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## Writing under wartime conditions : North and South Korean writers during the Korean war (1950-1953)

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## Chapter One

### The Emergence and Institutionalization of the Ideology of War

As war broke out on the Korean peninsula on the early morning of June 25, 1950, the literary fields in North and South Korea had to adapt quickly to the situation. After only a short time of deliberations, both the North Korean as well as the South Korean writers had settled on a plan on how to make their literature useful for wartime purposes. The speed with which both sides were able to form very similar visions of what role writers and their literature should play during war betrays the fact that the writers had a previous experience of war, or at least were expecting a war to break out soon. They had received experience of war in the final years of the colonial period, when the colonial regime started to promote the ideology of total war on the Korean peninsula. Many writers were swayed by the pressures of the government at that time and started to forge their wartime roles. When Japan's rule over Korea ended on August 15, 1945, the total war ideology as well seemingly disappeared. The wartime years of Japanese colonial rule, with the forced conscription of Koreans for labor and military service, the suppression of the Korean language, and the forced adoption of Japanese family names, had left a deep mark on Koreans' identities and way of living. Every citizen had been mobilized in the name of total war to put in an effort for the ongoing war.

For writers living in the Liberation Period (1945-1948), the liberation was seen as a post war event which signaled the end of mobilization and the start of a new beginning. Yi Sŏnhŭi (1911-?), for example, stressed in his novel *Window* (*Ch'ang*, 1946) that the end of the Greater East Asian and Pacific Wars meant a demobilization, making the end of conscription "more important to the villagers than independence."<sup>1</sup> With the slogans and mechanisms of total war gone, people could go back to normalcy. The day the war ended, therefore, was a joyous occasion.

August 15, 1945, however, was also to be the starting point of a deepening division between North and South. Not only can one see the emergence of a territorial division in this post war period, but in the cultural field one can also see the emergence of a literature that helped to produce a division. A contestation emerged in the cultural field and writers passionately started to propagate their personal ideas on what the nation and its literature should be like. Heated debates had sprouted among writers in the 1920s and 1930s on what function and role literature could play to gain independence and create a strong and self-reliant Korean culture. One group of writers propagated the need for a cultural movement that would gradually transform society, and which would thereby prepare the nation for its eventual independence. Another group formed around the Korean Artists Proletarian Federation (KAPF) heavily criticized this approach, and argued that only a culture that would stir people to take political action would be effective against

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea*, p. 63. The novel was printed in the *Seoul shinmun* from 26 June to 20 July 1946.

the colonial authorities. Even though there were several attempts to work together, no common ground could be reached when these arguments were eventually suppressed by the Japanese authorities.

Now with the liberation achieved, writers searched for a new function for literature which would undo culture from the remnants of colonization, and simultaneously strengthen the nation. The earlier disagreements of the 1920s and 1930s soon flared up again. Some writers argued that socialist realist literature would suit the needs of postcolonial Korea, while others started to propagate their vision of a so-called “pure literature” (*sunsu munhak*). In tandem with the political circumstances on the Korean peninsula, these two aesthetic doctrines would become the most dominant, and would eventually become directly linked to one of the two hegemonic political ideologies: Communism and Democracy. Processes within the cultural field would eventually lead to the emergence, establishment and ultimately the solidification of an imagined North and South Korea.

During this process, the discourse of total war and mobilization, which was thought to be a thing of the past, reappeared in the *habitus* of the writers, especially when the Korean War broke out.<sup>2</sup> It is this aspect that I will focus on in this chapter. First, I will give a historical background of the North and South Korean intellectual organizations and activities during the Korean War. Then I will

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<sup>2</sup> I use the notion of *habitus* as Pierre Bourdieu has defined it, as a system that refers to lifestyle, values, dispositions and expectation of particular social groups that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1990), p. 35.

focus on the intellectuals' reaction to the outbreak of war, and how they explained the war in their essays as a total war. The total war paradigm would not only become visible in their definition of the war itself, but also influenced their views of the role of the writer and of literature during war. This reaction can be seen as a return to their previous experience of war under Japanese colonial rule, as they had created definite ideas on these literary issues under the influence of the total war ideology. Besides this explanation, however, I argue that people in the literary field, and especially writers, used the total war narrative to attain cultural power and to strengthen their status and position in society. The ideology of total war would quickly regain its position as the dominant narrative and was reinstitutionalized in both wartime societies as war became more protracted in March 1951.

### **A short historical overview of the Korean War**

The initial developments of the Korean War on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1950, saw dramatic changes in the fortunes of the governments of North and South Korea.<sup>3</sup> While the North Korean People's Army managed to conquer Seoul rapidly in three days, the rapid response and buildup of American troops started to hamper their advance until it was halted along the Naktong frontline. A counterattack at Inch'ŏn by the UN army on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September

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<sup>3</sup> Here I will only give a brief summary of what transpired militarily during the war. For an informative overview on the Korean War, see Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010).

crumbled the North's overstretched supply line and led to a frantic retreat. Having quickly reestablished the pre-war boundaries along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel by October, the UN army went on the offensive, occupying almost the whole of the Korean peninsula when they in turn were thrown back by the intervention of the Chinese at the end of November 1950.

After the Chinese intervention, the UN troops were pushed back quickly to below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and Seoul once again fell into North Korean hands in January 1951. The UN managed to set up their defense below Seoul, and after a few months of hard fighting recaptured the capital. A further push brought the UN army once again above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, but here the Chinese spring offensive halted their attack and pushed them back. In late spring, the battle lines stabilized similar to how Korea's demilitarized zone is defined today. It would still take two years of negotiations to agree on a ceasefire between all belligerent parties, during which the fighting turned into attrition warfare.

These general developments had an influence on the way the intellectual organizations were formed: In the early months of the war there was a number of intellectuals who formed groups to actively support one of the regime's war efforts. As soon as the changes in the movement of the frontline stagnated in the last spring of 1951, these groups started to get the support from the government and would from now on include the large majority of each society's intellectuals.

## Intellectual organizations and activities in South Korea

On the 26th of June 1950, one day after the outbreak of the Korean War, a group of intellectuals, organized in the National Association of Cultural Organizations (*Chŏn'guk munhwa tanch'e ch'ongyŏnhaphoe*, hereafter NACO), gathered in the offices of *Munye* magazine in Myŏngdong to discuss how to ideologically meet the threat of the North's all-out attack.<sup>4</sup> After deliberations the Emergency Civilian Propaganda Unit (*Pisang kungmin sŏnjŏndae*, henceforth ECPU) was established the next day. This unit was to be a separate branch of the NACO, and was formed to create a mobile unit that could more quickly react to the changing situation. It was already now that an Army Intelligence Officer was assigned to the NACO from the Troop Information and Education Office (TIAEO) of the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>5</sup> The main task of the ECPU was to rewrite data received from the TIAEO about the actual war situation and pass this data on to newspapers, radio and other

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<sup>4</sup> The National Association of Cultural Organizations had been established on February 12, 1947 in large part to act as a counter movement to the left wing Chosŏn Federation of Cultural Organizations (*Chosŏn munhwa tanch'e ch'ongyŏnmaeng*, established on February 24, 1946). Its activities before the war consisted of organizing a 'Rally of all Intellectuals to Promote the Minjok Spirit' held on December 27 and 28 of 1948, and the publication of the magazine *Minjok Culture* (*Minjok munhwa*). Thirty people were present at this meeting: novelists Kim Song and Kim Dongni, poets Cho Chihun, Pak Mogwŏl, Yi Hanjik, Sŏ Chŏngju, Kim Yunsŏng, Pak Chonghwa, Mo Yunsuk, Kim Yŏngnang, Kong Chungin, O Yŏngjin, Sŏ Chŏngt'ae, Kim Chinsŏp, Yi Wŏnsŏp and Yi Tongju, literary critic Cho Yŏnhyŏn and painter Ko Hŭidong.

<sup>5</sup> Cho Yŏnhyŏn in "Munye shidae", *Han'guk mundan imyŏnsa*, (Seoul: Kip'ŭnsaem, 1983), pp.301-302. This close connection with the army and the government had already been established during the Liberation period, when the NACO was actively sought by the authorities to report on the aftermath of the Yŏsu uprising. See chapter five for a more detailed description of these ties.

mass media organizations. The second task was to pursue propaganda activities to make the public feel more at ease and improve the public's 'fighting spirit'. They were allowed to pursue the propaganda activities described in this second task "as they saw fit".<sup>6</sup> The members of this unit immediately set out to work on press releases, wall newspapers, and drafting news articles.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the rapid advance of the North Korean army, the intellectuals had to hide or flee and the unit soon dissolved. Some intellectuals who had managed to get out of Seoul gathered briefly in the auditorium of the agricultural school in Suwŏn, where on June 28 a new organization was set up, the Group of Combined Artists to Save the Nation (Munch'ong kuguktae).<sup>8</sup> Kim Kwangsŏp took the lead over this group and it marked the first time that the writers started to call themselves "War Writers" (Chonggun munin).<sup>9</sup> After two days the organization fled to Taegu and not

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<sup>6</sup> Cho Yŏnhyŏn, *Nae-ga saraon han'guk mundan*, p. 263. For its convenience the office of the ECPU was located in the *Munyesa* building as it was also the home of the NACO. It was also around this time that Painter Ko Hŭidong, head of the NACO, and poetess Mo Yunsuk hosted a radio program where Kim Yunsŏng and Kong Chungin read out patriotic poems.

<sup>7</sup> The initial news that was dispersed to the public was much too positive. Messages that the North Korean army had been pushed back were broadcast, while the sound of approaching artillery fire at Ŭijŏngbu were clearly audible to the citizens of Seoul. This damaged the reputation of the government and criticism of this misinformation can be found in wartime literary works as well.

<sup>8</sup> Present at the inauguration of this organization were novelists Kim Song, Cho Hŭnp'a (1918-1980) poets Kim Kwangsŏp, Sŏ Chŏngju, Cho Chihun, Pak Mogwŏl, Cho Yŏngam, Pak Yŏnhŭi, Yi Hanjik, Ku Sang, Pak Hwamok (1924-2005), Sŏ Chŏngt'ae, Yi Wŏnsŏp, and Kim Yunsŏng (1925-) and literary critics Yi Hŏn'gu and Im Kŭngjae (1918-1962).

<sup>9</sup> Ku Sang, "Chonggun chakkadan 2 nyŏn", *Chŏnsŏn munhak* 5 (1953.5), p. 57. As a member of this group Im Kŭngjae witnessed the battle at the Han river near Yŏngdŭngp'o and was wounded there, thereby becoming the first casualty among the war writers.

long after that to Pusan. The group's aim was to support the friendly troops with broadcasts, publish newspapers, make propaganda leaflets, give lectures and so forth.<sup>10</sup>

After Seoul was recaptured by UN troops, the writers who had managed to flee southwards took charge of reestablishing control over cultural affairs. One of the activities organized by the NACO in Seoul was a "rally of intellectuals to overthrow Communism" (T'agong munhwain kwölgi taehoe) in the National Theater on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>11</sup> When the UN army moved into the North from October 1950, poets O Yöngjin and Cho Chihun briefly established a North Korean branch of the NACO (Pukhan munch'ong) in Pyongyang.<sup>12</sup>

When the Chinese entered the war, many intellectuals made the decision to move to Pusan and Taegu, which became known as the

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<sup>10</sup> A few days later a play by Kim Song entitled "The middle frontline" ("Chungbu chönsön") was performed under the auspices of the NACO. Also a mass performance was organized in which more than fifty intellectuals participated, among others Kim Tongo and Yu Ch'ihwan.

<sup>11</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 9 October 1950.

<http://dna.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1950100900209102008&editNo=1&printCount=1&publishDate=1950-10-09&officeId=00020&pageNo=2&printNo=8315&publishType=00010> (last retrieved 13 December 2011). One day later this was followed by an "Anti-Communist rally of all *minjok* intellectuals" in the Civic Center. People active in the organization of these rallies were Ko Hüidong, Pak Chonghwa, Yu Ch'ijin, Yi Hön'gu, Kim Kwangsöp, O Chongsik, Yi Sögu, Kim Dongni, Kim Song, Kim Pyönggi and Cho Chihun.

<sup>12</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 11 July 1973.

<http://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?articleId=1973071100209205008&editNo=2&printCount=1&publishDate=1973-07-11&officeId=00020&pageNo=5&printNo=15930&publishType=00020> (last retrieved 21 January 2012)

“4<sup>th</sup> of January retreat” (1.4 hut’oe).<sup>13</sup> As the front stabilized in the spring of 1951, the TIAEO of the Air Force, and Colonel Kim Kiwan in particular, started to lobby on behalf of the writers for the establishment for a separate war writer organization. Shin Söngmo, the Minister of Defense, declined this plan, stating that he did not want to favor a certain group in society for special treatment over others. Yi Sön’gün, who was in charge of all the TIAEO’s of the Army branches, however, did acquiesce. This was a move to intensify propaganda dissemination and make it more centrally organized, while also helping the writers sustain themselves. Therefore the first group that was established was the Blue Sky Group (Ch’anggon kurakpu) in Taegu on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1951.<sup>14</sup> The TIAEO of the Air Force helped the writers out by giving them a wage similar to the position of a civil servant, and from time to time with food.

Cho Chihun and Ch’oe Inuk were dispatched to the air force base

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<sup>13</sup> Writer Chöng Pisök, who was entrenched with the 6<sup>th</sup> ROK division into North Korea, was lucky to escape the Chinese entrance into the Korean War alive, since on that day he was bedridden because of a small cold. *Minjog-üi chüngön* 7, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> The Blue Sky Group was officially named the Air Force War Writer Group (*konggun chonggun munindan*), but to avoid confusion with the Army War Writer Group it had given itself another nickname. Other intellectuals had already organized themselves earlier. December 1950 saw the establishment of groups consisting of painters, musicians and movie directors. This was followed by a group for actors in January 1951 and for light music in February 1951. Its members consisted of children’s literature author Ma Haesong (chairman), Poet Cho Chihun (vice-chairman), writers Ch’oe Inuk (secretary), Ch’oe Chönghüi, Yu Chuhyön, Kwak Hashin and Pang Kihwan, poets Pak Tujin, Pak Mogwöl, Kim Yunsöng, Yi Hanjik and Yi Sangno. A year later Hwang Sunwön, Kim Tongni, Chön Sukhüi and Pak Hunsan were added to the group. The office of this organization was located in Töksandong, Taegu. Hwang Sunwön and Kim Dongni were staying with their families in Pusan and therefore Chön Sukhüi frequently travelled back and forth to Taegu to bring their written pieces to the group for publication.

in Yöüido for a week in April 1951, to witness base operations there. They did not manage to get any experience on how it was at the front, since for this they would have to fly along in a jet plane, for which the seating was obviously very limited.<sup>15</sup> The group was very successful with a “national aircraft donation drive” held in July 1951, for which they went all over the country to hold lectures and collect funds.

Together with the Army War Writer Group they organized from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1952, an arts festival in the Free Theatre of Taegu where a part of Kim Yöngsu’s play *People of my hometown* (*Kohyang saramdü*) was performed.<sup>16</sup> June 6<sup>th</sup> till June 9<sup>th</sup> saw the performance of Ch’oe Inuk’s play *The tale of Ch’unhyang with wings* (*Nalgae Ch’unhyangchön*) in the Culture Theatre of Taegu by the Shinhyöp Theatre Group. During the war the Blue Sky Group also published a poetry collection called “The Vault of Heaven” (“Ch’anggung”) and a story collection titled *Medal*

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<sup>15</sup> Writings about the life they experienced at the front or in the army were then presented to an audience in the National Theatre of Taegu in May 1951. In 1952, when Pak Tujin, Yu Chuhyön and Yi Sangno also went on a visit to an Air Force base, they did manage to fly along and see the frontline from the sky.

<sup>16</sup> Instead of using professional theater actors and actresses, writers like Ch’oe Chönghui, or literary critic Cho Yönhöön among others were performing the parts in the play. Due to their inexperience with acting, they forgot their lines or looked very clumsy on stage. However, this clumsiness was met with great cheers and laughter, and in fact because of its popularity the play was performed once again the next day in front of an enthusiastic crowd in Pusan. The cooperation between these two groups continued in March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952, when in the Pusan Theatre, Kim Yöngsu’s play was performed in full, while poets Mo Yunsuk, Cho Chihun, Cho Pyönghwa, Ku Sang, Pak Namsu, Chang Manyöng and Kim Kwanggyun recited some of their works, while playwright Yu Ch’ijin and literary critic Yi Hön’gu gave a lecture. A day later, poets U Ch’ijin, Pak Mogwöl, Kong Chungin and Yi Hanjik also read out some of their poetry. In the same month two similar recitals were held for Air Force personnel.

(*hunjang*). Furthermore they twice published their own magazine *Blue Sky* (*Ch'angsong*) while Yi Sangno and Pang Kihwan among others were in charge of editing the *Air Force journal* (*Konggun sunbo*) and *Comet* (*K'omet'ü*).

Also based in Taegu and established at a meeting in teahouse “Adam” on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1951 was the Army War Writer Group (*Yukkun chonggun chakkadan*), which was chaired by writer Ch’oe Sangdök.<sup>17</sup> On this first meeting only the obtainment of an adequate army uniform and accompanying insignia for the group was discussed. The next day, they met again to discuss the group’s future activities. It was decided that a writers group should be dispatched to the front as soon as possible and that a lecture would be organized soon after this group’s return. More generally it was agreed upon that each member would pay a monthly membership fee of ten thousand wŏn, that the members’ literary works should be published in all sorts of magazines and newspapers, and that the group would publish their own magazine with money that was being managed by Kim Song. This group did not receive the same benefits as the Blue Sky Group, in that they did not receive any monthly wages. Instead they were helped only with office space,

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<sup>17</sup> It is said that Pak Yŏngjun was the driving force in the establishment of this particular group. See the *Tonga ilbo*, 11 July 1973. The other initial members of the group were writers Kim Song (as vice-chairman), Pak Yŏngjun (committee member), Chang Tökcho, Ch’oe T’aeüng, Chŏng Pisök, Pang Kihwan, and poets Yi Tökchin (committee member), Cho Yŏngam, Kim Chinsu, Söng Kiwŏn, Pak Inwan, Chŏng Unsam, Kim Yŏngsu, Im Kŭngjae, Kim Yisök, Yi Ponggu and Yang Myŏngmun. This group’s office was located in the same building as that of the *Yŏngnam ilbo* newspaper, however, since Pak Yŏngjun and Chŏng Pisök both worked as civil servants for the Army’s TIAE, mostly their office was used. *Minjog-üi chŭngŏn*, p. 89.

paper whenever it was available, and occasionally with rice provisions.

Kim Song, Ch'oe T'aeŭng, Yi Tökchin, Cho Yöngam, Söng Kiwön and Kim Isök were the ones chosen to tour the frontline in June 1951. The first lectures of this group were presented on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1951 in the Culture Theatre of Taegu.<sup>18</sup> The goal of these lectures was in the words of Pak Yöngjun to "inform the people at the home front in detail about the heroic fight of the frontline soldiers, in order to muster the whole power of the people for the war, thus bringing about victory."<sup>19</sup> The stories told about the soldiers on these meetings were more vivid and poetic than could be found in the newspapers or in other media and therefore gave the audience a different and more immediate flavor of the war. Many more lecture events were organized from that time onwards.<sup>20</sup>

The establishment of the Navy War Writers Group (Haegun chonggun chakkadan) in June 1951 was mainly due to the efforts of writers An Sugil and Yi Sön'gu (1917-?), who already were working as civil servants for the Navy. They were joined by writers Yun Paengnam (charged with press releases of the group), Yöm

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<sup>18</sup> Chöng Pisök, Pak Yöngjun and Chang Tökcho gave a lecture, Ch'oe Chönghui read a story, while Yang Myöngmun, Cho Chihun and Yi Tökchin read a few of their poems.

<sup>19</sup> *Minjog-üi chüngön*, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Meetings were organized on September 20, 1951 in the Central Theater of Seoul, December 6, 1951 in the Cultural Theater of Taegu, June 25, 1952, December 23, 1952 and May 26, 1953. Similar to these lecture evenings were the "literature evenings" (*munhag-üi pam*) and "literature and music evenings" as well as several lecture events to commemorate important events like the recapture of Seoul (September 28, 1952), or Liberation day (August 15, 1952). Next to this the writers were also active in organizing radio broadcasts for Taegu radio.

Sangsöp (chief editor) and Yi Muyöng, who all received a special training from the Navy in Jinhae before being allowed to join.<sup>21</sup> It had also been decided that female writers Son Sohüi and Yun Künsuk would join, but when they found out that women were not allowed on board of a ship they could not do so.<sup>22</sup>

This group was not as active as the Army Writers in entrenching themselves with the forces. Pak Kyeju was twice entrenched with the marines for a week, while Pak Yönhüi went aboard vessel nr. 309 for three weeks. While on board Pak did not witness any “dazzling” naval battles, and in fact was quite bored. Therefore, after hearing his story, no other members of the group felt an urge to have a similar experience and they all remained on shore.<sup>23</sup>

Next to the war writer organizations that from 1951 were in liaison with each specific army branch, the NACO also continued its activities during this period. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1951 it participated in the “6.25 anti-communist rally” where among other things they organized the performance of Kim Yöngsu’s play *Red Seoul (Pulgün Söul)* in the Tong A Theatre that ran until the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. From the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1951 they organized a lecture series on the current state of affairs. Throughout these last

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<sup>21</sup> *Minjog-üi chüngön*, p. 133 Later on Hō Yunsök, Pak Yonggu, Pak Kyeju (1913-1966), poets Pak Yönhüi, Kong Chungin, Yi T’aerae, Kim Kyudong, Pak T’aejin (1921-2006), Pak Hwamok, and literary critic Yun Kojong (1912-?) also joined this group. Their office was located at the Navy division of the TlaE, which was situated right across the street of Pusan station. Instead of a chairman, they had loosely assigned Pak Kyeju to be a manager, a position that was later transferred to Pak Yönhüi.

<sup>22</sup> *Minjog-üi chüngön*, p.134

<sup>23</sup> *Minjog-üi chüngön*, p.135. Another notable activity of the group was the effort of Yi Muyöng, who had been transferred to run the administration for the admiral in Chinhae, to erect a statue of Yi Sunshin during the war.

two years, the NACO held several other rallies in commemoration of March 1<sup>st</sup>, Liberation Day, or the start of the Korean War. Later, as the signing of the armistice agreement seemed to be very near, they held an emergency meeting on June 13<sup>th</sup> to organize a protest. These protests were held on eight different locations throughout Pusan on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.<sup>24</sup>

Even though organization-wise there was a clear division in which writer belonged to which group, in reality the writers intermingled with each other and even organized many events together. Their reminiscences of the café's they frequented in Taegu and Pusan clearly show this.<sup>25</sup> The above summary of their organizational activities show that they were very active. In recognition of their deeds, Ch'oe Sangdök, Kim P'albong, Ku Sang and Pak Yöngjun were awarded the Gold Star Hwarang Medal of Military Merit (Kümsöng hwarang mugong hunjang) in 1955.

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<sup>24</sup> Next to this the NACO regulated the prices for manuscript submissions, which fluctuated strongly due to inflation. Throughout the war years, the prizes went from 100 *wön* per 200 syllables for a manuscript and 10000 *wön* for a poem on April 11, 1951, to 3000 *wön* (April 20, 1952), to 5000 *wön* (May 20, 1952; 50000 *wön* for a poem), to 100 *hwan* (June 5, 1953; 1000 *hwan* for a poem).

<sup>25</sup> *Haebang munhak 20 nyön*, p. 89.



**2 Ch'oe Sangdök, Kim P'albong, Ku Sang and Pak Yöngjun receiving the Gold Star Hwarang Medal of Military Merit (Kümsöng hwarang mugong hunjang) in 1955**

Throughout the war period, there was a severe paper shortage which cut down the number of opportunities of the writers to get published. The writers of the Army War Writers Group, for example, had planned to publish the military magazine *Frontline Literature* soon after the group was established. However, it took until April 1952 for the first issue to see the light of day.<sup>26</sup> Due to wartime inflation, the payment writers received for their writings was not enough to live on. The war writer organizations therefore from time to time provided the writers with clothes and rice.

The writers in society who did not, or were not allowed to join up with one of the war writer groups led a very harsh life, especially those who took refuge in Pusan. One tragic victim of the war's circumstances was the young poet Chön Pongnae (1923-1951).

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<sup>26</sup> Many magazines during the war frequently mention the difficulties they had in procuring paper for printing their magazines. Even with these difficulties it is extraordinary just how many stories and novels were printed during the course of the war (see Appendix for a complete list).

When war broke out, he and his brother were unable to flee Seoul and spent three months in hiding during the occupation by the North Korean army. After Seoul was recaptured his brother was drafted into the army, while Chŏn Pongnae moved to Pusan. Here he found himself stranded without housing and food, and saw no other way out than to commit suicide by drinking poison in Café Star, a café frequented by many writers.<sup>27</sup>

The death of this promising young poet, and especially the reason for his actions, was a big shock to the other writers.<sup>28</sup> Later during the war, another young poet, Chŏng Unsam (1925-1953) also committed suicide.<sup>29</sup> Due to the many refugees that had

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<sup>27</sup> He made his debut in 1950 through the *Literary Arts* magazine. During the liberation period he had moved to the south together with his brother and spent most of his time in several café's enjoying Bach's music or reading the poetry of Paul Valéry. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February he sat down and drank the poison. While the deadly effects of the potion slowly manifested itself he wrote the following note. "I drank phenobarbital. 30 seconds have passed. Nothing happens./Two minutes, three minutes have passed. Still nothing seems to happen./Ten minutes have passed. My eyes are becoming heavy./I did not want to leave this splendid world./But in order to live correctly and upright I will go to my death with a smile./Bach's music is flowing around./To the people I miss, February 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> In his novel *Living Forever* (*Yŏngwŏnhi sanŭn kŏt*, 1952), Kim Song inserted a reference to Chŏn Pongnae's suicide note, when the main female protagonist of the story contemplates suicide and writes in her diary that she was thinking of committing suicide by drinking phenobarbital while listening to Bach's music. See Kim Song, *Yŏngwŏnhi sanŭn kŏt*, *Han'guk munhak chŏnjip* 26 (Seoul: Minjung sŏgwan, 1976), p. 267.

<sup>29</sup> He had published his first few romantic poems in *Whiteclothed people* (*Paengmin*) magazine in 1949 and was a promising new poet on the literary scene. During the war he had fled to Pusan, where he obtained a job as a teacher at Sukmyŏng Girls' High School. The day he committed suicide did not seem any different from his other regular visits to café Miltawŏn. However, next to his pent up frustration due to the war, he had just experienced a painful heartbreak. This led him to his decision. His suicide note read: "After a long time it has really become clear to me./Now, in the rolling waves of the sea, I can see the face of my lover sending me a smile./Now I see before me that almost all of my beloved friends have gathered./I don't want to prolong my life any longer in this time and place where they have taken care of me./Be well People I miss./January 8, 1953 Chŏng Unsam."

flooded the city of Pusan, many of the writers were struggling to find a small place to sleep. Female writer Kim Malbong and poet O Yöngsu, who both owned a house in Pusan before the war broke out, helped the refugee writers and their families out as much as they could in this regard, by letting them sleep over.<sup>30</sup> Kim Tongni would later record the story of the writers' hardship in Pusan in his famous 1955 novel *The period in Miltawön (Miltawön shidae)*.<sup>31</sup>

### Organisations and activities in North Korea

Immediately after Pak Iru's radio speech announcing the commencement of the Korean War, the North Korean Federation of Literature and Arts (Pukchosön munhak yesul ch'ongdongmaeng, henceforth the NKFLA) called for an immediate general member's meeting to discuss the situation.<sup>32</sup> The next day, June 26, a first group of more than twenty war writers was formed and sent to the front.<sup>33</sup> Among the first of this batch were writers Kim Saryang

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<sup>30</sup> Cho Yönhyon remembers fondly of how much effort Kim Malbong put in to try to help all the writers in need in *Naega saraon Han'guk mundan*, pp. 286-288.

<sup>31</sup> In this novel the characters are all modeled on one of the writers living in wartime Pusan. Miss Kil is for example modeled on Kim Malbong, while Cho Yönhyon appears as Cho Hyönshik and poet Yi Ponggu is Yi Chunggu.

<sup>32</sup> Before the establishment of the DPRK this organization was first known as the Pyöngyang Region Proletarian Art League (P'yöngyang chigu p'üroret'aria yesul tongmaeng) and was led by Yi Kiyöng. In September 1946 it changed its name to the NKFLA. It had its own publishing house and was financially supported by running a brewery. In January 1948 there were some organizational changes were made and Han Sörya became the new chairman. After the DPRK was established it was put under the auspices of the ministry of Culture and Propaganda, but in reality this ministry did not have much influence over the NKFLA's activities.

<sup>33</sup> Hyön Su, *Yökch'i 6 nyön-üi pukhanmundan [The North Korean literary scene under six years of communist rule]*, Seoul: Taehanch'ulp'an (1952), p. 173. Writer Chön Chaegyöng and playwright Han T'aech'ön also went to the frontline on this day.

(1914-1950), Pak Seyöng (1902-1989), and Yi Tonggyu (1913-1951), as well as poets Kim Pugwön (1911-1984) and Kim Chogyu (1914-1990). On the 27<sup>th</sup> a second group was sent, this time containing a lot of artists who had previously fled from the south, such as writers Yi T'aejun (1904-1953) and Kim Namch'ön (1911-1953), poets Im Hwa (1908-1953), Cho Pyögam (1908-1985), and playwright Ham Sedök (1915-1950).<sup>34</sup> These artists immediately set out to perform all sorts of propaganda activities, and wrote reportages of their experiences at the front.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, a few days after Seoul had been taken, Im Hwa, Kim Namch'ön and literary critic Yi Wönjo (1909-1953), among others, had established the Seoul Branch of the Federation of Literature and Arts (Munhakyeseul ch'ongdongmaeng Söul chidobu).<sup>35</sup> An Hüinam, the chairman of the Writers League (Munhakka tongmaeng) took charge over this organization, together with poets Yi Pyöngch'öl and Yi Yongak (1914-1971).<sup>36</sup> Yi Pyöngch'öl, who had been imprisoned before the Korean War, was a driving force behind the Writers League, and was seen by many as a hero because of his prison time.<sup>37</sup> Already that very same day a poster was hung on the wall asking for newly written materials for

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 174. Poets Cho Yöngch'ul (1913-1993), An Hüinam, and playwright Yi Söhyang (1915-?) are also mentioned to have left for the front on this day. Ham Sedök died on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June in Seoul, allegedly while trying to throw a grenade towards the South Korean army which exploded prematurely in his own hands.

<sup>35</sup> The office of this organization was located in the Hanch'öng building which was located at Chongno street.

<sup>36</sup> Yi Kibong, *Pug-üi munhak yesurin* [Writers and artists from the North,] Seoul: Sasayön (1986), p. 262.

<sup>37</sup> Cho Yönhyön, *Naega saraon han'guk mundan*, p. 269.

publication.<sup>38</sup> The first reportages from the front arrived in Pyöngyang around the middle of July and were quickly printed in various newspapers and magazines. The most popular writings were those of Kim Saryang, followed by the ones written by Yi T'aejun, Yi Tonggyu, Kim Pugwön and Chön Chaegyöng.<sup>39</sup>

On the 25th of July a large meeting with more than ten thousand participants was held in Seoul by the main branch of the Writers League. Here Yi Pyöngch'öl gave a speech to induce writers to volunteer for becoming a war writer.<sup>40</sup> Around the same time a new group of writers was sent to the front from Py'öngyang.<sup>41</sup> What was special about this group is that for the first time these writers wore army uniforms with the rank of captain.<sup>42</sup>

As the fortunes of war turned around completely from the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, many writers also had to retreat further up North. Kim Saryang lost his life around this time. At the beginning of October, all writers groups were urged by the NKFLA to flee and to reorganize in the town of Kanggye.<sup>43</sup> While the North Korean Army was in full retreat, writers like Pak T'aewön (1909-1986) and Hyön Tök (1909-?) came back from Seoul.<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that, while it was possible for writers to make use of this opportunity of

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<sup>38</sup> Chang Yöngch'ang, *Söur-ün pult'anda* [Seoul is burning,] Seoul: Tongjisa (1978), p. 80. *Minjog-üi chüngön*, p. 56

<sup>39</sup> Hyön Su, pp. 174-175.

<sup>40</sup> Yi Kibong, p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> This group of about eight people contained the likes of writer Yun Sejung (1912-1965), poet Yi Wönu and Ko Irhwan.

<sup>42</sup> Hyön Su, pp. 177-178.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

confusion, only a small group of writers decided to move to the South.

As the frontline stabilized in the spring of 1951, the writers reorganized themselves. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1951 the NKFLA merged with the South Korean Federation of Cultural Organisations (Namchosŏn munhwa tanch'e ch'ongyŏnmaeng) to form the Korean Federation of Literature and Arts (Chosŏn munhakyeshul ch'ongdongmaeng, hereafter KFLA). According to literary critic Ki Sŏkpok this was done in order to "assist in the creation of works that would prepare the people for a protracted war."<sup>45</sup> Han Sŏrya (1900-1976) became the chairman of this organization, while Yi T'aejun and poet Cho Kich'ŏn (1913-1951) were chosen as vice-chairman.<sup>46</sup>

Under the auspices of the KFLA, next to the organisations for theater, music, art, film, dance and photography, there was the Literature Organisation (Munhak tongmaeng). Here it was Yi T'aejun who served as chairman, with Pak P'aryang as vice-chairman and Kim Namch'ŏn as secretary.<sup>47</sup> Related to this organization was the Literary Arts Press (Munhak yesulsa) whose

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<sup>45</sup> Ki Sŏkpok, *Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng-gwa uri munhak*, p. 228

<sup>46</sup> Pak Unggŏl served as secretary. Other board members of this organization were novelists Yi Kiyŏng (1895-1984) and Kim Namch'ŏn, poets Im Hwa and Kim Chogyu, playwright Shin Kosong (1907-?), actor Pak Yŏngshin, musician Kim Sunnam (1917-1986) and painter Chŏng Kwanch'ŏl (1916-1983). Members of the supervising committee were literary critic An Mak (1910-1958? as chairman), Kim Pugwŏn, Yi Wŏnjo, An Hŭinam and novelist Yi Pungmyŏng (1910-1988).

<sup>47</sup> Listed as members were Yi Kiyŏng, Han Sŏrya, Im Hwa, novelist Ch'oe Myŏngik, Yi Wŏnjo, Cho Kich'ŏn, Kim Chogyu, An Hoenam, Yi Yongak, An Hamgwang, poet Min Pyŏnggyun and Hyŏn Tŏk.

chief editor was Kim Chogyu, which published the monthly magazine *Literary Arts (Munhak yesul)* from April 1951 to the end of the war without discontinuations, which is quite an achievement considering that also in the North there was a severe lack of paper. Next to this there was also the Cultural Frontline Press (Munhwa chönsönsa) which was under the supervision of Kim Namch'ön.<sup>48</sup> The location of the KFLA was in a small village approximately twenty kilometers east of Pyöngyang and many of the North's writers resided at this location.<sup>49</sup>

Circumstances in the North were very bleak. Due to the incessant bombing campaigns of the UN forces, life had literally moved underground, with presses or factories moved inside caves. Poet Cho Kich'ön died during such a bombing raid on his office in July 1951. In order to keep morale high among the population, theatre groups were dispatched throughout the country to give performances, for example around the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1952. Writers were also sent out to give lectures to report on events at the front or to recite poems.<sup>50</sup> Yi Ch'ölchu, who was active as vice-president of

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<sup>48</sup> *Munhak yesul* 4.1 (April 1951), p. 35

<sup>49</sup> The exact location of the office was in Kangdonggun, Shijök-myön, Songhangni. According to Yi Ch'ölchu this place escaped UN bombing raids and was therefore quite safe. Yi Ch'ölchu, p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Also in the North several writers were honored by the state for their efforts during the war. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1951 Yi Kiyöng, Yi T'aejun, Han Sörya, Im Hwa and Cho Kich'ön received the National Flag medal 2<sup>nd</sup> class, Kim Chogyu, Pak Unggöl and Shin Kosong the National Flag medal 3<sup>rd</sup> class, Kim Pugwön, Nam Kungman, Yi Wönu and poet Hwang Hail the Army Service Medal and Kim Namch'ön, Kim Sünggu, Yi Pungmyöng, Min Pyönggyu, Pak P'aryang, poets Chöng Söch'on and Ch'oe Söktu the Medal of Merit. (see *Munhak yesul* 4.2, p.38) What is interesting is that the majority of the recipients of medals consisted of theatre actors, dancers and singers, showing that the importance of artistic activities lay foremost in these fields. For example in the announcement of medal

the youth theatre group during the war, recalls of these dire circumstances: “There were no blankets or mattresses. There was no ink either, so you could hunker down in the canteen, pen in hand, and concentrate on writing as much as you wanted; it could hardly result in an actual work. ...In every house people tried to get by on maize gruel, but even that wasn’t available in sufficient quantities, so one had to eat herbs, roots and bark to survive until the next day of distribution.”<sup>51</sup> Everyone had to be in the possession of a ration card in order to get food. One could also rely on the army for food, however, this was almost exclusively possible for writers who had joined as war writers.<sup>52</sup> Therefore most writers had to endure days when they could not eat. Writers who did not get into favor with the authorities and therefore could not get a high position in literary organisations or get published were leading particularly difficult lives.<sup>53</sup>

## Writer’s attitudes towards the Korean War

As hinted earlier, what stands out in this narration of the intellectuals’ wartime activities is the swiftness with which they

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recipients for people in the field of arts in *Munhak yesul* (1951.12, pp.57-59), no writer received a medal.

<sup>51</sup> Brian Myers, *Han Sōrya and the Failure of Social Realism*. Yi Ch’ōlju, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Yi Ch’ōlchu, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> One example of such unfortunate writers was poet Yi Pyōngch’ōl, who had been active during the North Korean occupation period in Seoul to convince other writers to write for the North. Without any opportunity to get acknowledged he was trying to get by in a small hut with his wife and three children, who kept asking for food to their parents. Yi Ch’ōlchu, pp. 83-84.

came into action to support the war effort and the lead that writers in specific took herein. Although it happens that individual authors decide to write positively for the war effort, it is not common that writers mobilize themselves in such big numbers, without an impetus from the state.<sup>54</sup> It is clear from their actions that the Korean writers already had a clear conviction on the role a writer has to play in war. The vast majority of writers during the Korean War were of the opinion that during war, all intellectual efforts should be in the interest of the nation. In the December 1950 issue of *Munye* [Literature] magazine, Yi Sŏn'gŭn(1905-1983), who was Head of the Ministry of Defense, discussed the direction literature should take during war and especially stressed the importance of the intellectuals' patriotism. This importance, he explained, came from the fact that "intellectuals are the creators of ideology" and that "during war, victory would not be achieved by a military victory over the enemy, but only if there is also an ideological victory. Thus it is necessary that the writers instill patriotism in the hearts of the people and augment their fighting spirit."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> British, French and German writers in World War I and American, British, Japanese, German and Russian writers in World War II all were organized into propaganda war writer groups only by actions of the state. See for example Wolfgang Mommsen ed., *Kultur und Krieg: Die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg*, (München: Oldenbourg, 1996); Prochasson and Rasmussen, *Au nom de la patrie: les intellectuels et la première guerre mondiale (1910-1919)*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1996); Sherry ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); or MacKay ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Yi Sŏn'gŭn, Inyŏm-ŭi sŭngni, *Munye*, 1950.12

Novelist Park Yŏngjun (1911-1976) agreed with this view and saw the importance of the intellectual's role in war by the fact that "Modern war is a total war and in total war the thought[propaganda] war, the spying war and the war over the airwaves are just as important as the military aspects of it."<sup>56</sup> Yi Hŏn'gu (1905-1983) stressed the need of the writer's propaganda work in the thought war to increase the morale of the people at the home front and even called it a 'holy occupation' for a writer during war.<sup>57</sup>

Ch'oe Sangdŏk (1901-1970) expressed the importance of writers in the following way in the first issue of *Frontline Literature* (*Chŏnsŏn munhak*). "The pen we carry with us to fight should become a new weapon just like a hydrogen bomb or a field gun."<sup>58</sup> He continues to tell that not only is the pen useful in confronting the enemy, but it can also be used to unite the front with the home front and thus "the writer should be seen as a soldier who unites, and whose special task it is to increase the morale of the soldiers at the front and increase the fighting spirit of the people at the rear." This opinion of the writer as 'a soldier who unites' can also be found in the essay of Yi Muyeŏng (1908-1960) who noted that "in modern warfare sacrifices are asked not only of soldiers, but also of writers and the whole people of the nation."<sup>59</sup> Thus as can be seen

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<sup>56</sup> Park Yŏngjun, "Kunin-gwa chŏngch'i," *Chŏnsŏn munhak*, 1952.12.

<sup>57</sup> Yi Hŏn'gu, "Illyuae-wa tongjogae," *Chŏnshi munhak tokpon*, 1951, p. 138.

<sup>58</sup> Ch'oe Sangdŏk, "Ch'anggansa," *Chŏnsŏn munhak*, 1951.4

<sup>59</sup> Yi Muyeŏng, "Chŏnjaeng-gwa munhak," *Chŏnsŏn munhak*, 1953.5.

above, each writer explained the relationship between war and the writer in their own respective ways.

Although specific reflections on the role of writers during war are scarce in North Korean essays, a similar opinion is definitely held. For example in a wartime speech to writers by Kim Il Sung in June 1951, the aforementioned uniting principle of the writer is stressed when it is remarked that “In these times the tasks of writers is truly important. As engineers of the human spirit, our writers do not only express our people’s strong nationalism, unmoving fighting spirit and their iron belief in the ultimate victory. The writers’ works serve as the most powerful and effective weapon for our people to fight and inspiringly move our whole people towards final victory.”<sup>60</sup> Han Sörya echoed these words of Kim Il Sung and said that “Nowadays, the task of the writer is to strengthen the people’s belief in the attainment of victory in both the heroic People’s Army and the people at the home front.”<sup>61</sup> An Hamgwang mentions in an essay that “Through the writer the people’s fighting spirit is augmented and rallied completely for the war, strengthening their resolve even more.” The role of the writer is therefore seen as an important factor in “linking the front to the home front, which will bring about the country’s liberation and keep world peace.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kim Il Sung, “Meeting with writers,” *Munhak yesul* 4.2 (June 1951), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Han Sörya, “Kim IIsöng changgun-gwa munhakyesusul,” *Munhak yesul* (1952.4), p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> An Hamgwang, “Chosön literature during wartime,” *Munhak yesul* 4.1 (May 1951), p. 87, 102.

The overarching idea that appears in the Korean writers' views is that they relate modern war, and thus also the ongoing Korean War, to the ideology of total war. However what is noticeable in their essays on the role of the intellectual or of literature during war, is that they do not find it necessary to define what total war is. Kim Song (1909-1988) even stated in 1951 that the setup of an organization by the intellectuals only three days after the outbreak of the war came about "automatically", showing almost a sort of "casualness" with which the writers dealt with the outbreak of the war.<sup>63</sup> Since the term of total war did not need any specific explication or introduction among intellectuals or the public during the Korean War it is, therefore, necessary to first describe the influx of the ideology into Korean intellectual thought to see how it became a part of the authors' habitus and to get an idea of how the ideology was perceived in the public mind.

### **The ideology of total war and its influx in Korea**

The total war narrative conventionally begins in the era of the French Revolution, when the first modern attempts were made to mobilize entire populations in support of a war.<sup>64</sup> During the

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<sup>63</sup> Kim Song, "Munhak hanŭn kunin-dŭl," *Chŏnsŏn munhak*, 1951.4.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed theoretical discussion on a general definition of the concept of total war, see Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, *In the Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Roger Chickering, Stig Förster and Bernd Greiner, *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

American Civil War the generals involved realized early on the modern ramifications of industrial mobilization and the importance of civilian morale to the war's outcome. But the real debut of total war can be said to have come in the second half of the First World War, at about the time the front had turned into a stalemate. The leaders involved in the war recognized that the home front had turned into a decisive dimension of the war and made efforts to drive the mobilization of the home front to new extremes.

Retrospective analysis of the war in the 1920's and 30's paid special attention to the civilians' role in the outcome and focused particularly on their deficiencies and vulnerabilities. The conclusions were inescapable: civilians were critical to the supply of weapons, munitions, and the other essential materials of combat, and they provided the moral backing without which the war could not be sustained. However, civilians were also seen as more vulnerable to both subversion and military attack, for they were less acclimated to the terrors, deprivations, and demoralization that war brings. The *Dolchstoß* (stab-in-the-back) legend that came into being in Germany was based on these perceptions, as the German military leadership genuinely believed that the moral collapse of the home front in 1918 had wrecked what would otherwise be a victorious military campaign and thus felt betrayed by the civilian population.

Although the term “total war” was coined by French civilian leaders during the late phase of the First World War, when they announced their ambitions to mobilize the country’s every resource, it came into the limelight through Erich Ludendorff’s pamphlet *Der totale Krieg* in 1935.<sup>65</sup> Although after the Second World War, the phrase “total war” carried different connotations, referring less to the efforts of one’s own population and more to the death and destruction inflicted on the population of others, this was not what total war was about in the first place. Total war was historically not in the first instance about soldiers, but rested on the insight that the claims of war in the industrial age had become all-embracing. In other words, modern wars implied that the loyal participation of entire populations – men, women and children – had become more important than soldiers to the outcome of the war. This is also the vision of total war in Ludendorff’s *Der totale Krieg*. In his treatise he was not concerned with tactics or strategy, but instead described the sort of government that was required to ensure full national mobilization.<sup>66</sup>

It is in this form that the Japanese military leadership introduced the term to their population. Having witnessed the collapse of the German empire firsthand as a participant in the First World War,

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<sup>65</sup> The terms the French used were *guerre totale* (total war) and *guerre integrale* (integrated war), the German equivalent *der totale Krieg* came into being in German military literature from 1934. Roger Chickering and Stig Forster, *Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.9.

<sup>66</sup> Erich Ludendorff, *General Ludendorff – Der totale Krieg* (München: Ludendorff Verlag, 1935). The full text of his treatise can be read at <https://archive.org/details/Ludendorff-Erich-Der-totale-Krieg>.

they concluded that Germany's defeat lay not in the lack of morale among the population, but the fact that Germany had to rely on its own industry to fight in the war. They realized that the export-reliant German economy was severely hit by the naval blockade of the Allied forces.<sup>67</sup> That is why many among the Japanese leadership were of the opinion that a self-reliant Japanese economy should be created in order to be able to win a modern war. Of course this still meant that the whole population should be mobilized to ensure that such a self-reliant economy could come about and be maintained.

Ludendorff's thesis had a lot of influence on Japanese policy makers and after the 'Manchuria incident' in September 1937 several organizations were set up within Korea to prepare the population for a prolonged war so as to ensure their active participation for the war effort. Thus in October of the same year the 'Central Organization for the Full Support of the Population' was established and was followed by the 'National Mobilization Law' (Kukka ch'ongdongwönpöp) in April 1938.<sup>68</sup> Under the banner of 'Japan and Korea are One' and the prospect of a 'Greater

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<sup>67</sup> Scholars nowadays agree with this vision and see the naval blockade as one of the most influential causes for Germany's loss. See for example Christopher Birrer, "A Critical analysis of the Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1918", *Journal of the Center for First World War Studies* 1.2 (November 2004)

<sup>68</sup> In this law "national mobilization" was defined as follows: "National mobilization means that in times of war for the purpose national defense, human and material resources shall be employed in its most effective manner for national strength." (Art. 1) Article 4 deals specifically with the government's right to draft civilians: "When the government issues an order in times it needs a national mobilization, it can draft citizens of the empire and let them engage in mobilization activities. This law does not conflict with the application of the soldier conscription law."

East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', Korean society was mobilized to participate actively with the policies of the colonial authorities. Korean writers were acquainted with the principles of total war around the time the rules and regulations were promulgated in 1938. The first time Korean intellectuals spread their views on the principles of total war was in a series of articles published in September 1938 in the *Tonga ilbo*.<sup>69</sup>

With the publication of Hino Ashihei (1907-1960)'s *Barley and Soldiers (Mugi to heitai)*, which was translated in 1939 by the Government-General translator Nashimura Shintaro, a debate broke out among the Korean writers as to how they could show their support to the Japanese efforts in China and at the same time could bring the war to the Korean people's attention.<sup>70</sup> Here they argued that "while in a total war every individual is important in attaining victory, the responsibility for writers is even greater since they have the task to drive out anti-nationalistic ideas and are thus guardians of culture."<sup>71</sup> It was soon decided that Korean writers needed to visit the Japanese troops in China so that they themselves would have a firsthand view of war which they then could transmit to the Korean population through their writings. For this aim the 'Writer's Group to Support the Imperial Army'

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<sup>69</sup> These articles were Kim Chöngshil's "Ch'ongnyökjön-üi pöpchök chöngbi" (1-17 September 1938) and O Namgi's "Kündae chönjaengnon" (18 September - 6 October 1938).

<sup>70</sup> This debate was set in motion by a panel discussion between Kim Tonghwan, Kim P'albong and Pak Yönghui which was published in *Samch'ölli* [3000 Li] magazine of January 1939.

<sup>71</sup> Anon., "Munhwain-üi ch'aengmu" [The Duties of People in the Cultural Field], *Inmun p'yöngnon* 2 [Liberal Arts Review], (December 1939), p. 1.

(Hwanggun wimun chakkadan) was established in March 1939 and one month later Kim Tongin (1900-1951), Pak Yŏnghŭi (1901-?) and Im Haksu (1911-1982) were chosen to visit the frontline to report about the efforts of the Japanese army.<sup>72</sup> Park Yŏnghŭi(1901-?), however, found this insufficient and argued that “while reporting about the efforts of the Imperial Army is a good thing, another important role for the Korean writer is to make the Japanese mind one with the whole population, in the sense that we also have to show our beautiful ethics and morality, and our open-minded ideals towards life, which is lacking in our modern Korean literature.”<sup>73</sup> A larger organization of writers was formed in October 1939 with the founding of the Chosŏn Writers Association (Chosŏn munin hyŏphoe).<sup>74</sup>

With the institutionalization of the ideology of total war in full swing, The role of the writer in wartime society was also explained in connection with this dominant ideology. As an editorial in the magazine *Liberal Arts Review* (*Inmun p’yŏngnon*) of December 1939 explained: “Since modern wars are so called total wars, the

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<sup>72</sup> The literary fruits of this first trip were the publications of Kim Tongin’s “A Reportage Novel of a True Story” (“Monogatari teki na hōkoku shōsetsu”), Pak Yŏnghŭi’s “Comprehending the Holy War through Literature” (“Seisen no bungaku teki haaku”), “Travelog to the North” (“Kitaji ryokōki”), “A Trip to the Front” (“Sensen kikō”) and Im Haksu’s “Romanticism at the Frontline” (Senji e no romanchishizumu), “Report from the Pen Corps” (“Ben butai hōkoku”), “Poems from the Frontline” (“Sensen shishū”).

<sup>73</sup> Park Yŏng-hŭi, “Chŏnjaeng-gwa chosŏnmunhak,” *Inmun p’yŏngnon* 1, (October 1939).

<sup>74</sup> Involved in this organization were among others Yi T’aejun, Yi Kwangsu, Kim Ōk, Yu Chino, Chŏng Insŏp, Yi Kiyŏng, Pak Yŏnghŭi, Kim Tonghwan, Chu Yohan, Yu Ch’ijin and Ch’oe Chaesŏ. Later in April 1943 this organization would merge with others into the Chosŏn Writers Association to Save the Nation (Chosŏn munin pogukhoe).

ultimate defeat or victory is decided by the potential energy of the citizens at the home front. Therefore, duties regarding the war are also placed on the people in the field of culture, but what is expected from them is that they deal with war directly. As a person in the field of culture one must feel it is his greatest responsibility not to be passively confronted with war's destructive powers, but to actively create an autonomous culture that will completely eradicate anti-national thoughts."<sup>75</sup> In this editorial the latent power of civilians is regarded as being a crucial factor in winning a modern war and it argues for the active participation of people in the cultural field, because their efforts create an autonomous culture and remove any "anti-national" tendencies that could arise in society.

### **The role of the writer and literature during total war**

As could be seen from their attitudes towards the Korean War, the idea of total war was very much present in the way the writers' views were shaped. This is visible in Park Yŏngjun's essays where he also makes a reference to the 'Dolchstoss' legend. "The Germans could confront the Allied Powers on an equal footing on the battlefield. They were defeated, however, because of the collapse of the political ideology among the people at the home front. This proves that they lost because of their failure in the thought war."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Anon., "munhwain-ŭi ch'aengmu", *Inmun py'ŏngnon* 2 (December 1939): p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Park Yŏngjun, "Kunin-gwa chŏngch'i", *Chŏnsŏn munhak*, 1952.12

He goes on to stress that the political ideology should be strengthened and that the pros of democracy and the cons of communism should be constantly stressed. This is similar to the remark from the Pacific War found above in that he defines communism as an anti-nationalist idea that needs to be driven out. In another essay he also uses Germany's defeat during World War I as a warning when he remarks that "While everything is being done on the military side to confront the communist armies, we cannot just rely on the military aspects. In order to fight with the full strength that our Free Korea is capable of, we should unite the front with the citizens at the rear. Next to warfare we will have to pursue the realization of a struggle by economic, political and cultural means. We should not forget what happened to Germany during World War I when they were winning the military war, but were defeated in the political and cultural war."<sup>77</sup>

In the essays written by the writers during the Korean War, it can be seen that the term total war (*ch'ongnyŏkchŏn*) is most commonly used as a means to stress the importance of the role of the writer when it comes to the struggle in the 'thought war'. Ma Haesong also related the writers' role during war as being closely related to the ideology of total war. According to him "writers, painters and artists are the most deprived group in society during war. However, because of total war they have no time to lament this fact. Modern war is a total war and the purpose of a modern war is to destroy the enemy's culture, while infiltrating with your

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<sup>77</sup> Park Yŏngjun, "Chayu segye-nŭn isang ŏpta", *Shinch'ŏnji*, 1952.5

own. For this reason the artists should pursue their activities most vigorously."<sup>78</sup>

As the writers saw it, the role of the writer was of the utmost importance if one wanted to attain victory in war. This is what we could find earlier in the words of Ch'oe Sangdök among others. To be more precise, it was the intellectual who was unwavering in a war and the nation's hope for victory. It was the intellectuals' task to keep the population together, since in their opinion, and hereby they echo Ludendorff's criticism of the common people, the normal population could be easily swayed by 'unwanted ideologies'. Kim P'albong said about this: "When the war drags on for a long period of time the normal citizens will behave more and more like animals and thus the wisdom of the writers should be on a higher level than theirs."<sup>79</sup> Ku Sang pronounced this in an even more radical way and thought that writers were the only ones capable of maintaining their morale. "The war writer can be likened to a righteous soldier...while the other intellectuals in society show that they give in to demoralizing and fatalistic ideas, it is only the war writer groups that are showing that they are the pillars of the nation."<sup>80</sup>

This last remark of Ku Sang shows well what other issues were involved during the Korean War, especially when the war was coming to an, in the opinion of the writers, unwanted end with the signing of the armistice agreement. There is no doubt that the

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<sup>78</sup> Ma Haesong, "Ch'ongnyökchön-gwa munin" in *Chönjin-gwa insaeng* (Seoul: hüngguk yönmun hyöphoe, 1953.1), p. 163.

<sup>79</sup> Kim P'albong, "Chönjaeng munhag-üi panghyang," *Chönsön munhak*, 1953.2

<sup>80</sup> Ku Sang, "Chonggun chakkadan 2 nyön," *Chönsön munhak*, 1953.5

writers believed that their role within wartime society was essential to establish the important total war goal of uniting the population to keep morale high. However, here we can see the term of total war as a ready-made instrument with which they could stress their unique position of the intellectual in society and with which they could present their arguments more persuasively. By doing so they put themselves above other writers who had or could not join in one of the war writer groups and above all other intellectual endeavours.

This positioning on the part of the writers who were members of a war writer group was criticized by some. In their view the writers degraded their own social standing and literary works by being too close to the military and political spectrum, since intellectuals should remain “the voice of reason” of society as critical and free thinking subjects. This is for example how Yi Hön’gu defines the intellectual’s role in society. “The intellectual is a representative of the spirit of the modern world who understands completely the elementary and fundamental ideology in which all laws and freedoms exist and function by the people and for the people. The intellectual creates and protects the spirit of the times, and therefore at times has the right and duty to vehemently defy it.” However, even though Yi sees this as the natural role of an intellectual in society, he disagrees that this is the exact stance that intellectuals should take during war, since he is arguing for the establishment of a united cultural front. Ku Sang mentions some of the criticisms that were leveled at the war writers: “Now this

extreme ignorance is gone, but there was the misconception that “writers who go to the front” were merely seen to dance to the tunes of the army, and were therefore treated like newspaper journalists. ... [There are those] who regard war writers as mere government-patronised writers, and therefore their works are not literary works.”<sup>81</sup> Pak Yǒngjun confirms these views and writes that there are writers who deliberately refrained from joining one of the groups, in order not to become a tool for government propaganda. “There are writers who have the tendency to stay aloof [of the war writer groups], because by wearing a uniform you are flirting with the authorities.”<sup>82</sup>

The dominant opinion of the role of the writer in wartime society was propagated by the war writers, however, and for them maintaining high morale among the population was much more important than personal or artistic considerations. Therefore, it goes without saying that in order to fulfill such an important role in wartime society, writers would have to concentrate all their efforts on writing for their country and hence write their works in a nationalistic tone. The poet Ku Sang (1919-2004) did not see this as having a negative effect on the aesthetic aspects of a writer’s work and was of the opinion that writers in war would first and foremost “serve the freedom of the fatherland before the freedom of their ‘pens’ and will find the glory of their ‘brush’ in the face of

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<sup>81</sup> Ku Sang, “Chonggun chakkadan 2 nyǒn,” *Chǒnsǒn munhak* (1953.5), pp. 57-58.

<sup>82</sup> Pak Yǒngjun, *Chǒnsǒn munhak* 2, pp. 32-35.

the glory of humanity and the fatherland.”<sup>83</sup> The writer Yi Muyeong (1908-1960) held the same opinion. For him it would be absurd if writers ‘would keep writing their romantic love stories’ while war was all around them. The most important thing for him was that the war would be won and this required sacrifices from everybody in society.<sup>84</sup> According to him this was necessary, because “the situation in which our *minjok* is thrown today is that of a front line belligerent. This war is not fought by front line soldiers only. This is a war fought by our whole *minjok*.”<sup>85</sup> Writers were a part of this frontline and therefore he argued for literary works that would contribute to the war effort.

Kim P'albong agreed with this view and also argues for a literature that is fully in service of the war effort. According to him: “The goal of war is to win. Without victory our literature cannot exist. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that our literature demonstrates an indomitable love for the nation, countrymen and brothers in arms and promotes a fervent hatred for the enemy.”<sup>86</sup> For this reason he lists several aspects that wartime literature should try to incorporate and change.

- 1) Expose the irrationality and falsity inherent in the communist ideology and point out its contradictions.
- 2) Completely rid itself of decadent tendencies.

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<sup>83</sup> Ku Sang, “Chonggun chakkadan 2 nyön,” *Chönsön munhak* 5 (May 1953): p. 59.

<sup>84</sup> Yi Muyeong, “Chönjaeng-gwa munhak” [War and Literature], *Chönsön munhak* 5 (May 1953): p.7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>86</sup> Kim P'albong, “Chönjaeng munhag-üi panghyang,” *Chönsön munhak* 3, p. 63.

- 3) At the same time our literature needs to be hopeful.
- 4) The most important literary subject of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should be about “the revival and remodeling of human nature”.
- 5) Our literature should connect the home front and front with each other.

Especially in his explanations on the decadent tendencies that he found in wartime works one can see that Kim was highly displeased with some of his fellow writers. In his opinion: “Writings on humanity’s troubles like tragedy, worries and despair that stem from contradictions in reality, have already been described in literature since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and belong in the past...However close to the truth a description of a scene about [a character’s] primary urges is, or however much it is assumed that such a description is needed in writing a literary work, these sort of “close-to-the-truth” scenes can be seen when walking on the street, and should remain a sight for on the street. It is not an important element to put in literature. Therefore I am completely against decadence.” Here Kim P’albond shows his obvious dislike of the many novels that were written at the time about the social problem of Korean women who became prostitutes and usually catered to foreign soldiers. Needless to say, these kind of novels failed to arouse any patriotism or hatred for the enemy in a reader. He urged the writers who chose to write about these topics to change their habit and write novels only in a positive tone,

because failure to do so would inevitably lead to pessimism in the population, which then could lead to losing the war.

### **The dominant position of writers through total war**

As could be seen from Ku Sang's words above, some writers during the Korean War were of the opinion that one should write for one's own nation instead of writing about one's own interests. This meant that in order to support the nation it was necessary to combine all writer's ideological visions and activities in order to create a united front. Evoking hatred towards the enemy and patriotism should be the goal of literature. These opinions were especially present in the essays that were published in magazines from the several war writers groups, who clearly held the dominant position in the literary world during the war. However, even though there are many overtly propagandistic novels to be found in wartime South Korea, one finds even more works addressing social issues, or novels criticizing government officials. Even the writers who joined one of the dominant writer groups did not only write propaganda works. Some, like Hwang Sunwŏn and Kwak Hashin, never wrote a single propaganda novel, while others tried to find a balance between catering to the state with propaganda novels, while publishing their critical views through privately owned publishing houses. The writers were left free to choose their own topics.

One incident that provoked a debate during the war on the “freedom of the pen” occurred in February 1952. Kim Kwangju had published his short story “I hate you” (Na-nŭn nŏ-rŭl shirŏ handa) in the newest issue of *The Free World* (*Chayu segye*). The story deals with a tenor who writes a letter to the wife of the president of the Propaganda Bureau (Sŏnjŏnbu) about her vile behavior luring him to a dancing hall, getting him drunk and ending up in bed together. A few days after the magazine hit the stands in Taegu and Pusan, however, the vice-president of the Bureau of Public Information (Kongboch’ŏ) ordered the issue to be confiscated. It also soon came out, that the wife of this vice-president, who felt that the character of the wife in the story was modeled after her, had met with Kim in a café to discourage him from publishing his story, and after they moved their conversation to the house of said vice-president, Kim was beaten up by an employee of the house. Even though the vice-president tried to discourage the media from reporting about the event, it was carried in several newspapers.

The NACO responded by holding an emergency meeting to see whether the organization had to take a firm stance on the events in order to demand the protection of artistic freedom against the interference of government authorities. It was clear, however, that there were “differences between those in favor and those against”, and therefore a united stance was not agreed upon on how to react to what had occurred.<sup>87</sup> In order to overcome these differences between the two groups among the writers, a special committee

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<sup>87</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 23 February 1952.

was formed consisting of Kim Song, Kim Kwangsöp, O Yöngjin, Cho Yönhyon and publisher Kim Ch'angjip.<sup>88</sup> This led to a statement which was signed by many writers demanding that the authorities would protect human rights, would explain why the issue of *The Free World* was confiscated, that the wife of the Bureau of Public Information would make a public apology and that there would be an inquiry into a clear vision concerning the government's policy towards artistic activities.<sup>89</sup> Also a National Rally of Intellectuals was staged for the protection of artistic freedom. Here the intellectuals again reiterated their stance that these events were an infringement on human rights and a gross interference of the government authorities in artistic freedom.<sup>90</sup>

The writers did not mind to work closely together with the army or the government in order to write propaganda as long as the government did not interfere with their choice of literary topics. The NACO had from the start of the war actively set out to take charge of the intellectual wartime activities and had the necessary personal connections with the army and politicians to do so. Through the NACO and the separate war writer organisations, the writers were the dominant group in the cultural field. This strong

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<sup>88</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 24 February 1952.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Kim Kwangsöp and Mo Yunsuk were against this statement, while Ch'oe Sangdök remained neutral, just like Pak Chonghwa. However many writers did agree with this stance, among others Kim P'albong, Ma Haesong, Chang Manyöng, Chön Sukhüi, Yi Sangno, Pak Kijun, Pak Yöngjun, Yi Sangböl, Ch'oe Chönghüi, Kim Yöngsu, Pak Tujin, Yu Chuhyön, Ch'oe Chaesö, Yang Myöngmun, Pak Hunsan, Yi Hou, Cho Chihun, Pak Mogwöl, Pang Kihwan, Kim Yonghwan, Ch'oe Inuk, Kim Tongsa, Chöng Pisök and Kwak Hashin.

<sup>90</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 24 February, 1952.

position was criticized by other intellectuals. Professor Yi Sungnyŏng did this by saying that by relying too much on the few intellectuals that managed to flee when the North Korean army invaded was not enough to establish a true cultural policy that could be effective during total war. He remarks that:

“Without a broad cultural policy in mind the government first of all did not plan substantially for securing the [expertise] of the leading intellectuals in the field of culture, and even though there is the NACO whose core group exists foremost of writers, it happened that only these “superior” elements [from the cultural field] have been affiliated within the Army, Navy and Air Force. There are groups X and Y, and even though they can show some achievements and attendance rates for their meetings, they are not so efficient.”<sup>91</sup>

At the end of the war in July 1953, the publishing branch decided to withdraw from the NACO and form their own organisation. As for the reasons for this breakup they cited that they were “fed up with being treated like a concubine”, and that they could no longer endure the “factiousness of the writer groups who are in control of the NACO even though this organization is supposed to be for the whole cultural field.”<sup>92</sup> This suggests that it was indeed the writer groups who were in control of most cultural activities during the

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<sup>91</sup> Yi Sungnyŏng, “Chŏnshi munhwa chŏngch’aeknon” [Essay on a cultural policy during wartime], *Chŏnshi kwahak* 1.1 [War Science] (1951.8), p. 71.

<sup>92</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 7 July 1953.

Korean War. The ideology of total war that they propagated with a self-designated role based on the claim that writers kept wartime society together, struck a chord with many politicians and army officers, and helped to create an important position of cultural power for writers during the Korean War.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Intense struggles for power in the cultural field also took place in North Korea during the Korean War. These internal fights eventually led to the death at the end of the war of such famous writers as poet Im Hwa, Kim Namch'ön and Yi T'aejun, and fortified the leadership position of Han Sörya. Much has already been written about these internal fights in both Korean and English language scholarship by the likes of Yi Kibong, Yi Ch'ölchu, Brian Myers, and more recently, Tatiana Gabroussenko. For analysis and views on these struggles, I refer to Yi Kibong, *Pug-üi munhak-kwa yesurin* [The North's literature and artists], (Seoul: Sajoyön, 1986); Yi Ch'ölchu, *Pug-üi yesurin* [The North's artists], (Seoul: Kyemongsa, 1966); Brian Myers, *Han Sörya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1994); and Tatiana Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010).