)	Nam Tae-hyŏn	2005
15. Morning on the Front Line (Chosŏnui ach'im)	Pak Yun	2005
16. Plains of Ch'ŏngsan (Ch'ŏngsanpŏl)	Kim Sam-bok	2007

Table 3. *Immortal History* Series Historical Period and Incident Pre-Liberation

Novel	Writer	Historical Period	Historical Incident	Year of Publication
The Anchor is Drawn	Kim Chŏng	1925-1926	Organized 'Overthrowing of Imperialism Union' at Hwasong Ŭisuk	1982
Dawn of Revolution	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1927-1928	Kim Il Sung's student activism at Killim (Jilin)	1973
The Milky Way Galaxy	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1929-1930	Kim presented his Juche ideology at Karyun Meeting on June 30, 1930	1982
The Great Land is Verdant	Sŏk Yun-gi	1930-1931	Restored the fractured groups and revolutionized the farms	1981

Spring Thunder	Sŏk Yun-gi	1931-1932	Established the Korean Anti-Japanese Revolutionary Army	1985
The Year 1932	Kwon Chŏng-ung	1932-1933	First clash with Japanese soldiers and retreat to Southern Manchuria	1972
Spring at the Base	Ri Chong-ryŏl	1933-1934	The establishment and securing of the Righteous Base camp	1981
Difficult Escape	Pak Yu-hak	1934-1936	Marching from South to North Manchuria and a meeting at Nahu Dao	1988
Foot of Mt. Paektu	Ch'oe Hak-su/ Hyŏn Sung-gŏl	1936	May 5, 1936 formed the "Liberation of the Fatherland Group" and stationed at the foot of Mt. Paektu	1978
Apnok River	Ch'oe Hak-su	1936-1937	The best encounter with the Japanese army	1983
Noble Love	Ch'oe Ch'ang-hak	1937	Raising the youths to carry out the revolution in Milyŏng during the Sino-Japanese War	1987
Unforgettable Winter	Chin Chae-hwan	1937-1938	Arming and training the Korean People's Revolutionary Army (KPRA) in Milyŏng	1984
Arduous March	Sŏk Yun-gi	1938-1939	About a hundred days of arduous march from South Paecha to North Chŏngja	1976
District of Tumen River	Sŏk Yun-gi	1939	Planned the military strategy for the KPRA	1980
Severe Battlefield	Kim Pyŏng-hun	1939-1940	Retreated from northeast part of Mt. Paektu	1981
Red Mountain Range	Ri Chong-ryŏl	1939-1945	The harsh struggles for the KPRA	2000
Heaven and Earth	Hŏ Ch'un-sik	1940-1941	The advance of a small regiment across Mt. Paektu	2000

Table 4. *Immortal History* Series Historical Period and Incident Post-Liberation

Novel	Writer	Historical Period	Historical Incident	Year of Publication
Reform	Ch'oe Hak-su	1945	Established and reformed the Party on October 10	2002
Radiant Morning	Kwon Chŏng-ung	1945-1946	Dealt with the intelligentsia and established Kim Il Sung University	1988
Spring of Korea	Ch'ŏn Se-bong	1945-1946	Successfully organized Land Reform from March 5-8	1991
Square of Military Parade	Chŏng Ki-jong	1945-1948	Established the Korean People's Army on February 8	2001
Beautiful Land of Korea	Kim Su-gyŏng	1947-1948	Established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on September 9	2000
Anthem of the Sun	Nam Tae-hyŏn	1948-1955	Established the Korean Residents in Japan Council on May 25	2005
Summer of 1950	An Tong-ch'un	1950	Outbreak of the Liberation of the Fatherland (Korean War)	1990
Power of Korea	Chŏng Ki-jong	1950-1951	Temporary Strategic Retreat	1992
Verdurous Mountains	An Tong-ch'un	1951	Battles on Height 1211	2002
Morning on the Front Line	Pak Yun	1952	Battle with the U.S. in southern tip of Korea	2005
Victory	Kim Su-gyŏng	1952-1953	Meeting at P'anmunjŏm and signing of the armistice on July 27	1994
Road to Prosperity	Pak Ryong-un	1953-1956	Reconstruction period according to the Juche policy	2001
Legend of the Great Land	Kim Sam-bok	1953-1958	Collectivization of all the farmlands	1998
Song of Man	Kim	1956-1960	Chollima Movement and	2003

	Sam-bok		economic recovery	
Plains of Ch'ŏngsan	Kim Sam-bok	1959-1960	Announced the Ch'ŏngsanri thought and methodology	2007
Eternal Life	Paek Po-hŭm/ Song Sang-wŏn	1994	Kim Il Sung's death and the nuclear missile crisis	1997

Kwon Chŏng-ung, author of *The Year 1932*, says in the article "Up to the point of publishing *Immortal History* series, particularly *The Year 1932*" that the advice Kim Jong Il gave him was to intensify the conversation between Kim Il Sung and his mother Kang Ban Sok[66] for it reveals the central theme of the novel. The conversation between mother and son takes place after the formation of the anti-Japanese guerrilla and during his last visit to his ill mother. Kim Il Sung is ethically torn between tending to his dying mother and leading his force to national liberation. Kang Ban Sok says to Kim Il Sung, "You cannot make a revolution if you worry about your family" (*The Year 1932*, 134). Kim Il Sung concedes to his mother's words and departs from her with a formal bow, a bow that represents respect, gratitude, blessing, and parting. It is a bitter sweet farewell for the son who realizes that the road to revolution requires such severance from his mother. The emotional moment of passing (or *sublating* in the Hegelian sense)

[66] "Kang Ban Sok" is the way The Foreign Language Publishing House translated Kang Pan-sŏk, Kim Il Sung's mother.

from the nuclear family to the revolutionary family becomes the thematic discourse of the novel, and even perhaps all the novels in North Korea hereafter.

The dissolution of the nuclear family may have been considered as a righteous, self-sacrificing decision as long as it was for the cause of the socialist revolution. For example, in one of the self-proclaimed masterpieces in North Korean literature *Sea of Blood* (1982),[67] the mother loses everything she possessed by the Japanese colonialists: her husband, her village, and her youngest son Ul Nam. Through the course of the novel, the mother comes to realize the importance of the socialist revolution and accedes to sending off her eldest son and daughter to the guerrilla force:

> The mother saw them off, waving to them, standing on that same height at the foot of Mount Salgu where she had once stood one early dawn, seeing off her eldest son Won Nam on his way to the guerrillas. Today, along with her eldest son, her daughter Gap Sun was going with the guerrillas, and Yong Sil, who perhaps one day would become her daughter-in-law. Along with them, Du Hyok, Chil Song and other village lads were leaving. The mother saw only dots in green uniforms, she could not distinguish faces. At last, the tears restrained for so long gushed to the surface together with happiness and blurred her vision. Through her tear, the mother saw a broad road stretching far into the future—the road to the revolution. (*Sea of Blood*, 490)[68]

The future of the socialist revolution is prioritized over the nuclear family in *Sea of Blood*. The mother's tears of sending off her children to the guerrillas

[67] The transliteration of the characters' name in this paper is taken from the DPRK's translation of *Sea of Blood*.

[68] These names are taken from the DPRK translation of *The Year 1932* by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in 1977.

are tears of joy rather than her maternal instinct of worrying over her children. She has come to terms with herself that the guerrilla force will provide her children with comfort, food, shelter, and victory. The dissolution of the nuclear family is not a necessary evil for the mother; it is simply necessary for the construction of the socialist nation. There may have been unutterable pain in losing her husband and her youngest son to the Japanese, but there is no pain in losing Wol Nam and Gap Sun. She is proud that her children will contribute to the building of a new future. The mother is able to transcend her maternal instincts and allow her children to be incorporated into a new family, a revolutionary family, one that is forged by Kim Il Sung.

The Mother's revolutionary attitude in *Sea of Blood* is symmetrical to Kang Ban Sok's attitude in *The Year 1932*: "But what a lucky mother I am! I'm weeping because I'm so happy" (129-130). Kang Ban Sok realizes that the nuclear family cannot and ought not to remain intact if the revolution is to happen. People of the DPRK are supposed to learn from Kang Ban Sok and her dedication to the forging of the family-state: "Her whole life was dedicated to the struggle against all that were old and for the creation of the new."[69] The "new" stated here, of course, suggests the founding of a Kim Il Sung's nation-state with his band of guerrillas prior to the Soviet occupation. The implications are rather evident: the DPRK was always already a family state, and it was founded not by

[69] *Mrs. Kang Ban Sok: Mother of the Great Leader of Korea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1968), 1.

the aid of a foreign country or a foreign ideology but by the indigenous and unparalleled ideology of Juche.

In Soviet novels, much of the same sentiments and ideologues about the family and state existed. If there was any conflict between the state's interest and the nuclear family, citizens were urged to jettison their sense of family, based on blood ties, and replace it with a higher one, based on political kinship (Clark 2000, 115). In Chinese revolutionary literature, Joe C. Huang claims that the communist victory was born of a marriage between the Party and the peasantry (1973, 25). In all three cases (Stalin, Mao, and Kim), the familial bloodline submits to the forgery of a new family headed by these leaders. The seminal difference with North Korea's notion of the Great Family is the *über*-nationalistic discourse of a "sociopolitical organism" sharing the same bloodline with Kim Il Sung as a father-figure (Shin 2006, 85). North Korean literary critic Yun Ki-tŏk says a more shrewd statement, "The Great Leader of the working class has always emphasized the blood-like (*hyŏlyŏnjŏkin*) relationship with the masses as the most critical point" (1991, 195). Yun recognizes the rhetoric of the homogeneous bloodline as simply rhetoric, a discourse that tries to identify the common denominator for all North Koreans (including South Koreans), but only to the extent of it being a discourse rather than a biological fact.

The establishment of the anti-Japanese guerrilla without foreign aid is explicitly narrated in Sŏk Yun-gi's *Pom'ure* (Spring Thunder) published in 1985 as part of the *Immortal History* series, thirteen years after the publication of *The*

Year 1932. Similar to *The Year 1932*, this novel tells of the sacrifices the revolutionaries have made in order to forge a new family among each other: "[The revolutionaries] had to offer or abandon their parents, siblings, children, and even lovers. Therefore, on this day, April 25, 1932, the revolutionaries, who have abandoned their parents, siblings, wives, and children and only had the revolution in mind, stood on the road" (1985, 737). The title of the novel is *Spring Thunder* because of the metaphor of the thunderous clatter of rifles striking each other in the hands of the restless revolutionaries.

The narrative of *The Year 1932* is supposed to pick up from where *Spring Thunder* has left off. The historical significances of *The Year 1932* are the formation of the anti-Japanese guerrilla force, Kim Il Sung's departing from his mother, and the death of his mother. Kim's father, Kim Hyŏng-jik, had been killed by the Japanese without the opportunity to form an army (*The Year 1932*, 127). His mother, who had worked alongside her husband, will not live to see the day of Korea's liberation, but witnesses the day of the soldiers' departure toward revolution. However, she does not live to receive the news of Kim Il Sung and his revolutionaries' retreat from the advancing Japanese soldiers.

Then comes the dramatic moment in the novel: the 1932 retreat from Antu eventually took Kim and his anti-Japanese fighters to the Manchurian-Soviet border area. Japanese pressure intensified. *The Year 1932* ends in the winter of 1932 with Kim Il Sung's men stationed on the mountainous outskirts of Antu, preparing for the next military strategy to overtake the advancing Japanese. The

novel ends optimistically but also foreshadows the long and arduous march that the guerrilla army will soon have to face in the ensuing years:[70] "We will face still greater hardships but we will leave footprints that are even more glorious" (*The Year 1932*, 626). The footprints are the symbols of the path toward national liberation, the footprints made by the small band of guerrilla fighters who set Korea free from the harrows of colonial oppression.

The novel does not simply recount the initial guerrilla tactics used against the Japanese, but glorifies the legend of the Great Family with Kim Il Sung as the devoted parental-figure. Kim Il Sung assumes both roles of father and mother (*ŏbŏi*), where the Party often refers to him as *ŏbŏi suryŏng* (fatherly leader).[71] In the novel, Kim Il Sung explains to Paek Gwang Myong, who confesses to Kim for living a bourgeois life, the need for a revolutionary struggle. At that moment, Paek raises both his arms and shouts, "Ah, I have just been born today!" (*The Year 1932*, 122). Much like a religious conversion, Paek finally understands the significance of the revolution which allows him to emerge from the womb and perceive the new world and the new family members surrounding him. The words of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary anthem has given birth to Paek's new life. Kim Il Sung not only fathered the revolution but he also mothered the revolutionaries as his own children. Charles Armstrong says:

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[70] Novel *Konanui haenggun* (The Arduous March) written by Sŏk Yun-ki in 1976 describes the hundred days of marching from South Paecha to North Chŏngja during the winter of 1938.

[71] Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 418.

> The cult of Kim Il Sung is, however, much more than Neo-Confucian patriarchy dressed in Stalinist garb. In fact, much of the actual language of the cult is not primarily paternal, but maternal; it does not spring solely from the Confucian heritage of the elite, but strikes a deeper psychological and cultural chord in mother-child relations. (2003, 226)

The mother and child relationship that is represented in Kim Il Sung's relationship with the characters in the novel is formulated to portray the reciprocal love shared between a leader and his people. Each novel in the *Immortal History* series has an immense array of characters. According to South Korean scholar Kim Ŭn-jŏng (2006), there are a number of characters who represent actual anti-Japanese guerrilla heroes by using their real names or by making allusions to them such as: Ch'a Kwang-su, Kim Hyŏk, Kwon Yŏng-byŏk, O Chung-hŭp, etc.[72] The rest of the other characters that appear in the series are fictional. For Sin (2009), all of the characters in each novel found meaning in their lives through a relationship with Kim Il Sung. For example, in *The Year 1932*, Li Chol Gun and Ok Nyo joined the guerrilla out of personal vengeance toward the Japanese, but Kim Il Sung teaches them to project their communist vision beyond the scope of their personal desires to the construction of a utopian nation. Li Hyok is an intelligent young man and Choe Chil Sung is an uneducated middle-aged man, but both discover a new world of ideological education through the teachings of

[72] Kim Ŭn-jŏng. "Suryŏng hyŏngsang munhakron: ch'ongsŏ 'Pulmyŏlui Ryŏksa'wa 'Pulmyŏlui Hyangdo'rŭl chungsim'ŭro" (Theory of the Personality Cult of Kim Il Sung: Focusing on the *Immortal History* and *Immortal Leadership* series). *Pukhanui ŏnŏwa munhak* (Language and Literature of North Korea), edited by Chŏn Hyŏn-jun (Seoul: Kyung-in Publishing, 2006),152.

Kim Il Sung. And Chu Ho Rim, a member of the Independence Army (nationalists), hesitates to join Kim Il Sung's guerrilla force and is assassinated by the Japanese. His individualistic impulse led to his death, reminding Kim Il Sung's group the importance of collective efforts. Chu Ho Rim's death deeply pains Kim Il Sung as though his death could've been prevented with a little more care and proper teaching. The ideological discourse of the novel shows that Kim Il Sung's love extends beyond his guerrilla family to even "outside" members like the Independence Army because every Korean under the Japanese rule is part of the Great Family. Of course, the justification of a homogenous bloodline, the notion of the Great Family of all Koreans,[73] and the need for unification underline much of the political, literary and media discourse in North Korea to this day.

The androgyny of Kim Il Sung is not supposed to be read as a gender issue or gender ambiguity but as an asexual leader, whose love for his people goes beyond the heart of a mother and father. The *Immortal History* series is supposed to show not only Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history but also his unfathomable character that is revealed in his intimate relationship with the guerrilla soldiers. North Korean literary critics in the 1979 *DPRK Almanac* rave about Kim Il Sung's everlasting and profound love for the people in *Paektusan kisŭk* (Foothills of Mt. Paektu, 1978). One of the most memorable scenes in this novel is when General Kim Il Sung approaches and comforts Comrade Puk-ch'ŏl's distressed

[73] Sin Hyŏng-gi O Sŏng-ho. *Pukhan Munhaksa: hangilhyŏngmyŏng munhak'e-sŏ chuch'e munhakkaji* (History of North Korean Literature: From Anti-Japanese Literature to Juche Literature). (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000), 269.

heart in the middle of a snowy March evening. Critics in the DPRK Almanac accredit this scene as Kim Il Sung's utmost care and sympathy, but the actual scene has Kim Il Sung explaining why the comrade must continue to fight and endure physical pain. For ten pages, Kim Il Sung recapitulates the idea of Juche to the young comrade, who is more concerned about the family he left back at home. As soon as the General is done with his Juche spiel, he orders the soldier to go to sleep. The literary critics who praise this novel and particularly this scene are lauding the Juche ideology proceeding from the mouth of the Great Leader. This scene, actually, is a rather touching one for other reasons. The notable aspect of this "famous" scene is not when Kim Il Sung re-explains the Juche ideology, but when he crawls into a corner of a room to sleep because the room was occupied by fatigued soldiers. It shows that the General is willing to sacrifice his comfort and his space for his soldiers who need rest to carry on the next day. The way Kim Il Sung looks at his men resembles the way a parent watches his/her child fall asleep. In *Foothills of Mt. Paektu*, Kim Il Sung is constantly watching his men throughout the day and night, concerned for their health, safety, and spirit. The literary critics should've focused more on the actual love and care that Kim Il Sung shows to his soldiers rather than glorifying the General for explicating the Juche ideology.

The end result of each novel in the *Immortal History* series must project five conditions: first, the old traditions of writing must be eliminated and a "new

system" of writing must be instated;[74] second, the "new system" of writing must unify the history of Kim Il Sung during his anti-Japanese struggle;[75] third, the description of Kim Il Sung must elevate him above the people and even above the past heroes of Korean history such as General Yi Sun-sin; fourth, the series must emphasize Kim's Juche ideology coupled with the monolithic system in order to accentuate "our style of socialism;"[76] and fifth, the series must be masterpieces of (North) Korean literature.

According to Sin Hyŏng-gi (2000), the series was not to neglect even the slightest moment in Kim Il Sung's life, and, therefore, the series is to be North Korea's greatest literary achievement in constructing the heroism of the leader. Sin criticizes the series for inventing Kim Il Sung as the omnipotent and omniscient leader: "As the Kim Il Sung matures throughout the series, he doesn't learn Juche; he already knows it" (2009, 85). Although Sin's criticism is rather acerbic, he is still under the impression that the depiction of Kim Il Sung in the series is still referring to the real personage of Kim Il Sung rather than the novelized Kim Il Sung, where the latter justifies that *in the beginning was the*

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[74] Refer to Kim Jong Il's *Juche Munhakron* (Theory on Juche Literature) (Pyongyang: Choson rodongdan ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 31.

[75] Kim Ŭn-jŏng. "Suryŏng hyŏngsang munhakron: ch'ongsŏ 'Pulmyŏlui Ryŏksa'wa 'Pulmyŏlui Hyangdo'rŭl chungsim'ŭro" (Theory of the Personality Cult of Kim Il Sung: Focusing on the *Immortal History* and *Immortal Leadership* series). *Pukhanui ŏnŏwa munhak* (Language and Literature of North Korea), edited by Chŏn Hyŏn-jun (Seoul: Kyung-in Publishing, 2006), 151.

[76] Ibid., 148.

ideology, and the ideology was with Kim, and the ideology was Kim, and the ideology became writing.

The *Immortal History* series is about Kim Il Sung, and yet it is not about him. It retells his life, and yet it is fiction. It is not supposed to be completely fictional, and yet it can't help but be completely fictional. It is not supposed to be a biography, and yet it is. It is supposed to signify the truth of Kim Il Sung, and yet it is caught up in the web of signifiers. It is supposed to use Kim Il Sung's earlier discourses to generate an image, and yet the image generates new discourses for the readers to adopt. It tries to convince the readers that it is *the* Kim Il Sung, and yet it is only *a* Kim Il Sung—an image within the framework of art. It tries to tell the affirmative history of the nation, and yet negativity is inevitably embedded within the affirmation, where the affirmative proclamation of "This is how it happened" contains its negativity "This is *not* how it happened." *The* Kim Il Sung will be forever haunted by *a* Kim Il Sung as Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* seems to evoke its own negativity at the sight/site of the written/drawn utterance. "Negations multiply themselves, the voice is confused and chocked" (Foucault 1982, 30). The discourse that constructs *the* Kim Il Sung simultaneously de-constructs it by its own negation of *a* Kim Il Sung.

Neglecting the rules of perception is the new writing style for writers in the Writer's Union and the April 15 Literary Production Unit. Writer Ch'oe Sang-sun knew this all too well in his ostensibly reverent short story *My School*. The

disproportionate size of the female soldier of the People's Army is an obvious error in the North Korean art world that prioritizes realism over abstract art, and Ch'oe uses this example to demonstrate the ensuing problems in literary works that were being published in his contemporary art world.[77]

For this reason, Ch'oe ends his short story satirically. The narrator of *My School* says, "Whenever I hear this story, I can't help but to think of the genius artistic sensitivity of our Great Leader" (Ch'oe 25). The narrator's overzealous compliment to Kim Il Sung for his unparalleled taste for art overshadows Ch'oe's cynical tone beneath it, a tone that reminds the readers of Kim Il Sung's admitting to the hyperbolic narrative of his personality cult. The date is February 8th, Korean People's Army Establishment Day, a day when the nation commemorates the founding of the North Korean military. A war veteran does not come to a school to tell the students of his heroism, but instead he tells the students of the Great Leader's genius sensitivity toward ideological art. Suk-young Kim in *Illusive Utopia* makes a more blunt statement than Ch'oe Sang-sun:

> Kim Il Sung, who could show no concrete evidence of his artistic expertise or creative activities, was hailed as the author or inspirer of numerous revolutionary plays after coming to power. […] It was imperative to invent Kim Il Sung as the authentic creator of revolutionary art, since this not only compensated for his lack of an artistic career but also created a sense of tradition for North Korean culture dating back to the preliberation period of the 1930s. (2010, 139)

[77] Kim Il Sung, in "On Some Questions of Our Literature and Arts," says, "You must be guided not by abstract concepts but by concrete realities. Remember that abstraction in art means the death of art" (1972, 22). This speech was delivered to writers and artists on June 30, 1951.

My School was written in 1974. Did Ch'oe Sang-sun ever imagine that his story would be one of the last ones that commemorated the Korean People's Army Establishment Day on February 8th? Did anyone in the DPRK other than the top officials anticipate the shift in the emphasis on the guerrilla faction over the Korean War veterans?

The problems raised in *My School* were not only problems for Ch'oe Sang-sun but for many of the writers in the Union and the April 15 Literary Production Unit. Writers in the DPRK could and would never directly voice their discontent with the "new system" of writing, but some of their sardonic views on the new policy can be read implicitly in the ironic tone and hyperbolic rhetoric in their works. I find it my task to allow these subsumed voices to be heard so as to reformulate and reconfigure the often misconstrued image of the people of the DPRK. This is where I turn to the North Korean literary critic Yun Ki-dŏk. His statement, "[T]he project of immortalizing the Great Leader will be an endless endeavor" (1991, 19) is doubly important because of the implication of generating more narratives of *a* Kim Il Sung as an endless, perpetual, and even perhaps burdensome endeavor. The "endless endeavor" that Yun states refers to the practice of reiterating the discourse of the Great Leader, a practice that continues even after the death of Kim Il Sung. Both the *Immortal History* and *Immortal Leadership* series (re)generate and (re)produce *a* Kim Il Sung rather than *the* Kim

Il Sung. In the next chapter, I will explicate the practice or ritual of perpetuating discourses as seen in Ri Hŭi-nam's *Yŏdŏl sigan* (Eight Hours, 1986).

Chapter 2

Disruptive Memories in Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours*

Problems with fictionalizing Kim Il Sung's life—where the truth of the revolutionary history must preserved—reflects what Baudrillard says, "History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth" (1994, 43). That is, the practice of writing such a narrative (re)produces the discourse of *a* Kim Il Sung rather than the actual leader. In this chapter, I will analyze Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours* to show Ch'ŏl-u's (the male protagonist) personal memories as that which reveals the disjunction of how the past (a lost referential) affects present conditions, and that the continuity of such past in the present is through the perpetual practice or ritual of self-referencing—referencing the reference. In short, the practice of reiterating the discourse of the nation's past is more important than the actual past.

The narrator in *Eight Hours* says, "Ch'ŏl-u began to bury himself quietly in the past memories that had nothing to do with the current situation. (Ri 124). The current situation at the ore mine is momentarily suspended or disjointed by the interjection of Ch'ŏlu's personal memories. It is precisely moments like this that I consider to be marginal writings from the grand narrative of the nation-state. The narrator describes Ch'ŏl-u's actions at the mine as "out-of-character" or "out of the ordinary" (*ttŭt pakke*), which can also characterize the nature of Ch'ŏl-u's personal memories from the narrative of the novella. Ch'ŏl-u's personal memories are, therefore, *a-teleological*, disrupting moments in the novella's attempt at a

prescriptive narrative. For Ri Hŭi-nam, memories are "out of the ordinary" and disjointed from the grand narrative of the nation, always creating fault lines in the veracity of the past.

There are three disjointed memories mentioned in the novella. I will not place them in the order that they should be to make sense of the temporality of the memories, but rather, I will place them as they appear in the novella to show that Ri Hŭi-nam is conscious of the disjunctions and displacements of memory. I have taken the liberty to present the somewhat lengthy sections of memories, but I feel it is necessary to bring my readers into the literariness of *Eight of Hours*.

[Memory One]

> "Father." It was the one word that he really wished to call out with all his heart. Ch'ŏl-u eagerly wanted to feel his father's warm embrace and his loving hands, but there was no way for him to know.
> "Mom, what did father look like?" asked Ch'ŏl-u, not being able to contain his yearnings anymore.
> The sight (*mosŭp*) of her son yearning for his father was so touching (*kagŭnghayŏ*) that the mother had to hold back her tears and proceeded to explain slowly his father's facial features.
> Then Ch'ŏl-u brought back a funny portrait of a man on his sketch book, asking if this was the correct image of his father. Ch'ŏl-u was not at the age where he was able to understand the principles of drawing, and no matter how carefully he tried to depict his father, there was no way for Ch'ŏl-u to portray him correctly.
> The mother couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of the portrait.
> "Ch'ŏl-u, let's have a look. If you make the eyes a bit bigger, it may resemble your father."
> The fading embers in Ch'ŏl-u's eyes were relit.
> The next day, Ch'ŏl-u returned to his mother with another portrait of the father.
> The mother felt despaired. It was because the revised portrait appeared even more absurd than the first one. However, she did not reveal her thoughts and proceeded to alter the nose and the ears. It was difficult for

the mother to try to explain to her son the vague image of his father. She wished there was a photograph of his father, but even that was burned during the bombing.
The next day, Ch'ŏl-u returned with a picture of an ordinary People's Army soldier with a long rifle, advancing toward the enemy line.
"Mom, is this father?"
The picture did not look anything like his father. Although Ch'ŏl-u could not imagine the father's face, he was able to depict the father's final charge toward the enemy with great detail. The mother tightly embraced her son saying, "It is your father! This is exactly how your father fought!" (Ri, 49-52)

[Memory Two]

The prankster snatched away Ch'ŏl-u's picture and raised it above his head to show the rest of the classmates.
"Look at this. Ch'ŏl-u's drawing!"
The prankster did not know that this was Ch'ŏl-u's picture of his father. The prankster just wanted to show the class the peculiar picture.
Ch'ŏl-u did not like what the prankster was doing, so he grabbed his wrist and pulled him down.
They both grabbed the picture and began a tug-o-war. Suddenly, the picture that Ch'ŏl-u focused on with much effort and later titled "My Father" ripped. (Ri, 56)

[Memory Three]

It was a late spring night with rain sprinkling outside the window.
As usual, Ch'ol-u was drawing another portrait of his father rushing toward enemy line, and his mother was sitting on the floor, staring at the troublesome (*sayŏn'i manŭn*) drawings.
Suddenly, a voice outside the window was quietly calling for mother.
Ch'ŏl-u quickly got up, opened the door, and looked out into the pitch dark night. As soon as he saw a tall man standing hesitantly, the young bodyguard shouted "Mother's not here" as he normally did to men seeking his mother and slammed the door. (132)
"Ch'ŏl-u," responded mother.
His mother got up from the room and ran out to ask Ch'ŏl-u who it was.
"Don't know. It was a tall man."
"A tall man?"
Mother was shocked and stood by the door where Ch'ŏl-u had been standing.
"It's me," said the voice from the darkness.

> "Ch'ŏl-u, open the door. He might get drenched in the rain," said mother with an anxious tone.
> "No!"
> "I said open the door."
> Mother slightly pushed Ch'ŏl-u aside to open the latch to the door.
> "Don't go out. You must not go out."
> Ch'ŏl-u slid between his mother and the door. He placed the latch back on the door and tied it tightly with a string.
> "That should do it."
> Ch'ŏl-u looked at his mother with a sense of accomplishment.
> "Ch'ŏl-u," said mother with a feint voice. She stared into Ch'ŏl-u's eyes with resentment for a moment. She let out a deep sigh and leaned against the wall. With an enervated voice, she called to the man standing outside.
> "This is not going to work."
> "What?"
> "It's not going to work out for us. Just…forget me please…forever." (133)
> Then, mother dragged her feet across the floor to the corner of the other room. She glared at the drawings on the floor and quietly sat still.
> Mother neither blinked nor seemed to breathe. With her two arms wrapped around her knees and her lips slightly awry, she stared forlornly at the drawings with a sense of resolution. (134)

The three memories are not in chronological order. Ch'ŏl-u's memories "take turns going to and fro (*pŏnkal'a ogo'ga*) from him childhood days to his teenage years" (Ri 1986, 125). If the memories are to be chronologically ordered, then Memory 2 would come after Memory 3. However, for author Ri Hŭi-nam, memories are never (re)told in a chronological structure as is the conventional practice in North Korean narratives. In fact, the very nature of memories disrupts structure and resists teleology. Memories are suspended from time and space and escape the appropriation of the novella's narrative.

At the same time, much like other North Korean narratives, *Eight Hours* promises a teleological trajectory through the dialectics of allowing the characters

to sublate their individualism for the completion of the state. Unlike other North Korean narratives, however, *Eight Hours* does not utilize memories as catalysts to transform individuals for the greater good. The affect of memories, in *Eight Hours*, haunts the individuals more than it enables character development. This novella is one of the few literary works in North Korea that truly questions the function of memory and the practice of memorializing. Yet, it would be necessary to contextualize the narrative before I proceed with my analyses of the three memories.

Eight Hours is about two pairs of working-class youths in an ore mine: Pak Ch'ŏl-u and Sun-ki, and Su-ryŏn and T'am-sil. Ch'ŏl-u and Sun-ki are childhood friends, and Su-ryŏn and T'am-sil are friends at the mine. Sun-ki is handsome, articulate, and has leadership-qualities, whereas Ch'ŏl-u is reclusive and always hesitant to speak his mind in fear of others mocking him. Su-ryŏn is sincere, strict, perhaps too "square," but passionate, stubborn, serious, and truthful, whereas T'am-sil is coquettish, and takes work as something she does on the side. Ch'ŏl-u loves Su-ryŏn, but she rejects his proposal because she does not feel that he is quite the revolutionary man that he ought to be. T'am-sil has had interest in Sun-ki, and when he starts to return that interest, Ch'ŏl-u admonishes Sun-ki not to play with a girl's heart.

One day, a large boulder caves into a new mining shaft. The workers come up with various ideas to break through the blockage, but the risk on the workers' lives is too great. The manager restrains the workers from entering into the shaft,

but Ch'ŏl-u decides to override the bureaucratic decisions and throws himself into the shaft with tools and explosives. Sun-ki and the other workers join Ch'ŏl-u in the shaft. Once the debris gets cleared away and there is enough space, Ch'ŏl-u takes a jack-hammer to drill through the boulder. Eventually, Ch'ŏl-u succeeds in completing his daring endeavor after eight hours of strenuous labor. Su-ryŏn realizes that Ch'ŏl-u is more of a revolutionary man than she had once thought, and that she was less of a revolutionary woman. In the end, Su-ryŏn accepts Ch'ŏl-u's love, and all the workers celebrate Ch'ŏl-u for his heroism.

Chosŏn Chung'ang Nyŏn'gam (DPRK Almanac)[78] considers *Eight Hours* as a good example of a heroic struggle to produce ore by the working-class.[79] On the outset, the narrative follows a young miner of the working class who overrides the bureaucratic agents and overcomes the obstacle before him. South Korean scholar Sŏ Chae-jin believes that criticisms directed at the cadres (or the middleman) is a circumscriptive method of deflecting criticisms of the top officials of the DPRK. While the work of fiction can certainly function as a means of attacking the top-tiered officials, it can also be read as direct criticisms against local cadres and bureaucrats who have perverted power for their own benefit. Contrary to the way North Korea appears to the outside world, power is not always a top-down relationship, where biopower is solely administrated by the

[78] This annual publication reviews and celebrates works that were published in the past year. The works that appear in this publication are the ones that the Party considers to be "worthy" of building an ideologically equipped North Korean people.

[79] "Munhak (Literature)." *Chosŏn Chung'ang Nyŏn'gam* (DPRK Almanac). (Pyongyang: Chosŏn chung'ang t'ongsinsa, 1987), 272.

Kim Family. Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and the Party may demand certain outcomes from the workers, but to think that the workers or the working class is a homogeneous group of people, awaiting the next directive directly from the top-tiered officials may be a reductive understanding of the complex social network among the people. The socio-political network is far more complex than a unilateral chain of command. Although my research focus is not on the infrastructural bureaucratic organization of the DPRK, it may be insightful to understand the complexity of the social structure so that readers outside of North Korea can somewhat grasp the intricate power network dispersed throughout the country at different levels and different categories that controls the everyday citizen of the DPRK.

Central Committee of the Worker's Party, Chosŏn so'nyŏndan (DPRK Children's League), League of Socialist Working Youth (LSWY), Sa'roch'ŏng (another youth league that derived from the LSWY), Chosŏn chigŏpch'ong tongmaeng (DPRK Work Union), DPRK Agricultural Union, DPRK Women's Union, Writer's Union, Democratic Youth League, Pulgŭn ch'ŏngnyŏn kunwidae (Red Youth Military League), Chosŏn ch'ŏndogyo ch'ŏng'udang, and all the different departments within the Party are but a few of the large and visible groups in North Korea. Additionally, the Party and some of the leagues extend their sub-departments into concentric geographical spheres: *to* (province), *si*

(city), *kun* (districts), and *ri* (communities).[80] The cadres, Party secretaries, and cell (*sep'o*) cadres are responsible for the different levels and tiers of each league at each concentric geographical sphere. The Three Revolutions Team Members Movement is an addition to the multitudinous branches of the political ranks in the DPRK, creating a new body of youths who were called to support Kim Jong Il's succession preparations. This kind of addition may be synonymous to Hannah Arendt's analysis of Hitler's totalitarian regime:

> The multiplication of offices was extremely useful for the constant shifting of power; the longer, moreover, a totalitarian regime stays in power, the greater becomes the number of offices and the possibility of jobs exclusively dependent upon the movement, since no office is abolished when authority is liquidated. (1979, 401)

The political power structure and the chain of command in *Eight Hours*, for example, are organized as the following: the workers answer to the on-sight manager (*chibae'in*), who answers to the vice superintendent (*pubu'jang*), who then answers to the superintendent (*pujang*), and who answers to the Party secretary (*tangbisŏ*) of that factory in the geographical region of *kun* (district). In the story, the vice superintendent and his upper officers are not even present at the factory but are only contacted through a telephone call (Ri 164). In *Eight Hours*, there is no presence of the Three Revolutions Team Member (*sojowŏn*), but if

[80] Sŏ Tong-ik's *Inmin'i sanŭn mosŭp* (The Life of the People, 1995) describes the life of the youths in these different leagues that they must join. Chŏng Sŏng-jang, Chŏng Sang-don, Chŏng Sŏng-im, and No Kwi-nam in *Chosŏn rodongdan'ui woe-gwak tan'ch'e* (DPRK Worker's Sub-Government Organizations, 2004) explain the organization and the function of each of the different leagues and unions in the DPRK.

there were, the Party secretary would have to answer to the *sojowŏn*. The workers also have their own chain of command, where Sunki, for example, is the *chiha'p'aswoejang* (the underground explosives director) who answers to the *chi'ryŏngjang* (the director). In fact, North Korean literature is full of ranks aside from military ranks which make it difficult for readers outside of the North Korean system to fully understand the chain of command and the role of each character. Thus the myriad ranks and multiple chains of commands make the criticisms directed at local cadres more tangible and actual than as criticisms against the top officials of the Party.

Narratives that combat the local cadres and bureaucrats are nothing new to North Korean readers. One of the films that Kim Il Sung personally enjoyed watching was *Uri ryŏlch'a p'anmaewŏn* (Our Train Vendor, 1972), where the female protagonist undermines the authority of the local bureaucrats and proceeds to fix the problem herself. In the end, her noble efforts provide the train passengers with great and efficient service. Kim Il Sung lauds this film as the epitome of Juche principles and encourages the Party members to act accordingly.[81] The film clearly shows how the female protagonist finds herself lost in the chain of commands.

[81] Kim Il Sung. "Yesulyŏnghwa *Uri ryŏlch'a p'anmaewŏn*'ŭl pogo tangjung'angwiwŏnhoe, chŏngmuwŏn ch'aegim ilgundŭlkwa han tamhwa" (A Conversation with the Party Central Committee and Top Officials After Watching *Our Train Vendor*). Speech delivered in January 11, 1973. *Kim Il Sung Chŏnjip* (Completed Works of Kim Il Sung) vol. 50 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 2003), 346-351.

In Stalinist novels, Gladkov's *Cement* (1925) and Lyashko's *The Blast Furnace* (1925) both articulate the protagonists' discontent and frustration with the local officials and bureaucrats who deter the reconstruction and re-opening of the factory/blast furnace with petty paper-work and indifference. In Maoist literature, Lo Tan's *Dawn in Wind and Rain* (1959) traces the plot of Gladkov's *Cement*, where the protagonist is saddened by the dismal sight of the steel structures at the factory and decides to renovate it against the cadres' insistence.[82] Likewise, in North Korean literature, social criticisms against the indifferent performance of the bureaucrats become a consistent theme in the literature of the 1980s. Ri Hwa's *Sogŭm kkot* (Salt Deposits, 1984), Paek Nam-ryong's *60 Nyŏn hu* (After 60 Years, 1985) and Kim Mun-ch'ang's *Yŏlmang* (Desire, 1999) are a few works that expose the transformation of passionate local cadres into impervious bureaucrats. On the level of the readership, social criticisms against local cadres may be more cathartic than criticisms directed at the Great Leader and his son for the obvious reason that everyone confronts local cadres in one form or another at school, factory, farm, military, or other social institutions, leagues, and unions.

In both Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours* and Gladkov's *Cement*, the metaphor of the boulder of bureaucracy blocks and stands in the way of the socialist revolution. Gleb in *Cement* (1980, 208) wants to know "this impassable bulwark

[82] Huang, Joe C.. *Heroes and Villains in Communist China* (New York: Pica Press, 1973), 220.

of the Economic Council and the factory administration," "this massive rock [that] stood in his path all the time." For Ch'ŏl-u in *Eight Hours*, the boulder also symbolizes the bureaucratic system that prevented the workers from entering the mine shaft. The difference in the two texts lies at the motivation of destroying the boulder. For Gleb, the reconstruction and regeneration of the neglected factory drives him to question, contest, and retaliate against the officials. Gleb, a former revolutionary soldier, won the military front, but he is now engaged in the reformation of the economic front (*Cement* 1980, 64). Ch'ŏl-u, on the other hand, decides to drill the boulder for a different reason. In fact, he is a taciturn worker who cannot make a clear decision for himself, and yet, for Ch'ŏl-u to impetuously pick up a jack-hammer and begin to drill away on the boulder is out of the ordinary (*ttŭt pakke*) or out of character. *Eight Hours* may be ostensibly about the success of the mine workers who overcame the indifferent and lackadaisical bureaucrats, but the characterization of Ch'ŏl-u offers an insightful reading of his out-of-character motivation.

Eight Hours contains more than the overwrought narrative pattern of boy-gets-tractor[83] that dominates the majority of North Korean short stories and novels. Author Ri Hŭi-nam resists writing about the prototypical framework of collective memories and their functions in characters. In most North Korean narratives, when an individual recalls the past, it enables him to carry out a task or

[83] This is a phrase Katerina Clark uses in *The Soviet Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 182-185.

a project. In other narratives, memories of the past raise the spirits of the individual and allow him to achieve his ideological consciousness. However, in *Eight Hours*, Ch'ŏl-u's memories neither encourage him to overcome the boulder problem nor raise his downcast personality. Although the past events explicate Ch'ŏl-u's introverted behavior, Ri Hŭi-nam destabilizes narrative patterns by elucidating a personal memory that conditions the possibility of questioning the reconstructive processes of forging a mythical nation.

Economy of the Father

There is only one word Ch'ŏl-u desires most: father. It is a word that is non-existent in his vocabulary. He has never seen his father, so the word was never exchanged at home with his mother. Ch'ŏl-u's father dies on the battlefield during the Korean War, leaving his wife and only son at home. Ch'ŏl-u begins to inquire about his father as he "understands life" (*sesang'ŭl alge toe'myŏnsŏ*). A word that he has never heard of or used in his life enters into his vocabulary as he learned the ways of the world.

There are many "fathers" in North Korea. Most notably, Kim Il Sung represents the parents (*ŏbŏi*) of the nation, which implies the existence of a father. North Korea calls itself *choguk* or fatherland, which the Chinese character "cho" in *choguk* (祖國) means ancestors or forefathers. An elderly man at a factory or

collective farm is often referred to as *abai*, which is a familial way of respecting a patriarch. Ch'ŏl-u is surrounded by "fathers," and although he has never once used the term, he has come to realize the oddity of not having a father at home. To Ch'ŏl-u, a normal or ordinary family consists of a father and mother, but he feels that his family is *out-of-the-ordinary*.

At the same time, there are many absent fathers in North Korean literature. It is not unusual for widows to rear their children to become successful citizens of the DPRK without the physical presence of a biological father. The absent father in narratives kindly ushers in Kim Il Sung as the surrogate father, whose benevolence and generosity enables a family to prosper. The reading is rather obvious: Kim Il Sung is the father to all families and is a better father than the biological ones for he provides eternal guidance, hearth, and optimism. However, in *Eight Hours*, Ch'ŏl-u calls for his biological father and not Kim Il Sung:

> "Father." It was the one word that he really wished to call out with all his heart. Ch'ŏl-u eagerly wanted to feel his father's warm embrace and his loving hands, but there was no way for him to know.

Ch'ŏl-u desires the acquisition of a language that is ultimately foreign to him. It is neither his mother's language nor his mother tongue. It is the language of the father that begins with the utterance "father" and a reciprocation of that language from his father "son." Ch'ŏl-u may wish to call out that word with all his heart, but what he truly desires is the exchange, the reciprocation, the economy of that language. Ch'ŏl-u's young heart is torn not because he cannot

utter the word "father" but because there will be no response. The economy of the language of the father does not exist in Ch'ŏl-u's world.

This economy is given to Ch'ŏl-u by his mother, who is a non-member of the patriarchal language. As a wife and mother, she has no *business* in patriarchal affairs. She has no name that identifies her individuality in *Eight Hours* (like many mothers in North Korean literature). She is simply "mother," one who provides hearth, teaches, and gives the patriarchal language to her son. The mother is always removed or *replaced* from the patriarchal discourse, or as Luce Irigaray says, "The order of this empire decrees that when a proper name (*nom*) is given to a child, it substitutes for the most irreducible mark of birth, the navel (*nombril*) (1987, 14). There is a deliberate play in the way Irigaray uses *nom* and *nombril*, where the center/navel (*nombril*) of one's life is replaced or subverted by the re-centering of the proper name (*nom*) of the father.

For Irigaray, there exists an elemental identity tag or scar for every individual: the umbilical cord or the womb of the mother. Every human being was once housed in a mother's womb before entering into the patriarchal world. The economy between mother and child is the most elemental and life-giving exchange. In *Eight Hours*, the mother recalls, "During Ch'ŏl-u's infant days of suckling on his mother's breasts, he did not know the pain of not having a father" (Ri, 49). The economy between mother and son is exchanged through the gift of nourishment from the mother's breast to the son's dependence on his mother. But, for Irigaray, this economy gets severed from the moment the umbilical cord is cut.

The exchange is no longer between mother and child but between father and child. “Her womb, sometimes her breast, gape open as a result of the gestation, the birthing, the life which have issued from them, without reciprocity” (Irigaray 1987, 15). The mother’s identity as mother is replaced by the economy of the patriarch. The child seeks earnestly his father as he understands the way of life (Ri, 49).

Economy (*oikonomia*) inevitably begins in the house (*oikos*), the management of the household. For Irigaray, the elemental economy happens inside the womb, which houses (*oikos*) the child. And in *Eight Hours*, after Ch’ŏl-u’s father leaves for the war and relinquishes the household management to the mother, she is once again in an (elemental) economic relationship with her child. However, Ch’ŏl-u requests to learn the language of the patriarch from his mother:

> “Mom, what did father look like?” asked Ch’ŏl-u, not being able to contain his yearnings anymore.
> The sight (*mosŭp*) of her son yearning for his father was so touching (*kagŭnghayŏ*) that the mother had to hold back her tears and proceeded to explain slowly his father’s facial features.

Ri Hŭi-nam’s choice of *kagŭng* (touching, pitiful, miserable) to express the heart-felt moment of a son desiring his father is worthy to note. On the one hand (and perhaps the standard way of interpreting the word), *kagŭng* means emotionally moving or to take pity on someone, which in this case, the mother takes pity on Ch’ŏl-u for longing for his father. Ch’ŏl-u is the subject of pity: the poor child wants to see his father. On the other hand, it is Ch’ŏl-u’s sight (*mosŭp*)

of yearning for his father that makes the mother take pity on her son. In other words, the *gesture of yearning* is the subject of pity. It is pitiful for the son to search for his father when "father" was not even a part of his vocabulary. That is, Ch'ŏl-u's longing to learn of his father, the language of the patriarch, is a pitiful or pitiable sight for the mother. This sight causes the mother to hold back her tears. These tears are supposed to be read as the mother's emotionally moved reaction, but I will later show how these tears also contain sentiments of dejection and depression. The tears well up, but it is difficult to read this as simply tears of joy. Instead, these are the tears of feeling betrayed by her son, who has not uttered the patriarchal language till now.

The nation inevitably excludes the presence of women, whose sole responsibility is supposed to support the nation through their motherhood. While gender equality, new marriage and divorce laws, and women's participation in the workforce, military, and other social institutions suggest the paradigmatic shift of the *progressive* North Korean nation-state, their essential function in society is to reproduce the next generation of socialist revolutionaries. Much like what Friedrich Engels argues in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, North Korean women are socialized and incorporated into the state insofar as they continue to generate and educate their children to work for the state.

For women to be integrated into a state like North Korea, for example, they have to become *masculinized*, where the women, too, need to acquire the patriarchal language. In other words, gender equality in socialist states does not

eliminate gender difference but homogenizes gender into a single masculine gender. In the name of gender equality, the entire nation masculinizes gender—the *nom* has replaced the *nombril*. The masculine discourse of the nation-state has conveniently eliminated gender difference and equality, instating the hegemony of males. The mother in *Eight Hours* is forced to articulate the patriarchal language to her son as she proceeds to describe his father, reintegrating her role as a mother and as a wife back into the patriarchal society.

The patriarchal economy begins for Ch'ŏl-u at home (*oikos*), the very domain of which his mother is now the master. The mother unwittingly (perhaps indicated through the tears she holds back) gives Ch'ŏl-u the medium through which he can exchange his yearning for his father: the description of his father's face. The economy is initiated through the practice of drawing the father's face. Ch'ŏl-u, at first, is incapable of appropriating this new language, which causes his mother to laugh. Even after numerous attempts and guidance from his mother, Ch'ŏl-u can only draw an ordinary soldier of the People's Army advancing toward enemy line. The mother is certainly despaired at the fact that the picture resembles nothing of Ch'ŏl-u's father but just another representative of the nation-state. Nonetheless, to the mother, Ch'ŏl-u has developed the understanding of the language of the patriarchal nation-state through the image of a soldier. The image of the soldier substantiates the patriarch economy for Ch'ŏl-u: born of the womb, raised from home, enters the political world, commits to be loyal to the state, and sacrifices one's life for the state. And the cycle begins all over again.

Ri Hŭi-nam is faithful to the concept of economy as that which always begins at home. Ch'ŏl-u continues the practice of drawing his father/soldier at home:

> As usual (*yŏjŏnhi*), Ch'ol-u was drawing another portrait of his father rushing toward enemy line, and his mother was sitting on the floor, staring at the troublesome (*sayŏn'i manŭn*) drawings. (Ri 132)

The drawings of the father/soldier are troubling to the mother, who remains outside of the patriarchal economy. Her input in the correct way of depicting the father was the last words she spoke of before being excluded from the male practice. For the mother, Ch'ŏl-u's drawings are troubling, problematic, complex, multi-layered (*sayŏn'i manŭn*) because of the exclusionary practice that marginalizes the very body from which patriarchy first derived. "The scar of the navel is forgotten" (1987, 16) are the words of Irigaray and possibly what the mother thinks as Ch'ŏl-u focuses on his drawings rather than conversing with his mother. In fact, it is interesting how Ch'ŏl-u and his mother hardly converse with each other throughout the novella, which further demonstrates the exclusionary practice of the patriarchal economy. As usual, Ch'ŏl-u continues the practice of drawing his father in the presence of his mother. As usual, Ch'ŏl-u perpetuates an economy that excludes his mother. As usual, Ch'ŏl-u has forgotten about the economy that he once shared with his mother. And as usual, the mother finds these drawings to be troublesome.

The logic of economy is predicated on the "as usual" (*yŏjŏni*) or the circulation, and without it, the notion of economy comes to an abrupt halt. The

exchange must be repeated or repeatable. The portraits of the father are troubling to the mother because she knows that there is no economy in the practice of drawing. Ch'ŏl-u will never hear his father's voice nor feel his embrace through the drawings. The mother already knows that these drawings have no economic value, no value of exchange or reciprocity. Economy may begin at home, but it cannot and must not remain at home if it is to continue. In order for the patriarchal economy, the language of the father to persist, he must enter the public space.

Ch'ŏl-u goes to school, a political institution that breeds patriotic/patriarchal soldiers. A prankster finds Ch'ŏl-u's picture and shows it to the class. This may have been the optimal moment for Ch'ŏl-u to exchange his patriotic/patriarchal language with the classmates: to share with his peers how his father valiantly fought to protect the nation and therefore they must all prepare themselves to do the same. However, the picture is all too personal and private for Ch'ŏl-u. He does not feel that this language must be shared beyond the confines of his own domain, and that his father did not die for the nation but only for him. As the struggle begins between Ch'ŏl-u and the prankster, the most unpredictable (*ttŭt pakke*) incident happens at school:

> They both grabbed the picture and began a tug-o-war. Suddenly, the picture that Ch'ŏl-u focused on with much effort and later titled "My Father" ripped. (Ri, 56)

It was an accident, an understandable situation between school children tugging at the picture. The irony is that the picture got torn asunder at the very

institution that raises and educates children to become patriotic/patriarchal soldiers and citizens of the state. The only remnant of Ch'ŏl-u's memory of his father is dismembered by his classmate. The image of the People's Army soldier is ripped, creating this memory to be perhaps the most provocative moments in the novel. Ch'ŏl-u takes the torn picture along with the other copies of the drawing and buries it deep in his cabinet, forever entombing the memory of his father. The economy comes to a complete halt. The torn picture no longer has the economic function in Ch'ŏl-u's life. Much like how Ch'ŏl-u was torn from his mother by the umbilical cord, he has now been torn from his father. The scar remains in his deep unconsciousness as the picture is buried in his closet. For Ch'ŏl-u, the incident is a rude awakening that the economy between him and his father was never and will never be a reciprocal exchange. Instead, he will have to develop another form of economy that grants value to his identity. That is, his identity as a loyal citizen, a defender of the socialist revolution and a devoted follower of the Party is not predicated on the memory or history of his father (or fathers of the DPRK), but rather, it is one's personal commitment to himself. The incident at school changes Ch'ŏl-u's behavior and attitude in his social world. He becomes a reticent, faceless worker at the mine, reluctant to participate in collective efforts.

The provocative moment of the ripped picture signifies, for Ch'ŏl-u, a dissociation from prescriptions of creating a Party-desired individual. The patriarchal economy is cut or ripped. As an adult, when Ch'ŏl-u decides to enter

into the mind shaft with explosives, Ri Hŭi-nam uses the word *ttŭt pakke*, which means out of the ordinary, unusual, or unexpectedly. Ch'ŏl-u's actions are impulsive rather than calculating, or to put it in Katerina Clark's terms, spontaneous rather than conscious. What is Ch'ŏl-u's impulsive behavior based on? Is it reflective of his father's final charge to the enemy line? Ri Hŭi-nam reminds the readers that Ch'ŏl-u's memories have no relation or does not correspond to the current situation. Taking control or being the master of one's life is the fundamental creed of Juche ideology, which may explain Ch'ŏl-u's impulsive action to blast the boulder. But it is hard to imagine that Kim Il Sung would condone impulsive actions from his people. The boulder in the mine shaft did not trap any workers, so no lives were in danger. The local cadre suggested building a new mine shaft, which sounds the most logical and rational considering the situation the workers were in. Yet, the workers resist the cadre's advice and plan to remove the boulder. While the others suggested harmless methods of removing the boulder, Ch'ŏl-u grabs a box of dynamite and volunteers to go inside the shaft. Ch'ŏl-u's impulsive action is contradictory to his reticent personality, so, then, what does the novella actually reveal?

The operative word is *ttŭt pakke*—out of the ordinary. For Ri Hŭi-nam, human life is not prescribed or predicated on the Party's instructions but always conditions the possibility of "out of the ordinary." As the narrator in *Eight Hours* admits that "The human psyche is truly peculiar" (Ri, 129), the unpredictability of human actions reveals the complexity of human thought or the impossibility of

absolutely knowing or the controlling of human behavior. Much like most North Korean literature, writers will include statements that reflect the true purpose of an individual's actions in the narrative:

> Looking back, all this was related to his father, who had sacrificed his life for the fatherland (*choguk*). This was also Ch'ŏl-u's calling, and it totalized his present, future, happiness, and worthiness. (Ri, 156)

The Party often reminds the people of the "calling," the purpose of one's life for the nation. There is only one calling, one language (monolingualism), and one purpose in life for the citizens of the DPRK. Statements, like the one above, are common rhetorical devices prevalent in North Korean literature. There is never a shortage of trite and prescriptive statements in fiction that destine the teleological trajectory of an individual. The more interesting inquiry and necessary for closer examination whenever these statements appear is precisely where it appears in the narrative and under what circumstances.

This statement comes in between two sentences: one has the word *sayŏn manŭn* (troublesome or complex) and the other sentence has metaphor of the white poplar tree (*paekyang namu*). The narrator reminds the readers of Ch'ŏl-u's troublesome and complex childhood. Then, the narrator mentions Ch'ŏl-u's purpose or calling in life for the nation. Finally, in that same paragraph, the narrator reminds the readers of the white poplar tree that the mother had planted for Ch'ŏl-u when he was born. It is certainly strange (if not irrelevant) to situate a statement that determines Ch'ŏl-u's purpose in life in between two statements that

reveal the indeterminacies of life. In other words, Ch'ŏl-u's memories reveal complex (*sayŏn manŭn*) and unpredictable moments in his life, and the white poplar tree signifies natural and organic growth. The white poplar tree grows naturally and uncontrollably. Therefore, purpose in an individual's life, the purpose for the Party and for the nation, is sandwiched by the complexities of human life, the purposelessness and indeterminacy of human thought. The way in which Ri Hŭi-nam situates the typical Party directives reveals how contrived such ideology is to the lives of individuals, that the people (whether it is characters in the narrative or actual people) always negotiate the torrents of their uncontrollable emotions and thoughts with the Party-prescribed instructions of living a purposeful life for the nation, Party, and the Great Leader. However, Ch'ŏl-u's character seems to show otherwise.

Ch'ŏl-u stands at the crossroads of indeterminacy, not knowing whether to quit the endeavor of destroying the boulder or not. Sonia Ryang says, "In the North Korean perception of self, one is wholly and solely responsible for one's own improvement" (2012, 141). It is expected of Ch'ŏl-u to rectify his indeterminacy and carry out with his intended duty. This is not only beneficial for the other miners and the Party, but it is his imperative as a citizen of the DPRK. Ch'ŏl-u's thoughts and determination are supposed to be directed at pleasing the Great Leader, but as his determination to continue with the effort increases, the narrator says:

> All of a sudden (*munttŭk*), he recalled the words of a writer from some book he had read in the past.
> "Better to die with honor than to live with shame" (*nae sŭngni'jaro salgi an'ŭmyŏn yŏng'yero chuk'ŭrira*)
> His determination grew stronger. But then, unwittingly, he submerged silently into the world of his distant memories again.
> As he entered through the small gate of his unforgettable memory… (Ri 130)

Ch'ŏl-u is not motivated by the Party directives (as most characters in fiction are) but is instead motivated by a proverb that he read somewhere in a book by some unknown or unspecified author. It would be strange for Ch'ŏl-u not to remember that those words were from Kim Il Sung or a Party slogan, especially in a critical situation as the one he is enduring. If every character in North Korean literature is guided by the eternal teachings of Kim Il Sung and is loyal to the Party, then a proper citation would be conventional. Yet, Ch'ŏl-u recalls the words of *some* author from *some* book. This leads me to believe that this proverb was not spoken by Kim Il Sung or the Party, or even if Kim Il Sung had said this proverb at one point or another, Ch'ŏl-u does not associate this proverb with the Great Leader. Ch'ŏl-u is not concerned about the author of the proverb as much as he is concerned about the proverb itself, the very words that fortify his determination. Ch'ŏl-u is encouraged by the discourse of the proverb rather than the author of it, whether it was spoken by Kim Il Sung or not.

The more astounding element to the recollection of the proverb is the "all of a sudden" (*munttŭk*), the unaccountable contingencies in human thought and life. Ch'ŏl-u proactively thinks that he should work and live for the Party, but the

motivational proverb comes to him unexpectedly. These words do not come to Ch'ŏl-u in a prescribed or a matter-of-fact fashion like the way most of the Party directives fall into place in North Korean narratives. Instead, the unexpectedness of such proverb demonstrates the character's ability to think beyond the monolinguistic discourse. Ch'ŏl-u's source of strength derives from the power of a discourse by *some author from some book* that is not (or is difficult to be) associated with the national political discourse. At the same time, the characters in fiction and actual people of the DPRK are expected to continue the economy of the patriarchal language. In the next section, I will analyze the way in which the memory of the nation or the history of the Great Leader is nothing more than a reproduction of discourses without a referential.

Ritual as the Death Knell of the Patriarchal Discourse

In the Introduction to *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung say, "The puzzle of the North Korean political system is therefore not the practice of extraordinary cult of personality but the extraordinary continuity of this practice" (2012, 3). The two authors refer to this phenomenon as "legacy politics" (*yuhun chŏngch'i*) and "politics of longing" (*kŭriumui chŏngch'i*). In Chapter 1, I discussed the politics of legacy or the legend of the revolutionary history to some extent. In this section, I will discuss

the notion of longing for the absent father as a ritual or practice of discursive (re)production in *Eight Hours* that precedes the real or the actual father.

Jean Baudrillard's understanding of the postmodern as simulacra seems rather cogent to my discussion of North Korea's discursive practice. Baudrillard says, "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory" (1994, 1). Following Baudrillard's thought, it is questionable as to whether or not the territory has ever existed. The constant drawing and redrawing of maps (political, physical, topographic, climate, economic, road, traffic, thematic, satellite, Google, etc.) reveal a certain fetish (loss of referentials) to the practice of depicting a territory. The map is never the real territory, and it is perhaps not even concerned about the real. The territory no longer functions as *the* referential, but rather, each preceding map functions as its own referential—the practice of referencing references.

The situation in North Korea may not be so alien to Baudrillard's criticism. The death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 propelled the nation toward heightened forms of simulacra, changing the landscape to be the everlasting performance and practice of The Great National Bereavement (Kwon and Chung 2012). "Kim Il Sung is dead" did not decrease the level of moral principle by which North Koreans ought to have lived as Nietzsche's proclamation of "God is dead" was supposed to engender. Instead, the direct opposite occurred: North Korea's moral and filial responsibility increased, and the Party demanded greater loyalty than

ever before. Kwon and Chung (2012) attribute the politics of longing to the fortification of the Military-first policy (*sŏn'gun*):

> Military-first politics may have provided a solution to a crisis in the family state and to challenges to the partisan state. In advancing this solution, however, the new partisan state politics, called military-first politics, and the new family state politics, which created the landscape of longing, resulted in one of the most tragic events of death in modern history, in which the commemoration of one man's death contributed to the loss of innumerable human lives, the lives of people who were all categorically the deceased man's children. (2012, 33)

The nation bereaving the death of the Great Leader must not be taken for granted. It is obviously a serious ordeal not only for the political officials to maintain control over the people but also for the people themselves who are supposed to offer their utmost devotion. The problem with North Korea's politics of longing rests precisely in the Party's demand to its people to yearn for the discourse of *a* Kim Il Sung rather than the referential Kim Il Sung, the so-called "real." Kim Il Sung the man may have physically died in 1994, but the discourse on *a* Kim Il Sung has persisted throughout the man's life and still persists. The politics of longing demand from North Koreans to long for the longing. It is a perpetual self-referential cycle that sees no end. The slogan "The Great Leader Is Forever With Us" is not only to be read as a religious/spiritual symbol of Kim Il Sung's omnipresence, but as a haunting reality that the discourse (such as this slogan) of the Great Leader is forever programmed in various circuits of North

Koreans' lives. For me, Ri Hŭi-nam, as a state-sponsored writer, knew this all too well even before the death of the Great Leader.

Let us examine Memory 3 in *Eight Hours*, which may help elucidate the theoretical concept of the simulacra.

> As usual (*yŏjŏnhi*), Ch'ol-u was drawing another portrait of his father rushing toward enemy line, and his mother was sitting on the floor, staring at the troublesome drawings. (Ri 132)

In the previous section, I discussed the repeatability of a practice in order for it to have economic value. Following that thought, in this section, I will focus on the notion of the *iterability* as that which is the subject of the practice. It begins (or it has already begun) with "as usual" (*yŏjŏnhi*). In the original text, the word "another" does not appear but is implied. This "another" does not mean it is a different drawing of Ch'ŏl-u's father but that it is the same one that he's been drawing: the portrait of his father rushing toward enemy line. As usual, Ch'ŏl-u was re-simulating what his father has done on the battlefield according to the previous drawing. It is not important what his father actually did, but it is important that the discourse of a People's Army soldier rushing toward the enemy line remains static in Ch'ŏl-u's imaginative production. Ch'ŏl-u re-performs, re-produces, and re-creates the discourse more than he longs for his actual father. The politics of longing for Ch'ŏl-u is in the very ritual of re-performing, re-producing, and re-creating the image of his father.

Moments before the recollection of Memory 3, some war veterans visits Ch'ŏl-u's house and gives a photograph of Ch'ŏl-u's father out on the battlefield. Ch'ŏl-u realizes that the portrait he's been drawing and the photograph of his father are not identical at all (Ri 130). He has spent his childhood rendering the portrait of his father as if it were his actual father. But this begs the question: Why the numerous reproduction of the same portrait? Would one not have sufficed? The more baffling problem with this realization is that Ch'ŏl-u is not terribly disappointed or confused. He simply acknowledges the photograph of his actual father and still considers his childhood of reproducing the portrait as precious and invaluable. The man who comes out of the cave in Plato's allegory is blinded by the truth and realizes that he's been fooled by mere representations on the walls of the cave, but Ch'ŏl-u dismisses the truth and returns to the cave in delight of the reflections.

The practice of reproducing the portrait is what Ch'ŏl-u cherishes more than the concern of whether or not his drawing realistically or truthfully depicts his father. The practice becomes a ritual, and it is in the ritual that Ch'ŏl-u finds comfort. It is perfecting each portrait, making the last one better than the previous one. Alongside this, each rendition of the same portrait will always be slightly different from the previous one. This is not a peculiar practice or ritual if we consider the thousands of paintings of Christ hanging along the walls of the Uffizi Gallery or the Louvre Museum, or, to use a more contemporary example, people taking snap-shots of themselves with their phones and posting them up on

websites. The preoccupation with such practice resides in the practice itself. The photograph of Ch'ŏl-u's father does not make Ch'ŏl-u feel dejected from drawing all those portraits of *a* father rushing toward enemy line. His actual father may have physically died on the battlefield, but *a* father lives on through the reproduction of the same discursive portrait: rushing toward enemy line and the title "My Father."

The portrait of the father precedes the actual father. Long before the photograph of Ch'ŏl-u's father is delivered, Ch'ŏl-u has been engaged in the practice of reproducing the portrait of his father. The absent father is made present through this simulacrum, and in some ways, the delivery of the photograph was not necessary. The "truth" or the "truthfulness" of the father's features are also unnecessary:

> "Ch'ŏl-u, let's have a look. If you make the eyes a bit bigger, it may resemble your father."
> The fading embers in Ch'ŏl-u's eyes were relit.
> The next day, Ch'ŏl-u returned to his mother with another portrait of the father.
> The mother felt despaired. It was because the revised portrait appeared even more absurd than the first one. However, she did not reveal her thoughts and proceeded to alter the nose and the ears. (Ri 50)

The mother takes great pains in revising and altering the facial features of the absurd portrait. She, too, has but a faint memory of her husband. The narrator informs the readers that she had been married for only a year before the husband was taken to the battlefield, and now, she is given the challenge to recreate her

husband truthfully for her son. The fact of the matter is, even the mother cannot reproduce her husband whom she's actually seen. It is an impossibility, therefore, for Ch'ŏl-u to imagine his father whom he's never seen. Ch'ŏl-u can only rely on what he does know and has seen in public. The myriad portraits, statues, mosaics, propaganda slogans that decorate the entire nation are more than enough to serve as a *referential* for Ch'ŏl-u:

> The next day, Ch'ŏl-u returned with a picture of an ordinary People's Army soldier with a long rifle, advancing toward the enemy line.
> "Mom, is this father?"
> The picture did not look anything like his father. Although Ch'ŏl-u could not imagine his father's face, he was able to depict the father's final charge toward the enemy with great detail. The mother tightly embraced her son saying, "It is your father! This is exactly how your father fought!" (Ri 52)

Surely, it is not "exactly" how his father fought but a simulation. The mother resorts to lying to her son because of the impossibility of reproducing a truthful image of the father. However, her lying ("It is your father!") becomes the discursive truth for Ch'ŏl-u. The soldier is not his father but is made into one through the utterance of "It is your father." The biological father is replaced by a universal or ordinary soldier, the image of the patriarchal state. The soldier becomes the source of the repeatable practice, the simulacrum. The discourse of the soldier rushing toward enemy line must be told and retold, drawn and redrawn rather than excavating and researching for the truth of his father's face.

No other portrait, not even a photograph, can alter or replace the "truth" of his father. In fact, no other man can take the place of the simulacrum. In Memory 3, a faceless man stands outside the house, calling for the mother. Ch'ŏl-u stands in between the man and his mother, preventing her from meeting him.

> Suddenly, a voice outside the window was quietly calling for mother. Ch'ŏl-u quickly got up, opened the door, and looked out into the pitch dark night. As soon as he saw a tall man standing hesitantly, the young bodyguard shouted "Mother's not here" as he normally did to men seeking his mother and slammed the door. (Ri 132)

There seems to have been numerous accounts of suitors coming for the mother, in which case Ch'ŏl-u would interfere and send them away. It is not that Ch'ŏl-u does not want his mother to remarry but that he can't imagine anyone replacing the discourse of his father-soldier. Many North Korean narratives depict orphans or fatherless children, whose fathers have died during the war. However, these children are never left in this world to survive on their own. The Great Father Kim Il Sung replaces the children's biological father as the surrogate, eternal father to all the people of North Korea. In *Eight Hours*, Ch'ŏl-u, on the other hand, initially yearns for his biological father and never Kim Il Sung as the surrogate. In fact, Kim Il Sung is not even mentioned in the narrative, and it may be a misreading to assume the spiritual presence of Kim Il Sung in *Eight Hours*. For Ch'ŏl-u, the tall man who comes to visit cannot replace the discourse of his father or the practice of (re)drawing his father. Though Ch'ŏl-u's father is physically absent, the ritual of Ch'ŏl-u's drawing keeps *a* father alive.

What Ch'ŏl-u fails to realize is the patricide committed each time he redraws the portrait of his father. Each portrait does not re-present the original (for there is none even with the photograph, which comes to Ch'ŏl-u much later in his life). It is caught in the cyclical pattern of simulating the previous portrait: a simulation of a simulation. This does not allow Ch'ŏl-u to have a better image of his actual father but for him to substantiate and materialize the discourse of *a* father.

The ritual practice of Ch'ŏl-u's drawing begins with his longing for his actual father who died on the battlefield. The object of Ch'ŏl-u's longing is not his father but the ability to call him "father"—a language. Ch'ŏl-u attempts to draw what his mother dictates, and thereafter reproduces the dictation or the discourse again and again. He even has a title for each portrait: "My Father" (*Uri Abŏji*). Ch'ŏl-u writes, but for whom?

The title "My Father" is not Ch'ŏl-u's father, but he believes it is his father because of the title. The title confirms his belief, but the title and the drawing have no association—it is not a signifier (the title) of a signified (the drawing)—with each other. The drawing, too, functions as a signifier to the signified (his actual father). The title "My Father" neither indicates the drawing (for it is not his father) nor his actual father (for he has never seen his father). At the same time, the title "My Father" indicates both the title of the drawing (despite whether or not the drawing is his father) and the episteme of once having a father. Each of Ch'ŏl-u's drawing has the title "My Father" written at the top.

Readers will never know whether he writes the title first or after the drawing. Ch'ŏl-u writes, which means the writing must be legible and repeatable. The drawing, too, must appropriate this gesture of iterability. Ch'ŏl-u draws numerous portraits of his father along with the title "My Father." Does "My Father" refer to the drawing at hand or the previous drawing? Or does "My Father" refer to the previously written title, in which case it must be written as ""My Father"" and so on.

Ch'ŏl-u never questions this statement or the discourse; it is his father. It is in the affirmative and not in the negative. But the negative is always already present within the affirmative statement. "My Father" already contains its negative: "Not My Father." No matter how many times Ch'ŏl-u writes the affirmative, its negative will always haunt the truth claim of the affirmative statement. In *Memory and Literature*, Renate Lachmann states it succinctly: "So the simulacrum is both a true and false image; it refers to something and cancels that reference; it represents that which is absent and simultaneously disclaims it" (1997, 10). Each reproduction of the portrait is not the patricide of his actual father but precisely of the discourse of the patriarchal language: it simultaneously disclaims the truth claim of the title each time it is written. In other words, each time Ch'ŏl-u writes "My Father," he is simultaneously writing "Not My Father." Ch'ŏl-u believes that he has gained an economic language of the patriarchal society, that he understood the *truth* of the discourses that have been taught to him by his mother, school, friends, etc. But this truth cries out its other, its negativity:

"Not My Father," "Not Your Father," and "Not Our Father." The image coupled with the title is never the truth that it claims to be. Every representation, re-drawing, and rewriting of "My Father" implicitly denotes its falsity. The father is dead, and all Ch'ŏl-u has is a ritual that needs to remember its own practice rather than the memory of his father, which he does not possess. When the prankster at school rips "My Father," it becomes the end and the demise of Ch'ŏl-us ritual. Politics of longing ends for Ch'ŏl-u at the very moment when his image in torn. The photograph that Ch'ŏl-u later receives does not end the politics of longing, but rather, the ripping of the iconic image of his father ends his ritual. The ritual of drawing and writing "My Father" stops at this harrowing incident and is entombed in his closet along with all the other simulacra of "My Father." The more compounding realization is that his mother serves or has served from the very beginning as the accomplice to Ch'ŏl-u's patricide.

Complexity (*Sayŏni manŭn*) of the Mother

Article 62 of the 1972 DPRK Constitution states: "The state liberates women from their burdensome housework and supports all their efforts to enter into society." According to the Constitution, the state liberates these women (mostly referring to mothers) by providing them with socialized programs and institutions such as maternity leave (paid and extended if necessary), public

nurseries, preschool and kindergarten, and other benefits.[84] In essence, mothers do not have to be concerned about their child's welfare. The implications of socialized programs and institutions are for mothers to enter into the workforce and for them to relinquish their child to the state. The child belongs to the state and must be raised, trained, and educated by the state. The patriarchal state also provides maternal care for the children of the DPRK. As discussed in Chapter 1, the role of the mother in North Korea is to provide a channel through which her children can become loyal citizens of the state. This is the mother's agency and her ultimate sacrifice for the construction of the state, which Chizuko Ueno calls "contemporary feminism bound within the confines of both nationality and culture" (2004, 19).

The Constitution restructures the paradigm of the domestic and public spaces whereby the state functions as *the* domestic space in which the child's growth—physically, ideologically, and intellectually—is secured. The mother's body functions solely for the purpose of bringing the child to this world, but her responsibility for the child's general welfare is not to be burdened or infringed upon her efforts of working for the state. The DPRK Constitution considers the assumption of mothers rearing their own children as an outdated and unfair mode of labor division. Therefore, mothers in the workforce are just as important as

[84] Yi, On-juk. *Pukhan sahoe yŏngu: Sahoehakjŏk chŏpgŭn* (Research on North Korean Society: An Approach to Social Factors) (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1989), 176-177.

fathers, justifying the breakdown and blurring of gender inequality and of domestic and public spaces.

In a socialized state like North Korea, the domestic or private space engenders the possibility of disharmony and rupture with the Party's policies. The domestic space must be made public and controlled by the collective whether it is by the neighborhood watch (*inmin panjang*), the local Party secretary and cadres, or fellow neighbors and friends. However, it is impossible to control every aspect of human lives domestic or public. Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours* reveals this impossibility through the mother's complex thoughts—her un-ideological and all too personal resentment toward the state expressed in the quietude of her domestic space. The mother clearly demarcates the line between public and private spaces, fortifying her domestic space as her sovereign domain. It is at home and away from public scrutiny where she does the unthinkable: "She laughs at the absurdity of the picture."

> The mother couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of the portrait.
> "Ch'ŏl-u, let's have a look. If you make the eyes a bit bigger, it may resemble your father." (Ri 49)

The laughter of Ch'ŏl-u's mother must be taken seriously. Her laughter poses a serious threat to the state as it conditions the possibility of dismembering the state image from within—from within the family that stands as the immanent Other to the state, from within femininity that resists the masculinization of patriarchal discourse, and from within motherhood that disavows the state for

reducing and excluding the maternal from the patriarch economy. The mother's laughter is certainly not directed at Ch'ŏl-u's inability to draw but directed at the notion of a soldier, a metonym of the state. It is not how Ch'ŏl-u drew the soldier but the fact that he can *only* think of drawing his father as a soldier. To Ch'ŏl-u, the image of his father or fatherhood conflates with his military service to the nation. However, Ch'ŏl-u's mother clearly demonstrates to her son the importance of detailing his father's image. The memory of Ch'ŏl-u's father is not to be a faceless soldier, not to remain universal, indistinguishable from the rest. He is not to represent the indifferent state, but a father who lacerates his heart for never having seen his own son: "If I could just see his face even if it were for a moment I could die with no regrets" (Ri 51). The father longs to see his son's face as much as the son longs to see his father's face. The state has dismembered the family by engaging in a civil war, a domestic war, and has promised a fulfilling life for all members of the DPRK. However, the promises of the state and the victory of the war have not fulfilled Ch'ŏl-u and his mother's lives. The war has created an abysmal lack in their lives by taking away the father, a lack that cannot be replaced by the glorious discourse of the nation-state. It is now the mother's turn to dismember the iconic image of the state by personalizing the father's facial features. The mother literally reconstructs the memory of Ch'ŏl-u's father and resists the prescription of a loyal citizen depicted in the image of an emblematic soldier.

The mother's laughter discourages Ch'ŏl-u, who resigns his hope from ever seeing his father. Ch'ŏl-u misconstrues his mother's laughter, thinking it is directed at him. The mother recognizes this and decides to assist Ch'ŏl-u with the portrait. But the mother has forgotten the image of her husband, and without a picture it would be impossible to recall him. The mother's laughter evolves into her reconstructing *a* father rather than Ch'ŏl-u's father. The mother abates Ch'ŏl-u's yearning heart by constructing *a* father. She reconstructs the entire facial feature to convince Ch'ŏl-u that the image resembles his father. But Ch'ŏl-u simply returns the next day with a picture of an ordinary soldier. Ri Hŭi-nam's tone and word choice are noteworthy as they reflect the way the mother feels and reacts:

> The next day, Ch'ŏl-u did the most ridiculous (*ŏngttunghan*) thing. He returned with a picture of an ordinary (*wen*) soldier of the People's Army, holding a long rifle and advancing toward the enemy line.
> "Mom, is this father?" (51)[85]

The narrator, who is supposed to be the mother's thoughts, does not say that Ch'ŏl-u came to her the next day but that he did the most ridiculous thing. The mother's tone fortifies her disavowal of the portrait. Assuming the father as a soldier *is* ridiculous, to the mother, as much as assuming the soldier as his father

[85] 그러한 아들이 다음날 그만 엉뚱한 일을 저질러놓고말았다. 아들은 길다란 총을 비껴들고 적의 화점으로 육박하는 웬 인민군병사를 그려가지고 어머니에게 보여주었던것이다 (Ri Hŭi-nam *Eight Hours*, 51).

is. I took the liberty of translating the subsequent sentence using the word "ordinary" for the Korean *wen* (웬). In Korean, *wen* would be closer to "some" or to use it in a question such as "*wen il'iya*?" it would mean "What's the problem?" "What's up?" "What brings you here?" Despite the cultural implications and the various usage of this untranslatable word, the tone of its usage always seems to suggest an element of surprise or unexpectedness. The sentence "Ch'ŏl-u brings to his mother a picture of *wen* soldier of the People's Army," can be translated as, "Of all things, Ch'ŏl-u had to draw a soldier of the People's Army." The mother's tone of using this word also has a sense of annoyance, where the sentence can be reread as "Ch'ŏl-u brings to his mother *yet another* picture of a soldier of the People's Army."

To the mother, the picture is yet another image of a faceless, impersonal defender of the state. The implications are strong: the state calls on the people to sacrifice their lives while the women must continue to produce these future soldiers; both men who fight on the battlefield and women who produce soldiers are faceless, expendable machines; the image of the soldier victimizes the mother as a widow and someone who will have to hand over her son to the state; and finally, her only son cannot draw anything else but the image of a state produced soldier. The mother's dismal and annoyance at her son's (re)creation must be read and accentuated; it must be taken seriously as much as her laughter. It is precisely words like *wen*, which can easily be overlooked, that sets the tone for the way the

mother feels and (re)acts toward the patriarchal state within the confines of her domestic space.

The mother's annoyance at the pictures is further emphasized in Memory 3. Ch'ŏl-u, "as usual," is reproducing the image of his father while the mother looks on at her son. Suddenly, a man comes to visit the mother. Ch'ŏl-u prevents his mother from engaging with this unknown man. The mother resolutely bids the man farewell and returns to the living room where Ch'ŏl-u proceeds to redraw the image of his father:

> "It's not going to work out for us. Just…forget me please…forever."
> Then mother dragged her feet across the floor to the corner of the other room. She glared (*nunkkil'ŭl chumyŏ*) at the drawings on the floor and quietly sat still.
> Mother neither blinked nor seemed to breathe. With her two arms wrapped around her knees and her lips slightly awry, she stared forlornly at the drawings with a sense of resolution. (Ri 134)

The sentence that proceeds from the cited passage above tells the reader that the mother gains strength and perseverance to overcome her temptations. It does not specify any particular temptation, but it can be inferred that she has been tempted by suitors longing for her love. (Readers later find out that it was only one suitor.) The mother has only been married a year before the state took her husband to the battlefield. The husband makes a promise to return triumphantly like every confident soldier. He writes one letter to his wife and longs to see his child whom he's never seen. He never writes again, and he does not return to his family. But much like the faithful Penelope, who waits for Odysseus to return, the

mother tries to remain faithful despite the fact that she knows her husband is dead. The narrator in *Eight Hours* tries to convince the readers that the portraits of the father that Ch'ŏl-u has been drawing become the source of strength to remain faithful to her late husband. The readers are supposed to celebrate the mother for her faithfulness and devotion to her son and to her dead husband, that only a noble-minded individual can overcome her carnal desires.

But has she been faithful to her dead husband? She admits herself that she can hardly recall his face: "Her vague (*makyŏnhan*) memory of her husband made it extremely difficult to draw his face" (Ri 50). Then, who is the man in Ch'ŏl-u's portrait? The tall man, who comes to visit the mother that one evening, has been discharged from the army since the armistice of the war. She has been secretly meeting the tall man ever since then. He is the one man who has captivated the mother's heart, and his visit that evening was to propose to the mother. Is it imaginable to think that the portrait Ch'ŏl-u has been drawing was never his actual father to begin with but that it was the face of the mother's secret lover? When some soldiers come to the house to deliver a photograph of Ch'ŏl-u's actual father, Ch'ŏl-u is not dismayed at how the photograph and the portraits he's been drawing are not identical. But would Ch'ŏl-u have been shocked to discover that the portrait actually matches the face of the tall man, who comes to visit the mother that one evening? After all, Ch'ŏl-u never actually sees the tall man's face but only hears his voice. These are, of course, unsettling speculations that the Party would quickly dismiss. The narrative keeps the tall man in the dark, away

from sight, and away from identification. To even consider that a devoted wife commits patricide by superimposing her lover's face on to the face of the state would be iconoclastic. At the same time, a closer reading of the three memories in *Eight Hours* lends anything but a simplistic and prescriptive characteristic of Ch'ŏl-u's mother.

The three memories not only explicate the politics of longing for Ch'ŏl-u, but it also revisits gender politics in the DPRK through the (re)action of the mother. The mother offers a "new face" to nationalism by attempting to reconfigure the ordinary image of the state to something "otherwise than being," to borrow Emmanuel Lévinas' terminology. Mothers in the DPRK bear faceless, collective (or faceless because of the collective) soldiers for the state—the economy of the patriarchal discourse—as in the mother in *Sea of Blood*, who could not distinguish the faces of her own children marching with other soldiers toward the socialist revolution. Biological fathers are to be forgotten, replacing personal memory with the collective memory and determination of defending the fatherland. But this is not the case with Ch'ŏl-u's mother in *Eight Hours*.

Ch'ŏl-u's mother resides at home throughout the novella until the very end when she comes out to verify the safety of her son. Ch'ŏl-u and his mother do not converse in the novella as one may expect between a mother and her child. The mother knows that the economy she once shared with Ch'ŏl-u has lost its exchange value at the sight of his preoccupation with the patriarchal economy. Toward the end of the narrative, after Ch'ŏl-u succeeds in eliminating the boulder,

the first person to inform the mother is Su-ryŏn, to whom Ch'ŏl-u confessed his love at the beginning of the story. The mother only hopes to hear her son's voice calling out to her, but instead, it is the voice of Su-ryŏn. When Ch'ŏl-u finally emerges to the surface and greets his mother, all he can say is, "Calm down, mother" (*Chinjŏnghaseyo, ŏmŏni*) (Ri 162). Ch'ŏl-u is no longer a dependent child but a rational, cool-headed man of the state. Emotions not longer define Ch'ŏl-u but only logic and determination for the workers. Ch'ŏl-u's mother, on the other hand, has no business in public, nor does she want to. She may have been forced to be *domesticated* when her husband went out to the battlefield and when she had Ch'ŏl-u, but she discovers that the domestic space, the private sphere is precisely where otherness emerges.

If one were to come across Ri Hŭi-nam's later works such as *Pulgŭn nunbora* (Red Blizzard, 1999), one may detect an ostensibly different type of work, which may suggest that some narratives were commissioned by the Writers' Union for specific purposes.[86] The narrative focuses on Kim Jong Il's visit to his father's tomb on New Year's eve. With a series of flashbacks and overt symbolisms of the color red to suggest communism and the "continuity of the body politic," Ri seems to project a rather different image of the nation-state from *Eight Hours*.

[86] According to a couple of defectors who were formally members of the Writers' Union, they were often commissioned by the Union to write stories that were fitting to specific North Korean holidays or festivals such as Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's birthday. Interview with Ch'oe Chin-i and Mr. Han (pseudonym) in October, 2010.

In “On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium,” Stephen Epstein closely reads the “fissures within the conscious mythmaking” in *Red Blizzard*. Instead of presenting another optimistic conclusion to the narrative, Ri Hŭi-nam removes the readers away from such formulaic logic and saturates it with upsurge of sentimental emotions that allow for text to provide hope during North Korea’s most economically trying period. Epstein considers Ri’s gesture to be the “authorial sleight of hand in order to sweep the reader away in its hopeful conclusion” (2002, 40).

Ri Hŭi-nam’s writing patterns can also be identified from Epstein’s analysis of *Red Blizzard*. In both *Eight Hours* and *Red Blizzard*, Ri does not withhold sentimentalism, especially in the moments where characters recall past events. But the most striking moments in both texts is Ri’s mentioning of what Epstein succinctly says “the disjunction between timeless nature and human beings who age.” In *Red Blizzard*, Kim Jong Il looks at this deceased father and wonders why white frost settles upon the hair of the Great Leader if nature is verdant, which to Epstein is the “reassurance of the Great Leader’s immortality [that] needs to be given in the face of evidence of his obvious mortality” (2002, 40). Likewise, in the last sentence of *Eight Hours*, the narrator contemplates on the disjunction between static nature and changing humans: “O, the poplar tree receives abundant nutrients from this great land. It remains verdant and stands upright despite the house that changed its old self with time. O, how many

countless memories and lives have been etched on the bark of this poplar tree" (Ri 174).

In both narratives, Ri glorifies the timelessness of nature while indicating to his readers the transitive characteristic in humans. For Ri, humans change, will change, and, in some cases, must change. In that last sentence, Ri shows how human history is out of joint with nature's history. The house (*oikos*) that embodies or *houses* people changes its features, its characteristics, its structures as do the people who dwell in it. For Ri, the changing house points inwardly to the changing people. Ch'ŏl-u, the man of the house, changes his perception of life and his relationship with the collective, not according to Party policies but of his own volition.

On a broader scale, such memories on the discursive ritual in *Eight Hours* may provide insight to the changing literary stage on which writers in North Korea perform. Ch'ŏl-u's "as usual" performance of drawing his father may appear as an identical procedure, but each portrait engenders difference—difference in the repetition. Much of the same can be said about literature produced in North Korea, where it appears as though one narrative imitates the previous piece of literary work. However, I have tried to show that the practice of writing resists singularity or monolingualism, that no single work of literature can ever be identical to the previous one and can never speak the Party's political discourse in unison. The literary stage is constantly changing, adapting to a new political system, and resisting such banal prescriptions set by the Party. There is

creativity performed every time the writer approaches his work. Granted that North Korean writers' creativity is not as apparent or obvious as literary works from other countries, this is only a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind. Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours* may ostensibly appear as yet another literary work that criticizes the local bureaucrats at an ore mine, a love story based on Party-minded individuals, and a heroic tale of the working class edifying the pride of the nation. Yet, within this seemingly repetitious narrative, there exists difference(s).

Chapter 3

The Song of Sun-hŭi: Marginal Language in Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend*

No, no. I can't do that. I can't stand it anymore! –Paek Nam-ryong's Friend

This chapter is about the song of a female character Ch'ae Sun-hŭi, a song that eludes and resists the oppressive patriarchal social order that dictates the construction of female subjects of the DPRK. Her negative response to herself is a double affirmation (No, no) of her resistance to a social prescription that attempts to physically and spiritually (*chŏngsinjŏkin*) mold women into a Party-desired subject. *Spirit*, what a harrowing term for Sun-hŭi! It is a metonym for the ideological transformation of an individual into a rational being, where the notion of the DPRK's political ideology functions both as the Althusserian *interpellation* of a subject within a linguistic system as much as it functions as a prescriptive and discursive process involved in the construction of subjectivity.[87] Sun-hŭi refuses to be *interpellated* into a "rational" subject of the patriarchal state on two accounts: first, her double self-affirmation of resistance (I can't do that. I can't stand it anymore!); and second, her response without a response, which I will detail toward the end of this chapter.

[87] Lee, Namhee. *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 291.

Sun-hŭi speaks out against the prescriptive ideology of subject-making: "I can't do that." It is not that she does not want to be a wife or a mother, but rather she cannot continue to be the state-desired wife and mother. The law diagnoses her with a disease of irrationality and attempts to mold her into a rational subject who complies with the Party prescription of womanhood. Sun-hŭi makes a stance by claiming that she cannot *stand* it anymore, that she will no longer submit herself to the patriarchal order. It is her double self-affirmation that reveals her pent up angst against the hegemonic society and her imperative to file for divorce in the opening passage of Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend*.

> Ch'ae Sun-hŭi comes to Judge Chŏng Chin-u's office and files for divorce under the premise of personality conflicts. Sun-hŭi is a celebrity singer at the Province Performing Arts Theater and Sŏk-ch'un is a lowly factory worker. She claims that her husband is stubborn and an incompetent worker, who cannot win awards for inventing a new machine like the other workers. Chŏng Chin-u has already divorced a married couple (Ch'ae Rim and his wife) and is reluctant to see yet another broken family. Instead, he sets out to rectify the couple's marital problems.
>
> Chŏng Chin-u visits Sŏk-ch'un's factory and learns from the manager that Sŏk-ch'un has been working on the same project for the past five years without any progress, which he attributes to Sŏk-ch'un's stubbornness to change with the times. Then, Chŏng Chin-u visits Sun-hŭi's theater and learns that she has become arrogant and vain as a celebrity. Chŏng Chin-u pieces the accounts together and concludes that Sŏk-ch'un is at fault for not improving his technical skills and advancing his position at factory, and that Sun-hŭi's arrogance derives from her husband's incompetency as a man of this new generation. He critiques Sŏk-ch'un for falling behind and suggests taking evening classes at the technical institute. He, then, asks Sŏk-ch'un to recall the first time he met in order to reground his love for his wife.
>
> At the same time, Chŏng Chin-u has to deal with another problematic character: Ch'ae Rim. While Chŏng Chin-u tries to restore Sun-hŭi and Sŏk-ch'un's marital health, Ch'ae Rim (who is Sun-hŭi's

second cousin) stands on the opposing end, urging Sun-hŭi to divorce her husband. Ch'ae Rim is one of the local cadres with much influence and social power, but Chŏng Chin-u maintains his legal authority by not conceding to Ch'ae Rim's bribery. Additionally, he discovers that Ch'ae Rim has embezzled government funds—which were to award workers for inventing new machines—for his own personal profit. He realizes that the cash prize could have gone to Sŏk-ch'un, but Ch'ae Rim has been pocketing the cash all along. Chŏng Chin-u charges Ch'ae Rim for financial fraud and threatens to arrest him.

Chŏng Chin-u, then, begins to rectify the couple's marital problems by reminding them that their duty as a citizen is to continue the struggle for revolution. Chŏng Chin-u not only ideologically disciplines Sŏk-ch'un, but he also counsels his neighbors' marital problems and makes mends with his own wife, whom he has had regrets marrying because of her long absence away from home and from her domestic duties. In the end, Chŏng Chin-u proves to be more than a legal advisor and more than a marriage counselor; he is the exemplary friend to the members of the community.

Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend) was published in 1988 and made its way across the DMZ (demilitarized zone) and into the hands of many South Koreans by 1992. One of South Korea's renowned writers, Hwang Sŏk-yŏng (1993, 199), said this after reading the novel: "The first time I went to North Korea, I came across Paek Nam-ryong's novel, and I was deeply impressed. In this novel, the characters' individual concerns and circumstances were well described, which shocked me. Through this novel, I realized that there are people living in the North." Another South Korean writer Yun Chŏng-mo said, "Paek Nam-ryong's novel is not only the most extraordinary of all North Korean novels that I've read so far, it contains such shocking realities that it overturns any distorted knowledge

about the North."[88] Their genuine shock over Paek's *Friend* may not have been simply based on its theme of divorce but on a deeper level of reading and understanding the tenuous narrative structure and the complex theme of individual versus the state.

Paek's other stories such as *Pokmujadŭl* (Servicemen, 1979), *Il-t'ŏ* (Workplace, 1979), *60 Nyŏn-hu* (After 60 Years, 1982), *Chŏlmŭn Tang-bisŏ* (The Young Party Secretary, 1983), *Saengmyŏng* (Life, 1985), and *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) all center on cadres who struggle to improve the living and working conditions for the collective. Paek understands the critical role of the cadres as the middleman between the Party and the people.[89] The cadres are the most visible and tangible representatives of the Party. That is why Paek delineates cadres in many of his narratives as what Tatiana Gabroussenko (2009) calls the "caring cadre,"[90] who facilitates the imperative duty for individuals to conform to the Party directives. While the conflict between individual and state is a recurring theme in North Korean literature, *Friend* stands out among Paek's other works and even among other novels published around the same period for its inability to seal off and enclose individualistic tendencies in a female character—that the "utopian" ending in the novel is anything but artificially contrived to meet the demands of the Party's family revolution.

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[88] This quotation is found in the appendix of the South Korean publication of Paek Nam-ryong's *After 60 Years* in 1992.
[89] Sŏ Chae-jin or Suh, Jae-jean's *The Impact of Personality Cult in North Korea* for a deeper analysis of the "middleman" in North Korean socio-politics.
[90] Refer to Tatiana Gabroussenko, "North Korean 'Rural Fiction' from the Late 1990s to the Mid 2000s: Permanence and Change." *Korean Studies* vol.33 (2009): 79-81.

I am not suggesting that *Friend* is an antithetical text in North Korea, or, what one may call, a dissident work. The central theme in *Friend* complies with the Party-line of revolutionizing the family, where the protagonist Chŏng Chin-u administrates his legal power to restore a dysfunctional family to a healthy condition and thus raises the individuals' ideological consciousness to ensure the victory of the socialist state. The prescriptive and didactic reading of *Friend* articulates the development of aberrant characters into model citizens of the state by which readers are supposed to live. In the context of family revolution, the aberrant characters discover the Party-desired image of an ideal father/husband and mother/wife and transform their individual ways to conform to the ideality. The male characters learn to become a responsible, authoritative father-figure for the family and the female characters understand their duty as a submissive mother-figure. Although North Korea "officially" eradicated sexual inequality even before the inception of the nation-state in 1948,[91] even after forty years, literature seems to show otherwise. Women's participation in the public space is not a promise of their agency but an absorption and submission to the patriarchal state order. Central themes in North Korean literature are supposed to render a unitary reading, a univocal meaning that complies with the Party thought, where *difference* or *otherness* is disregarded, eliminated, or simply *unthought*.

[91] Article 22 of the 1948 DPRK Constitution. Park Sang-chŏl and Kim Ch'ang-kyu. *Pukhan'ui hŏnpŏp kaejŏngkwa ip'pŏptonghyang* (North Korean Constitution Revision and Legislative Trend). Seoul: Han'gukpŏpjaeyŏn'guwon, 1994.

The majority of the conclusions in North Korean novels not only promotes the Party and offers "eternal optimism," [92] but, more implicitly, reinstates a male-dominated socio-political order. In short, novels in North Korea en*gender* a masculine reading, where Partha Chatterjee's "the women's question" gets subsumed under the patriarchal discourse of the totalizing state. What makes *Friend* unique, however, is its implication and thematic conflict that love and loyalty to the state cannot be forced upon or demanded from the individuals. The main conflict in the novel begins with the divorcees but then proceeds to elucidate a larger thematic problem between the presiding judge (Chŏng Chin-u) and the obstinate female divorcee (Ch'ae Sun-hŭi). While the novel is suppose to present the divorcees' ability to transcend their differences and instantiate their obligation to the state, a problematic discourse yet exists, where Sun-hŭi resists the enclosure of her individualism and thus reasserts the "women's question."

Sun-hŭi confronts her male counterparts and attempts to express her agency within the sphere of patriarchy. *Friend* shows a dual power struggle at hand: first, the state's controlling efforts to tailor and construct a subject according to the Party directives; and second, Sun-hŭi's resistance from the subject-making force that delimits her individuality. Sun-hŭi initially struggles to divorce her husband, whom she finds to be an incompatible partner, but the novel divulges her struggle with Judge Chŏng Chin-u, her Director at the Province

[92] Refer to Stephen Epstein, "On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium." *Acta Koreana*. vol.5, no. 1, (January 2002): 33.

Performing Arts Theater, and even her son, who empathizes with his father more than his mother. Sun-hŭi is surrounded by her male counterparts who demand her submission to the state order, but the narrative does not render a promising enclosure of her individuality. The seams of a supposedly tight-knit narrative come undone at the end of the novel, opening up the condition of possibility for multiple readings—something that is surely a "threat" to the reading practices in North Korean literature.

Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend* ends with ambiguity as to whether or not a married couple on the verge of divorce will remain unified. Paek demonstrates that human emotions and interpersonal relationships between married couples resist prescriptivism.[93] Seen in this way, Paek's delicate use of language allows the readers to navigate around or circumscribe a prescribed narrative structure that the Party often demands on its writers. Thus, this novel is one of the few works in the late 1980s that creatively explicates the torrents of raw, undisciplined human emotions and desires in individuals,[94] who struggle to negotiate between their

[93] Sin Hyŏng-ki and O Sŏng-ho argue that *Friend* shows the revolutionary love of the couple, and that there have not been any other novels in North Korea that portray love as such (2000, 321). While this may be true—and certainly the way the Party wants the readers to interpret the novel—I argue that there are not enough evidences from the text to suggest the couple's unification.

[94] Individuality is highly regarded in North Korean literature. The individual does not refer to rights to privacy and private property, as Sonia Ryang (2002) notes. Instead, the individual in North Korea is self-cultivating in light of Kim Il Sung's *Juche* ideology. My reference to an individual is strictly the person, the character, the being that appears within the collective.

public and private lives—their external, superficial obligations to the collective and their internal, self-seeking ambitions for themselves.

The Discursive Kinship of the (Great) Family

In North Korean literature, a tale of the family ineluctably ensues the construction of the "Great Family," which consists of Kim Il Sung as the Father, the Party as the Mother, Kim Jong Il as the Son, and the people as the children. This type of literature is most notably a reflection of Kim Il Sung's *Juche* ideology and subsequently called J*uche*-literature. The harmony of the Great Family is predicated on the collective-spirit of individuals working to maintain the security of the family-state. This is not only a form of *uber*-nationalism seen in other totalitarian (e.g. Stalinist, Maoist, Nazis, and the Japanese Imperial Empire) societies but also a system that generates the discourse of kinship as the common denominator of all its citizens.

The rhetoric of the working-class still functions as the official ideologue of socialism in North Korea. But, in my reading of North Korean literature, I find the discourse of kinship to serve a stronger relationship among individuals of the DPRK. It is built into the linguistic system and practiced in speech, in writing, and supposedly in thought. *Ŏbŏi suryong* (Parental Great Leader) is one of the many names and titles given to Kim Il Sung, which becomes a systematized

linguistic practice—cited, and recited, reiterated, until it naturally rolls off one's tongue and renders it nearly blasphemous to call him without any of those prefixes. The pressing issue at hand is the becoming *natural* from that which was never natural to begin with. Recognizing the people of the DPRK as one kin, as a homogenous bloodline, a genealogy that establishes Kim Il Sung as the androgynous founder of the nation, Kim Il Sung becomes synonymous with the embodiment of both parents (father and mother) that supports the children of the Fatherland (*cho'guk*).

Whether or not the story directly celebrates Kim Il Sung, the end product of the majority of narratives produced in the DPRK projects a male-oriented social order by reinstating the head of the family as the resolution to the narrative conflict. This "head of the family" may come in the form of Kim Il Sung, a Party secretary, a local manager at a factory or collective farm, a bureaucrat, or any other representative of the state. Individuality—one of the main thematic conflicts in many of the narratives—is collectivized to ensure the prosperity of the patriarchal order. Luce Irigaray says, "For the patriarchal order is indeed the one that functions as the organization and monopolization of private property to the benefit of the head of the family" (1985, 83). Thus, the restoration of the head of the family becomes the symbolic motif in North Korean literature, where it provides the configuration of the ideal father-figure.

The notion of the family revolution is nothing new to literature in North Korea of the 1980s but is evident in literary works since the colonial period.

Narratives that take place during the colonial period or the Korean War often depict victimized families, persecuted by the colonialists or American imperialists as Brian Myers (1994) discusses through the works of Han Sŏrya and others after liberation. In these narratives, fathers are often ruthlessly murdered by the imperialists or have died on the battlefield, usually leaving the mother and her children vulnerable to the perpetrators. The outcome of these stories often finds or replaces the former head of the family with a new one under the guidance of Kim Il Sung or the "correct" attitude toward a brighter socialist utopia.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the dissolution of the nuclear family may have been considered as a righteous, self-sacrificing ethical code as long as it was for the cause of the socialist revolution. An individual is not supposed to remain in the domestic space but finds its completion in the public space. The dissolution of the family, in this sense, is not a "threat" to the family revolution but precisely a compulsory attitude that the family-state proffers the greatest good. For example, in one of the self-proclaimed masterpieces in North Korean literature *Sea of Blood* (1982),[95] the mother loses everything she possessed by the Japanese colonialists: her husband, her village, and her youngest son Ul Nam. Through the course of the novel, the mother comes to realize the importance of the socialist revolution and accedes to sending off her eldest son and daughter to the guerrilla force:

[95] The transliteration of the characters' name in this paper is taken from the DPRK's translation of *Sea of Blood*.

> The mother saw them off, waving to them, standing on that same height at the foot of Mount Salgu where she had once stood one early dawn, seeing off her eldest son Won Nam on his way to the guerrillas. Today, along with her eldest son, her daughter Gap Sun was going with the guerrillas, and Yong Sil, who perhaps one day would become her daughter-in-law. Along with them, Du Hyok, Chil Song and other village lads were leaving. The mother saw only dots in green uniforms, she could not distinguish faces. At last, the tears restrained for so long gushed to the surface together with happiness and blurred her vision. Through her tear, the mother saw a broad road stretching far into the future—the road to the revolution. (*Sea of Blood*, 490)

The mother in *Sea of Blood* epitomizes the duty of a state-desired image of a mother in her ability to wave good-bye to her children. The gesture of waving and sending her children off to join the collective ensures the establishment of the state, but, more importantly, it displays the mother's transcendental power of providing her children a channel that leads to the state. The Party calls on all the mothers of the nation-state to emulate the mother in *Sea of Blood* by understanding that the greatest good is found in the gesture of waving good-bye to her children. The mother's ethical participation in the construction of the nation-state is through her submission to the patriarchal social order.

The future of the socialist revolution is prioritized over the nuclear family in *Sea of Blood*. The mother's tears of sending off her children to the guerrillas are tears of joy rather than her maternal instinct of worrying over her children. She has come to terms with herself that the guerrilla force will provide her children with comfort, food, shelter, and victory. The dissolution of the nuclear family is not a necessary evil for the mother; it is simply necessary for the construction of the socialist nation. Judith Butler in *Antigone's Claim* states this

state-building phenomenon succinctly: "The state receives its army from the family, and the family meets its dissolution in the state" (2000, 36). The mother "could not distinguish faces" of her own children because they no longer belong to her but to the collective. Her children's faces are not identifiable as individuals among the collective but have become one face, a single face, a unitary face with no difference and otherness. There may have been unutterable pain in losing her husband and her youngest son to the Japanese, but there is no pain in losing Wol Nam and Gap Sun. She is proud that her children will contribute to the building of a new future. The mother is able to transcend her maternal instincts and allow her children to be incorporated into a new family, a revolutionary family, one that is forged by Kim Il Sung.

Suzy Kim reassesses the woman question by examining the role of the revolutionary mother in the early development of the DPRK. According to Kim (2010, 760), motherhood was defined as the most exemplary form of selfless public service, which not just women but everyone should strive to emulate. Much like the mother in *Sea of Blood*, the unconditionally sacrificing icon of motherhood becomes synonymous with the nation. Kim continues, "Before identifying themselves as women, women were to identify with the nation, as the woman question was equated with the national question" (2010, 761). The woman question emerged during the formative years and continued to circulate during the aftermath of the Korean War, and, as a result, women were to embrace national (re)construction as their highest calling.

As such, individuals in the DPRK were/are supposed to consider the state as the true family to which one belongs: the family-state. One's biological family simply serves as the medium through which the individual passes into the state, and it is state where one finds completion in his/her identity. Ch'oe Hak-su's *Haepitbalkŭn nara* (Radiant Country, 1972) celebrates an orphaned boy who eventually becomes a respected architect with the help of Kim Il Sung. The architect's "loss" of his biological father is replaced with Kim Il Sung as the surrogate father, that one is never deprived of a family as long as one understands that true kinship is found in working for the construction of the state. And Ri Tong-ku's *Pyŏngsa-ui kajŏng* (A Soldier's Family 1979) tells a story about a private who thinks about his family back home but later realizes that a true family bond is forged among comrades fighting for the nation.

However, the literary trend shifts in the 1980s, where domestic problems—discord between husband and wife, hostility between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, and generational gaps between parents and children—increase in narratives to identify the source of the problem or internal members of society who weaken the stronghold of the socialist family.[96] Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Saenghwalui Ŏndŏk* (*Height of Life* 1984) traces the daily life of a well-educated working wife whose only desire is to be a homemaker. Her attitude appears to be "bourgeois" to her husband, creating strife between the couple. The wife eventually continues her

[96] Refer to Kim Jae-yong (1994: 260-270) for a detailed analysis of various motifs in North Korean literature during the 1980s.

work and succeeds in inventing a heating system for the factory, which wins the approval of her husband. Their marital problems are resolved along with the bright outlook of the nation's technological advancement.[97] And Pak Chŏng-sang's *Kyŏrhon munje* (Marriage Problems 1985) depicts a young working woman who derides the conservative views of her future mother-in-law, causing problems even before the marriage. The young woman asserts the importance of her occupation in society and is unwilling to simply become a subservient housewife. Women in these narratives project their strong instincts for the welfare of the nation and become stronger nationalists than their male counterpart. These narratives confirm the need for women to revolutionize their outdated, bourgeois practices of withholding the private space from the public and allowing a new modality of the family-state to emerge. Additionally, these narratives reiterate the gender problems, both traditional and revolutionary, that have saturated the debates on the "woman question" in the formative years of the DPRK.

The woman question reemerges in the 1980s, requiring the women not only to work physically for the nation but to strengthen their ethical imperatives as a woman, a mother, a wife, a daughter, or a daughter-in-law accordingly to the nation's demands, that one's ethical obligation to the state or nation transcends all familial or personal duties. This kind of ethicality can be seen in Ri In-ch'ŏl's *Magne ttal* (My Youngest Daughter 1980), where three daughters are depicted:

[97] This is what Sin Hyŏng-ki and O Song-ho refer to as "technological ideology," where characters in novels increase their technological education directly for the construction of the nation (2000, 327).

the eldest daughter married a wealthy man but lives in misery because her husband has marital affairs with other women; the second daughter married a low factory worker but lives happily because her husband has the correct socialist ideals; and the youngest daughter has to choose between a wealthy businessman and a diligent factory worker as her suitor. The youngest daughter convinces her stubborn father to bless her marriage with the factory worker that true happiness derives from the correct ideology rather than material wealth. Thus, the woman question in narratives as such does not pose a threat to the nation as the trajectory of the discourse of women ends up promoting nationalism and serving the demands of the Party.

Although raising the consciousness of the women or the masses with the correct ideology is nothing new in North Korea, the 1980s marked a significant transition in both the political and literary world. In February of 1982, Kim Jong Il was announced as the successor to Kim Il Sung and, as a result, literature produced in *Chosŏn Munhak* and other state-owned media began to construct the personality cult of Kim Jong Il. Although Kim Jong Il does not appear in the narratives at this time, the contents of the plot issuing a stronger family bond among comrades and finding "hidden heroes" among complacent individuals seem to add yet another layer of reading in these works. Literature on the nuclear family can be read as Kim Jong Il's justification for enabling himself to rise to power. The implicit claim is that the relationship between father and son is

stronger than a non-family member, and, in order for the revolution to continue, a family member ought to succeed his position.[98]

Thus, literature depicts domestic problems as the modality of restoring the head of the household and raising the consciousness of the family members. The nuclear family functions as the appropriate allegory for the succession transition along with other contemporaneous social problems both within and outside of North Korea in the 1980s. That is, Paek's *Friend* was not simply a by-product of a Party-commissioned political agenda, but a product of global complexities and circumstances that may have impacted the novel beyond the frontiers of its national borders. It is amid these socio-political conditions that Paek's *Friend* makes it to the hands of many North Koreans in 1988 and into the hands of South Koreans in 1992. Despite its commonplace theme of a nuclear family, the issue of an individual's attempt to "divorce" her state and its subject-making codes renders it exceptional. It is precisely Sun-hŭi's voice, the marginal voice that utters "I can't stand it anymore" that poses a threat to the wholesome reification of the family revolution.

This novel makes divorce its central motif, which is rare, if not nearly non-existent, in North Korean literature before its publication in 1988 as it

[98] This is not to say that Kim Il Sung had always already Kim Jong Il in mind for his succession. According to South Korean scholar Lim Jae-cheon (2009, 52), Kim Il Sung had prepared Kim Yŏng-ju (Kim Il Sung's brother) above anybody else as his most probably inheritor. However, Kim Yŏng-ju's poor health forced Kim Il Sung and old guerrillas to change their succession plan and search for an alternative (Lim 2009, 53). Although the North Korean media began to disclose specific evidence indicating the political succession in early 1973 (Lim 2009, 54), it was not until 1982 that literary works on Kim Jong Il's personality cult were written in *Chosŏn Munhak*.

threatens the dissolution of the family-state. Turbulent marital problems, issues with raising children, and desires to live a comfortable life devoid of Party directives are some of the concerns found in *Friend*, and all of the characters are not without problems. That is, a model citizen is not already present or perfected in the narrative but developed through the intercourse of materiality, interpersonal relations, and self-reflection (or self-criticism).

The main couple is Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi who wants a divorce because of personality conflicts. The second couple is Ch'ae Rim and his wife (who makes an appearance without a name), who divorced because of personality conflicts. The third couple is a coal factory worker and a schoolteacher who has been faithfully married despite myriad personality conflicts. Finally, the fourth couple is Judge Chŏng Chin-u and Ŭn-ok who faces marital problems because of Ŭn-ok's long absence from home to conduct her research.

It may appear as though Paek polarizes two sets of couples to distinguish the ideal family (coal miner and schoolteacher) from the anti-revolutionary one (Ch'ae Rim and his wife). In stories like Ri In-ch'ŏl's *My Youngest Daughter*, the clear explication of polar couples allows the readers to mentally map the superimposition of the Party's ethicality of the good. Yet, this technique of polarizing the two couples not only depicts the individuals as being flat and undeveloped, but it also limits the readers' options of having any choice at all. In other words, the choice is rather obvious and prescribed to the readers by the Party.

However, Paek's narrative strategy is not for the readers to choose between the ideal and the anti-revolutionary couple. Instead, Paek focuses on every couple's marital problems in the novel to show the transformational process of a dysfunctional family into a revolutionary one. This is evident in Judge Chŏng Chin-u's last thoughts: "Don't worry child. Your parents will remarry. They may not have a wedding ceremony, but they will prepare a new family. It will be a *spiritual* wedding" (My emphasis. Paek 195). The term spiritual in the original is *chŏngsinjŏkin*, which refers to rationality or the mind. It is not spiritual in the sense of a religious enlightenment but that of perhaps the Hegelian *Geist*, spirit of the state or the collective. In other words, all individuals must come or arrive at an understanding that the family-state is the projection or completion of an individual's rationality, a rationality that adjudicates and legitimates the empowerment of a Kimilsungian nation-state. In this sense, it may not have been a coincidence for Paek to delineate his protagonist as a judge, a legal cadre of the nation-state, one who bases his rationality on "objectivity and justice" (Paek 11).

In short, *Friend* can be read as a didactic narrative that instructs its readers to develop rationality from their irrational impulses, to acquire the prosthesis of Kim Il Sung, the Party, or the nation-state as the rationalization of the dysfunctional family. That is, rationality of the nuclear family finds its completion in the family-state through the process of *prosthetization*—a foreign extension that is artificial to the individuals. It should not be surprising to any readers of North Korean literature to find such prosthesis of Kimilsungism, Party directives,

or characters who represent the state in the narratives. The prosthetic element is supposed to reveal the necessity of each individual in the narrative as loyal citizens of the DPRK no matter how contrived or artificial it may appear. The prosthesis is supposed to be taken seriously as a vital (but artificial) extension of the individual's life. As such, the dysfunctional couple in *Friend* must learn to accept Judge Chŏng Chin-u as the prosthesis that will enable them to recognize the much needed state-level and Party-minded rationality. The utopian future of the DPRK is fulfilled by the recognition and acceptance of such prosthesis. According to Ko In-hwan (2008, 309), the problem between Ch'ae Sun-hŭi and Ri Sŏk-ch'un is not to show how one overcomes the other, but rather, how the two acknowledge the mutual problem in order to create a better future for both of them. The achievement of this "better future" is fulfilled through the gesture of the individuals to maintain a harmonious family-state, which in the 1980s was orchestrated by the "hidden hero."

Hidden Hero as the Patriarchal Linguistic System

Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi's marital problems are presumably resolved by the incorporation of a new member into the couple's family: Chŏng Chin-u (a male legal cadre).[99] Throughout the novel, Paek vacillates between using "Judge Chŏng

[99] *Friend* shows that the divorce proceedings are administrated by a judge of the municipal court. The judge represents the state, and the duty of the judge is to foster care to the people.

Chin-u" and "Chŏng Chin-u." Paek shows the transformation and implication of Chŏng Chin-u from an impersonal and bureaucratic cadre of society to a personal, paternal, and a friend of Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi's nuclear family. When Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi leave with Ho-nam (their son) from Judge Chŏng Chin-u's apartment, the narrator says, "The judge wasn't their relative or a friend, but to invite the family over to his house and offer this kind of hospitality was out of the ordinary. The three left the judge's house" (Paek 56). Later, when Chŏng Chin-u criticizes Sŏk-ch'un, he says, "I'm advising you, not as a judge, but as your elderly friend." (Paek 158). Finally, toward the end of the novel, Chŏng Chin-u asks if he could visit Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi on the day of their anniversary: "I want to go over to your house not as a judge but as your friend. Ho-nam will also greet me like his pal." (Paek 165). Chŏng Chin-u's emphasis on the idea of "friend" seems to carry more weight than his occupation as a cadre of the legal world. For Chŏng Chin-u, becoming the *people's friend* (*inminui pŏt*) may be his highest calling as a cadre. This may be the indicative moment where Paek arouses the sentiments of the readers to accept Chŏng Chin-u as a friend and a fatherly-figure of the family.

Chŏng Chin-u represents the hero of the narrative for his strong moral qualities, un-bureaucratic attitude, and purpose of revolutionizing the family. North Korean literature specialist Kim Chae-yong (2000, 292) considers Chŏng Chin-u to be the "hidden hero" of the novel, where the hero of this kind are not guerrillas during the colonial era or soldiers on the battlefield during the Korean

War but the common folk. At the same time, "he must be able to show his objective development as a prototypical hero" (Kim 1994, 274). Chŏng Chin-u is a common civil servant, who embodies the magnanimous virtue of a hero. He is what Kim Chae-yong refers to as the "people's friend" (*inminui pŏt*). For instance, when Chŏng Chin-u discovers that Sŏk-ch'un's efforts have been fruitless because of the shortage of the proper type of sand, he goes to the riverbank and digs up a backpack-full of quality sand. As a result, Sŏk-ch'un is overwhelmed by Chŏng Chin-u's willingness to help him with his project.

As detailed in the Introduction, the Hidden Hero campaign in the 1980s singled out model citizens who manifested ideal characteristics for others to emulate. With the need to advance the society with technology—under the auspices of the Three Revolutions—the role of the hidden hero provided morale for the befallen individuals to become reincorporated into society. While many narratives on the hidden hero highlight their contribution to society in their respective field of expertise and their undying loyalty to Kim Il Sung, Paek Nam-ryong creates a hero that applies his legal expertise to penetrate into the domestic space of discordant families, using the language of the Same.

It is not unusual for communist societies and their literature to expose the domestic space to the public, showing the porous nature of the binary. But what Paek illustrates through Judge Chŏng Chin-u is the state's unexpected (and often

undesirable) visits to individuals' homes.[100] For example, Chŏng Chin-u goes to Sun-hŭi's house with the excuse of discussing the divorce issue with her husband Ri Sŏk-ch'un, knowing that he is still at work. There is no doubt that Chŏng Chin-u earnestly intended to talking with Sŏk-ch'un, but he is more interested in investigating the living conditions of the rivaling couple. The narrator says, "Although Kang'an District house number 19 was a bit out of the way, he could stop by on his way home from work" (Paek 18). The domestic space is never too far from the state's reach. It may be "a bit out of the way" for Judge Chŏng Chin-u, but the distance is only a minor problem in comparison to the impending task of rehabilitating a dysfunctional family and its misguided individuals. Guiding individuals to the correct Party-oriented rationality entails entering into the premises of their living space both literally and metaphorically. In *Friend*, the legal representative of the state not only physically enters into the private quarters of Sun-hŭi and Sŏk-ch'un to identify the source of their marital problems, but he also enters into their psyche, their inner thoughts in order to transform their irrationalism and to provide the light of the Party's directives.

Family revolution, therefore, became the language by which the Party eliminated and collectivized individualism, a language that structured the tenets of state-desired man/woman, husband/wife, and father/mother. This campaign

[100] In *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, Kang Chol-hwan recalls how agents came to his house unexpectedly to do random searches without a warrant. In my personal interviews with defectors, some recall how the local security guards would randomly enter the house to check if there was dust on the portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and some recall how this never happened to them.

asserts that the nuclear family is only a cell of the society, but that proper care and discipline are required to prevent the cell from turning into a cancerous one. In one instance, Chŏng Chin-u cultivates the vegetables during Ŭn-ok's (his wife) absence. Chŏng Chin-u's nursing the vegetables in the greenhouse reflects the micro-politics of maintaining and monitoring the nuclear family. Chŏng Chin-u controls the humidity level, measures the temperature, and clears away any weeds that may deter the health and growth of the vegetables. Although he grumbles at his absent wife for leaving him with all the household chores, Chŏng Chin-u faithfully tends to the vegetables as if they were his own. His attitude toward the vegetables mirrors the way he nurses Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi back to their marital health. After Chŏng Chin-u criticizes Sŏk-ch'un for falling behind the times,[101] Sŏk'ch'un enrolls in night school at a technical institute. His tenderness toward the couple as their friend makes Chŏng Chin-u a parental figure rather than a faceless bureaucrat.

His antithetical position against Ch'ae Rim, who is self-serving rather than serving the needs of the people, further secures his position as the hero. Ch'ae

[101] The idea of "falling behind" was a common criticism against workers with the "old ideologies." In 1973, Kim Il Sung announced the Three Revolutions Team Members, whose duties were to articulate the Party's technological and ideological demands. In 1975, Kim announced the national campaing Three Revolutions Red Flag Movement, which encouraged the entire nation to raise the Party's ideological consciousness and advance the technology. The Workers' Party of Korea promoted the slogan of "Three Revolutions," including *Sasang hyŏngmyŏng*, "Ideological Revolution," to make North Koreans faithful followers of the leader and the party; *kisŭl hyŏngmyŏng*, "Technological Revolution," to liberate North Korean agricultural and industrial production from old-fashioned technology; and *Munhwa hyŏngmyŏng*, "Cultural Revolution," to elevate the everyday life of North Koreans to a higher, more advanced cultural standard (Ryang 2002:27).

Rim's obese body symbolizes his opulent lifestyle and power. His silk suits and fashionable neckties show the disparity between the elite cadres and the workers. Ch'ae Rim is accused of falling into bureaucratism and formalism—which are the two most deleterious ideologies to the construction of the state—for profiting from government funds.[102] After Chŏng Chin-u threatens to arrest Ch'ae Rim for fraudulent activities, Ch'ae Rim confesses his misconduct and promises to redistribute the funds properly. Unlike the villains in the past, the literature of the 1980s presents the "enemy of the state" as no longer being found outside the Edenic society of the DPRK but rather inside, disrupting the movement of the state toward its socialist perfection.[103]

Paek's portrayal of "Chŏng Chin-u" as the sympathetic people's friend who transforms the nuclear family into revolutionary members by eliminating the family's discord, and "Judge Chŏng Chin-u" as the unerring law enforcer who proceeds to prosecute and attack the "cancerous" individuals in the society run parallel with the Party's family revolution. In this respect, Chŏng Chin-u assumes the category of the prototypical hero as discussed in Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema* (2001), where in North Korean *socialist realist* heroic fiction,

[102] Kim Il Sung. "Samdae hyŏngmyŏng-ŭl himitge pŏlyŏ sahoechu-ui kŏnsŏlŭl tŏ-uk tagŏch'ija" (Let us put more effort into the construction of socialism by supporting the Three Revolutions).Speech delivered in March 3, 1975. *Kim Il Sung Chŏjakjip* vol.30, (1985): 112.

[103] Ch'ae Rim markedly presents a different type of villain from the villains of the past. Refer to Alzo David-West (2009, 21) and Kim Jong Il's (2001) *On the Art of the Cinema* for a description of prototypical villains in literature.

everything is subordinated to the positive figure, including the fate of the entire dramatis personae (David-West 2009, 20).

At the same time, Chŏng Chin-u's psychological development provides depth to his character, which allows the readers to sympathize with the otherwise magnanimous hero. Amid conflicting marital couples, Chŏng Chin-u's own marital problems also tread along the verge of divorce. His wife Ŭn-ok's extended absences from her domestic duties as a wife plant seeds of regret for Chŏng Chin-u. When he comes home to an empty apartment, Chŏng Chin-u thinks to himself: "Does a husband have to understand the woman's duty as a housewife? It's not like her research is ground-breaking; it's just cultivating vegetables" (Paek 23). The narrator adds:

> He had to raise his son from kindergarten to the day he went to the military because his wife was gone most of the time. He complied with every one of his wife's requests and desires. However, now he was frustrated and was complaining about his wife and their family life. He has become indifferent toward his wife's research experiment. (Paek 90)

But after resolving other couples' marital problems, Chŏng Chin-u recognizes the importance of his wife's research for the community, that a healthy family must overcome personal interests for the improvement of the collective. He, therefore, transcends the limits of his personal angst toward his wife and supports the agricultural advancement of the collective for which his wife works:

> [S]ometimes I complain and vent out my frustrations. But it's been a rewarding life. This is beyond the expectations of our wedding night. To be honest with you, a few days ago, I was not able to think with such a pure and sympathetic heart. I began to envy other families whose wife stayed at home and lived a normal life. Don't be discouraged. Radishes and cabbages have to be considered a success. Don't you think the villagers at Yŏnsudŏk will be able to enjoy the cabbages and radishes by next year. (Paek 182)

Chŏng Chin-u's ability to accept his wife's research indicates his resolve with his individualistic desires and his ethical obligation to the collective. Unlike the gung-ho, flat, and prescribed heroes in narratives of the 1970s and even in the 1980s, Chŏng Chin-u's heroism derives from the *process* of overcoming his egocentric and self-indulgent behavior. Despite his occupation as a judge, whose rational acuteness and Party orientation are required, Chŏng Chin-u's subjective behavior reveals his ethical struggle for the "good" of the collective.[104]

While the conflict appears to have been resolved and a harmonious conclusion is promised, this type of conclusion reinstates a patriarchal restoration contrived by the Party directives, where the family revolution is implicitly gendered. Chŏng Chin-u compels Ch'ae Rim to confess his fraudulent misdeeds; he criticizes the Director at the Province Performing Arts Theater for not

[104] This type of characterization is not uncommon in many of Paek's stories. In *Life* (1985), a doctor fails to "heal" his son's academic problem and resorts to bribing the dean of the university to admit his son; in *Servicemen* (1979), a cadre at a factory pushes for his son to go on an important business trip, but when the factory council suggests a more qualified worker, the cadre struggles to overcome his ambitions for his son; and finally in *After 60 Years* (1982), a retiring manager fights to retain his position in order to salvage his social authority. It is clear in these examples that Paek's narrative contents delve into the tumultuous psyche of individuals to open up universal problems that extend beyond the parameters of the Party's imperatives.

maintaining social and ideological harmony; he convinces the coal miner to quit drinking and to pursue his long-lost passion; he transforms Sŏk-ch'un into a "new man" (*sae in'gan*) helping him to acquire the latest technological skills appropriate for the Party's demands; and, most importantly, he undergoes his own Party-desired transformation, qualifying him as the hero of the narrative. Interestingly enough, Chŏng Chin-u does not articulate the Party's directives to the women—the narrative is about the transformation of men. *Friend* appears to follow the formulaic structure of typical North Korean novels with the restoration of the male character as the head of the household and therefore the stronghold of the nation.

However, there is yet an unresolved issue in the novel. The end of the novel does not fulfill its enclosure of the narrative as in most cases with North Korean literature. The end seems to resist (en)closure, or, at the very least, suspends the completion of the novel. The ending is forced and contrived with the thoughts of Chŏng Chin-u leading the readers to believe that Sun-hŭi and Sŏk-ch'un will compromise their differences and build an optimistic family with Sŏk-ch'un as the head of the family and Sun-hŭi as the faithful housewife: "Chŏng Chin-u looked at Ho-nam and tried to appease his envious thoughts. Don't worry child. Your parents will remarry. They may not have a wedding ceremony, but they will prepare a new family. It will be a spiritual wedding" (Paek 195). A "new family," one that is not built on individualism or self-centeredness but on the spiritual (*chŏngsinjŏkin*)—even perhaps the Absolute Spirit (*Geist*) in the

Hegelian sense—or the rational ideology of the state. Indeed, the spiritual wedding is not referring to a reformation of the nuclear family but a new commitment to the patriarchal state. However, is this a new family model in the DPRK of the late 1980s? Chŏng Chin-u's concept of a family certainly does not appear to have progressed from the concept of a family in feudal times, where dialectical materialism seems to have had little or no effect on his concept of a family.[105] And yet, for Chŏng Chin-u, Hegel's dialectical movement of the family to state seems to have struck a chord with his understanding of a "new family." The family elevates itself, sublates itself, beyond itself, to and for the state. Meanwhile, where is Ch'ae Sun-hŭi?

Ch'ae Sun-hŭi : The New Linguistic System

Although the main conflict in *Friend* appears to be between the two antagonistic cadres Chŏng Chin-u and Ch'ae Rim, the implicit conflict is between Chŏng Chin-u and Sun-hŭi—a power struggle between the state and an individual. Ko In-hwan (2008) allegorizes Sŏk-ch'un as the state and Sun-hŭi as

[105] In one of many of Chŏng Chin-u's recollections, he thinks back to his university days and the time he presented his senior thesis to a large body of professors and law students. Chŏng Chin-u's thesis historicized the formation of a modern family through dialectical materialism. The irony of this thesis is that Chŏng Chin-u's written understanding of a progressive family differs drastically from his administrating the family of Sun-hŭi. Chŏng Chin-u's written expression aligns with the "progressive" family concept in North Korea, but the actual materialized family seems to remain in the feudal times.

the family, and argues that the harmony of the state and family represents the fulfillment of the family revolution set by the Party. Ko's observation is certainly correct in its *prima facie* reading of the married couple, and even perhaps in the way the Party expects from the readers. However, Chŏng Chin-u is undeniably the legal representative of the state, the ambassador of the Party, whose duties are to administer the law and secure the state ideology. To think that Chŏng Chin-u represents the failure of the state, the one who could not seal off the individualistic tendencies in Sun-hŭi, and thus creates fissures in the community may be an iconoclastic reading. However, it is precisely this reading that resists the novel's optimistic enclosure and allows difference and otherness—an altogether new linguistic system—to become visible from the margins of the narrative.

It is Sun-hŭi who pleads for divorce, not for the purpose of disrupting the harmony of the state but simply because she can't live with Sŏk-ch'un anymore (Paek 7). Her cry: "I can't stand it anymore" certainly refers to her intolerable relationship with Sŏk-ch'un. Sun-hŭi's initial request for divorce derives from her incompatibility with her husband—her private affairs. But Sun-hŭi quickly recognizes that her contention with her husband becomes a larger issue beyond the limits of her private world, an issue that ineluctably involves the state. "Marriage is a legal binding" are the words of Chŏng Chin-u, insinuating that Sun-hŭi's marriage to Sŏk-ch'un irrefutably belongs to the state. Sun-hŭi learns that her private affairs have been under the public purview from the moment she

stepped into the contractual agreement of marriage, an institution which is protected by the state:

> [W]hen a man and a woman fall in love and decide to marry, it's their freedom. But, they have to register their new family. The law protects the entity of a family. Divorce is disconnecting the relationship between a husband and wife; it's not a personal matter. The family's fate as the cell of society is concerned with the greater family of the society and socio-politics. (Paek 106)

Sun-hŭi's problem with Sŏk-ch'un's inability to advance in his career is minor compared to her resistance in becoming a state-desired subject of femininity, a wife, and a mother. The notion of the family revolution devises standard protocols by which husband and wife ought to behave. The rhetoric of the family as the cell of society is the state's method of controlling and administrating power over the people so that each family can reflect and recite the Party directives of emulating the revolutionary members of the Great Family. Sun-hŭi is aware of this subject-making discourse and asserts that she made efforts to be the state-desired wife:

> I have been faithful to my husband's demands. I have been standing by him and his work, the one thing he considers more important than me! I've been submissive to him while he has been working on a single project for the past five years. I didn't care if he did not bring home a salary or if he didn't help me with house chores. I've endured it all and continued to live with him. (Paek 9)

Sun-hŭi's attempt at being an ideal wife proved to test the limits of her agency and individuality. It may have been her choice to love and marry Sŏk-ch'un, but it was not her choice to become a manufactured product of the state-designed wife. Her faithfulness and submission to the patriarchal order has reduced her and has forced her to conform to and speak the language of the Same against her will.

Additionally, Sun-hŭi faces yet another problem when the state orders her to "let go" of her child and become the ideal mother who is self-sacrificing. Sun-hŭi realizes her powerlessness over the law, that the law will not decide which is best for the individuals but that which is best for the state: "As soon as she grabbed Ho-nam and pulled him into her arms, Judge Chŏng Chin-u reprimanded her like the way he did at his office. 'Comrade Sun-hŭi, let the child go.' She realized that the law supported the welfare of her son more than her" (Paek 55). The law tries to reduce Sun-hŭi to a mother, whose duty is to "let go" of what's rightfully hers to the state like the mother in *Sea of Blood*. Her only discourse is to be subordinated to the man or "reabsorbed and reduced by masculine discourse and practice" (Irigaray 1985, 126). The state instructs her to give up what is legally the state's.

The law will certainly be more concerned over Ho-nam not only because he is an innocent victim of rivaling parents but because he is the future of the

state.[106] In a previous divorce hearing, Chŏng Chin-u sent a boy to his father's custody for the boy's future which was related to his physical and mental growth (Paek 17). It is the state that "establishes" the child's patriarchal identity, while the mother "raises" and "lets him go." This logic asserts that children need to be well fostered in order to pass from the family to the state in Hegelian terms. "The family attains completion in the *bringing up* of children and the dissolution of the family" (Hegel 1991, 200) For Hegel, ethical life derives from the family but soon suppresses, interferes, preserves, and sublates the spirit of individualism. Though each individual originates from a family, the ethical calling for the individual is not to remain in the family but to break away and even dissolve the immediate family for the state in order to achieve a *completed* individual. Hegel (1967, 493) says, "The youth goes forth from the unconscious life of the family and becomes the individuality of the community [i.e. Ruler]." The family is a temporary space, the realm of the unconscious, before the individual (most notably men for Hegel) secures his identity in the state. Motherhood, then, as Suzy Kim (2010) discusses, is the selfless channel that allows for the son to enter into the state. While Sun-hŭi tries to hold on to what is obviously hers, the ominous words of the law orders her to "let the child go," reminding her that the tug-of-war is not with her husband but with the state.

[106] Refer to Frederick Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where he says, "The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not" (2001, 139).

Even Sun-hŭi's best friend at the Province Performing Arts Theater advises Sun-hŭi to "let go" of her stubbornness and submit herself to the patriarchal order. On her way to work, Sun-hŭi runs into Ŭn-mi, her best friend, who says, "Sun-hŭi, it's about time that you let it go" (Paek 100). Ŭn-mi, with the best intentions, tries to assuage Sun-hŭi's anxiety by attempting to sympathize with her marital problems. Ŭn-mi shares how she deals with her husband: "I just shut my mouth, bite the bullet, and just take it all in" (Paek 101). Ŭn-mi represents the submissive, rational wife in *Friend* whose individuality has been subsumed under the patriarchal order.

However, Sun-hŭi tries to make her voice heard; she makes the attempt to assert her otherness to the determining social order. When her director at the Province Performing Arts Theater blames Sun-hŭi's marital problems for interfering with the business, Sun-hŭi says, "If it's because of me that's bringing shame to the Company, then I will quit" (Paek 134). Sun-hŭi's claim against her society is initially aggressive and threatening to the status quo. The notion of "quitting" her job at the Province Performing Arts Theater, which is under the aegis of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, reveals an antagonistic attitude—one that indicates her lack of the correct ideology. Sun-hŭi is faced with an indeterminable choice between her career and defending her individuality against the patriarchal state. As soon as she utters these words, Sun-hŭi realizes her consequent fate: "In order to persist in her desires, she would have to sacrifice her fame and all that came with her future as a singer. And she would have to be

ostracized from the large family called society" (Paek 135). Paek Nam-ryong carefully describes this crucial moment in Sun-hŭi's life as a decision that generates unutterable pain and agony for Sun-hŭi. Paek draws his readers into Sun-hŭi's torment to show that such decisions are not "ready-made," prescribed or resolvable by the application of the Party's formulaic directives. Although Sun-hŭi may be willing to drop her career and fame for her insistence on resisting the male discourse, "all the thoughts that caused her to fear derived from her anxiety and despair from accepting the fact that she will be a wretched being" (Paek 135).

Sun-hŭi will be left without a job, family, her son, and, most importantly, her dignity as an individual. Her wretchedness derives not only from her deprivation of society but from her inevitable absorption into the very social order which she tried so hard to resist. Sun-hŭi has nowhere to turn, no one to depend on—her best friend Ŭn-mi urges her to remain married, her director nearly fires her, Chŏng Chin-u refuses to divorce the couple, and even her son seeks his father. Where can Sun-hŭi find refuge?

Memories. While Chŏng Chin-u asks Sŏk-ch'un to recall the romantic days to tenderize Sŏk-ch'un's calloused feelings toward Sun-hŭi, the judge never asks Sun-hŭi to do the same. The narrative does not recount her side of the story. Her voice is not heard in the grand narrative of the patriarchs. Sŏk-ch'un's story is told to re-establish his responsibility as the head of the family, where even the idea of memories serves the construction of the patriarchal state.

As described in Chapter 2, memories in North Korean literature are supposed to function as the operative trope to reconstruct a new identity for the protagonist. Most of the memories would recall the messianic deliverance of Kim Il Sung from the arduous days of the colonial period or the indelible trauma from the Korean War. At other times, memories of Kim Il Sung visiting a factory or collective farm or how the workers have sacrificed their lives for the construction of the nation would determine the positive outcome of the individuals' actions. However, Ri Hŭi-nam's *Eight Hours* and Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend* are exceptional in this respect because the individuals do not recall the nation's past but their own personal pasts. Of course, in the case of Paek's *Friend*, these memories serve as a narrative strategy to contextualize the couple's relationship that fulfills the logic of the narrative. In other words, even these so-called personal memories contribute to the construction of the dominant patriarchal order, where these memories do not tap into the unconscious level of the story-teller but remains at the conscious level. Even these personal memories seem to have their own rationality or contribute to the rationalizing of the nation-state.

Chŏng Chin-u attempts to enclose Sun-hŭi, to re-integrate her into the social "norms" by reminding her of their tenth wedding anniversary, which is his cunning method of constituting memory for her. The judge thinks that the memory of their anniversary will somehow move her and compel her to accept the social norms that are expected of her. The judge's attempt to reinforce "norms" or "normality" into Sun-hŭi's life proves to be futile when she responds:

"Those kinds of days are only meant for normal families" (Paek 165). For Sun-hŭi, memorializing her wedding anniversary is a state affair in sheep's clothing. It is a form of reconciliation and compromise that undermines her voice from being distinct in a world where individual voices are silenced and dominated by the unitary voice of the collective. Sun-hŭi asserts her otherness before the face of the law by making one last claim. When Judge Chŏng Chin-u asks if he could participate in Sun-hŭi's anniversary, she responds with a non-response:

> Chŏng Chin-u: Would it be fine for me to stop by your house on that day?
> Sun-hŭi: Please, who can stop you, Comrade Judge?
> Chŏng Chin-u: No, I'm not going to your house as a judge but as a friend.
> Sun-hŭi left without saying a word. (Paek 164)

Sun-hŭi's non-response insinuates her refusal to acknowledge Chŏng Chin-u's "friendly" gesture. In fact, her non-response extends beyond their dialogue and encroaches upon the disavowal of the entire patriarchal system. She refuses to participate or be incorporated into the language of the Same—the unitary voice of the existing social order. Sun-hŭi neither offers a tacit consent nor a verbal refusal to the judge. She is not exhibiting a submissive docility. Instead, it is a demonstration of her affirmative agency against the tides of the dominant and oppressive system of patriarchs. Her (non)response is a non-participatory act of ultimate defiance. It is a defiant act without words, a language that is foreign to the language of the Same. Her deafening silence disrupts the language of the

Same, throwing it into confusion and chaos. To Judge Chŏng Chin-u, who represents and adjudicates the language of the Same, Sun-hŭi is acting irrationally: she adamantly refuses to remain married to her husband and she breaks the social codes of conduct by leaving the court without bidding farewell to an elderly man. She no longer perceives herself as a docile participant of this systemic patriarchal order but an anomaly to the family-state. Her words, any words, even her reactive words would be a participatory kind of rationalism that the state seeks, a rationalism that recognizes the other in Sun-hŭi and attempts to sublate her. Instead of allowing herself to fall prey to such rationalism, she chooses on her own volition to exercise her individuality by disregarding the judge's imposition and by making herself *unrecognizable* to such rational logic. For Sun-hŭi, the judge's actions (no matter how "innocent" they may be) infringe upon her individual space, causing her to become more defensive rather than yielding to his prosthetic directives.

But who can stop the law from entering into the premises of Sun-hŭi's house? Even on her wedding anniversary the state watches the couple through the gaze of Chŏng Chin-u. The judge attempts to approach Sun-hŭi not as a cold and impersonal bureaucrat but a gentle and trustworthy friend. The state imposes itself through the threshold and into the domestic space with familiarity and a smile. It urges Sun-hŭi to *let go* of her resistance and conform to the *normality* of her social conditions.

However, normality, for Sun-hŭi, means the effacement of her individuality, the denial of her selfhood, and the *generalization* of her beingness. Sun-hŭi understands "normal families" as ones that abide by the dictates of the law, perform the set of practices instructed by the state, and conform to the unitary language governed by the totalizing power of patriarchy. Her attempt at distinguishing herself from normal families does not indicate a claim to sever all ties or to leave the community but to proffer a different linguistic possibility—albeit a scandalous or marginal claim—from the generalizing discourse of the social order. It is a claim that conditions the possibility of otherness, a resistance that does not become reabsorbed into the Same.

Sun-hŭi's voice is not heard at the end of the novel. It is the voice (or thoughts) of the judge. Although the reading practices in North Korea may instruct the readers to accept Sun-hŭi's resignation of her obstinate individuality and the forging of a new family, the narrative of *Friend* does not dictate this promising future. The utopian imagination at the end is elicited by a male patriarch. It is the state's forceful and contrived imagination that cries for the abnormal to become normal, the irrational to become rational, and the woman to become the man—insinuating that the promise of such utopia materializes through the sublating process of eliminating (but somehow still preserving) the women's question. But such binary oppositions do not compel Sun-hŭi to conform to the prosthetics given to her. She retains her own language, a natural

language, a language inextricably tied to the (birth)mark of every individual: the world of the *nombril*. Sun-hŭi's natural language is found in her reveries.

Sun-hŭi's only refuge is in *her* reveries, the imaginations that abound the limitations set by the subject-making law. Sun-hŭi's memories are of her childhood and not the days she dated and married Sŏk-ch'un. Her childhood memories are fused with her imaginations, making it difficult to decipher truth from fantasy:

> During her carefree childhood days, her dream-filled teenage years, and her pure blossoming adulthood, nature had blessed her with warm and beautiful memories. The dripping sound of rain from the eaves had been an enchanting, vibrant sound. Sun-hŭi thought that each drop of water contained the universe and was the fountain of life. At first, it had dripped like a stringed instrument, but soon it made the sound of a symphony orchestra, producing harmonious melodies as it fell on the pear tree leaves, barn roof tiles, wooden fences, flower gardens, clay pots, and on the dirt path. It seemed like the neighborhood children, who were also listening to the sound of the falling rain, were soon going to all gather at Sun-hŭi's house. A song was heard. Sun-hŭi's clear voice joined the voices of the neighborhood children.
>
> "Mom?"
>
> What a familiar voice. That voice was now pulling at her shirt, dragging her away from the reveries of her youthful days.
>
> Sun-hŭi was tossing and turning in her bed as she returned to reality, leaving her youthful days with the neighborhood children in her ephemeral dreams. (Paek 92)

This is the only account of Sun-hŭi's private, *unconscious* moment in the novel, the only moment where gender, class, and the Party do not determine her identity. Sun-hŭi's reveries open up the realm of the unconscious that suspend temporality from progressing along its teleological path—it is essentially an-

archic and a-teleological in Irigaray's terms. Sun-hŭi's reveries open up a space that is devoid of temporality. It is rather uncertain as to when or at which point in Sun-hŭi's life this memory occurs. She is not recalling a specific time but an a-temporal space that suspends and dissociates any enclosing narrative. The memory is essentially a non-narrative. A story is not being told to any particular reader(s), but rather the narrative of the nation-state often found in North Korean literature is being *untold* by this still-frame of Sun-hŭi's reveries.

Let us not forget that her occupation is a singer for the Province Performing Arts Theater, a producer of music that is coupled with the state's ideology. She is a musical propagandist, an animate instrument of ideology, a vocalist who is supposed to sing in unison with Party directives. Her singing is not only a performance on stage but is supposed to move her audience members to have them conjoin their sentiments with that of the state ideology. In this sense, she is also a representative of the state much like Judge Chŏng Chin-u. She has also been speaking the language of the Same, the very language which she tries to resist. The only difference between Sun-hŭi and Chŏng Chin-u is she considers her singing an occupation rather than her life. She is only a propagandist on stage but not at home. She distinguishes the domestic space from the public. In her reclusive, quiet place, in some remote thought emerges a different kind of imagination that offers a different kind of music—a music with no ideological lyrics.

Her reveries are musical, a song that is from nature, a natural song, perhaps the only song in which she whole-heartedly enjoys to participate. Sun-hŭi becomes one with nature as she sings along with its melody. It is the only song that truly moves her. Nature allows her to imagine a universe beyond her social conditions. It is nature that allows her to imagine, that empowers her to think beyond the scope of patriarchal rationality and produce new thoughts, new voices, and new linguistic systems. Her imaginations escape or slip away from the patriarchal economy in which she is supposed to participate. Sun-hŭi is not interested in man's achievement in dominating or mastering nature, as the creeds of communism may suggest. Instead, she learns from nature the power of self-becoming. After all, nature (*chayŏn* 自然) contains its own implicit definition of self-becoming. The song of Sun-hŭi is not a *Bildungsroman*, where a prescribed image (*Bild*) of a character constructs the teleological narrative. No, Sun-hŭi articulates her thoughts rather clearly on this issue when she says, "I can't stand it anymore." Sun-hŭi's song is more organic than that. She sings of the unpredictability of human nature, the self-becoming with no clear direction or ideological inclination.

The narrative trajectory of the nation-state in *Friend* can be determined by the three-part acts that structure the novel: Act 1 is called Their Love (Kŭdŭl'ui sarang), Act 2 is Two Lives (Tu saenghwal), and Act 3 is titled Family (Kajŏng). Simply by reading the three acts, the implications of a typical narrative structure are obvious. Act 2 (Two Lives) suggests the bifurcation of Sun-hŭi and Sŏk-

ch'un's marital relationship. It is in the opening of Act 2 where Sun-hŭi's reveries begin and end on the same page. Her reveries do not last longer than a page. It is a flickering moment in the novel, much shorter than Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*, where Mrs. Mallard experiences "freedom" from her marriage for only an hour. But it is enough to perceive that perhaps author Paek Nam-ryong is suggesting the two separate lives that coexist within Sun-hŭi. That is, she has resolved to live a bifurcated life: one for the state and one for herself. It is bifurcated but nevertheless a porous relationship, where she negotiates her two lives on a daily basis in public and at home. Sun-hŭi's reveries do not indicate what and how an individual ought to behave as a citizen of the DPRK, instead, she is indulging in a space where nature or self-becoming dictates her behavior.

The state cannot own or become the proprietor of Sun-hŭi's imaginations. It will try its best to "pull" and "drag" her away from ungrounded, unconscious, and un-ideological reveries, which is no doubt a dangerous zone on which Sun-hŭi stands. Sun-hŭi inevitably, against her will, must return to reality, to the conscious level, to her ethical and societal responsibilities as her son—the future of the state—gently beckons her.

How much of Sun-hŭi's resistance have been successful or materialized? Can her voice stand against the thunderous voice of that which she contests? Unlike Antigone and Mrs. Mallard, Sun-hŭi does not die in the end. Sun-hŭi's tragedy may be the very fact that she will have to continue to live in her patriarchal society without any recourse to a law that will empower her

womanhood. She is put back in her place, the domestic space. At the end, when Chŏng Chin-u, who came to the train station to welcome her back from her tour, asks Sun-hŭi how her trip went, *she does not reply*. Sun-hŭi's non-response to the judge's question is her method of disassociating herself from the oppressive linguistic hegemony.

The narrator speaks for Sun-hŭi: "She felt the utmost respect and humility before the representative of the law. Her heart grew warmer, and the hope of starting a new life enraptured her" (Paek 192). It appears as though (or is supposed to be understood that) Sun-hŭi has finally given up or has "let go" of her obstinacy and submitted to the existing social order. But Paek's choice of words, the words of "new life" (*saengsinhan sam*) suggest her new resolve with how she will live and practice her individuality within her social conditions. It does not suggest that she has absolutely given into the judge's directives, and the narrator does not suggest that this new life involves her husband. After this encounter, Chŏng Chin-u takes Ho-nam to a park to leave Sok-ch'un and Sun-hŭi alone. It is Chŏng Chin-u's hope to reignite the couple's love for each other. The last line of the novel ends as such: "A family is where the love of humanity dwells and is the beautiful world where hope flourishes" (Paek 195). Will his hope be transferred to the stoic couple? Does this "family" also include Sun-hŭi?

The song of Sun-hŭi does not threaten the stability of community because the narrative is told mostly from Chŏng Chin-u's perspective. Sun-hŭi's voice is marginalized, and must remain entombed in the deep chambers of the patriarchal

society. The criteria for a revolutionary novel are met in *Friend*: presence of a positive hero, criticisms against problematic individuals, and overcoming a conflict and finding a solution. This may be a universal narrative framework, but North Korean literature lays emphasis on the process of transforming the aberrant individuals to become loyal followers of the Party. In my reading of *Friend*, Sun-hŭi's highest obligation is to herself rather than to the ubiquitous demands of the Party. The unitary language coupled with the holistic ideology of the state attempts to enclose and homogenize Sun-hŭi's voice into the Same. It refuses to accept (gender) difference in its trajectory of *his*tory, where *her*story has never had a chance to challenge the oppressive patriarchal language, needless to say, emerge in other North Korean novels since 1967 and until, perhaps, the publication of *Friend*.

Sun-hŭi is precisely *abnormal* compared to her comrades. She establishes herself different from and oppositional to the rhetoric of state-desired womanhood. Paek Nam-ryong does not categorize or generalize the aberrant symptoms of Sun-hŭi in the same way Hegel determines the place of Antigone. In other words, by supplanting Antigone with "womankind," Hegel performs the very generalization that Antigone resists (Butler 2000, 36). The state's agenda is precisely to convert an aberrant individual like Sun-hŭi to a *normal* woman. Although the law may have legitimized Sun-hŭi and Sŏk-ch'un's marriage, and although Chŏng Chin-u may have brought the couple physically together by the end of the novel, there are no concrete indications as to whether or not Sun-hŭi

chooses the path to “normalcy,” whether she compromises her linguistic agency to the language of the state.

Chapter 4

(Un)Authorized Sex: Away From the Public Gaze

In Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy*, she delineates the quotidian life of North Koreans through interviews with defectors. She discovers ways in which North Koreans have evaded the ominous gaze of the Party to gratify their infatuations with the opposite sex. In one account, Jun-sang and Mi-ran's relationship began just as the lights were going out (Demick 2010, 82). As North Korea faced problems with generating electricity throughout the night, street lights and other lights in public areas would turn off, at which point lovers would creep out of the house to "date" in absolute darkness. Since public affection is normally frowned upon in both Koreas (a little less in South Korea these days), meeting the lover at night avoided public scrutiny because of the nation's lack of electricity. Between these two lovers, there were moments of "close calls" where Mi-ran's father unexpectedly returned from work when Jun-sang paid a secret visit to Mi-ran. Jun-sang had to hide until it was safe for him to make an exit:

> Later, Jun-sang and Mi-ran laughed for hours about these incidents. The truth was that they enjoyed deceiving their parents. The secrecy was not merely necessary, it was fun. It injected a frisson of the illicit and gave them a shared psychic space in a society where privacy didn't exist. It was a relatively safe way to rebel against the confines of their lives. (Demick 2010, 88-89).

Demick also mentions a housewife-turned-into-prostitute during North Korea's food crisis in the 1990s. Kim Il Sung's efforts to close down brothels and eliminate prostitution were never fully successful. According to Demick's interviews, private arrangements to meet inside people's homes were an alternative method of evading public scrutiny (2010, 153). Although these prostitutes were dressed modestly, unlike some of the common images of prostitutes in other countries, they would signal their intent with a swipe of red lipstick and a beckoning glance at a passing man (Demick 2010, 153). These glances that run under the radar of the security guards policing the streets result in "borrowing" someone's domestic space that fulfills the man's sexual desires, becomes a source of income for the prostitute, and also profits the room lender (Demick 2010, 154). Although this "triangular connection" is illegal and possibly subject to even prison camps, I am reminded of Sim Yŏng-hŭi's words, "It's because it's undoubtedly the daily life of people" (*Yŏksi ingan saenghwalinikkayo*) (Ha Chŏng-hi *Truthfulness* 1981, 27).

In *Inmini sa'nŭn mosŭp* (The Life of the People, 1995), South Korean writer Sŏ Tong-ik explicates the sociological phenomena in education, family, and occupation in North Korea. In one chapter, Sŏ writes about university students in North Korea and their breaking university policies against dating the opposite sex. Sŏ writes that many students have been expelled from the university as a result of getting caught, which forced many those who haven't been caught to make promises to marry once they graduate from university, and, in the meantime,

behave as if they didn't know each other (1995, 39). Sŏ sympathizes with these students and concludes that no matter how stringent policies are against involvements in sexual acts, they (the university administrators, the Party, the state) cannot completely control people's love for each other (1995, 38). Making promises to marry after graduation among university students may sound like puppy love, and even with Kim Il Sung's advice for men to marry after the age of thirty and women after twenty-eight, Sŏ tells how some young lovers elope at an earlier age to release their sexual energy despite the prescriptive law (1995, 179). Sŏ admits that it is not common among young lovers to engage in such a despised act of frivolity, but he is also not surprised by it when he adds, "This is why the youth's passion for each other is noble and also unpredictable" (1995, 172).

Even in Kang Chol-hwan's personal account of spending ten years in a prison camp in North Korea, he witnessed moments of public humiliation when two lovers were caught in their sexual act on the forbidden grounds:

> [Women] were made to stand before the entire population of the village and recount their frolics. Their stories were never graphic enough to satisfy the guard, who demanded a detailed description of the caresses the woman used and the way her lover responded to them. They wanted to know what the couple had done with their hands and tongues and what positions they had tried. (*The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, 145)

The guards want details of the sexual act. The gatekeepers of the state desire pornographic sex, live vicariously through these private accounts, and gaze at the female body as their masturbatory object. Kang describes the prison guards

as violent and lewd, taking advantage of these sexual accounts for self-gratification as long as it stays within the gates of the prison camp, as long as no one else hears about them. The guards, too, are products of the repressed state, and, therefore, desire the sexual world to be narrated to them. After all, they, too, are human beings with carnal desires even if they are donned with the state's uniform.

Much like the prison camp described by Kang Chol-hwan, literature has its own confinements and gatekeepers that monitor and safeguard the state's moral principles. There is to be no deviance from the Party orchestrated morality, and, thus, the narrative is expected to didactically raise the readers' consciousness and morale. In literature, premarital sex between lovers at a factory or the countryside is often deflected or quickly shifted to the couple's marriage, reassuring the Party and the readers that the lovers were destined to wed—to themselves and more symbolically to the nation under the blessings from Kim Il Sung. Barbara Demick notes that North Koreans claim innocence with regards to premarital sex, that sex should only be exchanged between married couples. These social conventions dominate the psyche of North Koreans and, in some cases, determine the characters' behavior in literature, as well.

However, these social taboos are coded in literature, and as the prison guards crave to peer into the sexual world through the woman's words, I believe much of the same can be said about North Korean readers and their intuitive reading sensibilities in the face of the over-determined Party moral standards. I

am neither suggesting that all North Koreans have a perverse reading strategy nor attempting to portray a sex-starved group of readers. Instead, I believe the inclusion of sexual acts in narratives is a method by which writers *arouse* the interest of the readers which allows them to imagine the secretive, private emotions beneath the surface of the public, ascetic demeanor of the socialist revolutionary. Some works of fiction open up a space for readers to become implicit voyeurs, indulging in their guilty pleasures whenever suggestive moments arise in narratives.

I argue texts such as Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) and Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Saenghwal'ui ŏndŏk* (Height of Life, 1985) exemplify what I refer to as "unauthorized sex," where making love to another individual happens in secret and momentarily caught up in an impetuous desire for the other. It is not that the individuals do not take the revolution seriously or that they are attempting to subvert the Party policies by creating a counterculture of unrepressed sexuality, but rather it is an unmitigated, uncontrolled expression of passion for each other based on natural instinct of sexual attraction. In my reading of these texts, the writers distinguish two types of love expressed by individuals: a contrived, "unnatural" devotion to the state or what I call *revo-love-tion*, and a "natural" sexual drive for the opposite sex. In these texts, the characters' mannerisms and behavior during the day and in public contrast greatly with their unremitting instincts that emerge at night and behind closed doors. What is more interesting to me in reading these sexually charged texts is not how characters find methods in

which they can meet in secret but how the political and economic crises of the state create these spaces for characters to fulfill their sexual appetite.

When the Sun Sets and the Lights Dim

Kim Il Sung is often compared to the sun as the symbol of life. A film series called *Minjokui t'aeyang* (Sun of the Nation) spanned from 1987 to 1991, and an earlier film series called *Chosŏnui pyŏl* (Star of Chosŏn) spanned from 1980 to 1987, which all deal with the life of Kim Il Sung and his warmth toward the Korean people during the Japanese colonial period. Han Chin-sik's *Han t'aeyang arae* (Under the Sun, 1972) denotes Kim Il Sung as the omnipresent being and the provider of new-found life even for South Koreans. Kim Il Sung's love for his people extends beyond the borders of the peninsula and reaches to even the Koreans living abroad. One of the novels from the *Immortal History* series called *T'aeyangch'angga* (Anthem of the Sun) written by Nam Tae-hyŏn in 2005 recounts Kim Il Sung's efforts to establish residency for Koreans living in Japan in 1948 to 1955. Countless stories, poems, and songs praise the Great Leader's paternal care for his children who dwell in his radiance.

The sun as Kim Il Sung never sets in North Korea. Even after his death in 1994, he was confirmed by the Party as the everlasting leader of the nation. The agenda for socialist revolution has not waned in spite of economic unrest from

untimely floods, famine, lack of fuel, and electrical blackouts. Despite the dismal landscape of North Korea in the mid-1990s, the daylight of revolution continues with much more draconian force. Love for the nation, the Party, and the Great Leader are supposed to be carved into the bones of the people as Han Chin-sik portrays through his characters in *Han t'aeyang are* (Under the Sun, 1972). Thus, as long as the sun shines brightly on North Koreans and makes their every move visible, their love for the revolution and the Great Leader must continue.

However, what happens at night? When the sun kisses the horizon and bids good night to the DPRK, what do the people do? For one thing, the lack of electricity deters most people to enjoy the "night-life" that most capitalist countries host. While the forms of entertainment in North Korea may differ from the rest of the world, the lack of electricity precisely allows young people to enjoy the night-life as they sneak out from their respective houses or apartments to meet the opposite sex in complete darkness. The night is full of life for these young lovers while, during the day, they must behave as if there is no other life than to serve the nation and the Great Leader. Meeting at night when the lights are out is not only a social phenomenon among actual North Koreans but also a literary one among characters.

Sex or erotic gestures are coded in the literary texts as such that they avoid the prohibited explications on overt sexuality but, at the same time, draw the readers into the voyeuristic world of self-gratification and private pleasures. My fascination with sex in North Korean literature derives from the Party's obsessive

restriction on exposing the human body as a pleasurable sight/site and, instead, marking the body or covering the body with the garb of the lackluster political ideology. The idea of everyone having to look the same, behave in a similar manner, and chant the Party's creeds in unison may be what is expected in public, but the private world of each individual in North Korea (and in literature) cries out otherwise.

Much like the other communist countries, characters are often portrayed as ascetic revolutionaries devoid of human emotions. If they were to have any emotions, then it is exerted to the construction of socialism—the prototypical end-all rhetoric of communist political discourse. The extent to which the body (and more specifically the female body) is limited in description in many of North Korean novels sustains my argument of the "faceless" socialist revolutionary discussed in the previous chapters. However, there are fleeting moments where authors like Paek Nam-ryong and Kim Kyo-sŏp describe particular physical features of a female character that disclose eroticism and voyeurism. In addition to physical descriptions, passing conversations between characters leave the readers with ambiguity (something that is not supposed to happen in communist or totalitarian literature), where the double entendre plays an incisive role in revealing or releasing the sexually repressed libido both for the characters and the author.

Let us take Paek Nam-ryong's *Pŏt* (Friend, 1988) as an example of premarital, erotic advances between infatuated lovers. Ri Sŏk-ch'un is a

technician who comes to a factory-town in the countryside to educate and install the latest technology. He meets Ch'ae Sun-hŭi and immediately falls in love with her. He decides to write love letters to her, but soon finds it rather unmanly for him to resort to hyperbolic rhetoric often produced in such writings. He musters his courage to express his feelings for her in person. He invites her to meet him at the small park after work, but she does not appear. It begins to rain, and soon Sŏk-ch'un is completely drenched. The evening grows darker, and the workers' dormitory lights turn off one by one. There is still no sign of Sun-hŭi. It is very late and the street lights are also turned off, leaving Sŏk-ch'un in absolute darkness. He begins to regret ever coming out to the park in the first place and realizes the absurdity of his infatuation with a woman who doesn't seem to care at all. But, then, he identifies a shadowy figure standing with two umbrellas. It is Ch'ae Sun-hŭi.

It is clear as to why Ch'ae Sun-hŭi waited till the last moment before she made herself seen: she wanted to be with Sŏk-ch'un in the dark, alone and away from public visibility. Meeting after the lights are out resembles Jun-sang and Mi-ran's story found in Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy*, except, in *Friend*, the lights are turned off not because of an energy crisis but for "energy conservation." The next night when everyone else is fast asleep and the lights are turned off as usual, Sŏk-ch'un demands Sun-hŭi to confess her love for him:

> Sŏk-ch'un was able to see her blushed cheeks, the contours of her lips, her long countable eyelashes, and her timid eyes with the help of the bright

> moonlight. Under her curvaceous (*koksŏnmi*) shoulders, he also perceived her swollen breasts (*pungkŭt'han kasŭm*) rapidly beating.
> At that moment, Sŏk-ch'un was so driven by his impulse that he reached his hands out and grabbed Sun-hŭi's hands. She felt a little bashful, but she allowed him to hold her hands. (Paek 37)

The operative word here is "impulse" (*ch'ungdong*), which, if anything, poses a threat to social conventions that rely on collective efforts as opposed to individual spontaneity. Literature from communist countries depict the development of characters from what Katerina Clark calls "spontaneous" to "consciousness," from the personal irrationality to the collective rationality. Signs of "impulse" from individuals disrupt the collective trajectory and are seen as aberrant qualities that need to be tamed and controlled. Sŏk-ch'un's uncontrollable desire, the upsurge of emotional feelings propels him to grab Sun-hŭi, who permits his imposing behavior to persist throughout the night.

Sŏ Tong-ik claims that South Korean men choose their partners on the basis of physical qualities such as height, weight, facial complexion, facial features, legs, etc. and that North Korean men choose theirs on the basis of primarily her socialist activities and her potentiality of rearing children (1995, 173). This couldn't be farther from the truth for Sŏk-ch'un. His criterion in choosing Sun-hŭi is clearly because of her physical attributes rather than because of her socialist activism.

The narrator in *Friend* details Sŏk-ch'un's erotic gaze on Sun-hŭi as he begins from her face down to her breasts. Sŏk-ch'un's ability of noticing the details of Sun-hŭi's face indicates their proximity. Sun-hŭi's timid eyes suggest

her first time out with a man in the dark and alone, and it may also suggest her fear of getting caught by a townsperson. But the moment is too intimate for Sun-hŭi, allowing her to dismiss her surroundings. Her inexperience with a man alone in the dark at a park causes her to project her uncertainties through her timid eyes. Sun-hŭi's eyes serve as a window into her deep and troublesome thoughts regarding this very moment of sexual impropriety. Normally in literary expressions, "long eyelashes" suffice, but Paek Nam-ryong adds "countable eyelashes" to approximate the two lovers' spatial distance and also the intensified moment prior to their lips locking. But kissing each other on the first night together would have been a sudden move between the lovers and even for North Korean readers. Instead, Sŏk-ch'un grabs Sun-hŭi's hands.

Sŏk-ch'un perceives Sun-hŭi's curvaceous shoulders—a distinct attribute of sexuality and a characteristic of beauty. Sŏk-ch'un's eyes, then, fall on Sun-hŭi's swollen breasts. The ambiguity of *kasŭm*—which can mean either heart or breasts particularly when referring to a woman—opens up the possibility of transgressing into the restricted visuality of sexuality. The ambiguous phrase that Paek uses to describe this intimate moment is "swollen breasts rapidly beating" (*pungkŭt'han kasŭmi sech'age ttwinŭn*). In the Korean language, this phrase could mean either that Sun-hŭi feels anxious of Sŏk'ch'un's advancement and therefore caused her heart to beat rapidly or that she feels sexually charged, causing her breasts to perk up with excitement. It is Paek's usage of *pungkŭt'han*, which could mean to perk up, that convinces me of his implication of Sun-hŭi's breasts

more than her heart. In a different passage, the townspeople celebrate Sŏk-ch'un and his comrades for teaching the town the latest technology. Sun-hŭi approaches Sŏk-ch'un with a bundle of flowers:

> The bundle of flowers that Sun-hŭi was holding seemed as though it has blossomed from her swollen breasts (*pup'urŭn kasŭm*). (Paek 26)

Again the imagery is sexual. This passage is supposed to be read as Sun-hŭi's gratitude toward Sŏk-ch'un's tireless efforts of assisting the townspeople. But the imagery of the bundle of flowers blossoming from Sun-hŭi's swollen breasts seems to indicate anything but a suggestive invitation into her body.

In Ri Hwa's *Sogŭm kkot* (Salt Deposits, 1984), Yŏng-t'aek describes Sun-gŭm's breasts as perky much like the narrator in *Friend* describes Sun-hŭi's breasts. Both authors use the word *pungkŭt'hada* (to perk up or to swell) to show the sexually excited breasts of both women (Sun-gŭm and Sun-hŭi) in the literal sense rather than the figurative. It is imperative to note that both authors describe the development of the women's physical bodies as opposed to their ideological maturity. Sun-hŭi's developed body is prepared to receive her man. As Sŏk-ch'un stands within inches of Sun-hŭi, Paek describes to his readers the emotional and sexual excitement that is exchanged between them. The readers, too, can feel the warm breath that is exuded from the lovers' mouths and can anticipate a physical embrace.

The two begin to meet on a nightly basis by the riverbank. On one particular night, Sun-hŭi stands before Sŏk-ch'un "coyly playing with a ribbon that hung from the front part of her one-piece dress" (Paek 39). Then, the narrator proceeds to explicate the natural surrounding:

> Silver fog rolled down the mountains. The willow trees by the riverbank fluttered their leaves as though they had life. The moonlight reflected off the pebbles and the rocks by the rapids. Two large rocks stood close to each other as though they, too, came out to exchange their love for each other. The stream from the mountains flowed down boldly with life. It was a lyrical sound. […] Foam from the eddy along with the small tides reflected the moonlight. Large waves crashed on the bank with gusto, spread thin along the bank, and then silently flowed down the river. Another set of waves crashed followed by next as it continuously flowed. (Paek 39)

The juxtaposition of the two lovers and the description of the natural scenery signifies the "naturalness" of their sexual drives and their sexual union. Without having to expound on the details of the sexual act, the readers can imagine the lovers' sexual consummation from the depiction of nature: the river rhythmically washing up on the banks as Sŏk-ch'un's body on Sun-hŭi's; the glistening rocks from the moonlight as the two lovers' sweating bare backs; and the large tides repeatedly crashing on the banks as their orgasmic release.

The allusion to nature in the couple's sexual act may not be a particular phenomenon in North Korean literature but a more traditional or conventional method also found in pre-modern Korea, where *unuchirak* (雲雨之樂 the pleasure between cloud and rain) would be used as an euphemism to describe sex between

a man and a woman. It is a quiet spring evening, which already suggests the season of rampant sexual desires since the repressive wintery nights. North Korean readers are not unaware of seasonal implications. Another North Korean writer Chŏng Ch'ang-yun wrote a short story in 1985 called *Pompam* (Spring Evening), which is about a worker secretly visiting his girlfriend at night and sleeping over. The readers can surmise that a "happy ending" in this short story is more than narrative convention. The sexual symbol of spring evening is a universal literary trope. Sŏk-ch'un and Sun-hŭi are alone at night and conveniently veiled by a "silver fog," hidden from the other villagers. The state creates a space for their sexual union by conveniently turning off the street lights for them in the name of "energy conservation." The only light provided is the reflection off the moon or natural light.

Their sexual consummation is not to be made known lest they become targets of public humiliation for allowing their sexual impulse to momentarily supersede their Party-mindedness. However, Paek reassures the Party and his readers by uniting the two in marriage, indicating that their premarital sex was not a moment's rapture but a long-term commitment to each other. Their marriage secures the Party morale and reconfirms their incorporation as a new cell to the revolutionary family. But it is for a moment (and only for a moment) on a cool spring evening that allows the readers to indulge in the couple's hedonism, suspending both the readers' and the couple's revolutionary imperatives and losing sight of "revo-love-tion" in the dark.

Premarital sex is not the only "unauthorized pleasures" found in North Korean literature, but extra-marital affairs have also emerged in the narratives of the 1980s to show the revolutionizing of dysfunctional families. Ri In-ch'ŏl's *Mangne ttal* (My Youngest Daughter, 1980) is perhaps one of the only instances in North Korean literature where a wife storms into the bedroom of her husband's mistress, knowing that the two would be there, and demands a divorce. The narrative takes place in Japan, which justifies narrating such dysfunctional families and depraved individuals. As long as immorality exists outside of North Korea, it seems as though such narratives are permissible to be published. The wife is a pro-North Korean resident in Japan (*choch'ongnyŏn*) and the husband is a wealthy Japanese businessman.[107] The narrative demonstrates how non-North Korean individuals commit immoral injustices on each other and how Korean residents in Japan still suffer as victims of the colonial past. Korean residents in Japan are not the only victims of the morally depraved society, however, but also South Korean men who fulfill their perverted desires by frequenting strip clubs and enjoying the company of women outside of their marriage as depicted in Ri Ch'un-gu's *Pomnalui nunsŏgi* (Thawing in Spring, 1985). This is a North Korean film, but again, it was filmed through Mount Wangjae Film Company that co-produces films with pro-North Korean residents in Japan. There seems to be more

[107] I am not trying to evoke the problematic position of Zainichi *Chōsenjin* ("Foreign North Korean in Japan") (在日朝鮮人) by presenting narratives that take place in Japan—that is another political problem for a different discussion. I am not taking a position on these residents in Japan but reading them through the way in which North Korean literature presents them. According to North Korean literature, these residents are "different" and inherently *Korean* despite the fact that they live on foreign ground.

leeway with the materials produced abroad and as long as it does not adulterate the purity and sanctity of the image of North Koreans.

These episodic moments of extra-marital affairs in societies outside of North Korea perpetuate the rhetoric of wholesomeness and purity of the North Koreans. The symbol of Kim Il Sung as the sun demarcates the Us from the Them, the ones flourishing in the light from those decaying in the dark. However, Kim Jong Il is not so oblivious and short-sighted to assume all the people in the DPRK as ardent revolutionaries. Kim Jong Il in *On The Art of the Cinema* (1989, 35) says, "There are no born revolutionaries, nor are there any perfect revolutionaries." In as much as literature supposedly functions to reflect the "reality" of social life in North Korea and raises the Party-mindedness of the people to overcome and transcend their personal trivialities, the utopian socialist society is yet to be achieved. Literature is one medium through which the readers could gain insight into the fallacies of living in the dark and learning to bask in the warmth of the sun. Therefore, narratives that disrupt the harmony of a nuclear family through extra-marital affairs need to find a method by which the family is restored and brought back to the light of the *revo-love-tion*, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Saenghwalui ŏndŏk* (Height of Life, 1984) reifies the typical formula for criticizing disloyal characters for their bourgeois ideologies and assimilating them to the larger socialist family. 100,000 copies were printed for this novel by *Munye ch'ulp'ansa* (Literary arts publishing house), which is relatively high for a novel in North Korea where most novels range from 5,000 to

50,000 copies.[108] The 1985 DPRK Almanac praised the novel for its ideological content and also allowed a separate section that mentioned its reception of the June 4th Literary Award (6.4 Munhaksang). The section states that over 10,000 works of novels, poems, dramas, and film literature were created in 1984, but only 1,300 were published, and of those *Height of Life* was chosen as the recipient of this literary award in the novel category. When the DPRK Almanac recognizes a novel like *Height of Life*, and when the novel receives one of the most acclaimed awards in North Korea next to the Kim Il Sung literary award, one can guess that the novel contains the prototypical form and highest ideological content. However, even within such a seemingly impermeable and overtly ideological narrative, there are moments where language seeps through and reveals sexual innuendoes to show the immanent difference and otherness in writing.

The story centers on two middle-class,[109] intellectual married couples who endure marital problems: Chŏng Ch'un-ae is married to Chun-ho a geologist, and Im Yŏm-sun is married to Paek In-sŏk. Ch'un-ae, Yŏm-sun, and In-sŏk all work in the same research lab. Ch'un-ae envies Yŏm-sun's relationship with In-sŏk because her husband Chun-ho is always away on a "research trip" for several

[108] Ch'oe Hak-su's *Pyonyang sigan* (Pyongyang Time, 1976) received raving reviews from the *DPRK Almanac* for portraying brave heroes who have constructed Pyongyang during the Chollima era under the gracious providence of Kim Il Sung. Even such "noble" novels only printed 50,000 copies through the same publishing house as *Height of Life*.

[109] The middle-class here is referring to a group of privileged North Koreans, who graduated from prestigious universities and are high-tiered technicians, laboratory researchers, and other high-ranked civil servants. The main characters in *Height of Life* live a more privileged life than ordinary citizens of the DPRK.

weeks or months at a time. One night, as Chun-ho was preparing to leave, Ch'un-ae cries, "What? Leaving? At this hour of the night?" And when Yŏm-sun inquired about Chun-ho, Ch'un-ae responds: "He's probably busy. Would there be any other reason?" (Kim 6). The narrator adds: "Ch'un-ae responded calmly, but, without her knowing, her voice quivered. This was because she didn't believe in what she just said" (Kim 6). Ch'un-ae suspects her husband is having an affair or became indifferent to his family. Chun-ho does not return from his trip until the end of the novel. The patriarch is absent from the narrative, allowing the readers to peer into the private, domestic world of a desperate housewife.

Chun-ho's extended absences from home causes Ch'un-ae to become dreary with her work and to question her worth as a wife, mother, researcher, and, most importantly, a woman. Ch'un-ae's lack of sexual intimacy with Chun-ho is reflected on her pallid face and despondent attitude toward her colleagues. Yŏm-sun suggests that Ch'un-ae is perhaps pregnant, to which Ch'un-ae curtly responds: "There is no way that could've happened" (Kim 147). Ch'un-ae's honest response is much too revealing of a housewife's sexual discontentment, an altogether personal lack that can neither be fulfilled by the state nor by correctly living with the Party-mindedness. Ch'un-ae desires intimacy from her husband, who claims that his greatest ambition is to satisfy the state. Her need is someone who can provide a sensual connection that will satisfy her erotic pleasures more than a supportive comrade who will lead her in becoming a nationally recognized

researcher. In the name of the state, he sets off to do "research" and leaves a lonely, desperate housewife unattended among male colleagues at work.

Pak Wŏn-p'yo is a Three Revolutions team member (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng sojowŏn*), who was assigned to assist the workers and researchers at the factory where Ch'un-ae works. Normally, these team members are young university students, chosen by the Party to educate the workers with the latest technology and revive the expiring embers of the revolution. During one of the factory meetings, Pak notices Ch'un-ae reading a novel instead of participating. He begins to pay closer attention to every move that Ch'un-ae makes, watching her from afar. When Pak inquires about Ch'un-ae to the manager Nam T'ae-guk, he discovers that she was once a promising researcher but lost her aspiration and is now performing below her standards. The manager recalls how Ch'un-ae, despite her intelligence, was always distracted by and distracting to young male workers, who would come by to propose to her:

> After Ch'un-ae graduated from college and entered into the workplace, people looked at her with much interest, but they didn't expect much from her. She was slender and voluptuous with a round face. Her face was bright even without make-up and whatever she wore, it fit her shapely body. On top of that, her college degree made her a prime candidate for a wife. Usually, well-dressed and neatly combed young men would flock around women like Ch'un-ae, deterring them from their work, or they would relentlessly approach these women with marriage proposals. (Kim 67)

The visual image of Ch'un-ae takes precedence over her ideological education and her commitment as a researcher. The narrator notes that the

workers—who may be predominantly men—looked at Ch'un-ae with much interest because of her appealing physique: slender body, voluptuous breasts, and round face. Most women described in North Korean literature have round and white faces—traditional standards of beauty in Korea—which make them appear innocent and congenial.[110] In contrast, "western" women depicted in North Korean films and comic books have dark, sharp features, which make them appear diabolical and conniving. The uncommon description of women in North Korean literature is their voluptuous breasts. In Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i* (2002) one of the servant girls is ashamed of her enormous breasts and tries to hide them by tightly wrapping garments around her body. However, in *Height of Life*, Ch'un-ae is not ashamed of her voluptuous breasts and knows that they attract more attention from the workers. When the manager describes Ch'un-ae's initial days of working at the factory and how young workers would come to see her, one can surmise that these men were attracted to her physique more than her ideological fervor. Ch'un-ae also recalls how she dated several eligible men before she married Chun-ho.

Ch'un-ae's voluptuous breasts are not only a site/sight for sexual voyeurism by the young men, but it also indicates her place in the domestic realm. The workforce or the public sphere requires the *masculinization* of individuals. The typical trope of individuals in North Korean literature grows out of the

[110] Kkot-bun from *Flower Girl* (1972) became a cult personality when she appeared on the silver screen, causing a sensation among the people for her immaculate beauty.

domestic or the feminine space and enters the public or the masculine space. One comes to terms with the Great Family of the state rather than one's biological family. Much like male workers, female workers are expected to overcome their femininity and become masculine. However, the enormity of Ch'un-ae's breasts already confines her to the domestic space, which takes her away from her ability to perform well at the factory—the other workers do not "expect much from her" (Kim 67). Even the other workers perceive Ch'un-ae as a motherly machine that can nurture children well based on the size of her breasts rather than her intellectual capacity as a model worker for the state. Ch'un-ae's well-endowed physique coupled with her ideality of domesticity alters her attitude about her research:

> She rejected many of the proposals, vowing that she would not get married until she did something great for society. However, she could not wait for more than a year and became anxious of losing the opportunity to get married to the right man. She began to date several men, and when she finally found a man with talents and a promising future she quickly married him. (Kim 69)

The narrator describes her dating several men as *t'winggida* (to bounce around) to show her preoccupations with sampling partners more than her devotion to work. The narrative does not detail how she met and married her husband, which is not uncommon in many of North Korean literature. However, taking Ch'un-ae's capricious attitude toward men into account in the text, I find this to be a deliberate gesture on author Kim Kyo-sŏp's part. Ch'un-ae's ambition

in life is to create a harmonious family, regardless of who her partner may be. When she faces marital problems with her husband, she looks at Yŏm-sun's family (particularly In-sŏk) with envy. She wonders if her husband could ever be domestic(ated) or caring for the family as In-sŏk. At work, Pak Wŏn-p'yo, a representative of the Party, creates a space and time where In-sŏk and Ch'un-ae can work on the new design till late into the evening for an extended period of time. The proposal for the project itself is innocent: it is to bring two bright and promising intellectuals together to design a heater for the factory. The two intellectuals just happen to be a man and a woman. Author Kim Kyo-sŏp shows that whenever such heterosexuals spend numerous hours and days together the unthinkable or the inevitable happens even if each is married to someone else.

As In-sŏk spends more time with Ch'un-ae, she becomes worried at the different treatment that she is receiving from him, whom she sees day and night (Kim 131). And the narrator says, "In-sŏk had never shown much interest in Ch'un-ae before, but suddenly he's been respecting her greatly, which made Yŏm-sun uncomfortable." (Kim 212) The concern that Ch'un-ae feels is not that of displeasure about working with In-sŏk but a risqué thought of a married man spending too much time with a married woman, which in turn makes Yŏm-sun uncomfortable. But there is nothing Yŏm-sun could say to Pak Wŏn-p'yo about not having her husband work so closely with her friend Ch'un-ae, after all, their work is supposed to construct a stronger factory and a formidable nation. Yŏm-sun turns to Ch'un-ae and advises her not to do the project that Pak Wŏn-p'yo

recommended doing with her husband. Ch'un-ae then asks, "Is it because you think I will interrupt (*panghae*) his work?" (Kim 162).

Ch'un-ae's question to Yŏm-sun is a loaded one, knowing their past and how competitive they were since studying at the same university. They were considered "twins" at university, shadowing each other's mannerisms and the way they dressed. Ch'un-ae is described as a mild-tempered personality with a voluptuous body, whereas Yŏm-sun is bubbly and slender (Kim 161). They shared everything together. When Yŏm-sun found a boyfriend she would first go to Ch'un-ae for her advice and support, vice versa. The important word that writer Kim Kyo-sŏp uses regarding Ch'un-ae's finding a boyfriend is "yŏksi," which has a variety of meanings: as well, also, as expected, without a doubt, or as usual. The ambiguity of *yŏksi* opens up the space to imagine that Ch'un-ae has always had men around her not because of her political-mindedness but purely because of her physique. For this reason, when Ch'un-ae asks, "Is it because you think I will interrupt (*panghae*) his work?" implies that Yŏm-sun thinks Ch'un-ae is on the prowl with her best friend's husband. On the surface-level reading, this question asks if Yŏm-sun thinks that Ch'un-ae will interrupt or hinder In-sŏk's project and eventually take over the task, which was Pak Wŏn-p'yo's intention at one point. On the other hand, the question asks if Yŏm-sun thinks that Ch'un-ae will inadvertently tempt In-sŏk by simply working together in the same lab and always making her voluptuous body visible to him. To this Yŏm-sun responds:

> It's true that I am a bit uncomfortable with the whole thing. But it's not because you've decided to do the project. I may have been hurt, and I'm still worried about your project. But I am not worried that you have decided to complete the blueprints. Regarding this issue, you will not have to worry. (Kim 163)

Yŏm-sun is clearly not being honest with Ch'un-ae. Yŏm-sun wants to say more, wants to be more critical toward Ch'un-ae, and wants to shout "Stay away from my husband!" Of course, these are just conjectures from the way Yŏm-sun remains "depressed" (*u'ulhaejyŏtda*). At this critical moment when Yŏm-sun could and wants to utter a few more words to discourage Ch'un-ae from working with her husband, Ch'un'ae says:

> If my blueprint could be a small bolt in the future plans that our Great Leader has set out, there can be nothing greater than that! […] I will keep this thought with me as I work. This is also the *sojowŏn's* advice on the technicians! (Kim164)

What an (un)timely moment to use political rhetoric to diffuse Yŏm-sun's angst toward Ch'un-ae. As I discussed in Chapter 2, it is not *how* writers use political rhetoric in their narratives but precisely *when*, and in this situation, political rhetoric is stated to control and abate Yŏm-sun's suspicions on Ch'un-ae. But Yŏm-sun knows Ch'un-ae all too well. Yŏm-sun does not believe that Ch'un-ae believes in the words that she just uttered. Yŏm-sun thinks that Ch'un-ae is using political rhetoric to make her project more noble and lofty than it actually is:

> Yŏm-sun silently glared at Ch'un-ae with doubting eyes. After a while, Yŏm-sun let out a sigh and asked, "Do you actually think those thoughts as you endure obstacles in life?" (Kim 164)

Yŏm-sun is not convinced that Ch'un-ae holds these political thoughts as the motivation of her completing the given task. Political rhetoric is supposed to control, discipline, and compel individuals to look beyond personal problems and achieve lofty goals expected from the Party. However, Yŏm-sun thinks there is an underlying motive in Ch'un-ae's excitement to complete her blueprints, and she believes that Ch'un-ae's use of political rhetoric will further win the approval of men who surround her at the lab. To Yŏm-sun, Ch'un-ae is nothing more than an attention-hungry, desperate woman.

This is not the first time Ch'un-ae felt the overwhelming attention from men at work. She notices Pak Wŏn-p'yo gazing at her during work (Kim 36), and in one of their conversations, she realizes that Pak went through a great deal of trouble to find out about her past and her recent fight with her husband. He stops by Ch'un-ae's house in the late evening to talk about "work," knowing that her husband was away. As a result, Manager Nam T'ae-guk admonishes Pak for placing too much interest in housewives (*kajŏngpuin*) (Kim 116). On her way home, Ch'un-ae's thoughts are filled with Pak's excessive concern and attention on her, so much so that she forgets about her husband (Kim 64).

The only person who cannot forget about her husband is Yŏm-sun. She grows more and more suspicious of Ch'un-ae and In-sŏk's late-night "project." Ch'un-ae's use of the political rhetoric had no effect on Yŏm-sun. On the night of

In-sŏk's birthday, Yŏm-sun decides to prepare a lavish dinner to rekindle their faltering marriage life. However, In-sŏk does not come home nor call Yŏm-sun to tell her that he will be late. She waits for him close to midnight by the bus stop for the last bus to arrive. Upon the doors opening, Yŏm-sun recognizes In-sŏk and Ch'un-ae getting off the bus together (Kim 214). This is the defining moment where Yŏm-sun and In-sŏk's marital life faces unprecedented discord under the suspicion of extra-marital affair.

Height of Life never reveals the actual love affair of In-sŏk and Ch'un-ae; it is only implied. However, it is the implication or the possibility of her husband's illicit affair that drives Yŏm-sun mad. Every move that both her husband and Ch'un-ae make fills Yŏm-sun's thoughts with unbearable suspicions. These tormenting thoughts force Yŏm-sun to leave the house, to escape from her husband and her friend, leaving her son with his grandmother. Ch'un-ae finds Yŏm-sun and persuades her to return home. Yŏm-sun agrees under the condition that Ch'un-ae gives up the project. But even after her return, and after Ch'un-ae gives up the project, she suspects that In-sŏk's mind is still on Ch'un-ae when he supports Ch'un-ae's blueprints. Yŏm-sun tells her husband: "I cannot stop you from loving others. But, please be discrete about it so that others will not see" (Kim 238).

This striking admonition from Yŏm-sun differentiates between one's inner thoughts and outer decorum. In *On the Art of the Cinema*, Kim Jong Il instructs his writers and filmmakers to create heroes and heroines whose actions and

dialogue conform to their correct ideological thought: the outer is the direct manifestation of the inner. As the private sphere is not supposed to exist in communist societies, one's inner, personal thoughts are to be made public or conform to the collective thought, uniting individualism to Party-mindedness, as well. The dichotomy of public and private expressions is a common practice in human beings, but it is also a practice that must be broken down and made transparent in the North Korean system. Yet, Yŏm-sun warns her husband to hide his personal thoughts and present a different decorum in public. Yŏm-sun's statement: "I cannot stop you from loving others. But, please be discrete about it so that others will not see" (Kim 238), then, questions her husband's sincerity in his political rhetoric and conventional discourses exchanged in public. In short, In-sŏk must learn to store his feelings toward Ch'un-ae in the depths of his private chambers, while, at the same time, presenting the desired performance of a socialist revolutionary in public.

However, the private and public entities do not remain separated for long. The novel must end. Much like most narratives in North Korean literature, *Height of Life* finds a way in which a problematic situation is resolved through the over-dosage of reciting the Party directives and the honoring of Kim Il Sung. Ch'un-ae finds her college diploma hidden in her closet and remembers how she once loved her nation and the Great Leader. She commits to drafting her design and unsurprisingly completes it, winning the approval of the research institute. Manager Nam T'ae-guk unsuspectingly has a change of heart, confesses his sexist

views on women researchers, and vows to support them unconditionally. Ch'un-ae encourages Yŏm-sun to carry out the design that too she started in college. Yŏm-sun abandons any iota of suspicion she had about Ch'un-ae and her husband's relationship and realizes her becoming too complacent as a researcher over the years. She strives to complete her design with the help from Pak Wŏn-p'yo (just as he helped Ch'un-ae) and wins the heart of her husband once again. Ch'un-ae's husband returns from his trip, and the family is stabilized. This is, of course, all made possible with the loving guidance from the Fatherly Leader Kim Il Sung.

Notwithstanding the formulaic ending, *Height of Life* appeals to the readers on several levels: first, it allows the readers to peer into the domestic lives of middle-class intellectuals, which make up a small percentage of the North Korean society; second, their marital problems become the source of unmediated voyeuristic pleasure; and third, it centers on working housewives and the need to reevaluate sexism in working conditions against the creeds of state-sponsored feminism. *Height of Life* is certainly not the only novel in the 1980s that discloses the lives of middle-class intellectuals and issues concerning women's right at the workplace. However, it is one of the few novels that addresses marital infidelity, which makes it an interesting read in the North Korean society of the 1980s. The soap opera-esque plot and tone of *Height of Life* make it a page-turner as it attempts to hide the characters' inner most secrets from each other and from the gaze of the Party.

Hence, young lovers are not the only characters in North Korean literature with uncontrollable and uncontainable sexual desires, but also housewives who spend too much time with other married men. Much like how the state "provides" the romantic atmosphere for young lovers by conveniently turning off the street lights, Party representatives like the Three Revolutions team member also provide the condition in which workers entertain the thoughts of extra-marital affairs by closely working together late into the evening.

Characters in Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend* and Kim Kyo-sŏp's *Height of Life* understand their duty to practice "revo-love-tion" in public. They know the expected decorum, the appropriate gestures, and the ideological rhetoric that mark them as loyal subjects of the Great Leader. In other words, these characters do not develop from "spontaneity" to "consciousness," from unawareness of their ideological position in society to awareness, but rather reconfirm and reaffirm their devotion to the Party and Kim Il Sung. The Party discourse on equipping the citizens of North Korea with the correct ideological principles consists of producing faithful followers of Kim Il Sung—ones who can truly express the tenets of "revo-love-tion." Therefore, the internal struggles that characters face reside in the negotiation between the ostensible "revo-love-tion" and the personal—all too personal—love that is meant to remain repressed. This is evident when Yŏm-sun questions Ch'un-ae's rhetoric of living her life wholly for the Fatherly Leader: "Do you actually think those thoughts as you endure obstacles in life?" (Kim 164). The *human voice* is found in Yŏm-sun's statement:

her genuine ideological struggles, her attempt to overcome disbelief, her tenuous friendship with a comrade whom she entrusted with her life, and her abysmal marriage life. However, Yŏm-sun, like any other characters in North Korean novels, knows when to have her personal expressions recede in public.

Revo-love-tion: Ostensible Expression of Love

The ostensible "love plot" in North Korean literature can be characterized as being puritanical and prudish, where the women are often bashful, coy, and, at most, coquettish toward the opposite sex. Hardly any physical affection—holding hands, embracing, and kissing—between a man and a woman occur in many of these novels. The loving couples usually pay utmost respect to the other: the chivalrous man and the submissive woman, reminiscent of the people during the Chosŏn era or the Victorian period. Love is rarely exchanged in dialogue: men are found fumbling with their words in the presence of a woman, and women often have their head lowered and reticent to speak their thoughts freely and openly.

In Ha Chŏng-hi's *Chin-sim* (Truthfulness, 1981) the female protagonist at a farm writes letters to her admirer but never sends them in fear of revealing too much of her true feelings toward him, and instead, focuses more on her duty to advance the agricultural technology according to the Party's decree of the Three Revolutions (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng*). In Ri Hŭi-nam's *Yŏdŏl sigan* (Eight Hours,

1986), the female protagonist rejects the male protagonist's love and watches him from a distance to gauge his devotion to the mine and to the nation. When, in the end, he proves to be the upright revolutionary man she had wished him to become, she reciprocates his love. In Kim Sam-bok's *Sedae* (Generations, 1985), a male character secretly wishes that his crush will not leave for the city and remain with him in the mountains. He has no courage to express his true feelings and prevent her from leaving, but the female character realizes on her own that serving the nation in the mountains is just as rewarding, if not more, than improving her conditions by moving to the city.[111]

Narratives as such portray the individuals' ability to transcend private emotions for the collective and, most importantly, for Kim Il Sung. These novels do their best to avoid any notions of eroticism that may arise from the characters' thoughts because of their preoccupation with the state. When love is implicitly consummated between lovers, it is not the product of their uncontrollable passion

[111] There are countless narratives like these that fall into the "typical" accounts of the love plot regardless of the decade in which it was written. Kim Nam-ho's *Mannam* [Meeting, 2001] was written in the advent of the monumental meeting between the two leaders of both Koreas. Amid the media hype on this meeting, two journalists living in South Korea (who are advocates of North Korea) also reunite after a long period of separation. They loved each other in the past, but the male protagonist unexpectedly leaves South Korea to travel around Russia and the other former communist countries to examine the pitfalls of their collapse. He fears that North Korea may experience the same fate as the other communist countries and begins to lose hope in the nation. His female lover encourages him and begs him to keep his faith in North Korea. The two marry at the end of the novel and look ahead to a bright future of North Korea's socialist reign and influence on South Korea. Even with changing political tides on the Korean peninsula, the love plot seems to reproduce the same kind of ascetic revolutionary, wholly devoted to the construction of the nation rather than to the development of his/her personal love life.

for the other but a mutual respect toward the other's commitment to the Great Leader. Sonia Ryang calls this the "eternal triangle:"

> North Korean love flows only in one direction: from the people to Kim, from a people who constantly strive to elevate their love for Kim to an increasingly higher and purer level, where Kim's a priori love for the people in taken for granted. Furthermore, the people's love for Kim Il Sung is to be identified through their ties with each other in their common journey of dedication and devotion toward him. Along the long journey taken to demonstrate their loyalty toward Kim, men and women find companions in each other. This is how North Korean love forms an eternal triangle. (2012, 77)

This type of love plot is what I call *revo-love-tion*, where the hero or heroine's love for the opposite sex is subordinated to the primary purpose of one's life in the collective, the Kim Il Sung-centric state. In *Revolution of the Heart*, Haiyan Lee (2007) traces the history and the intellectual debate on love in Chinese literature. According to Lee, the KMT reformers and educators began to form a distinct voice in the debate on the nature and rules of love in literature, where intellectuals like Yang Xianjiang argued that love for "revolutionary youths" poses a grave threat to the revolution because it diminishes the revolutionary zeal and induces treason, discord, suicide, and murder (2007, 257). As these young lovers in Chinese romance literature focus too much on love, according to Lee's analysis, they lose sight of the larger enterprise and become entangled in a love triangle that results in a morbid or destitute act. Unlike these Chinese romance novels that Lee describes, North Korean novels hardly (or I dare say never)

portray North Koreans committing suicide[112] or murdering another North Korean in the name of love. The love plot is not so intricate that it leads an individual to commit heinous crimes against the other. Neither Kim Il Sung nor Kim Jong Il will condone such "inhumane" characteristics from his writers. Instead of a treacherous ending for such characters, the postponement of love and the subordination of sexual relationships to the revolutionary agenda may be much more palatable not only to the Chinese political ideologues but also to the North Korean writers and critics (Lee 2007, 256).

Love between youths, in North Korean literature, must not occupy the central theme of the novel but supplement the revolution. Love is a segment of the narrative that enables the hero or heroine to successfully perform his/her revolutionary duties. Love must not interfere in this enterprise, and it certainly must not be detrimental to the characters. As Chinese critics praised Jiang Guangci's novella *Seaside commemoration* (1927) for representing "revolution + romance" structural plot, much of the North Korean novels extract this formula into their plot as *revo-love-tion*. This type of love suppresses individualistic tendencies for the opposite sex and raises the banner of revolution. The love plot is not only predictable but oddly structured. Just when an intimate moment is about to happen between two lovers, the discourse of revolution intrudes, mediates, and abates the sexual excitement.

[112] In the film *Thawing in Spring* (1985), the female protagonist attempts suicide when her family forbids her to marry a pro-North Korean lover.

For example, in Ri Hwa's *Sogŭm kkot* (Salt Deposits, 1984), protagonist Ri Yŏng-t'aek and Ri Sun-gŭm work at a salt mine and find each other attractive. They exchange glances during work and smile bashfully but nothing materializes until the miners hold a dinner party. After eating, one of the miners calls Yŏng-t'aek and Sun-gŭm to the front to sing a duet. Yŏng-t'aek figures that Sun-gŭm knew about this event when she hands him a guitar that she has prepared. Then, the narrator (who is Yŏng-t'aek) says, "She protruded (*naemilda*) her perky breasts (*pungkŭt'han kasŭm*) forward and gently leaned her shoulder against mine" (Ri 82). The narrative quickly shifts to Yŏng-t'aek's singing: "Our Father is Comrade Kim Il Sung, and our home is in the Party's bosom (Ri 82). The narrator confesses that he sings the song with a pure heart and truly believes in the lyrics. Again, it is imperative to know precisely *when* such political rhetoric is interjected in the narrative. Yŏng-t'aek's glorifying the Great Leader and the Party is not to be taken seriously despite Yŏng-t'aek's confession of his genuine belief in the lyrics. He is ultimately an unreliable narrator. There is no doubt that Yŏn-t'aek was aroused at the sight of Sun-gŭm's protruded breasts and her leaning on his shoulder. Singing about the Great Leader and the Party abates Yŏng-t'aek's arousal and forces him to displace his carnal excitement to a spiritual excitement in praising the Great Leader. Then, the narrative shifts to a couple of days later. Meanwhile, what happened to Sun-gŭm?

Sun-gŭm's perky breasts that have been protruded for Yŏng-t'aek are overshadowed by voluptuous bosom of the Party and the paternal love of Kim Il

Sung. Considering that this is a dinner party—a public affair—it may be Yŏng-t'aek's "proper" code of conduct to sing praises of Kim Il Sung rather than to continue his voyeuristic gaze on Sun-gŭm's imposing breasts. In public, the Party and the Great Leader must be prioritized over personal desires in order for the hero to display his revolutionary consciousness. For Yŏng-t'aek, Sun-gŭm's leaning on his shoulders is enough to presume her love for him, and that no further detail into their love affair is necessary. In fact, it isn't until two chapters later that the readers discover that the two have been married for some time now. No detail of their courting, dating or their marriage ceremony is mentioned. This is the first and only physical contact that they exchange, and the narrative abruptly shifts to their already married life.

To me, the choice of song that Yŏng-t'aek sings for his audience, despite how he claims that he had "pure intentions," is his ostensible display of Party-mindedness rather than his ascetic attitude toward his sexual attraction to Sun-gŭm. In fact, it is precisely his claim of "pure intentions" that makes the reading more suspicious and dubious. After the dinner party and after he gets discharged from military service, Yŏng-t'aek is appointed as the head manager of the salt mines—the one position he coveted most. Yŏng-t'aek begins to abuse his managerial authority and resorts to bureaucratism. After several decades of serving as a manager, he reflects on how he changed over the years and resolves to become a passionate revolutionary. Yŏng-t'aek gained the trust of the workers by displaying his Party-mindedness at the dinner party, but lost their trust when

his self-seeking motives finally surfaced in the years of being a manager. What appeared to be his devotion to the Party in his youth turns out to be a self-aggrandizing performance.

The narrative subordinates love or sexual desire to the grander ambition of the hero's revolutionary spirit. Reading this text at face value may lend to the conclusion of yet another typified love triangle among the lovers and Kim Il Sung, which reinforces generalizations of love narratives in North Korean literature.[113] It appears as if Yŏng-t'aek achieves in transcending his love for Sun-gŭm and prioritizes his love for Kim Il Sung, the Party, and the nation above all else. Texts like *Salt Deposits* (1984) show through their narrative structures the prescriptive formula of *revo-love-tion*—the pure and unadulterated forms of passion for the state.

In an ostensibly controlled and repressive society like North Korea, it may be unimaginable to think that eroticism and sex exist. In *Nothing to Envy*, Barbara Demick says that Kim Il Sung closed not only brothels, but the more ambiguous *kisaeng* houses where women entertained wealthy men. Pornographers were executed (2009, 81). In short, Kim Il Sung seems to have attempted to sterilize his people from finding pleasure with their body and has created an asexual image of the nation, giving birth to an anti-sexual community. The logic behind creating an anti-sexual community is to have the individuals focus on the revolutionary tasks

[113] Refer to Sonia Ryang's essay "Biopolitics or the Logic of Sovereign Love—Love's Whereabouts in North Korea" In *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding,* edited by Sonia Ryang, 57-83. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009 for an analysis of her model of the love triangle, which always includes Kim Il Sung even if it is erotic sex.

rather than on personal pleasures. Sex between husband and wife is the only sanctified form of sexual pleasure condoned by the Party and the community, and any aberrant form of sexuality such as prostitution, extra-marital affairs, and homosexuality would be scorned. As much as the North Korean society attempts to maintain sexual sterility, the literature also ostensibly portrays individuals whose minds are set on edifying the nation-state thereby pleasing the Great Leader rather than pleasing their own bodies.

Conversely, for me, it is rather unimaginable to think that eroticism and sex do not exist in North Korean literature. Although writers are not given the license to freely express their notions of sexuality in literature by Kim Il Sung and the Party, I argue that writers suggestively draw the readers out from the restrictive reading practices and allow them to transgress into sexual voyeurism. I find the more the Party places oppressive sanctions on sex, the more the writers find crevices from which repressed sexuality emerges. As much as North Korea prioritizes political rhetoric—and more specifically that of Kim Il Sung—above everything else and creates a sterile nation of revolutionaries, I find the imposing facades and edifices, enormous phallic monuments, countless statues of Kim Il Sung to be heavily sexualized, rendering the topography of North Korea as a body that engenders eroticism more than an environment that exorcises it. The effort to enclose a space in which sterility must exist, in turn, creates pockets of resistance, counter-writings, and counter-readings even in the national campaigns.

National Campaigns and Sexuality

The ability to conquer oneself or to possess absolute self-control over sexual drives runs parallel with Marxist-Leninist notions of the role nature ought to play in human development and the conviction that people could dominate it to serve their ends through technology.[114] But by 1972, the Party revised its Constitution and prioritized Kim Il Sung's *Juche* ideology above Marxism-Leninism (Article 4), whereby proclaiming man's mastery over his own life and his own body. According to Kim Jong Il in *On the Art of the Cinema* (1989, 1), "The Juche age is a new historical era when the popular masses have emerged as master of the world and are shaping their own destiny independently and creatively." Under the aegis of Juche, *chajusŏng* (autonomy) is the life and soul of man, an attribute of man who desires to live and develop independently as master of the world and his own destiny (1989, 330). Juche is not only supposed to serve as the beacon that allows man to achieve socialism by ridding himself of his outdated, counter-revolutionary, bourgeois attitude, but it is also supposed to empower man to dominate, suppress, and become the master of his own individuality so that he can subject himself to the sovereignty of the Great Leader. However, Juche is not the only prevailing regulation on sex.

[114] Diaz-Briquets, Sergio and Jorge F. Perez-Lopez. *Conquering Nature: The Environmental Legacy of Socialism in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 14.

National campaigns like the Chollima Movement in the late 1950s and 1960s called on the people to rapidly reconstruct the befallen nation after the Korean War. The campaign expected the people to fly like the legendary horse at a thousand paces against their South Korean counterpart, who was also crippled from the war and was nearly unable to recover at the same speed as the North Koreans. This national campaign can be seen as the *masculinization* of the masses that eliminates gender differences, which then can eliminate sexual attraction with the opposite sex. Much like images of Rosy the Riveter in the United States, images of hard-working, tireless women stood alongside the men in the efforts to reconstruct the nation. These images were meant to be asexual, but novels like *Sansaedŭl* (Mountain Birds, 1966)[115] by Ri Chŏng-suk show gender inequality, sexually attractive young women, and women who resist the becoming of a machine during the industrious era of the Chollima movement.

The 1970s opened the gates to two national campaigns: Three Revolutions Movement (*Samdae hyŏngmyŏng*) and Speed Campaign (*Sokdochŏn*). The Three Revolutions Movement called on the masses to inculcate Juche as the governing ideology in their lives that affects the growth of technology and the expansion of culture. As Juche is meant to shed light on darkness, there is supposed to be no space for aberration or intrinsic sexual desires in any aspect of one's life. The Three Revolutions Movement sterilized and neutered the nation to construct a

[115] This novel was first serialized in *Chosŏn Munak* journal in 1963 over the span of several months. It was later reprinted in novel form in 1966 by Munye ch'ulp'ansa (Literary Publishing House).

new type of socialist being that Kim Il Sung calls "new man" (*sae ingan*). Kim Jong Il says, "The freer man is from the fetters of nature and society and from worries over food, clothing and housing, the greater his need for art and literature" (1989, 3). Although Kim Jong Il does not make sex or carnal desires explicit in this statement, he implies that the new man craves for ideological education over carnal appetite. Or to put it in a slightly different way, ideological education overrides any carnal appetite. In order for the ideological education to be inculcated to the masses, the Party required eyes and ears on every individual's movement and discussion. Hence, alongside the Three Revolutions Movement came the team members (*sojowŏn*), who closely monitored and watched every move that workers made both in the public and private spheres.

In the North Korean film *Ch'ŏngch'un'ui simjang* (Heart of the Youth, 1987), the *sojowŏn* not only works hard to keep the workers at the factory under control but also lovers by entering into their private quarters and having the lovers understand their greater love for the Great Leader. Alongside the Three Revolutions Movement, the Speed Campaign urged the people (and for those who worked in the art, literature, and film industries) to increase productivity at an unaccountable pace to overfeed and over-saturate the populace with the Juche ideology. Essentially, these campaigns attempted to eliminate the time factor for individuals to even engage with one another other than through the given tasks under a tightly regulated quota.

Amid these national campaigns and implementation of moral codes, literature and film have found ways of assimilating what Kim Jong Il calls "episodic moments" that hinder the revolutionary movement. Kim Jong Il in his speech "Let Us Create More Revolutionary Films Based On Socialist Life" critiques a film called *Nyŏsŏng ttŭlaktto unjŏnsa* (A Woman Tractor Driver, 1970):

> Living at home, chatting comfortably or dozing off at her desk is not proper behavior for such a heroine. The kind of character which finds pleasure in gossip about unfaithful love and in trivial personal affairs does not suit the sound ideal and life of our contemporary young people. Not even the smallest element of bourgeois ideology, feudal-Confucian ideas, revisionism or any other unsound ideas has its place in revolutionary cinema. (1992, 88).

In Kim Jong Il's criticism, love, sex, or even a discussion on love has no place in the discourse of the revolution. Kim renders these "episodic moments" as hindrances or distractions to the true ambition and the development of the socialist being. The internal logic of this thought proscribes these depraved elements as anything but intrinsic to the North Korean people, and that if any of these acts were to occur, then it would be perpetrated by "outsiders" or "capitalist imperialists." In "On Some Questions of Our Literature and Arts," Kim Il Sung accuses the "gentlemen" of Wall Street of carrying off Korean girls stripped naked in their cars and tanks, perpetrating all kinds of outrages and barbarities against them, surpassing all imagination (1972, 23). For Kim Il Sung, these acts of violence against the people of Korea must be, in turn, justifications for hating

the Americans and foreigners who adulterate the purity and innocence of Koreans. Furthermore, in "To Let Us Create Literature and Arts Worthy of the Chollima Age," Kim Il Sung reprimands a film for lacking in ideological content and only portraying love for love's sake. Kim Il Sung proposes that "the love of men and women of our new type should serve the lofty aims of the revolution and through it the struggle for the victory of the revolution should be woven" (1972, 37-38). It is not surprising, therefore, that the formula for constructing a "love plot" requires the characters' Party-mindedness, their loyalty to the edification of the nation, and their undying devotion to the Leader.

Writers in the North Korean system work under the repressive state sponsorship, which means that their works must essentially abide by the Party's asexual morals. I will not go as far as to say that these writers are merely "echoes" of the Party, as Kim Chong-hoe (2007) asserts, but that they must attempt to configure their works to appeal to the Party directives. Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i*, of course, may be the exception to the myriad of literary works produced in that system. And much like there are exceptions to seemingly seamless rules, love, sex, and eroticism seem to find their channel out from the stringent prescriptions.

Party-Sanctioned Sex: Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i*

Under the candle light, I slowly take off my clothes…I pull down my underwear…I lower my hands to reveal my breasts…I undress him and lie on the bed…I slowly move down on his body…I quietly whisper, "Close your eyes…close 'em. Close your eyes and enjoy the pleasure I'm about to give you." His entire body trembles as though a volcano were about to burst, and then he groans loudly. (Hwang Chin-i, 276)

This excerpt is taken from Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i*, published in Pyongyang first by Munhak ch'ulp'ansa in 2002 and reprinted in Seoul by Taehun in 2004. Hong accepted the Manhae Literary Award—one of the most prestigious awards in South Korea—for his novel. To this day, Hong is the only North Korean novelist to receive a literary award from South Korea since national division. That's right: the sexually explicit excerpt is taken from a North Korean novel, written by a North Korean novelist, reprinted in South Korea, and was given one of the most prestigious literary awards. Donald MacIntyre, journalist for *Time Magazine*, quotes Brian Myers on his response after reading *Hwang Chin-i*: "I read some parts with my jaw hanging open. The parallels to the current political situation are really just too obvious even for the most obtuse, literal-minded reader to miss."[116]

To this day, no literature in North Korea has described sexual acts (there are more throughout the novel) with as much ribald and pornographic detail as

[116] Refer to http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,655483,00.html#ixzz1crBDcg1P

Hwang Chin-i. The closest any form of popular media got to sexual explicitness in North Korea is a film called *Pomnalui nunsŏgi* (Thawing in Spring) produced by Mount Wangjae Company in 1985, where a Japanese stripper reveals frontal nudity at the center of the frame and not just in passing. The South Korean uncle tells his niece that in capitalist countries you can buy love. He then hands a Japanese performer a wad of cash, and she strips from her clothes for his viewing pleasure. The Party-minded message of the film is to promote a moral and unified society between the two Koreas by contrasting the existence of sexual immorality and debauchery in capitalist societies like Japan. Nonetheless, the stripper's frontal nudity and other sexual implications throughout the film may have been considered audacious during the mid-1980s.

At the same time, it would be a hasty assumption to think that North Korea has opened up its sexual delimitations based on the film *Thawing in Spring* and *Hwang Chin-i*. The film, after all, takes place in Japan, where immorality is expected to exist outside of puritanical North Korea, and the novel takes place during a period well before North Korea's conceivable existence and centers on the life of a courtesan. This may have been Hong's justification to avoid the scrutiny of the censors. Still, to make each sexual act so carnal may be indicative of the writer's repressed or restrained writing practices under the system. That is, *Hwang Chin-i*'s eroticism can be read as a cathartic expression of "carnality" or the raw torrents of human nature that expounds beyond the puritanical parameters of the Party-oriented moral values, class division, and gender politics.

Eroticism in *Hwang Chin-i* is a two-way street: viewers gaze at Hwang Chin-i, and she allows herself to be seen; she is the object of sexual desire, and her sexual prowess subjects her male clients; and the readers gaze into her erotic world as Hong Sŏk-jung seduces his readers into a virtual world of untamed sexuality. *Hwang Chin-i*'s erotic world is not limited by time and space. Hwang Chin-i (both the text and the character) forces the readers to lose sight of reality, and it seduces the readers to relish in the forbidden, (un)authorized, and dangerously risqué grips of the woman. In one episode, Hwang Chin-i, her servant, and her midwife are out, enjoying a hot mid-summer night. The midwife identifies a peeping-tom and scorns him for his inappropriate decorum, but Hwang Chin-i calls him over to her and asks what he desires. The peeping-tom extends a piece of cloth and requests her to write something by which he can remember her. She writes two Chinese characters *myŏng-wŏl* (bright moon), which is her signature (*ki'myŏng*). Later in the novel, she discovers that the peeping-tom has died of love-sickness (*sangsa'pyŏng*).

The more pressing issue with the publication of *Hwang Chin-i* is not so much the explicit sexuality described in the novel but the intended audience. Limited data on North Korea's distribution method and readers' accessibility to the novel renders it difficult—if not nearly impossible—to assess the openness of sexuality in the country today. Scholars like Myers speculate that the novel was intended for South Korean readers, and was, therefore, given permission by the

Party to narrate graphic moments.[117] However, South Korean scholar Kim Chae-yong begs to differ. After Kim's visit to North Korea and meeting with Hong Sŏk-jung, Kim is not convinced that the novel was written for foreigners but was originally read by North Koreans.[118] If, indeed, *Hwang Chin-i* had been intended for an audience other than its own citizens, then the implications of the novel and the society from which it was constructed are loaded. First, the existence of such a novel implies Hong Sŏk-jung's (and perhaps even other writers') capability of producing works worthy enough to win literary awards from South Korea, and that such writers are capable of devising imaginative works beyond the prescribed narrative formula. Second, the Party continues to assert and prescribe its moral values on the people through the medium of literature, that there is a distinction between works written for the people of North Korea and works written for "others." Last, repressive moral codes placed on the writers to produce "wholesome" literature may directly affect the writers' repressed sexuality that needs to find its way out precisely through the medium of literature where it houses the ambiguity of language.

Since the publication of *Hwang Chin-i*, writing strategies have not changed much for the rest of the writers in the Writers' Union. Much of the same "love plots" typify the relationships between the characters, and their ostensible reverence to either the Great Leader Kim Il Sung or the Dear General Kim Jong Il

[117] Myers, B.R. *The Cleanest Race* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010), 89.

[118] Interview with Kim Chae-yong on the matter of Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i* in June, 2010.

is unsurprisingly included to bring the narrative to a wholesome conclusion. Although South Korean scholars like Kim Chae-yong consider *Hwang Chin-i* as a seminal text that altered South Koreans' perception of North Korean literature,[119] the grim reality of literary works still published in the North does not reflect the potentiality set forth by this novel. This indicates the marginality of *Hwang Chin-i* in the context of the rest of North Korean literature, that literary works or renowned writers do not set the trend for the future of writing and reading in the North Korean system but that institutions like the Writers' Union, Department of Propaganda and Agitation, and the Party delimit such possibilities from opening up and redefining literary practices for the people of the DPRK. Then the task of marginal writings still remains for North Korean writers—utilizing ambiguity, implying multi-layered imagery, and providing sexual innuendoes. No matter how much the Party enforces stringent policies on writing, the very gesture of writing transgresses, resists, and satirizes at every stroke of the writer's pen.

Thus far, I've only discussed heterosexuality in this chapter as a way of thinking and writing in the margins of the nation discourse. Sexuality between male and female in North Korean literature poses a threat to the fulfillment of state tasks. The DPRK cannot and does not prevent sex between lovers as long as the narrative promises a wholesome family that ultimately edifies the nation-state. Sexual immorality such as marital infidelity is viewed as improper behavior, but

[119] Refer to Kim Chae-yong. *Sara innŭn sinhwa Hwang Chin-i* (*Hwang Chin-i*: The Living Mythology) edited by Kim Chae-yong. Seoul: Taehun, 2006.

with the correct ideological re-education, the heated passion between lovers can be ameliorated. Sexual activity in North Korea is not shunned upon as long as it is between a husband and wife, and as long as the individuals understand their higher calling in the state.

Love for the Great Leader, the nation, and the Party must precede all other forms of love, but this does not mean that all individuals in the narratives abide by what is "supposed" to be done. Sexual attraction precedes any artificial or forced love for the Great Leader, the nation, and the Party. North Korean narratives clearly demonstrate the individuals' sexual dichotomy between unrelenting sexual attraction to the opposite sex and their utmost love for the Great Leader. "To love or not to love" is always the question that muddles the individual's task and purpose of working as a loyal citizen. It is at this crossroad where the reader's heart beats in unison with the negotiating individual.

The more contentious aspect of sexuality in North Korean literature may be homosexuality, homosexual tendencies, or homoeroticism. Neither Kim Il Sung nor Kim Jong Il makes any explicit remarks regarding homosexuality in society and in literature, but this does not mean, of course, that homosexuality is nonexistent in North Korea. In fact, heavy emphasis on gender decorum detailed in literary works reveals a certain fear toward the potential emergence of homosexual impropriety. That is, over-determined "normalcy" of masculinity and femininity mitigate this lurking fear of sexual deviance. Gender politics in North Korean literature not only instruct or exemplify the appropriate behaviors for both

men and women, but they also attempt to eliminate the possibility of sexual impropriety. Furthermore, the saturation of heterosexual relationships prevalent in North Korean literature and film perpetuates the image and discourse of "normalcy," that it is normal for a man to gaze at a woman, or for two men to gaze at a woman. The literary world of North Korea considers it normal for men to gaze at the woman as the object of desire, not on a pedestal but between men. And when the woman is positioned between men (as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would say), the men have the potential to share a homosexual experience in the guise of heterosexual pursuit. Of course, the DPRK will not condone homosexual or homoerotic readings (and needless to say writings). Homosexuality may be considered a disease in the DPRK, not only threatening the sanctity of the nation-state but also the family as the mode of producing *upright* citizens. However, this does not preclude homosexuality in the society of the DPRK; only time and further research will be needed to make such deviance more visible.

Conclusion

North Korea is constantly and rapidly changing. It may not be changing in the way the rest of the world wants it to change, but the country is changing in its own right and very similarly to some of the other countries around the world. Just past the DMZ, many South Koreans bury themselves in their smartphones to read the latest news, webtoons (comic books on a website), or other entertaining tidbits as they head toward work, school, or other engagements. As the translation editor for KLTI's (Korean Literature Translation Institution) monthly newsletter *plus list_Books*, I recognize a prevailing problem that latest published works in the South Korean market address: time. South Korean readers are pressed for time (or so they think), and instead of lengthy novels, they prefer short, dramatic, humorous webtoons to pass the dreary time spent inside a crowded subway. With high-speed internet access nearly everywhere in Seoul, the Korean public's time becomes more precious. More than the content of the reading material (although this is still very important), the emphasis is more on the quickest way to read. In this respect, North Korea is no different.

In *Sosŏl ch'angjak-kwa kigyo* (Fiction Writing and Its Technique, 1991), North Korean literary critic Kim Hŭng-sŏp says, "Writing short (*tchalbŭn*) short-stories (*tanp'yŏn sosŏl*) is the demand of today's era" (1991, 212). On the next page, Kim continues, "People today are looking for short (*tchalmakhan*) short-stories that can be read within ten to thirty minutes during their break-time from

work or at their leisure, which is characteristic of today's lifestyle" (1991, 213). Kim's assessment of short stories needing to be shorter may not only be a reflection of paper shortages in North Korea and therefore the writer's conscious effort to write economically but also of the need to keep the readership interested.

Kim Hŭng-sŏp compares short stories from the past with contemporary short stories produced in North Korea and says, "It is not justifiable to use rapidly developing technology or the wide scope of our revolutionary struggle or the complexities of daily life as reasons for lengthy short stories" (1991, 218). Instead, Kim argues that the history of writing short stories shows that writers have been conscious of a particular aspect of daily life as the theme of their narrative and have written them with much wit (1991, 219). Another way to read this is: Instead of trying to formulate a narrative that is comprehensive and inclusive of all the Party's demands for that era, select one aspect of the Party's instructions that affects a slice of life and depict it with much craft and wit.

Kim uses the word wit (*chaech'i*) several times in his analysis, which suggests that writers today (1980s writers for Kim at the time he published his book) lack a sense of ingenuity and authorship. Kim, of course, instructs his writers to reflect the correct Party instructions (it would be a crime not to), but his emphases on minimal length and wittiness in the work also imply a certain level of *auteur*-ship for literature as he cites European (*kura'pa*) writers like Goethe, Edgar Allan Poe, Maupassant, and Chekhov to name a few. My sensitive readers may have detected a misidentification with Kim Hŭng-sŏp's list of great

European short story writers. Kim writes that Edgar Allan Poe was an English writer who urged the efficaciousness of short stories (1991, 216). It is evident that Kim Hŭng-sŏp admires these European writers and even an American writer, but Kim knows that the DPRK is not yet prepared to accept the admiration of a writer from the country that it considers as its arch-nemesis. For Kim, it is safe and perhaps harmless to include Edgar Allan Poe in the list of European writers. Aside from nationality or the politics of identifying a writer from a particular nation, Kim Hŭng-sŏp's acknowledgement of these writers shows his literary keenness and sensitivity to wit and authorship, that these writers are identifiable precisely through their writing rather than through their nationality. That is, great writing escapes nationality, national borders, and even polemical political ideology such as in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, who is an American, but can be read with much literary appreciation.

There may still be a consensus among observers of North Korea that there is no notion of authorship in a socialized political system like the DPRK and that all writers in North Korea are merely Bartleby-like scriveners who copy and reproduce a given template. Is it possible to think that North Korean writers condition the possibility of uttering and expressing *I would prefer not to* in their work of literature? It is true that there are literary works produced through collective effort of multiple writers, and it is true that writers cannot possess their own copyright of their written work. But this does not mean that there is no appreciation and recognition of *auteur*-ship in North Korean literature, film, and

art. Unlike capitalist countries that require a trademark quality for writers, filmmakers, and artists to stand out among their competitors, North Korea may not display *auteur*-ship to that extent, but there is an appreciation for style over content. Well-respected female North Korean writer Ha Chŏng-hi says, "How to write is a problem, but what to write is a growing problem," (1975, 76)[120] which implies that, for Ha, style is not her main concern because she is quite capable of writing with much auteur-ship, but her concern is with the content. During preparations for special occasions in North Korea, the Writer's Union calls on the writers to exemplify their loyalty to the nation by writing a short fiction or poem, in which case some lesser known writers may try to exhibit their style and content so that it will be published among the greats in *Chosŏn Munhak*.

It is clear that Kim Jong Il acknowledges certain stylistic writers over others for their incisive talent over content as I discussed in Chapter 1. I am not dismissing content, at all. I believe what the editors of the Writer's Union and Department of Propaganda and Agitation want are writers who can stylistically express the political ideology. In fact, the April 15 Literary Production Unit is a group of hand-picked writers whom the Department of Propaganda and Agitation and the Writer's Union consider to have exceptional talent. The criteria of such selection process are neither detailed nor publically exposed. Some of the expectations from Kim Jong Il in the early stages of forming the April 15 Literary Production Unit were gifted writers with an outstanding history of literary works.

[120] Ha Chŏng-hi. "Chakkadŭl'ui chŏngch'ijŏk sikkyŏn-kwa anmok" (Writers' Political Insight and Discernment). *Chosŏn Munhak* vol.3 (1975): 76.

But, of course, there are writers with great skill and *auteur*-ship without being a member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit.

Brian Myers notes the respect that Han Sŏrya had received from Kim Il Sung for his loyalty, service to the nation, and a long track record of writing. Ch'ŏn Se-bong and Kwon Chŏng-ung are considered veterans in the Writer's Union for their long history of writing respectable works. Hong Sŏk-jung, Ri Hwa, and Han Ung-bin are also much celebrated writers who have shown wit in their plot and crafty sentence structure. Paek Nam-ryong, Ch'oe Sang-sun, and Kim Sam-bok are relatively younger writers compared to the greats mentioned above, but nonetheless, they exhibit an honest reflection of social problems, which is recognized by the Party as necessary to take corrective measures. In my opinion, Chŏng Ch'ang-yun is by far the best short story writer in North Korea today. His writing style is slightly humorous and his endings are always a bit twisty and unexpected, resembling that of O. Henry. In a later project, I hope to expound more on the writings of Chŏng Ch'ang-yun. But no writer/poet has captured the hearts of many North Korean people as much as poet Kim Ch'ŏl. Many defectors have told me that Kim Ch'ŏl's *Yongsŏhasira* (Forgive Me, 1987) is memorized and recited at school, and male defectors add that it was mandatory to learn the poem during their military service. I placed the original along with my translation to show the poem that has moved many in the nation:

용서하시라 어머니시여
무명천으로 통바지 해주었다고

투정질하며 어머니의 속을 태우던
이 아들을 용서하시라

용서하시라 선생님이시여
화학숙제도 제대로 안 해오고
대수공식도 외우지 않아
선생님을 애먹이던 이 제자를
선생님이시여 용서하시라

그러나 용서치 마시라 조국이여
진격의 길에서 내 주저하며
순간이나마 생명의 귀중함을 생각한다면
하여 나의 가슴을 겨눈 적의 탄알이
전우의 가슴을 뚫게 된다면
절대로 용서치 마시라

허나 나는 그대의 아들
내 혈 전장에서 용맹하려니
잊지 마시라

내 최후의 돌격전에서
기발 들고 나가다 쓰러져
영영 다시 일어나지 못한다 해도
조국이여
부디 나를 잊지 마시라
그리고 용서하시라

Forgive me, oh mother
For breaking your heart when I complained
About making my pants from a sewing cloth
Forgive this son

Forgive me, oh teacher
For distressing you when I did not
Do my chemistry homework
Or memorize algebra formulas
Oh Teacher, forgive this disciple

However, forgive me not oh my country
For hesitating on the road where enemies advance
If for one second I were to think about the preciousness of my life

And then the enemy's bullet aimed at my heart
Pierces the heart of my comrade
Never forgive me

But then, I am your son
On the hills of the battlefield I will prove my bravery
Forget me not
On the final charge toward the enemy
If I fall while carrying the flag
And even if I never again rise
Oh Fatherland
Please, forget me not
And do forgive me

Kim Ch'ŏl—one of the most celebrated poets in North Korea—returns to Pyongyang after a long hiatus from writing poetry. In *Pukhan chakkadŭl'ui saenghwalsang* (Life of North Korean Writers, 1979), Ri Hang-gu—defector and former writer for the Writer's Union—mentions in passing the great poet Kim Ch'ŏl's expulsion from the Union and his consequent deportation to the countryside after he defended a female writer Pak Myŏng-ja, who openly critiqued the Party's trade policy with the former Soviet Union.[121] Acording to Ri, although Kim Ch'ŏl held a high position in the board of editors of the Writer's Union, his defending Pak Myŏng-ja was seen as a complicit act of defiance. Ri states that since Kim Ch'ŏl was originally from a farming background (*sŏngbuni nongbu*), he did not fear being deported to the countryside. Once Kim Ch'ŏl was fired from the Writer's Union and deported to the countryside, his wife divorced

[121] Ri Hang-gu's 北韓作家들의 生活相 (Life of North Korean Writers). 서울: 國土統一院 調査研究室, 1979: 99-101.

him. According to Ri Hang-gu, Kim Ch'ŏl and Pak Myŏng-ja broke up after two years. Ch'oe Chin-i—also a defector and former poet for the Poet's Union—offers a different insight into the incident: Kim Ch'ŏl, who was already married and had a son, and a Pak Myŏng-sun[122] had an open affair in the late 1950s. When Pak Myŏng-sun became pregnant as a result of the affair, the Committee Board of the Bureau of Propaganda and Agitation gave Kim Ch'ŏl an option to give up the Union or to give up his woman. Kim resigned from the Union and audaciously left with Pak. It is not clear as to what happened to Kim for the next twenty-three years, but, according to Ch'oe, he returned to Pyongyang in 1980 because of the outstanding reception of his poems in *Chosŏn Munhak*: "Mansudae" (Mansudae) and, two years later, "Ŏmŏni" (Mother).[123] Kim's article on his New Year's Resolution in *Chosŏn Munhak* January edition in 1982 "Chinigo pult'anŭn ch'ungsŏngsim'ŭl" (With a Burning Loyalty) may be the indicative piece that reveals his complicity with the Union and the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, winning their favor to return to Pyongyang. One of his collection of poetry won him the June 4th Literary Award (6.4 Munhaksang),[124] and one of his most recognizable poems is *Yongsŏhasira* (Forgive Me) published in 1987. Ch'oe

[122] Pak Myŏng-ja and Pak Myŏng-sun are supposed to the same person. According to my research, there is no female writer by the name of Pak Myŏng-ja, but there is Pak Myŏng-sun. Ri Hang-gu did not invent this tale of Kim Ch'ŏl because it is evident that Ch'oe Chin-i is also aware of such incident. Unfortunately, I cannot offer any explanation regarding the name difference.

[123] Interview with Ch'oe Chin-i February 2011.

[124] Interview with Ch'oe Chin-i February 2011.

Chin-i recalls how the poets from the Union excitedly prepared for Kim Ch'ŏl's homecoming, marking him as a legendary hero.

It is rather obvious that Ri Hang-gu and Ch'oe Chin-i's accounts are dissimilar, but we can gather that Kim Ch'ŏl's incident has left an indelible impression on writers and poets at that time and even today. Poet like Kim Ch'ŏl is not only legendary for his audacity and obstinacy but also for his great literary mind and sensitivity to human emotions. These may be obvious traits that poets need to possess in order to write poetry, but there is no doubt that Kim Ch'ŏl's poems stand out among others. Just from these two accounts of Ri Hang-gu and Ch'oe Chin-i, we can observe the dynamic and dramatic world of writers in North Korea, although this incident reportedly happened before 1967. Nevertheless, I believe the small community of writers who live in Pyongyang experience interesting and unpredictable occurrences beyond the scope of our imagination on a regular basis.

Returning to my reading of North Korean literary critic Kim Hŭng-sŏp, it is also evident in his writing that he is a thinker of colonial polity and of the contentious notion of modernism. Kim says, "Compared to the flourishing European theoretical debates on writing short stories, Asian countries have fallen behind in developing theirs and furthermore could not take great leaps in advancing forward" (1991, 216). Theories on modernity seem to occupy Kim's analyses of literature in North Korea, that perhaps there is a sense of its "immobility" as a result of it lack of theoretical discussions to further advance the

technicity of writing fiction. It may be an oversight to suggest that Kim Hŭng-sŏp desires North Korean fiction to adapt some of the European tradition of writing short stories. Instead, it may be safe to say that Kim appreciates open discussions about literature, something the former Soviet Union more or less once practiced on the notion of socialist realism.[125] Although he does not explicate any further, Korea's colonial history and North Korea's future in developing the genre of fiction are important inquiries to consider for Kim. But from the little that is written, we can gather that Kim Hŭng-sŏp is truly a thinker of writing and of the important literary function it has on the readers.

Of course, Kim adds that short stories from Europe have aesthetically and scientifically developed this genre for humanity, but the artistry of communist literature coupled with the scientific theory of Juche policies on writing fiction has further enabled the development of the genre of short stories for writers in North Korea (1991, 216). Statements like this are neither surprising to North Korean writers and readers (and to outsiders) nor helpful in thinking about the genre of fiction. They are rather a necessary component of writing in general for North Koreans. Whether or not a writer truly believes in Juche or a filmmaker believes in Kim Jong Il's "seed theory" (*chongjaron*) is beside the point. Statements like this (as discussed in Chapter 2) are repeated as a practice or ritual

[125] Refer to Boris Gorys' "The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde" in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Culturual Experiment*, 193-218. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), and Abram Tertz's *On Socialist Realism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.

that cares little about the actual theory and focuses more on the practice itself: it is an indispensible protocol to the political discourse.

It is hardly surprising that North Koreans will chant "Amen" to political theories that they can barely grasp because it is the gesture of chanting that is recognized. There is no way to discern one's truthfulness from falsity. The expectations of singing in the choir are greater than believing in the lyrics. After all, to push the metaphor a bit further, singing in the choir can be entertaining. One's participation in a collective must be meaningful rather than having it seem like laborious work all the time. This is where literature and film have significant roles in depicting the collective life and the problems that always arise when people live, work, and interact with each other. Some of the cultural and social depictions in literature and film may not be relatable to many outside readers, but human interactions differ only in degree than in kind. That is why dismissing North Korean literature for being purely propagandistic and contrived may be overlooking the more dynamic interplay between characters, the writer's literary devices, and the reception of such literature by the general public.

Unlike capitalist countries, North Korea does not have something equivalent to The New York Times Best Seller, Academy Awards ceremony for films, or Billboard chart for music. The North Korean public may have their own system of celebrating certain literary works, films, and songs over others, but nothing on the state level except for honorary awards given to writers of great Party loyalty. Regardless of ranking and celebrating individual works, North

Korea must still keep the masses entertained. Sonia Ryang may be correct in saying that everyone has to read, memorize, and be able to articulate the ideological contents in literary works at work, school, or other social events (2012, 25), but those literary works still have to be entertaining and moving. The people may have been more or less forced to read such literary works, but the taste of the readership also needs to be taken into account. According to Kim Hŭng-sŏp (1991), one of the ways short stories can be entertaining to the readers is through their brevity—the content is secondary. The shortness of short stories may be more appealing to the public today.

However, this is nothing new to criticisms on short stories in North Korea. In a roundtable discussion on "Thoughts on Short Stories," published in *Chosŏn Munhak* (October 1966), Ri Chŏng-suk states that she understands short stories to be short and not a comprehensive purview of an individual's life. The content of the short story must be palpable to the reader, which means that the structure, *syuzhet*, descriptions, expressions, and sentences should be short (Ri 1966, 96).[126] It is clear that Ri Chŏng-suk had her readers in mind when she wrote her thoughts on writing short stories. Despite the image of the North Korean society as being inculcated with political ideology through literature and the over-saturation of propaganda, both Ri Chŏng-suk and Kim Hŭng-sŏp seem to be sensitive to the readership. It is uncertain as to how much readers' input affects the writer's

[126] Ri Chŏng-suk uses the term *syuzhet* (narrative) in her article, which may give insights into her educational background.

ability to redesign a plot like the way South Korean viewers have some leverage on the outcome of a plot in drama series through fan letters or blogs. But according to former poet Ch'oe Chin-i, many writers received fan letters (how they were delivered is still a mystery), which comes to show that the public may not have direct access to alter or demand desirable stories from officials at the Department of Propaganda and Agitation or from the executives of the Writer's Union but that they can personally contact the writers and perhaps suggest to them to write certain narratives more using flattery.

Even within a stringent political system, there is always space for the writers to display their artistic creativity, which I believe the North Korean reader can easily identify. North Korean readers are capable of reading past overwrought political rhetoric and deciphering for themselves the writer's tactful approach, which Stephen Epstein calls the "implicit contract" between state, writer, and reader.[127] Epstein understands that "the reader's role in the implicit contract established with the state and author, then, is to allow his or her faith in the system to be reaffirmed" (2002, 48).

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, on the back side of most novellas and novels, there is an indication of the number of copies made for that particular work. These numbers typically range from 5,000-100,000 copies, depending on the prestige of the writer, the ideological content, and some other unknown factors. According to

[127] Epstein, Stephen. "On Reading North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium." *Acta Koreana* vol.5, no.1(January 2002): 33-50.

the DPRK Literature Encyclopedia in 2000, Ch'oe Hak-su's *Pyongyang sigan* (Pyongyang Time, 1976) was granted 250,000 copies by Kim Jong Il. This is unusually high for any writers to receive this kind of generosity from the Dear Leader. For the rest of the novels, it is unclear how some works are granted more copies than other. But one thing for sure, just because a novel was only granted 5,000 copies does not mean it was any less "popular" than a novel that was granted 100,000 copies. The Party can only disseminate the propaganda, but it cannot control the readers' subjective taste.

Without valid and reliable empirical data, it is extremely difficult to assess readers' preferences of certain literary works, writers, and genres. However, much like any society, there is no doubt that North Koreans, too, desire enjoyable readings and entertaining films. What the outside world often overlooks is the entertaining aspect of North Korean literature—that it is fun to read some of the fiction. Reading about the nation's revolutionary history against the Japanese colonialists, fighting against the imperialist Americans, marriage problems, divorce problems, disrespectful teenagers, obstinate parents, spies, double-agents, and many more have to be entertaining. There are moments of melodrama, suspense, action, and comedy. Of course there are obvious narrative patterns and repetitious plotlines such as "they lived happily ever after," "justice has been served," and "the good guy always wins." As much as these hackneyed plotlines work and entertain audiences from around the world, these also work for North Koreans. Propaganda must not be like swallowing rocks. Furthermore, it would be

short-sighted to accuse North Korea of only producing ideologically laden literature and film, whereas the rest of the world is free from political messages.

I admit that not all North Korean fiction is entertaining. As former North Korean writer Sŏng Hye-rang writes in her autobiography, "We had to find themes that praised the Party. Aside from writing about the optimism of the era, typical stories, or anything that supported the current political policies, we had to find ways to write about the Great Leader" (2000, 343).[128] While there are narratives that read as if the writer had copied someone else's writing or put no effort into being innovative. Some narratives completely lack luster and energy, which is literary critic Kim Hŭng-sŏp's criticism against these unmotivated writers. At the same time, there are works of fiction that enrapture the readers, compelling them to read and circulate it amongst themselves.[129] There are also films that the public enjoyed watching beyond the self-proclaimed masterpieces of *Sea of Blood* and *Flower Girl*. According to defectors, *Uri jip munje* (My Family's Problem, 1972) and its subsequent series are considered to be one of the

[128] Sŏng Hye-rang. *Tŭngnamu jip* (House of Wisteria) (Seoul: Chisik nara, 2000), 393. Sŏng Hye-rang is the younger sister of Sŏng Hye-rim, with whom Kim Jong Il fell in love when he met her on a movie set. They were never official married because perhaps Kim Jong Il did not want to present an actress as his wife to Kim Il Sung. Sŏng Hye-rim is the mother of Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Il's eldest son, whom Kim Jong Il truly loved according to Sŏng Hye-rang.

[129] Defectors testified that Paek Nam-ryong's *Friend* was a novella that was heavily circulated among friends at the university dorms. It was circulated not because it is a "dissident" work, but because it was so entertaining that readers wanted to read it over and over again.

most memorable films produced in North Korea because of the comedic factor and the sheer entertaining plotline.[130]

As I mentioned in the Introduction, my method of selecting literary works to analyze in this dissertation is an *unmethodological* one. I chose from the ones I found particularly entertaining. On a personal level, I am biased toward literary works published in the early to mid 1960s, prior to what is known as Juche literature. But the true challenge was being able to find entertaining works of fiction from the era of the so-called Juche literature, where my presuppositions about such literary works already prepared me for prosaic plots and overwrought propagandistic discourse. However, it wasn't difficult to find entertaining works, which reinforced the fact that North Korean writers are capable of slipping in their *auteur*-ship amid heavy demands to produce highly politicized literature.

This is not to say that North Korean literature is not highly politicized or that some writers are capable of distinguishing the political from the apolitical. On the contrary, *all* literature is political whether or not it is from North Korea or from South Korea. During Korea's colonial period, a group of writers pushed for what they coined "pure literature" (*sunsu munhak*) or art for art's sake. This was more or less a political move against proletariat or leftist literature that has gained popularity. Since Korea's national division, "pure literature" has become a major discourse and methodology of writing fiction for South Korea, which is a

[130] According to a survey conducted by Korean Film Council (KOFIC) in 2002, *My Family's Problem* was ranked high on top twenty-four films by defectors.

countermeasure to North Korea's politicized literature. I am not provoking an engage in a political debate with proponents of "pure literature," but rather to make obvious of the fact that writers who claim to write only "pure literature" is never innocent of its political purity. Hence, to say that North Korean literature is heavily politicized is not only redundant but beside the point of what else literature can do to its readers. Furthermore, for the Party and Department of Propaganda and Agitation to think that North Korean literature is only for political purposes of serving the nation-state and the Great Leader is also overlooking and underestimating the elusive nature of literature.

This dissertation by and large draws out moments in North Korean literature where changes have occurred and, more importantly, where changes must occur in order for the nation-state to be acknowledged as a sovereign state by the international community. That is, the DPRK's international recognition does not only have to be imposed by threats of nuclear weapons and missile tests but a more humanitarian effort of displaying the wealth of the nation's literature, art, film, and other cultural pride. The summer Arirang performance (despite its political content) has already been receiving global visibility for its grand scale and impeccable choreography. The DPRK's athletic performance at the Summer and Winter Olympics and FIFA World Cup have shown the world of its formidable talent. Hong Sŏk-jung's *Hwang Chin-i* (2002) impressed South Korean literary critics and some readers from around the world, demonstrating that the DPRK is fully capable of producing literary works beyond the

monochromatic and monolingual political ideology. These are only a few examples of the potentiality of the DPRK and what it has done on the international stage. There is much more to be done in this growing field of North Korean Studies. My project attempts to show the intertextuality in the nation's literature to gesture toward generating comparative studies.

This dissertation analyzes several literary works that I find to be particularly entertaining and important in addressing the issues of memory, gender, and sexuality. These three issues create fault-lines in the narratives that are supposed to be read in a singular way. For Ri Hŭi-nam, memory does not simply function as a means to enable a character to carry out the Party's instructions or as a clear reference that retells the nation's glorious revolutionary past. Instead, memory slips away from the grips of time and space and constructs and different narrative of the individual. For Paek Nam-ryong, the discourse on gender construction is contrived and purposed for the patriarchal state. The notion of happiness or happy ending in *Friend* does not entail the reinstating of a harmonious patriarchal family but rather the ability of an individual to utter difference (or in the case of Ch'ae Sun-hŭi to remain silent), something other than what is prescribed to her. For Kim Kyo-sŏp, when a man and a woman (married or unmarried) work closely together night after night for an extended period of time unexpected incidents inevitably occur even if the two are working for the construction of the nation-state. Political ideology and moral principles may have some affect on the individuals' decision to advance an illicit relationship, but

ultimately Kim shows that human emotions are innately untamable. Furthermore, *Height of Life* reveals that extra-marital affairs also occur in the DPRK and cause unutterable pain within the family.

These are what I call marginal writings that occur in North Korean literature. They are *not* supposed to be written or read in this way. My critics may say that I've completely missed the context in which these works of fictions was written and that my readings are asymmetrical to the writers' intention. Some of my critics may even go so far as to say that my readings of these texts are based on my "Western" training, that I can only read them through "Western" lenses, and that no North Korean would read these works in the way I have. I do not refute any of these claims. Rather, I am open to learn the singular "context" that threads across the entirety of the DPRK (past, present, and future) and the uncontestable authorial intent. There is no doubt that I've been trained in the United States and in England, but I invite my critics to explain the notion of "Western," which ineluctably implies an "Eastern," "Northern," and "Southern" way of reading. Furthermore, I will pay my utmost attention to my critics who can explain to me how the twenty-five some odd million North Koreans would read and interpret fiction.

North Korea is constantly and rapidly changing. On the political level, the salient Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the Fourth Central Party in 1967 made Juche ideology and the monolithic policy as the centerpieces of national discourse. Although the meeting signified this change, the nation as a whole was undergoing

this development for some time before and immediately after. In other words, this change did not happen overnight, but once it was made official, the change took some years before such discourse dominated the entire nation. Not every Party official, Party secretary, cadre, or soldier—those who may be considered representatives, advocates, or close followers of Kim Il Sung—obeyed the dictates of the new political discourse. Controlling these officials (needless to say the masses) at remote locales of the nation was always an arduous task. Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot guidance was limited to one man's vision. The next best method of making the entire nation more visible to the Kim leaders was dispatching more pairs of eyes and ears. A group of university students, mostly from Kim Il Sung University but not limited to this institution only, became the special task force that conveyed reports of what was happening in the nation directly to Kim Jong Il. This group was called the Three Revolutions Team Members (*sojowŏn*). They still nominally exist today—occasionally there will be newspaper articles in *Rodong Sinmun* written about the *sojowŏn* working tirelessly for the public. The *sojowŏn* title no longer carries the same political weight it once did during the formative years of firmly establishing Kim Il Sung and later Kim Jong Il's political superiority. This group may have helped boost the morale of the people to support Kim Jong Il's succession (or at least make the transition smoother), but once Kim Jong Il took over the country after his father's untimely death in 1994, the *sojowŏn* became more ineffective.

On the economic level, the DPRK has certainly weathered irreparable severities, especially during the mid-1990s with famine, floods, and the death of the Great Leader. My argument that the DPRK is not a top-down power structure but a dispersed network of local administration and provincial governments could not be more evident than during the food crisis and food distribution. Kwon and Chung (2012) show that Pyongyang government's uncoordinated distribution of food led to crisis in the northeast region of Hamgyŏng Province, but the local officials and residents found means to survive despite such negligence from the Party. As the food crisis became more severe, people began bartering and establishing marketplaces to support themselves. "There is ample testimony that local party leaders at the town or province level, unlike their superiors in Pyongyang, were actually supportive of the local residents' survival efforts, including their mobility and marketplace activity" (Kwon and Chung 2012, 168).

The emergence of these marketplaces not only produced a different collective formation among the buyers, vendors, and local officials but also exposed the public to Chinese, South Korean, Japanese, and American products and goods. Many younger defectors testify to watching South Korean dramas and listening to pop music secretly. Despite the common understanding that North Korea is a completely enclosed state with borders tightly secured and watched and some horror stories of North Korean guards firing openly at defectors, the economic and cultural borders are always porous, allowing for exchange of both products and ideas. I am not denying that the North Korean border is heavily

secured or that defectors risk their lives to escape; border control that prevents *anyone* from leaving or entering is a tragedy of the modern nation-state. I am simply adding alternative images to the often misunderstood images of North Korea, that there are actual people living there and enjoying the company of their family and friends. Media particularly from the United States savors footages or reports of daring defectors and is shocked or resistant in showing North Koreans who enjoy life in the country because this would be a political paradox to the United States government's discourse on the so-called rogue countries.

As more research on defectors and quotidian life in North Korea emerges, I do not doubt that preconceived discourses on the fatalistic nation-state will be met with such paradoxes, that sentiments of feeling sorry for North Koreans and the impetus to "democratize" the DPRK are extensions of imperialist attitude. The elimination of Saddam Hussein, for example, may have removed a dictator, but the gesture of democratizing Iraq in the model of the free world countries was imperialistic from the start and has confronted pockets of resistance that has crippled US international relations with the Middle East and with some "allied" nations. With the sudden death of Kim Jong Il on December 17, 2011, discourse on the "collapse" of North Korea saturated the global media once again, hoping to find an opening through which the free world can free North Koreans from decades of oppression. And once again, the general South Korean public seemed to display wariness of such discourse. Perhaps it was indifference to unification, negligence to the typical discussions of high politics, or the dismissal to the

possibility of a nation-state collapsing because of a deceased leader—the nation didn't collapse when Kim Il Sung died, why would it collapse now that Kim Jong Il died? North Korea consists more than just Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and now Kim Jong Un, and more research is required to open up possibilities for exchanging dialogues at the roundtable of literary minds and literariness, or perhaps even extending it to what Gayatri Spivak calls the *depoliticization* of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come.[131] That is to say, North Korean Studies must take strides to depoliticize Area Studies that secures U.S. power in the post-Cold War era and orientalism that perpetuates the radical otherness of the DPRK. The literary works that I examine in this dissertation expose the changes occurring within the totalitarian regime, legitimizing the need to read the works for its literariness rather than as merely another component of state propaganda.

Much of this project is indebted to the *spirit* of Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. But whose spirit? Which spirit? That of the late Jacques Derrida? That of Karl Marx? Or that of the specter of communism that haunts Europe? Or that of Derrida's works on spirits and specters starting from Plato to Hegel to Heidegger? Or that of his methodology of reading and writing? Derrida has faced his opposition and critics during his career, and now, with his passing on has

[131] Spivak, Gayatri Chakrovorty. *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 13.

Derrida's spirit also departed from academia? Or does the spirit of deconstruction haunt us in a different form or forms? There is certainly, as Derrida extrapolates in *Specters*, a fear of Marx, of Marxism(s), and of Communism(s), which may account for a strong disavowal to countries that uphold or wave the red flag of communism. The fear precedes any communication or dialogue with these communist states, which then leads to immediate political action: containment policies, the dissemination of anti-communist discourse, the dehumanization of the radical other, security-related policies that initiated Area Studies or Comparative Literature in academic institutions during the Cold War, and a more recent trend in Korean Studies of orientalizing North Korea in efforts to "know" this more or less peculiar group of people under a peculiar political regime.

The attempt to silence, marginalize, exorcise, and forever shut the door on difference(s) is not only a phenomenon that happens in draconian, military, communist regimes like North Korea. On the contrary, every nation (as far as it considers itself a sovereign nation), pockets of culture within that nation, ethnic groups (whether they are the majority or minority), religious groups, and even among family members have a tendency to exclude difference(s). However, it is impossible to eliminate the specters of difference(s) for the plain reason that spirits always return to haunt the very organization or institution that exorcized them. This is the logic of haunting or, what Derrida calls, *hauntology*.[132]

[132] In spoken French, hauntology and ontology are indistinguishable. It is only through writing that their difference is read. For Derrida, ontology as the thinking of being or of the Same is always already haunted by its difference. Emmanuel

Much like any dissertation project, my research on North Korean literature has become an organic inquiry. What started as a curiosity has enabled me to read difference(s) in this national literature, that there were many specters that haunted the totality of the national discourse. For my dissertation, I have decided to narrow my scope to the role of women and mothers in the narratives as the perpetual specter that haunts the patriarchal system. Hegel knew this all too well when he wrote that "womankind is the eternal irony of the community." For Hegel, the irony of womankind is the condition of possibility for her to retaliate against the state while, at the same time, she resorts back to producing male subjects for the state. Hegel seems to view that woman, or more specifically Antigone, is a reparable glitch in his system of *Aufhebung* that constantly moves toward perfecting the patriarchal state, that woman is a minor setback to the completion of Absolute Spirit (*Geist*). However, I do not read women in North Korean literature as the radical other to the patriarchal state but as ones who conditions the possibility of providing spaces that have been otherwise enclosed by state discourse. That is to say, there are other or differing voices that emerge immanently from the monlingualism of the state, which in my case of reading North Korean literature happens to be found mostly in women.

Lévinas is no foreigner to this discussion, where thinking otherwise than Being preoccupied much of his career. Derrida's playful gesture of hauntology prevails throughout his career and writings. And it is in this spirit of reading and writing that I approach North Korean literature.

My dissertation was not intended to be read as a "feminist" work, as loaded as this term may be. I have no training in feminism or women studies, but I have applied the *spirit* of feminism to my research because of its continuous efforts to provide other readings than the dominant reading practices taught at most academic institutions. I am aware of the different "camps" of feminists from Europe, North America, and Asia, and I do not hold any particular bias to a camp or a feminist thinker (although Irigaray has been cited in this dissertation on numerous occasions). This is because my project is not to read North Korean literature through feminist lenses but that the literature always already immanently contains its differing voices, which I believe is compliant to the feminist spirit.

Understood in this way, North Korean literature shows endless possibilities other than the monolingual method of reading. Reading the women, their resistance to obsequiously conforming to gender politics, and their agency within a patriarchal social order are not phenomena of the 1970s and 1980s North Korean literature only. I believe a closer reading of literary works produced today in the DPRK may also lend a deeper grasp of the dynamic literary world of the writers. That is, if we shed our preconceived notions of what North Korean literature was, is, and will be, and set aside Kim Il Sung, the Party, and the state ideology for a moment (despite how intricately they are connected to works of fiction), then we may perhaps be able to recognize the voice of another human being.

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