

The Literary Ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il: An Introduction to North Korean Meta-Authorial Perspectives

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Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il

Abstract

This essay makes a comparative examination of the North Korean *Juche*-Stalinist literary ideas in Kim Il Sung's *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* and Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema*. Outlined are the backgrounds of the Kims, their definitions of literature, their conceptions of the writer, and their character typologies of heroes and villains. The essay concludes with a critical summary, discusses the problems of the meta-author and intentional fallacy, and proposes reading strategies for interpreting North Korean literature.

Keywords

Juche, Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, North Korean Literature, Socialist Realism, Stalinism

Introduction

Kim Il Sung's *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* (1972) and Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema* (1973) are two North Korean cultural policy statements that the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Pyongyang translated and published in English over three decades ago. Neither document, however, has been formally outlined on comparative terms in English-language scholarship. Since the time both works appeared and especially with the onset of the post-Soviet 1990s, major structural changes have occurred in North Korea: economic crisis, famine, capitalist "reform" measures, penetration of foreign capital, cracks in the information control system, sociological and psychological shifts, and the turn from party to military dictatorship in the post-Kim Il Sung regime of Kim Jong Il.¹ Literature policies have also evolved from doctrinal espousal of slogans such as *socialist realist* literature, to *Juche* (self-reliance) literature, and, recently, to *Songun* (military-first) literature. The national literature is adapted to the changing policies and tactics of party and state. Consequently, overreliance on two works from the 1970s, whether they were written by or for Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, runs the risk of being out-of-date in the appraisal of North Korean cultural politics and state-controlled cultural production.

Despite the fact that *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* and *On the Art of the Cinema* are dated, both documents stand as political artifacts that are necessary in the analysis of North Korean literature and literary discourse. Their period-specific character and reflection of the political needs of the 1970s do not invalidate them as subjects of examination. There are at least four arguments in support of that case: (1) some of the fundamental political needs of the 1970s still exist among the ruling state bureaucratic caste, for example, defense of their social privileges and the so-called anti-Japanese guerrilla tradition; (2) there has been little change in North Korean literary

¹ See Andrei Lankov, "The Natural Death of North Korean Stalinism," *Asia Policy* 1 (January 2006), 95-122, for an overview of changes in North Korea from 1991 to 2006. See also Andrei Lankov, *North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2007). See Alzo David-West, "Stalinism, Post-Stalinism, and Neo-Capitalism: To Be or Not to Be?" *North Korean Review* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2008), 58-67, for a response to Lankov's claim that North Korea can no longer be regarded as Stalinist. See also Alzo David-West, "Marxism, Stalinism, and the *Juche* Speech of 1955: On the Theoretical De-Stalinization of North Korea," *Review of Korean Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2007), 127-152.

policy, the conceptual structure of the *Juche* theory of literature, and the works produced through the framework of “*Juche* realism” (Kim 2008; Kwon 2003, 503); (3) the two said documents contain the substance of the Soviet Stalinist- and Maoist-influenced concept of “*Juche*-oriented, revolutionary literature and art, national in form and socialist in content” that was first codified in Article 45 of the 1972 constitution and is retained in Article 52 of the 1998 constitution; and (4) the Kims’ definitions of literature, the writer, and characters are authoritative starting points for understanding the political heritage of North Korean literature. *Juche* was formally established as the state ideology and as the “monolithic ideology” (*yuil sasang*) of the Workers’ Party of Korea in 1972.

Without the presuppositions and potential confusions of applying a complex and possibly unfamiliar theoretical apparatus to *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* and *On the Art of the Cinema*, the author will provide a formal descriptive outline of Kim Il Sung’s and Kim Jong Il’s backgrounds, their ideas of literature as party literature, their understandings of the party writer, and their typologies of heroes and villains. Because these problems are not original in North Korean studies, it should be emphasized that this paper is intended for an interdisciplinary and even non-specialist audience, with the aim of introducing and expositing certain literary-specific concepts and categories in an accessible form. Delimited focus on the literary does not suggest disregard of society, history, and politics. North Korean literary policy and literature cannot be understood without those contexts. Scholarship on North Korea can help, since much research centers on politics, history, and economics. While the outline of the Kims’ ideas that follows is more directly relevant to questions of literature, it is not meant as a substitute for the empirical and theoretical study of North Korean literature in the original or in translation, but as a companion to such study.

Kim Il Sung

A Chinese Communist Party guerrilla commander and Soviet Army captain turned leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung (1912-1994) was the son of Korean Presbyterian Christian nationalists who relocated twice from colonial Korea to Manchuria in 1919 and 1924. Enrolled in Korean and Chinese schools, he later associated with

illegal student groups linked with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Kim was arrested and expelled from middle school in 1929, serving a one-year prison sentence for attending meetings held by the South Manchurian Communist Youth Association. Thereafter, he abandoned academics, became a CCP member, and joined a guerrilla band. Into his adulthood, he served with the CCP-led Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, which raided Japanese police and army outposts, from around 1931 to 1941. Defeated, Kim, his wife Kim Jong Suk, and surviving partisans fled across the Sino-Russian border into Khabarovsk, where they were absorbed into the Soviet 88th Special Brigade. With the 15 August 1945 joint United States-Soviet occupation of Korea – after thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule and the division of the Korean Peninsula into American and Soviet zones of influence (the result of deals between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill at Yalta) – Kim and his partisans entered the Soviet Army-occupied northern Korean city of Pyongyang that September.

With Soviet support, Kim soon became chairman of the Soviet Army-created North Korean Workers' Party in 1946 and nominal ruler of the North Korean *deformed workers' state* (a hybrid state established under Stalinist leadership without a workers' revolution), whose construction Soviet military authorities oversaw until the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 9 September 1948. But it was only after the Korean War (1950-1953) and the genocidal American bombing campaign that Kim rose to the status of all-powerful dictator, eliminating his political rivals in the Great Purge of 1956 to 1960. The prelude to this campaign of terror was his 28 December 1955 speech in opposition to the tactically initiated Soviet "de-Stalinization" campaign, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work," which was addressed to party propagandists and agitators.² That policy statement, which recalled "serious ideological errors" (*k'ōdaran sasangjōk oyu*) on the "literary front" (*munhak chōnsōn*) and dealt with such problems in "propaganda work" (*sōnjōn saōp*), was made two months before so-called "de-Stalinization" was officialized by Nikita Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in

² *Juche* literally means "subject" or "main principle" but is understood in North Korea as national "self-reliance" in accordance with the nationalist Stalinist program of *socialism in one country*. North Korean sources in English translate *Juche sasang* as the "*Juche* idea." Partial translation, however, is misleading. The term is more accurately rendered as "subjectivism" or "national subjectivism."

February 1956. Thereupon, Kim consolidated his guerrilla comrades-in-arms in the party and state bureaucracy. Throughout his political career, Kim Il Sung was not an aesthetician, literary theorist, or philosopher in the proper sense of those terms. Nevertheless, as the credited founder of the national subjectivist *Juche* ideology and its prescriptive “*Juche*-oriented ideas of art and literature,” he is exalted in North Korea with such titles as “peerless patriot, national hero, ever-victorious, iron-willed brilliant commander.”

Kim Il Sung received a perfunctory introduction to aesthetics and literature during his youth in Northeast China. That is confirmed in officially sanctioned North Korean sources, such as Baik Bong’s hagiography *Kim Il Sung* and Kim Il Sung’s autobiography *With the Century* (*Segi wa toburō*). As the latter work evinces, Kim’s formal and, it would seem, most decisive acquaintance with literary matters occurred when he studied with the Chinese author Sang Wol (Shang Yue), who taught literature for six months at the private Yuwen Middle School in 1928. A twenty-six-year-old CCP member, Shang Yue reportedly exposed Kim to Chinese narrative works and Russian fiction in translation, including Maxim Gorky’s novel *Mother* (*Mat’*, 1907), his play *Enemies* (*Vragi*, 1906), and other assorted writings. Shang also reinforced the youth’s illusions in the perspective of leftwing peasant nationalism, which may have reflected ideological changes in the CCP after the defeat of the second Chinese revolution of 1925-1927. Kim and his mentor were fond of chatting about books and the social mission of literature. Shang Yue is quoted as saying, “[A]n author’s work reflects his social upbringing, but what is more important is the author’s world outlook.” He also explained that “literature *should be* like a lighthouse that guides humanity to *perfection*. Machinery enhances productivity and *literature makes humans that run machines more perfect*” (Kim 2001; emphasis added). Moreover, the teacher encouraged Kim to become a “proletarian writer.”

Shang Yue provided a didactic and moral theory of *art as instruction*, which apparently had some effect on the youthful Kim, who would eventually co-author simple anti-Japanese political dramas, such as *Sea of Blood* (*Pi’bada*), in the mid-1930s. These nationalist allegorical plays, typically performed for village and peasant audiences, served both propaganda and recruitment purposes in the Manchurian national-liberation

armed struggle against Japanese colonialism and fascism. Apart from Kim Il Sung's brief literary encounters in middle school and his forays into amateur playwriting, he does not appear to have been interested in advancing the utilitarian political aesthetic he assimilated in his adolescence. Although he seems to have accumulated considerable, albeit hasty, reading experience in his Yuwen days – his political syllabus also included works by Joseph Stalin – this generally occurred outside of school. Kim was not systematically educated in matters of aesthetics and literature, and his ideas on the arts remained politically motivated.

Definition of Literature

Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution (1972) is a compilation of twelve revised political speeches and excerpts from 1946 to 1970 and is an expanded reedition of the work of the same title published seven years earlier in Korean (*Uri hyŏngmyŏng esŏ ūi munhak yesul ūi immu*, 1965).³ Despite the limited and uneven distribution of literary-specific statements in *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution*, Kim's definitions of literature and his ideas on authorship can be distilled. For Kim Il Sung, literature is a domain that must be subjected to total control under the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). Central to his ideas is what he describes as the subject (*juche*) of the revolution, namely, the "Korean revolution" (*Chosŏn hyŏngmyŏng*) itself and not "any other country's revolution," as he says in the anti-Soviet reformism *Juche* speech of 1955 (Kim 1972, 19; Kim 1960, 326). Predominant themes Kim assigns to literary art consist of ideological indoctrination, constructing a national "socialist" culture, and cultivating patriotic attitudes. According to him, there is "nothing extraordinary about literature and art" and some "clumsiness does not matter" in its state-controlled production (Kim 1972, 113). This orientation essentially regards the creation of literary works as a craft, as seen in the statement "[G]ive them a bit of artistic polish. That's all there is to it" (Kim 1972, 112).

³ The 1965 Korean edition of Kim Il Sung's *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* contains four speeches: "On Some Problems of Our Literature and Arts" (*Uri munhak yesul ūi myŏt kaji munje taehayŏ*, 1951), "For the High-Level Development of Our Literature" (*Uri yesul ūl nop 'ŭn sujunero palchŏnshik'igi wihayŏ*, 1951), "Let Us Create Literature and Arts Suitable to the Chollima Age" (*Chollima shidae sangŭngha munhak yesul ch'angjohaja*, 1960), and "On Creating Revolutionary Literature and Arts" (*Hyŏngmyŏngchŏk munhak yesul ūl ch'angjakhal taehayŏ*, 1964).

More fundamentally, literary art in Kim's perspective is a political craft:

[P]eople read literary works not for killing time, instead of taking a nap, but for acquiring a deeper understanding of life, learning from the lofty spirit of ordinary people who devotedly serve the country and the people and for gaining confidence in the happy future of mankind. (Kim 1972, 9)

That is to say, literature must be socio-functional. Reflecting his military background, the late North Korean leader describes literature as an educational “weapon” that is subordinated to the line and policy of the WPK and which gives prominence to “positive examples.” Accordingly, he demands a “heroic” literature that portrays an “epic reality” and a “full life.” He also bans the genre of satire, claiming that it is a foreign import and alien to the “natural idiosyncrasy” of Koreans (Kim 1972, 97). “Literature and art which sing the praises of socialism are necessary,” Kim says (Kim 1972, 123). This is underscored by another point in *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution*, in the 1955 *Juche* speech, when Kim dismisses the Russian poets Alexander Pushkin and Vladimir Mayakovsky as “foreigners,” or outlanders (*oegugsaram*), because they cannot evoke “national pride” or ethnic-racial pride (*minjokchök chabushim*) in school children (Kim 1972, 23; Kim 1960, 330).

Although *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* represents almost three decades of political intervention in the creative process, the theoretical level of the writing remains low. Besides the Soviet Stalinist influence, the work also uses Maoist formulations: “go to the masses, mix with them, talk to them in plain language and write what they want”; “the genuine creator of great art is always the people”; “There should be lively criticism and self-criticism in the creative activities”; “A party divorced from the masses is like a fish out of water”; “The people are the real critics of art. No critic is wiser than the people”; “if the writers and artists do not mix with the masses [. . .] they will become aristocrats and bureaucrats”; and “guard against professionalism in literary and artistic activities” (Kim 1972, 2, 11, 12, 40, 94, 137, 151). Considering Kim's past CCP membership (1931-1941), the Chinese military presence in North Korea (1950-1958), and the leanings of Pyongyang to Beijing after the Sino-Soviet dispute, which

became a public split in 1963, the appearance of Maoist phrases is not surprising.

The Writer as Combatant and Engineer

Writers must be loyal to and obey the WPK. Kim Il Sung calls them “combatants on the cultural front,” “engineers of the human soul,” and “soldiers,” who must develop national culture, promote patriotic ideas, and cultivate victorious convictions. These non-Marxist notions derive from the speech by Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin’s cultural czar, at the 1934 First Soviet Writers’ Congress, where *socialist realism* and its main tenets *partiinnost’* (party spirit), *narodnost’* (popular spirit), and *ideinnost’* (ideological expression) were promulgated (Zhdanov 1950). Other Zhdanovist principles are *bezkonfliktnost’* (conflictlessness), *klassovost’* (class spirit), and *tipichnost’* (typicality). During his exile in the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1945, Kim Il Sung met Zhdanov in Moscow on 14 August 1945 to discuss the prospect of state-building on the Korean Peninsula (Korean News Service 1998). Furthermore, the DPRK was constructed under the Soviet Army during the era of “high Zhdanovism” in the Soviet Union, and *socialist realism* became official cultural policy with the founding of the North Korean Federation of Literature and Art in 1946. The Stalinist-Zhdanovist tradition is seen in present-day North Korea in the use of the terms *dangsŏng* (party spirit), *rodong kyegŭpsŏng* (working-class spirit), and *inminsŏng* (popular spirit).

Hyun-soo Lim observes that “A. Zhdanov’s interpretation of socialist realism became the guiding rule of the literary control framework of North Korea” (Lim 1989, 117). Vladimir Pucek adds, “Only one approach – socialist realism in its extreme form – received official approval” (Pucek 1996, 70). Confirming these statements, a North Korean source from 1959 describes *socialist realism* as “the only creative method of our literature and arts” (*Korean Handbook* 1959, 160). While the *Juche* ideology and “*Juche*-oriented ideas of art and literature” were introduced in the mid-1960s and 1970s, *socialist realism* continued to be “the only valid creative style of our time” into the 1980s (Chai and Hyon 1980, 23). Brian Myers, who overprivileges the national form and narratology of Soviet literature, has claimed that *socialist realism* failed in North Korea (Myers 1994). Kwon Youngmin explains, however, that the North Korean state

“advocates socialist realism as the one and only proper principle in artistic creation,” and “the concept of socialist realism is restricted to emphasizing self-reliance and revolutionary thought based on Kim Il Sung’s Chuch’e theory” (Kwon 1991, 58).

“Socialist realism constitutes the essential element of aesthetics in North Korea” (Kwon 1991, 62). *Socialist realism* is adapted to the needs of the ruling national-Stalinist party and to national conditions. North Korean literature thus fulfills the tenets of party spirit, popular spirit, and ideological expression and is faithful to the Stalinist formula of “national in form and socialist in content” (*minjokchŏk hyŏngshik kwa sahoejuŭichŏk naeyong*). In the Stalinist perspective, national form is also ethnic form, and socialist content means adherence to the political program of *socialism in one country*.

Besides the prominent influence of Zhdanovist *socialist realist* principles on Kim Il Sung’s literary conceptions, the late North Korean leader mentions that writers must embrace the tradition of the Korea Artista Proleta Federatio (KAPF), the association of literary activists that functioned in colonial Korea from 1925 to 1935. Faced with mounting Japanese repression in 1927, KAPF assumed the character of a centralized political organization, described literature as a “weapon” and writers as “soldiers,” and declared the unity of politics and literature (Chee 1973, 236-37). Although the KAPF was internally divisive – some members were pro- and others anti-socialist – it is probable that most of its sections carried over the general tendency of leftwing Korean writers to urge resistance against Japanese imperialism and colonialism by identifying all Koreans as a “mass proletariat” race (Pihl 1977, 69). The result in Kim’s writing is a mixture of national-Stalinism and anti-colonial national-populism.

From the context of Kim’s discussion, he wants North Korean writers to retain the mass populist spirit of the KAPF. Li Gi Yong (Yi Ki-yŏng) is one KAPF writer mentioned by name. (Han Sŏrya, another KAPF write and the architect of the Kim Il Sung personality cult, is removed from the edition of the *Juche* speech published in *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution*.) Importantly, Yi became a major figure in North Korean letters after the Soviet liberation, authoring such novels as *Land* (*Tttang*, 1949) and *Tumen River* (*Tumangang*, 1961), both epic valorizations of the Korean peasantry and North Korean “socialism.” Through the writings of Yi and others, certain tendencies within the KAPF tradition are apparently maintained in North Korean *Juche*

literature. The so-called “proletarian literature” of the KAPF, however, opposed authoritarianism during the period of Japanese colonial-fascist rule in Korea and, for that reason, was crushed by the colonial government.

There are at least twelve commands Kim Il Sung gives to writers that are remanifested throughout *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution*: (1) “eliminate the survivals of Japanese imperialist ideas in literature”; (2) represent the “noble ideas and sentiments” of the people; (3) portray the people “engaged in the creation of a new life”; (4) depict the “creative labor and heroic struggle” of the people; (5) reveal the people’s “criticism and hatred of things old and of the love and longing for the new”; (6) present the “lofty patriotism” of the people; (7) depict the “heroism and fortitude” of the Korean People’s Army; (8) fortify the Army and people’s “confidence in victory”; (9) study orature and folklore; (10) educate the youth and students with a “brave fighting spirit”; (11) “skillfully sugar-coat” political messages for young people; and (12) scrutinize “factories and villages.” These orders directly lend themselves to Kim’s authorized characterizations of heroes and villains in North Korean literature.

Character Typologies: Heroes and Villains

According to Kim Il Sung, the demographic that qualifies for categorical heroic status consists of workers, peasants, office employees, and students, namely, children of the working masses and Chollima Riders, that is, model workers, North Korean Stakhanovites (Kim 1972, 9, 91). Obscuring the objective contradictions inherent in the political and class interests of workers and peasants, Kim subsequently illustrates a universal heroic typology:

The hero [. . .] should be portrayed as a typical new man who is cheerful and optimistic, a man who does not succumb to difficulties and has a very strong will to move forward. We should skillfully depict a course of life in which a man, once subjected to humiliation and oppression, labours devotedly in the face of ordeals and succeeds at the end due to his strenuous efforts and moral improvement. (Kim 1972, 91)

With this definition of a *positive hero*, Kim establishes how love and love relationships are configured into the male and female positive personalities:

Love between men and women of a new type must serve the noble aims of the revolutionary cause, and be closely linked with the struggle for victory in the revolution. Our films, therefore, should hit out at the decadent love of those who forget the revolutionary cause and indulge only in personal enjoyment, and should exemplify the noble and beautiful love of a new type of young people who are waging a heroic struggle for the great aims of [national] socialist construction, helping and leading each other forward. (Kim 1972, 92)

This formula incarnates into the body of the central *positive hero* the virtues of asceticism and collectivism. Therewith, Kim gives an example of how to interweave the guiding social consciousness of the *positive hero* into the structure of literary plot. He outlines a hypothetical war film, the protagonist of which is a simple soldier: (1) “start [. . .] with a soldier’s reminiscences of a hero”; (2) “associate the hero’s life in the past with his present life”; (3) “show the hero’s childhood” (education, parents, friends, girlfriend); (4) “describe how bravely the hero fought the enemy”; (5) describe “what impressions he got from the hero’s struggle”; and (5) “portray how [. . .] he is participating in the building of [national] socialism at present, how he fares today and how his heroic friend and his parents are getting along [. . .] thereby introducing topics of today’s life” (Kim 1972, 115). The hero here is the *be all* and *end all* of the text, a figurative construction and keystone without which the architecture of the work would be unable to stand.

Villains receive less attention in Kim Il Sung’s discussion, and their prescribed characterization is basically that of effigies or demonic agencies. The only real instruction is to arouse “hatred” and “hostility” against them, as well as the statement that simple reproduction of their atrocities in war-related works is insufficient to provoke rage and revulsion. Referring to the Korean War, Kim first limits villains to “U.S. imperialists” and the “Syngman Rhee clique” (i.e., after the American-installed South Korean president and government). He describes American militarists with words such as “sly,” “heinous,” and “the most abominable barbarians of modern times.” Two-

dimensional as these descriptions are, Kim does base his views on war crimes committed in the 1950 to 1953 conflict, which he describes in 1951 as follows:

The U.S. robbers have reduced our towns and villages to ashes and are slaughtering our people en masse. The American missionaries who once behaved themselves as apostles of “God” in Korea are now bringing pregnant women together by scores and shooting them all at once with carbines, and are running over children with tanks. The “gentlemen” of Wall Street who used to boast arrogantly of the “Goddess of Liberty” to the world, now carry Korean girls stripped naked in cars and tanks, perpetrating all kinds of outrages and atrocities against them which surpass all human imagination. (Kim 1972, 10)

Despite the documented atrocities and violent sex crimes perpetrated by the United States Armed Forces in the Korean War,⁴ the villains in Kim’s conception of literature are neither rounded nor individualized characters nor are they supposed to be fully human – only killers, rapists, monsters, bastards, and so forth. Later, albeit in a non-literary context, “spies, waverers, nepotists, parochialists and factionalists” who plot “to make people distrust one another and set them at odds with each other to disintegrate our ranks from within” are added to the villainous typology (Kim 1972, 43). Outside of war literature, these other figures represent negative internal forces that threaten the “harmony” of postwar “socialist” society in North Korea. As such, they must be identified and rooted out. Kim Jong Il’s *On the Art of the Cinema* inherits and reasserts these ideas more systematically.

⁴ Sexual crimes connected to U.S. and UN soldiers increased during the Korean War (Lee 2006, 98). See documented sex crimes against Korean women in Commission of International Association of Democratic Lawyers, *Reports on Investigations in Korea and China: March-April 1952* (Brussels: International Association of Democratic Lawyers, 1952), 20, 23-27; *Communiqués of the Investigating Committee of the United Democratic Fatherland Front of Korea Regarding the Atrocities Committed by the American Aggressors and the Li Seung Man Clique* (Pyongyang: Union of Democratic Youth of Korea, 1951), 65-69, 72-74, 85-88; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 706, 904n119, 904n120; and Charles J. Hanley et al., *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 102-103, 189-190, 196.

Kim Jong Il

Kim Jong Il (1942) had a privileged childhood in North Korea and is officially reported to have been born in a secret guerrilla camp on Mount Paekdu located on the border between Korea and Manchuria. Western and South Korean scholars, however, have argued that he was born in 1941 in a Russian military camp near Khabarovsk in the Soviet Far East. Kim spent his early years in the Soviet Union; he was sheltered in China during the Korean War; he completed his general education in North Korea; and he enrolled into Kim Il Sung University in September 1960. Writing a thesis titled “The Position and the Role of the County in Socialist Construction,” dealing with his father’s county-centered agricultural policies, Kim Jong Il earned the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in economics with a concentration in political economy. Unlike his peers, he was exempted from compulsory military service. A month after his May 1964 graduation, Kim was assigned party duties, beginning in the Department of Organization and Guidance of the Central Committee of the WPK, where he engaged in cultural, ideological, and propaganda work. A rising spokesman of party policy on the arts, he soon intervened at a major annual film conference, the Aesthetic Review Meeting, where he banned discussion on “foreign” film concepts and ordered the burning of the entire conference archive: “Your sole yardstick in creative work is the President’s teaching and Party policy.” He subsequently reorganized the conference as the “Meeting for the Study of the Great Leader’s Artistic and Literary Thought” (Choe 1985, 59-64).

Kim Jong Il’s involvement in film and literary administration became more pronounced, and he apparently headed a wave of denunciations to counter the relatively liberalizing artistic influences of the post-Stalin Soviet Union (Choe 1985, 55-8; Tak, Kim, and Pak 1985, 165-6). In 1967, he was assigned to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the WPK and organized the Paekdusan Production Unit (*Paekdusan Ch’angjak tan*) for filmmaking. He also ordered the formation of a writers’ collective called the April 15 Literary Production Unit (*4.15 Munhak Ch’angjak tan*) to write novels about his family – namely, the *Immortal History* (*Pulmyŏl ūi yŏkssa*) series, which became a fifteen-volume epic saga of Kim Il Sung (*Kim Jong Il* 1998, 98). Being a crucial year, 1967 was when Kim Il Sung’s rule became

indisputable, the “great leader” (*suryŏng*) system was institutionalized, and when Kim Jong Il reportedly purged opponents of his father’s dictatorship. The opposition leaders Pak Kum-ch’ol and Yi Hyo-sun were found out when they commissioned a film and play that did not pay tribute to the all-powerful leader. Also around this time, Kim Jong Il worked under the influence of WPK theoreticians Hwang Chang-yop and Yang Hyong-sop to reconstruct and systemize the *Juche* ideology (Petrov 2003; Suh 1998, 18). From 1968, Kim Jong Il began to oversee production of cinematic versions of the 1930s Manchurian guerrilla plays: *Sea of Blood*, Parts 1 and 2 (*Pi’bada*, 1969), *The Fate of a Self-Defense Corps Man* (*Han chawi tanwŏn ŭi unmyŏng*, 1970), *The Flower Girl* (*Kkot p’anŭn ch’ŏnyŏ*, 1972), and others. These films were followed by “revolutionary operas” (*hyŏngmyŏng kagŭk*) starting with the adaptation of *Sea of Blood* in 1971, the same year Kim Jong Il became head of the Department of Culture and Arts of the Central Committee of the WPK. *Sea of Blood* became the preeminent model work of the genre thereafter known as the “*Sea of Blood*-style opera” (*Pi’bada shik hyŏngmyŏng kagŭk*).

Having acquired almost a decade of political experience in the state arts bureaucracy, Kim Jong Il delivered the series of essays that was published as *On the Art of the Cinema* on 11 April 1973, expounding the “*Juche*-oriented ideas of art and literature.” At this time, Kim Il Sung launched the Three-Revolution Team Movement (later changed to the Three-Revolution Red Flag Movement) to build youth and party support for his son’s succession. In September, the movement was placed under the control of Kim Jong Il, whom the WPK soon elected as party secretary in charge of organization, propaganda, and agitation (Jo 1986, 1095-96). Through the second half of the 1970s, Kim Jong Il continued to coordinate cultural activities and ascend the bureaucratic party hierarchy. He became a member of the Politburo in 1974 and was awarded the highest medal in North Korea, the First Order of Kim Il Sung, in 1979. By the 1980s, at the summit of the WPK – though appointed General Secretary in 1997 – he had published several treatises on the *Juche* ideology and established himself as the sole authority of his father’s ultranationalist Stalinist doctrine. He also led monumental architectural projects, for example, the Tower of the *Juche* Idea and the Arch of Triumph, in observance of Kim Il Sung’s seventieth and eightieth birthday celebrations.

Kim Jong Il was made second in command of the North Korean regime following

the Sixth Congress of the WPK on 10 October 1980. But his anointment had more or less been assured by birth and with Article 61 of the 1972 constitution as follows: “The revolutionary fighters, the families of revolutionary and patriotic martyrs, the families of the People’s Army men, and the honored disabled veterans enjoy *the special protection of the state*” (*Socialist Constitution* 1972, 19; emphasis added). This “legal” sanctification of a hereditary military caste and basis for dynastic succession of power is retained in Article 76 in the 1998 revised constitution. After Kim Il Sung succumbed to a massive heart attack in 1994, his son and heir became the absolute ruler of North Korea. Kim Jong Il, like his father, has also been lauded in North Korean publications as a “great thinker and theoretician, outstanding genius of leadership, boundlessly benevolent teacher of the people, and the great leader of the century.”

Definition of Literature

Kim Jong Il’s *On the Art of the Cinema* (1973) is a 329-page volume – twice the size of *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* – that is divided into eight chapters: (1) Life and Literature, (2) Directing for the Cinema, (3) Actor and Character, (4) Camera and Image, (5) Screen Art and Fine Art, (6) Scenes and Music, (7) Art and Creative Endeavour, and (8) Guiding the Creative Process. Despite the title, originally *Film Art Theory* (*Yŏnghwa yesul ron*) in Korean,⁵ the book also embraces literature. As Kim Jong Il’s hagiographers have explained: “[T]he work contains theories on the creation and development of literature and art in general,” and, “it is an encyclopedia on literature and art which has developed the Juche-oriented theory of President Kim Il Sung on literature and art, systemizing the theories on the motion pictures and on literature in an integrated way” (Tak, Kim, and Pak 1985, 188-9). *On the Art of the Cinema* is regarded as a major “textbook” in North Korea, and Kim Jong Il maintains that life and literature are to be modeled on the “Juche idea.” Working upon this conception and its

⁵ The 1977 Korean edition of *On the Art of the Cinema* includes three speeches that are not published in the 1989 English edition: “On the Ideological and Artistic Characteristics of the Immortal Classic Masterpiece *The Fate of a Self-Defense Corps Man*” (*Pulŭi kochŏnjŏk myŏngjak “Han chawi tanwŏn ūi unmyŏng” ūi sasang yesuljŏk t’ŭkssŏng e taehayŏ*, 1970), “Some Problems in the Creation of Masterpieces” (*Taejak ch’angjak eso chegidoe nŭn myŏt kaji munje*, 1968), and “Let Us Create Many More Revolutionary Films that Reflect Socialist Reality” (*Sahoejuŭi hyŏnshil ūl panyŏngha hyŏngmyŏngjŏk yŏnghwa rŭl tŏ mani ch’angjakhaja*, 1970).

nationalist demands on art, he comments on subjects ranging from literary theory, directing, acting, camerawork, screen art (costumes, makeup, props, and scenery), film music, speed campaigns, and administrative assessment, essentially outlining party policy on these subjects in the form of political commands and directives.

The only figure of authority Kim Jong Il invokes is his father, the “great leader” Kim Il Sung, and the same basic utilitarian principles are reproduced. While observing the political and ideological inheritances in *On the Art of the Cinema*, one should note that the work is written with some understanding of the constructive elements of the literary text, such as setting, plot, character, style, structure, atmosphere, and theme. Kim Jong Il also distinguishes the genre-specific logic of novel writing and scriptwriting, noting that the former can more comprehensively embody period, social background, theater of activity, and major events (Kim 2001, 87). Here, the comprehension and definition of the formal aspects of literature adhere to the formulas of *socialist realism* as adapted to the national peculiarities of North Korea. Nationalism, patriotism, populism, and didacticism thereby figure prominently in the discussion.

Kim Jong Il affirms that art and literature are “indispensable to a fully human life” (Kim 2001, 3). Yet he qualifies this statement by saying that literary art is strictly an educational tool to inculcate state ideology into the national consciousness, to exhort people and inspire productivity, and to teach moral lessons in order for people to be obedient members of North Korean society. This literature is subsequently described as “popular art and literature,” “working-class art and literature,” “communist art and literature,” and “socialist, national art and literature.” In the final chapter of *On the Art of the Cinema*, Kim declares that art and literature are under the “direct control” of the WPK, that the arts constitute “part of the Party’s ideological work,” that this is “Party-oriented, people-oriented art and literature,” and that they are the “Party’s own art and literature” (Kim 2001, 305-10). Kim’s doctrinal definition of North Korean *Juche*-Stalinist *socialist realism* is as follows:

Communist art and literature are the endeavour to describe model examples of a new type of person who strives devotedly for the building of [national] socialist and communist society, in order to help develop the revolutionary outlook on the

world of all members of society and impart a strong impetus to the people's revolutionary struggle and their work of construction, in the course of which they transform themselves, society and nature in accordance with the principle of Juche. (Kim 2001, 303-4)

Art and literature are seen here as a branch of political ideology that portrays models and types through a form of nationalist allegory. Underscoring these views is Kim Jong Il's frequent emphasis on "emotions" and "emotional conviction" in the construction of narrative works. While he explains that emotional spontaneity is a force to be directed, *pathos* plays a central role in his definition of literature. He also says, "Books and film should *never* be created simply for the sake of entertainment" (Kim 2001, 49; emphasis added). The point is not unlike that made earlier by Kim Il Sung.

Humanics, Seed Theory, and the Writer

Two major theories in Kim Jong Il's arts doctrine are the theory of "humanics" (*inganhak*) and the "seed theory" (*chongjaron*). Both are employed in the first chapter of *On the Art of the Cinema* as justifications for party control of literary-artistic consciousness and creation. Presented as an abstract anthropocentric category, "humanics" designates literature to the domain of human affairs and human problems. It is also a didactic-homiletic theory which promotes moralistic works that focus on lofty ideas, setting high standards to teach people how to "live in an honourable fashion" and illumining the "road to a worthwhile life." The artist-writer, however, is not the one to determine the ultimate character of these ideas as images. "[H]umanics literature," Kim says, "gives prominence to the principle of Chajusong, the development of independent individuals, and creates the image of the truly typical man of the new era, thereby contributing to the transformation of the whole of society in accordance with the concept of Juche" (Kim 2001, 4-5).

Briefly, *chajusong* (independent spirit) has philosophical affinities with the indeterminist theory of freedom of the will and is a metaphysical populist essence unique to human beings who struggle against oppression in social life. An official North Korean

definition of the concept can be found in Kim Chang Ha's *The Immortal Juche Idea* (Kim 1984, 64-77, 185-240). In North Korean literature, *chajusǒng* is a justification for the nationalist Stalinist program of *socialism in one country* as it is constructed into the nationally oriented narratives of *socialist realism*. The "seed theory," which North Korean studies political scientist Dae-Sook Suh once described as a "strange concept" (Suh 1988, 284), is what ensures the ideological foundation of the said political justification. Kwon Youngmin says, "The so-called 'seed theory' [. . .] is nothing but a method of forcing artists to follow the demands and policy of the party," and it "lays down the guidelines on artistic activities, eliminating individual creativity" (Kwon 1991, 57).

Described by Kim Jong Il in organic terms, the "seed theory" refers to the party-approved methodological and axiological premises of North Korean literature. The "seed" (*chongja*) itself is the "guiding criterion [. . .] which provides the principles for the organization of content and the unification of all formal elements of the work in conformity with the content" (Kim 2001, 59). Some of the formal elements Kim Jong Il mentions are the hero (in whom "the seed" finds its main embodiment), character, conflict, events, mood, plot, subject, structure, and theme. But the "seed" does not only organize formal elements; it also exists as their basis and determinant. Despite its various functions, the "seed" alone cannot guarantee the success of any particular work. Rather, success is dependent on the fact that the "seed" is not an exclusively formal concept, but a political one. As Kim Jong Il says, it ensures "ideological value," but must be selected to "champion Party policy," "mirror Party policy artistically," and "always include the problems of the people," that is, problems of the state. There is, for instance, the "seed" in the People's Prize-winning North Korean film *A Worker's Family* (*Rodong kajǒng*, 1971): "[A] man who is a miner is not necessarily a worker and [. . .] a man who has worked in a mine for a short time does not necessarily belong to the working class." The value of this "seed" is found in its political didacticism, which "teaches people that the workers and everyone else must continuously revolutionize themselves at all times" (Kim 2001, 19). Regardless of how technically proficient a work may be, if it lacks the authorized political and ideological content, the result is failure: "A person who knows only art and does not know the Party's policies cannot be a revolutionary artist. He

cannot create a valuable work” (Kim 2001, 282).

Against the above, the “seed” may thus be described as the operative core of state-controlled North Korean literature, placing the political before aesthetic considerations and criteria. This leads to the view that the idea the “seed” represents can embrace the whole of the (social) subject. But there is a dilemma. Kim Jong Il explains that if a particular “seed” cannot produce the desired effects, it is more likely the object of philosophy or political economy and not literature (Kim 2001, 20). The implication is that there are certain domains in which art cannot see too far. From an aesthetic standpoint, that is generally correct. Yet the fact that the “seed” is chosen under the dictates of the WPK testifies not to the limitations of art and literature in general, but to the conditions created by the bureaucracy, which restricts the writers’ field of literary cognition. If, according to Kim Jong Il, the “seed” serves to “champion Party policy” in the North Korean state, then the emergent shortcomings he recognizes in party-oriented literary art are not those of artistic creation, but those of the propaganda genre.

According to Kim Jong Il, “The writer [. . .] is guided by the Party’s ideology *in his thinking and acts on the Party’s will*” (Kim 2001, 24; emphasis added). Kim subsequently bans “personal tastes” and decrees that “capitalist ideas” must be eliminated from the writers’ consciousness. The role of the writer is to essentially be an artistic conduit for state policies and to find him or herself “*accepting unconditionally* the instructions of the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung and the directives of the Party” (Kim 2001, 305; emphasis added). This is underscored by the use of religious language. Kim Jong Il says writers must entirely entrust their “destiny” to the party, place their “unswerving faith” in the organization, defend it, and “firmly believe in it without the slightest vacillation” (Kim 2001, 277). This outlook manifests itself in the writers’ required focus on the principal character of the North Korean literary text: the hero.

Character Typologies: Heroes and Villains

On the Art of the Cinema insists that writers must “pay especial attention” to the hero (Kim 2001, 22). Kim Jong Il holds the perspective that the hero is a virtuous character whose developing, sometimes imperfect, personality converges with the main

storyline. The hero also embodies *chajusǒng*. Kim lays down five principles: (1) “The hero must always occupy the centre stage, fulfilling his role of linking together the other characters and leading them forward”; (2) “he must play the leading role in the resolution of the work’s fundamental issue”; (3) “the hero can remain distinctly present through the images of other characters”; (4) “the hero can create a strong dramatic impression by appearing in only those scenes where his presence is required”; and (5) “Any character’s line of development is valuable only insofar as it fulfils the dramatic task of highlighting the hero’s line” (Kim 2001, 61-2). That is to say, in North Korean *socialist realist* heroic fiction, everything is subordinated to the positive figure, including the fate of the entire *dramatis personae*.

Kim Jong Il states that “[t]he heroes of our art and literature are model revolutionaries who have taken a firm grasp of the concept of Juche and are fighting devotedly to implement party policy” (Kim 2001, 274). Their typicality is expressed in “noble struggle” and the “noblest and most beautiful ideal,” all of which the party has the privilege of defining at any given period. The typology of the hero is marked by the following traits: a hero is a strong-willed optimistic character with political conviction, revolutionary faith, and “supernatural strength,” who has idealistic ambitions and is not devoid of emotions, especially hatred. The hero, in addition, is not an exclusively military person and may be incorporated into other political, cultural, and domestic circumstances and situations, provided that he or she is developed as a socio-functional “Juche-type man” (Kim 2001, 8-13). Kim Jong Il identifies party officials, rank-and-file party members, and characters of “different classes and backgrounds” as possible heroes (Kim 2001, 29, 62). He also makes persuasion and emulation fundamental in the didactic portrayal of these positive heroic characters:

When [people] see the process of growth by which the hero is awakened to [national] class consciousness and takes up the struggle, imbued with bitter hatred for the enemy, the audience will realize clearly the true meaning of revolution and why the revolution is necessary, and they will be convinced that everyone can work for the revolution if they are determined, indeed, that they must do so. (Kim 2001, 32)

Concerning villains, they are defined as objects of hatred who are possessed of an intrinsically “reactionary nature.” They include external class enemies, foreign aggressors, comprador capitalists, and landlords. Interestingly, Kim defines a category of semi-villain, “non-hostile negative elements” or “backwards characters” who can be re-educated or reformed. They consist of non-comprador capitalists (national bourgeoisie) and “people who lag behind the developing situation [. . .] who, in spite of their subjective desire to follow the Party, are influenced by the remnants of obsolete ideas” (Kim 2001, 70, 73). Kim Jong Il assures the reader that the latter characters exist in literature as problem-solving devices to bring out the positive elements of the hero. Other than that, but with the exception of “actual hostile elements,” it is said that there are no “negative people” in North Korea who find fault with the policies of the WPK because such people cannot exist. This is an assertion of Zhdanov’s 1946 theory of *bezkonfliktnost’* (conflictlessness). Marshall R. Pihl observes:

There are no villains in North Korean fiction set in the present-day DPRK. The only inveterate villains are found among landlords and Japanese in stories set before Liberation or American and Korean officials in modern tales that take place in South Korea. In stories set in the DPRK, we find no interpersonal conflicts involving true enmity, but, rather, solvable misunderstandings, such as those between faithful believers and backsliders. The stance is optimistic, evincing a belief in human perfectibility. Since all people are seen essentially as believers susceptible to conversion or correction, there is no character development beyond the individual’s recognition of party truth. (Pihl 1993, 96)

In a related examination of stories in seventeen North Korean textbooks published between 1986 to 1991, Dennis Hart describes the presence of foreign enemies, namely, “Japanese imperialists (*iljenom*), American imperialists (*mijenom*), landlords (*jijunom*), and the government of South Korea and its agents.” This “national Other is evil but repeatedly vanquished by the hero in the story.” The foreign villain is “less than clever,” possessed of a “frail and flawed intelligence,” and recurringly depicted “as having limited abilities and being generally uninterested in the process of thinking.” The inferiority of the character makes it defeatable, thus promoting hope but also a sense of fear (Hart

1999). That is consonant with the general perspective Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il outline in their typologies of heroes and villains, which writers are obligated to implement in contract with the party and state through compulsory membership in the Korean Writers' Union.

Conclusion: The Meta-Author and Intentional Fallacy

The premise of this paper has been that Kim Il Sung's *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* and Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema* are authoritative cultural policy statements and political artifacts that are necessary in the analysis of North Korean literature and literary discourse and that the period-specific character of both documents does not disqualify them as subjects of examination. The task of the author has been one of introduction, outline, and exposition in order to facilitate study of North Korean literature outside of North Korean studies. Accordingly, in appendix to the present work is a list of forty-three North Korean narrative texts in English translation, which consist of novels, novelettes, short stories, and opera librettos. Although it is generally difficult to acquire these publications outside of university libraries or without the services of a rare books dealer, the literature forms a potential basis for analysis in interdisciplinary fields, such as cultural studies and multicultural literary studies, with different empirical and theoretical models of interpretation.

The literary ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, which are not indistinguishable but share fundamental commonalities, point to the fact that North Korean literature is bureaucratically controlled, functionally didactic, culturally nationalist, and politically Stalinist. Certain ideological imperatives and constants are, furthermore, perpetuated in the state-controlled fiction. *Juche socialist realism* prescribes exemplary, optimistic, and self-sacrificing heroic figures who are placed at the center of the text. Narrative logic and plot structure are subordinated to these archetypal *positive heroes*, who embody the given political line and are designed to be empathized with and emulated by the reader. The depicted literary world, moreover, is one of good and evil and a nationalist allegory of *socialism in one country*.⁶ North Korean literature is not

⁶ See Alzo David-West, "Nationalist Allegory in North Korea: The Revolutionary Opera *Sea of Blood*,

only a “mirror of ideology,” as Angus Fletcher famously defines the symbolic mode of allegory (Fletcher 1964, 368), but more specifically intended as a mirror of the official nationalist-Stalinist “monolithic ideology” (*yuil sasang*). As Kim Jong Il says, literature is to be modeled on the *Juche* ideology. North Korean literature, in that case, is a political subject. Therefore, it requires a critical approach that can competently interpret its inherently partisan modes of meaning. Still, that does not preclude reading the state-sanctioned narrative texts as *literature*, by which is meant here as relatively self-contained fictional works with a set of universal interests on the preconscious and conscious levels. Despite the aesthetic, cognitive, and sociological limitations of propaganda art, it still has some sort of art function, the extent of which has to be determined in the examination North Korean literature, even if the literature may be a distorted simulacrum as a result of the external demands that are not the intrinsic demands of the material, or subject matter, itself. There are other views, however.

Vladmir Pucek notes that state control, disproportionate investment in propaganda, the domination of *Juche* theory, the imposition of *socialist realism*, and isolation have degraded North Korean literature and art, seriously compromising the reputation of North Korean writers abroad: “[T]heir foreign counterparts have dismissed them as soulless puppets and their productions as worthless rubbish. The fact that few scholars or researchers abroad have ever indicated any interest in translating post-Liberation North Korean literature testifies to the validity of this conclusion” (Pucek 1996, 64-5). Pucek subsequently adds that North Korean literature is fated for stagnation because of insularity, parochialism, and the “obduracy of the Kim Il Sung regime” (Pucek 1996, 70). A similar prognosis is shared by Yearn-Hong Choi, who says, “North Korean literature promotes socialist ideology, new technology and Puritan communist culture,” while neglecting shortages of transportation, power, and food (Choi 2008). Choi identifies a number of other subjects that are also neglected in the *socialist realist* literature:

Juche thought North Korean writers have not written down any short story on the United Nations Development Project on the Tumen River Basin [1995] and the

North Korean Review 2, no. 2 (Fall 2006), 75-87, and “The North Korean Positive Hero in *The People of the Fighting Village* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2007), 101-118.

Najin-Sungbong free trade zone [1991], opening of Mt. Geumgang for South Korean tourists for revenue [1998], reconnection of the railroad between North and South Korea [2003], construction and stoppage of light-water reactors after the [1994] Geneva accord for electric power by South Korea, development of the Gaesong industrial complex by South Korean government and business [2002], and enormous monetary and material assistance from South Korea to North Korea. In the 2000s, I could only add “military first” [*Songun*] theory or ideology in their literature. I don’t see any hope. (Choi 2008)

Pucek’s and Choi’s reading strategies presuppose the absolute control of *Juche* ideology over North Korean literature. Stephen Epstein comments on such views in literary scholarship on North Korea:

Analysis of North Korean literature almost invariably begins with discussion of its relationship to official policy, for as much as anywhere in the world artistic production is steeped in and skewed by heavy-handed directives from above. [. . .] Scholarship on North Korean literature in the West (outside of the former Communist bloc) is infrequent and its particular focus on relationships with the development of *Juche* ideology and the Kim personality cult has at times precluded detailed analysis of individual texts. Even the more frequent book-length studies emanating from South Korea that treat works in depth tend to use them primarily as a vehicle for understanding DPRK society rather than examining closely how they function as literature *per se*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a generally low assessment of the quality of the DPRK’s literature has also contributed to the paucity of close analysis [. . .]. (Epstein 2002, 34-5)

Whereas Pucek and Choi are pessimistic, even fatalistic, in their readings, appraisals, and prognoses of North Korean literature and the North Korean writer, Epstein proposes the following reading strategy:

I would prefer to argue, however, that the undeniable prescriptivism does not eliminate creativity but circumscribes it, and that an alternative methodological

perspective from which to approach the fiction of the DPRK is in terms of an implicit contract established between state, author, and reader. [. . .] In other words, while all concur that North Korean literature functions as a tool of state ideology, we still need to examine whether the nation's writers can wield this tool with sufficient subtlety that it functions not as a blacksmith's hammer, but a sculptor's chisel. It is not, for example, inevitable that characterization in North Korean literature be rough-hewn: although it often is, some writers portray their characters with a sympathy and insight that brings them to life even for a reader outside the ideological framework of *Juche*.

[. . .] Given the revelation of social fissures in North Korean literature, its reception by its audience merits continual consideration; if we focus solely on how the regime wishes its fiction to be interpreted, we run the risk of taking its profession of monolithic solidarity at face value, precisely as its fiction warns us against doing. [. . .] it is in fact precisely the idiosyncratic moments of epiphany concluding many DPRK short stories that reveal all the more clearly deep-rooted structural problems in contemporary North Korean society; the constant repetition of themes suggest an ultimate lack of confidence in solutions that substitute emotional catharsis for verifiable proof. (Epstein 2002, 35-6)

Since the late 1990s, access to North Korean source materials and the advent of inter-Korean exchanges have allowed South Korean scholarship on North Korean letters to improve in quantity and quality (Bae 2005), certain limitations of the literary criticism notwithstanding. English-language scholarship by contrast is insubstantial at present. The lesson to be drawn from Epstein is that North Korean literature is a matter of counterintuitive reading and understanding how the *intentional fallacy* is at work in the literature in spite of the intentions of the literary ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, which guide the state literary apparatus, which controls the writer. If North Korean literature is a case of the party and state writing through the writer, the party-state may be considered a meta-author. But that does not necessarily bespeak the death of the individual author or that all North Korean writers are "soulless puppets" or that final authority of interpretation goes to the party and state. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley's influential essay on the problems of authorial intent may, within a certain

range of tolerance, be applied to the North Korean meta-author, who is neither as omnipotent nor omniscient as it presents itself to be. “Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1982, 18). North Korean literature should not be judged from the meta-authorial perspective or from the standpoint of the *Juche* ideology, but from what the literature says on its own with its own internal evidences. What does the text say that the meta-author did not intend? What has the text said in the past, and what is it saying today? What has the meta-author missed? What has been unintentionally incarnated? As “all [North Korean] stories promise a better tomorrow, even at the expense of raising contradictions between a text’s details and its final message” (Epstein 2002, 48), analysis can lay bare such contradictions in the textual medium and the political message.

The literary ideas of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il define the political and ideological parameters within which the North Korean writer must write and the North Korean reader must read. Even so, that does not mean the *Juche*-Stalinist conceptions of party literature, the party writer, *positive heroes*, and reactionary villains constitute a watertight or even unconditionally accepted system, however overt or subtle its enforcement. North Korean writers may be “employees of the state and spokespersons for the Establishment” (Ryang 2002, 22), but it does not follow that they are all blindly so. When foreign literature was indiscriminately prohibited in North Korea in 1970, for example, Kim Jong Il admonished against extreme anti-foreignism (Kim 1995, 48), yet he also railed against North Korean writers who complained that the domestic *socialist realist* narratives were not worth reading. Kim effectively told those who doubted North Korean *socialist realism* to shut up and read the authorized national literature (Kim 1995, 204). A subsequent episode in 1987 had him denouncing as “flunkeyist” and “dogmatist” writers whose offense was “showing an overabundance of curiosity of foreign works or copying them” (Kim 1997, 63). These cases suggest that the party and its directives are not in full control of the contradictions in the writers’ intellectual life and in so-called “party-oriented” literature. While it is presently not possible to examine the independent world of the North Korean writer, the critical de-construction of intentional fallacies in North Korean literature is aided by a historical awareness of national and international

events.⁷

The process of closely examining North Korean literature is a process of close analysis that involves questions proper to literature, such as allegory, characterization, description, metaphor, narration, and verisimilitude, even if the final objective is to understand the workings of North Korean society itself. The meta-authorial perspectives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are a statement of intentions, but these perspectives are also a statement of how intentions can be contradicted in literary form. A reading of North Korean literature, either in the original or in translation, will proceed best with some knowledge of the social structure, history, politics, and culture of the Stalinist country. That will substantially inform the competence of interpretation in the analysis of the national *socialist realist* literature. Needless to say, several fashionable theoretical frameworks are available in cultural and multicultural literary studies: deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, post-feminism, post-marxism, and post-structuralism. Sonia Ryang (2002), for example, has attempted to read North Korean novels written in the 1980s from a post-structuralist point of view. Other scholars like Tatiana Gabroussenko (2005) chart the older course of literary biography. The position of the author is that historical materialism as applied to questions of literature promises more redeeming applications.⁸ Premised on the primacy of matter over consciousness,

⁷ Major events include the U.S.-Soviet liberation and division of Korea (1945), the U.S. and Soviet military occupation (1945-1948), the founding of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (1948), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Chinese military intervention and occupation (1950-1958), the initiation of bureaucratic self-reform in the Soviet Union with the so-called "de-Stalinization" campaign (1953), Kim Il Sung's anti-Soviet reformist *Juche* speech (1955), the North Korean Great Purge (1956-1960), the rapid industrialization and forced collectivization Chollima Movement (1956-1961), the final rupture of the Sino-Soviet split (1963), the Maoist Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the declaration of political independence from the Soviet Union and China with the official inauguration of the *Juche* ideology (1972). Other events include Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (1986), the growth of North Korean private markets or *jangmadang* (1990), the loss of Soviet economic assistance after the collapse of the USSR (1991), the nuclear crisis with the United States (1993-1994), the sudden death of Kim Il Sung (1994), the massive floods (1995-1996) and great famine (1996-1999), the transfer of power from the party to the military under the military-first *Songun* policy (1998), and the second nuclear crisis with United States (2002-present). North Korea also established capitalist special economic zones to attract foreign capital – the Rajin-Sonbong SEZ (1991), the Sinuiju SEZ (2002), the Mt. Kumgang SEZ (2002), and the Gaesong SEZ (2004) – and initiated price and wage "reforms" in July 2002 pursuant to constitutional changes in 1998.

⁸ See Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005); Aleksandr Voronsky, *Art as the Cognition of Life: Selected Writings, 1911-1936* (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 1998); Lev Vygotsky, *The Psychology of Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971); Victor Serge, *Collected Writings on Literature and Revolution* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2004); and David Walsh, *The Aesthetic Component of Socialism* (New South Wales: Mehring Books, 1998). The first author provides five guiding

history as a law-governed process (not a series of contingent narratives), and the leading role of economic forces, the historical materialist method stands in contrast to post-structuralism and literary biography, which take notions of power and the author, respectively, as their starting points.

State-controlled literature in North Korea is an ideological and political institution, a superstructure on a definite economic foundation, which reflects the national-Stalinist system and serves to strengthen the domination of the ruling bureaucratic caste. The economic structure of North Korean Stalinism is the basis; however, the literature itself is not primarily reducible to economics. Social production of literature also involves factors that are relatively independent of economics, as well as the will of the bureaucracy, namely, those factors constituted in the intentional fallacy, which even the most faithful party-writer can be unconscious of. What objective socioeconomic processes underlie the political changes reflected in the ideological and political institution of North Korean literature? What is the alignment or disalignment between the objective and subjective? What aspects of the literary are present despite the political propaganda and nationalist allegories? These things are not simply determined by economic studies of commodity production, commodity circulation, and the law of value in North Korea, though studies of that sort are needed. The questions are more appropriately addressed by investigating feelings and their social conditions, social and class development, literary heritage, and historical influences. Such an investigation, one might add, could possibly be aided by an alliance of formalism, historical materialism, and humanist psychoanalysis, with emphasis on the method of the central approach so as not to compromise materialism and historicism. The purpose in the end with the historical materialist method is not apologetics, but critical illumination through aesthetic evaluation, sociological evaluation, and empirical verification that will confirm the disjuncture between Marxism and Stalinism and help reveal the outline, function, and direction of North Korean literature.

methodological questions of historical materialist criticism: (1) “[T]o which order of feelings does a given artistic work correspond in all its peculiarities?” (2) “What are the social conditions of these thoughts and feelings?” (3) “What place do they occupy in the historic development of a society and of a class?” (4) “[W]hat literary heritage has entered into the elaboration of the new form?” (5) “Under the influence of what historic impulse have the new complexes of feelings and thoughts broken through the shell which divides them from the sphere of poetic consciousness?” (Trotsky 2005, 143).

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Appendix: North Korean Literature in Translation

The following is a list of forty-three North Korean novels, novelettes, short stories, and opera librettos available in English translation. Reference to the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang, is abbreviated as FLPH.

Novels

April 15th Writing Staff. *Dawn of a New Age*, Volume 1 (FLPH, 1978)

_____. *Revolutionary Aurora* (FLPH, 1978)

_____. *The Year 1932* (FLPH, 1977)

Mother of Korea (FLPH, 1978)

Sea of Blood (FLPH, 1982)

Novelettes

Cho, Ryong Chul. *The Tale of Chun Hyang* (FLPH, 1991)

Chon, Se Bong. *The People of the Fighting Village* (New Korea Press, 1955; FLPH, 1986)

Han, Sorya. *Jackals (Han Sorya and North Korean Literature)*, Cornell, 1994)

Short Stories

Chin, Jae Hwan. "A Usual Morning" (*A Usual Morning*, FLPH, 1988)

Chon, Gi Jong. "Military March No. 1" (*A Usual Morning*, FLPH, 1988)

Chon, Se Bong. "Ogi" (*Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)

Han, Song Ho. "Guide" (*Korea Today*, 2009, <<http://www.kcckp.net>>)

Han, Ung-Bin. "Second Encounter" (*Words without Borders*, 2003, <<http://www.writerswithoutborders.org>>)

Hwang, Gon. "The Island in Flames" (*The Island in Flames*, FLPH, 1966)

- “The Japanese Imperialists Who Suffered Annihilation” (*Korean Studies* 23, 1999)
- Jo, Phil Su. “After Gunfire Dies Away” (*Korea Today*, 2007, <<http://www.kcckp.net>>)
- Kang, Kwi-Mi, “A Tale of Music,” (*Literature from the “Axis of Evil,”* New Press, 2006; *NPR*, 2006, <<http://www.npr.org>>)
- Kim, Byong Hun. “Travelling Companions” (*Travelling Companions*, FLPH, 1967);
“Fellow Travellers” (*Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)
- Kim, Hye Yong. “First Meeting” (*Korea Today*, 2007, <<http://www.kcckp.net>>)
- Kim, Puk-Hyang. “The Son” (*Korean Studies* 1, 1977; *Modern Korean Fiction*, Columbia, 2005)
- Ko, Byong Sam. “Unfinished Sculpture” (*Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)
- Li, Myong Gyun. “Homeland” (*A Usual Morning*, FLPH, 1988)
- Li, Sang Hyon. “But My Son Is at the Front” (*The Island in Flames*, FLPH, 1966)
- Lim, Hwa-Won. “The Fifth Photograph” (*Literature from the “Axis of Evil,”* New Press, 2006)
- Om, Dan Ung. “Everyone in Position!” (*Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)
- Pak, Il Myong. “Small House in My Village” (*Korea Today*, 2008, <<http://www.kcckp.net>>)
- Pak, Wung Gol. “Signalman Firstclass” (*The Island in Flames*, FLPH, 1966)
- Pyon, Hui Gun. “History of Iron” (*Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)
- Sok, Yun Gi. “Happiness” (*Travelling Companions*, FLPH, 1967; *Korean Short Stories*, FLPH, 1986; Fredonia Books, 2003)
- Sok, Yun Gi. “Second Answer” (*Korea Today*, 2009, <<http://www.kcckp.net>>)

Opera Librettos

- The Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man* (FLPH, 1976)
- The Flower Girl* (FLPH, 1973; 1978)
- Glorious Is Our Fatherland* (FLPH, 1969)
- The Heroines of Namgang* (FLPH, 1978)

Sea of Blood (FLPH, 1972; 1974; 1977)

Song of Glory to the Fatherly Marshal (FLPH, 1974)

The Song of Mt. Kumgang-San (FLPH, 1973); *The Song of Kumgang-San Mountain*
(FLPH, 1974; 1977)

Song of Paradise (FLPH, 1978)

Tell O Forest! (FLPH, 1974); *Tell the Story, Forest!* (FLPH, 1978)

The Tale of Shim Chung (FLPH, 1958)

A True Daughter of the Party (FLPH, 1973; 1974; 1978)

The Youth Orchard (FLPH, 1978)