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

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## Chapter Two

### The War Within: Motivations for Writing during the Korean War<sup>1</sup>

Any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character;

Ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfit for action.

Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man, and to plot against an enemy behind his back was perfectly legitimate self-defense.

Anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect.<sup>2</sup>

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

The first few months of the Korean War saw dramatic shifts in the frontline. Initially the North Korean army advanced rapidly and without much resistance from the South Korean army, until their advance was halted by American troops, who had quickly decided to intervene on behalf of the South with permission of the

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter has been published in *Studia Universitatis* 1 (March 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 147.

UN. A decisive breakthrough at the so called Naktong (Pusan) perimeter could not be forced, and with the rapid buildup of troops, the UN army soon launched a counter offensive in September 1950, which in turn drove the North Korean army back without any meaningful resistance. Now it was the UN army's turn to advance deep into North Korean territory, some units even arriving at the Chinese-Korean border at the end of October. Because of these dramatic shifts in the frontline at the beginning of the Korean War, the majority of the Korean population had to endure the rule of either the North and, or the South Korean occupier. During this initial phase, many citizens were forced to choose to support a specific regime, but also turned this "choice" around completely once the occupying regime changed. Each time the new occupier moved in, the authorities aggressively searched for traitors. In the atmosphere of mutual distrust these chaotic turnarounds created, even the slightest suspicion or accusation by friends or neighbours could have dire consequences that could lead to imprisonment or summary execution.<sup>3</sup>

North and South Korean writers too were caught up in the maelstrom of these early events and they presented them with obvious dangers. The poet Yi Haemun was executed in North Korea, while the young poet Yu Chino suffered the same fate at the

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Cumings estimates that up to 100,000 civilians were executed by the South Korean government or right-wing groups in these months, while North Korean government and left-wing organisations killed 30,000. Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 190.

hands of the South Korean police.<sup>4</sup> Others were forcefully taken and never heard of again, like Yi Kwangsu, Pak Yŏnghŭi, Kim Ōk and Kim Tonghwan.<sup>5</sup>

Genuine life and death choices had to be made by writers, and several chose to permanently cross over to the other regime. Pak Ch'anmo, Yi Tonggyu, Yi Pyŏngch'ŏl and several others decided to move North, while Kim Isŏk, Pak Namsu, Wŏn Ŭngsŏ and Yang Myŏngmun among others went the opposite direction.<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when the frontline stabilized in spring 1951 three war writer organisations were set up under the aegis of the army or the authorities. In the South these were the Blue Sky Group (Ch'anggong kurakpu), which was part

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<sup>4</sup> Yu Chino 俞鎮五 (1922-1950, not to be confused with the novelist and scholar Yu Chino 俞鎮午 1906-1987) was sympathetic to the communist ideology and is famous for reciting his poem "Who fills our youthful hearts?" (Nugu-rŭl wihan pŏkch'anŭn uri-ŭi chŏlmŭninya?) in front of a large crowd, for which he was imprisoned in 1946. After his release he joined a partisan group in the Chiri mountains, but was caught in March 1949. He received the death sentence, but this was commuted to life imprisonment. At the start of the Korean War, however, he was most likely executed by the South Korean police.

<sup>5</sup> Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950) is regarded as the first modern Korean novelist. Poet Pak Yŏnghŭi (1901-?) was president of the left-wing KAPF group in the early 1930s, and was an active figure during the last part of the Japanese colonial period. Kim Ōk (1896-?) was a poet who also translated many foreign poems into the Korean language. Kim Tonghwan (1901-?) was also a poet most active during the end of the colonial period, managing the pro-Japanese magazine *Korean literature* (*Samch'ŏlli munhak*).

<sup>6</sup> Writer Pak Ch'anmo, poet Yi Tonggyu (1913-1950) and poet Yi Pyŏngch'ŏl immediately became involved in the North Korean literary scene upon their arrival. Their initial status, however, quickly deteriorated to less important roles towards the end of the war. Writer Kim Isŏk (1914-1964) was active during the war and became the editor of the literary magazine *Literary arts* (*Munhak yesul*) in 1954. Pak Namsu (1918-1994) also was co-editor of the *Literary arts* magazine and *The world of thought* (*Sasanggye*). He made his debut in 1939 in the magazine *Literary writings* (*Munjang*). Wŏn Ŭngsŏ (1914-1973) was foremost a translator of foreign literature, while poet Yang Myŏngmun (1913-1985) wrote numerous poems as well as a book on the influence of the Korean War on Korean poetry.

of the Air Force, the Army War Writers Group (Yukkun chonggun chakkadan), and the Navy War Writers Group (Haegun chonggun chakkadan). The writers who joined one of these organizations were expected to write favorably about the troops and to instill the population with a will to persevere and fight. In this chapter I focus specifically on the Korean authors who wrote anti-communist propaganda literature and am interested in the question as to what social factors were involved that moved them to join one of the war writer groups.

### **Motivations for writing**

Judging from the recollections of some of the writers who had actively participated in one of the organisations, one gets the impression that there were two main reasons as to why the writers joined a government-funded organization during the war. Either they joined because the government would provide them with food, making life in the war-torn country much easier, or they chose to join out of a genuine feeling of patriotism. The first motivation is obvious. In the South most wartime refugees were packed together in the cities of Taegu and Pusan and had a hard time to make ends meet. With severe paper shortages and the skills of writers in short demand, it was difficult for writers to sustain themselves. One positive factor in favor of the writers, however, was the dominant definition among intellectuals, policy makers

and army officers in Korean society of modern war as a total war. By joining one of the organisations, and by writing one's literary works in a way that it catered to the demands of the state or the army, the writers had a better chance to get their works published and thereby earn a living. Female author Ch'oe Chŏnghŭi, whose husband poet Kim Tonghwan had been taken North during Seoul's occupation, joined the Blue Sky Group, and later remarked that by joining this organization she was provided with an army uniform, shoes, silk and rice.<sup>7</sup> She remembered that the rice that she was given was more than sufficient for herself, so that she could give some of what she had received to refugees in need. By joining one of the war writer organisations, therefore, the writers were provided with enough basic commodities to sustain themselves.

Pak Yŏngjun reminisced in the magazine *The Army (Yukkun)*, that it was especially the writers' patriotism that led them to write propaganda:

Since the supreme task of the country was to attain victory, it went without saying that for a complete victory the whole capacity of the civilian population had to be mustered. In order to do so, the population had to be instilled with the will to fight. Writers therefore had to work fulltime to show their abilities and whip up this fighting spirit. You can see this as an inevitable development, but **for the writers who**

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<sup>7</sup> Ch'oe Chŏnghŭi, "The refugee writers in Taegu" (P'inan Taegu munin), *Twenty years of liberation literature* (Haebang munhak 20 nyŏn), (Seoul: Chŏngŭmsa, 1966), p. 103.

**loved their state it was an inward calling that emerged of their own accord.** (emphasis mine)<sup>8</sup>

Pak's words make it seem as if all writers who decided to join one of the war writer organisations did so out of a genuine desire to help their country. Indeed, if one was to judge the motivation of the writers from the many essays from the war period itself, this seems to be the case. Though there were undoubtedly writers during the Korean war who were driven by genuine patriotism and belief in one of the regime's political system, I believe that such a view ignores the complicated social conditions in which the writers found themselves, both during and before the war.

Already before the war, after the establishment of the South Korean state on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948 and the suppression of the Yösu rebellion in October of the same year, it was becoming more difficult for South Korean writers not to get involved in the anti-communist activities that were demanded by the government.<sup>9</sup> Writers who had earlier openly showed allegiance to the communist ideology by participating in left wing writer organisations such as the Writers League (*Munhakka tongmaeng*) were indicted and imprisoned. Yi Yongak, who was a leading figure in this organization soon found himself in prison for his activities, as did Yi Pyöngch'öl who had taken over after Yi

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<sup>8</sup> Shin Yöngdök, *War writers and the Korean War (Han'guk chönjaeng-gwa chonggun chakka)*, (Seoul: Kukhak charyowön, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> The Yösu rebellion occurred on October 19, 1948 when the 14<sup>th</sup> army division refused their orders to suppress the Cheju-do uprising. I will deal more deeply with how the Yösu rebellion helped to shape South Korean literary views on North Korea in chapter 5.

Yongak's imprisonment.<sup>10</sup> Others like Im Hwa, Kim Namch'ŏn and Yi T'aejun escaped a similar fate by making the decision to move to the North before they could get arrested.<sup>11</sup>

Writing and publishing became more controlled and restricted with the implementation of a "prohibition law on writing activities and book sales" in November 1949. Every writing and publication needed to be checked by censors from now on, before they were allowed to appear in print. In this month, campaigns were also started against writers with leftist leaning sympathies to urge them to report themselves to the authorities, or to join the National Rehabilitation and Guidance League (Kungmin podō yŏnmaeng). This pursuit of leftist-leaning elements in South Korean society was pursued nation-wide. The *Chosŏn ilbo* of December 2, 1949, reported that of the 52,082 people who had joined the Guidance League, ninety-four were writers. The newspaper identified Chŏng Chiyong, Hwang Sunwŏn, Ŏm Hŭngsŏp, Yi Ponggu and Im Sŏha in specific as members of this group.<sup>12</sup> In January 1950, the artists

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<sup>10</sup> Kim Yongchik, *North Korean literature (Pukhan munhaksŏ)*, (Seoul: Ilchisa, 2008), p.93.

<sup>11</sup> These three literary figures were well-known writers during the colonial period, and got prominent positions in North Korean literary circles. Near the end of the war, however, they got caught up in factional strife and were sentenced to death or hard labor.

<sup>12</sup> Kim Ch'ŏl, "The establishment and development of conservative right-wing Korean literary organisations" (*Han'guk posuuk munye chojig-ŭi hyŏngsŏng-gwa chŏn'gae*) *Practical literature* (Shilch'ŏn munhak), 1990, p. 30. The poet Chŏng Chiyong (1902-1950) was active in the literary world in the late colonial period. During the Korean War he was imprisoned by the North Korean government and on his way north died during an American bombing raid. Hwang Sunwŏn (1915-2000) is a writer well known for his short stories. His most famous story "Rainburst" ("Sonagi") is part of the national South Korean curriculum. Ŏm Hŭngsŏp (1906-?) was a writer and became a prominent literary critic in North Korea when he moved north during the war. Yi Ponggu (1916-1983) became active

who had joined the Guidance League organized an arts festival where writers such as Yöm Sangsöp, Hong Hyomin, Yang Chudong, Im Haksu, Kim Kirim, and Son Sohüi also appear as members.<sup>13</sup> Chöng Chiyong described his reason for joining the Guidance League as follows:

I am the poet Chöng Chiyong, who allegedly crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel one night. I do not want to look too deeply at where this attack and conspiracy aimed at me came from, but just want to say that I am also a citizen [of this state] and a good citizen at that. I have suffered the experience of colonial rule for twenty three years. Because of this rumour that I supposedly went North, my neighbours have brandished me as a commie. Therefore, when I moved to another place, I simultaneously asked for protection from the police. They advised me to join the National Rehabilitation and Guidance League, and this is why I am here today. I will strive in the future to do meaningful things for our state.<sup>14</sup>

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especially from the liberation period onwards and his novels are known for its anecdotal qualities. Im Söha was also active during the liberation period writing short stories. During the war he moved to the north.

<sup>13</sup> *Kyönghyang shinmun*, January 8, 1950. Yöm Sangsöp (1897-1963) was a very influential novelist, known for his realist novels among which *Three generations (Sammae)* is most famous. Hong Hyomin (1904-1976) was a literary critic and journalist. Yang Chudong (1903-1977) was a poet and literature researcher. Poet Im Haksu (1911-?) moved north during the war and believed that literature should be for the masses. He was purged in 1966. Kim Kirim (1908-?) was a modernist poet who stressed that Korean poetry should contain sentimentalism. Son Sohüi (1917-1987) was a female writer active during the late colonial period until the late 60s, writing predominantly on the social circumstances of women and held cynical views on Korea's patriarchal society.

<sup>14</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, November 5, 1949.

South Korean society was more and more becoming immersed in the search for communist elements after the Yösu rebellion, and suspicion was easily bestowed on someone, even if it was done on the basis of merely having heard a rumour. Even the writers who had moved South before the establishment of the South Korean government started to be viewed with suspicion, and therefore the month of November 1949 also saw the inauguration of the “*Wöllam Writers club*” (*wöllam* meaning ‘moved to the South’).<sup>15</sup> In their manifesto they explicitly state that they are anti-communist in their convictions and endeavors as they “set out to create a new national literature that opposes all anti-democratic literary activities....”<sup>16</sup>

The writers had a increasingly tighter space in which they could manoeuver. In this atmosphere, writers even had to take strategic decisions to either deliberately cut ties with old friends, or forge new alliances with others to take away all suspicion of being seen to favor communism in any way. Literary critic Cho Yönhöön remarks on this:

The strength of the left had already declined and the Writers League as well existed in name only. Almost all writers who had diligently followed the communist path, or

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<sup>15</sup> Part of this organization were Hwang Sunwön, An Sugil, Kim Kwangju, Ku Sang, Yöm Sangsöp, Pak Hwamok, Pak Kyeju, Im Okin, Cho Yöngam, Chöng Pisök, Hö Yunsök, Chang Yonghak, Pak Yöngjun, O Yöngjin, Pak Yöhüi, Ch’oe Sangdök and Ch’oe T’aetüing among others. All would become very active figures during the Korean War in the various government-funded war writer organizations.

<sup>16</sup> *Kyönghyang shinmun*, November 24, 1949.

writers who were active in the Writers League, were now politically and ideologically converting themselves, except for its most enthusiastic supporters. [...] Since I had no substantial contacts with these writers up to that point, I thought it would be best to establish new contacts with them as well. [...] Part of the extreme right wing powers were still vehemently opposed to these writers and even applied pressure towards me to exclude them from the *Munye* [Literary Arts] magazine. I was, however, not to be swayed in my belief that in order to enrich our literature we should embrace all our writers in the motherland's bosom. [...] This is why I started to visit the late Yöm Sangsöp regularly and established ties with Hwang Sunwön, Kye Yongmuk, Ch'oe Chönghui and Hō Yunsök among others.<sup>17</sup>

Kim Tongni also had a similar opinion as Cho Yönhyon and clearly sensed the hostile environment in which the writers who were suspected of leftist tendencies now found themselves. He recalls that he gave deep thought to a method to keep these writers safe.

I was contemplating whether there was not another way to solve the issue of the writers who were forced to join or convert to the care of the Guidance League, since this had

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<sup>17</sup> Kim Ch'öl, p. 12. Writer Kye Yongmuk (1904-1961) is best known for his satirical story "Adada the idiot" ("Paekch'i Adada"). Hō Yunsök (1914-1995) was an author of short stories and wrote more than 100 of them in his career.

several severe consequences (since they were regarded as quasi-delinquents). Therefore the so called right-wing writers were looking hard for some counter measure. [...] The direct motivation [of the establishment of the Korean Writers Association] was to create an opportunity for the writers who had until then belonged to the Writers League to start anew among fellow writers instead of handing them over to the Guidance League....

Here Kim Tongni admits that the establishment of the Korea Writers Association on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1949, was set up deliberately to give the writers suspected of leftist leanings a new start so that they could escape being forced into the Guidance League.<sup>18</sup> To show their allegiance to the South Korean state, one of the organization's creeds explicitly stated that they would "contribute genuinely to world peace and the coexistence of mankind and reject all anti-national and anti-state formalism."<sup>19</sup> Here "anti-national" and "anti-state formalism" of course refers to those who are sympathetic towards the communist ideology.

### **The chaotic early months of the war**

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<sup>18</sup> The vast majority of the South Korean literary scene became a member of this organization. A full list of its members appears in the *Kyŏngnyang shinmun* of December 14, 1949.

<sup>19</sup> Kim Ch'ŏl, p. 16.

These efforts certainly saved many of the suspected writers who were part of the Guidance League to escape death, since members of this organization were specifically targeted by the South Korean authorities at the beginning of the war for summary executions. The pre-war events show that already before war had broken out, the writers consciously had to make it unambiguously clear that they were pursuing anti-communist activities. It also shows that writers were not driven by a desire to “write for the nation” to an equal extent, or out of their own free will. This would be to miss the complicated dynamics and zeitgeist of South Korean society before the war. The developments at the beginning of the Korean War, with North Korea controlling most of the Korean peninsula until the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, added more fuel to the fire. When at the start of the war the South Korean government confidently broadcast over the radio that the North Korean army would be driven back, many citizens of Seoul believed this propaganda. To many people’s dismay, however, the North Korean army arrived only three days after the war had started, and with the only bridge over the Han river having been hastily blown up to cover the fleeing South Korean army’s retreat, many were left to be subjected to the three-month rule of the North. Writers who remained behind either went into hiding or joined the reestablished Writers League where they helped to write wall newspapers, or do other propaganda chores.

When the UN/South Korean army returned on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September the real struggle of the Seoul citizens was about to start,

as the South Korean authorities and other right wing groups quickly started to seek out pro-communist collaborators. This threatening atmosphere is described by literary critic Paek Ch'öl in the following way: "It was not the case that when Seoul was recaptured that the day of peace had arrived as well. [...] This was because the liberating authorities treated the citizens of Seoul as second-class citizens. Under the pretense of seeking out collaborators there were many scenes of indiscriminate executions. In order to seek some sort of revenge they savagely vented their wrath."<sup>20</sup> This uncomfortable and dangerous time also shines through in the recollections of theatre critic Sö Kangsöök. In his memoir the only real threat and indignity he describes from his time during the North Korean occupation was that many of his books were confiscated by the authorities. When the South Korean government regained their hold over the city, however, he describes that for the first time he felt genuinely threatened in a physical way when everybody was called up to attend a meeting.<sup>21</sup>

This early stage in the war left a deep impact on South Korean society as a whole and split it in half between those who managed to cross the Han river and follow the retreating army, the *Togangp'a* (Group who crossed the river), and those that stayed behind, the *Challyup'a* (Group of those who remained behind).<sup>22</sup> Cho Yönhyon

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<sup>20</sup> Paek Ch'öl, (*Continued*) *Truth and Reality ((Sok) Chilli-wa hyönsil)*, (Seoul: Pagyöngsa, 1976), p. 439.

<sup>21</sup> Yi Kibong, *The North's literature and artists (Pug-üi munhak-kwa yesurin)*, (Seoul: Sajoyön, 1986), p. 265.

<sup>22</sup> The impact of which can be seen in such wartime stories as Yöm Sangsöp's "The morning of liberation" ("Haebang-ui ach'im"), "Bicycle" ("Chajönko"), "The house search" ("Kadaek susaek"), and Chang Yonghak's "A torn "introduction to

remembered the return of the liberating UN army and the new division that took shape within society as follows: “As Seoul was liberated on the 28th of September, the [members of the] *Togangp’a* were strutting around like victorious generals, while the *Challyup’a* were in very low spirits as if they were people who had sinned. [...] This division did not just stop as a general social trend in those days, but permeated every section and every institution in society,

<i>Togangp’a</i>	<i>Challyup’a</i>
Ku Sang, Kim Kwangsöp, Kim Song, Kim Yunsöng, Mo Yunsuk <sup>23</sup> , Pak Mogwöl, Pak Yönhüi, Pak Yonggu, Pak Hwamok, Sö Chöngju, Sö Chöngt’ae, Yu Ch’ihwan, Yi Hanchik, Yi Hön’gu, Im Küngjae, Cho Yöngam, Cho Chihun	Pak Kyeju, Kim Kwangju, Kim Tongni, Kim P’albong, No Ch’önmyöng, Pak Tujin, Pak Yöngjun, Pak Chonghwa, Pang Kihwan, Paek Ch’öl, Yang Myöngmun, O Chongshik, Yu Ch’ijin, Im Ogin, Chang Manyöng, Cho Yönhyön, Ch’oe Inuk, Ch’oe Chönghüi, Ch’oe T’aeüng, Han Musuk, Hong Kuböm, Hong Hyomin

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ethics” (“Chijöjin “yullihak tokpon”). Stories that came out after the war dealing with these events are Yi Munyöl’s *Time of heroes* (Yöngung shidae), Pak Wansö’s *Who ate all the shinga?* (Kü mant’ön shinga-nün nu-ga ta mögössülkka), Kim Wönil’s *The celebration of fire* (pur-üi chechön) and Im Ch’öru’s *The sound of the wind in our backs* (twian-e paramsori).

<sup>23</sup> Even though Mo Yunsuk spent time hiding from the North Korean authorities in Seoul, she is still regarded as belonging to the *Togangp’a* as can be seen from the list appearing in the magazine *Munye* of December 1950 where a list appears of who belongs to which group.

and also appeared within the literary field.”<sup>24</sup>

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1950 several joint investigation bureaus were established where the offices of the military, police and prosecutors worked together to search for and prosecute citizens suspected of collaborating with the enemy.<sup>25</sup> A little over fifty thousand of Seoul’s citizens were being investigated. Most writers who had remained behind in Seoul were also seen to have collaborated, since many had joined the Writers League, and were therefore also a target for the authorities. According to Cho Yŏnhyŏn, however, it was not the authorities but the *Togangp’a* writers, notably the right-wing NACO, who had taken charge of the issue of how to deal with these collaborator writers. “Right after the recapture of Seoul a pamphlet appeared in a magazine with a list of pro-communist collaborating literary people. This list had been published by members of the NACO in Pusan. On this list, every person from the *Challyup’a* was earmarked as being a collaborator, with the exception of people like Pak Chonghwa, Kim Tongni, Ch’oe Chŏnghŭi and Cho Yŏnhyŏn.”<sup>26</sup> The magazine containing the list that Cho Yŏnhyŏn is referring to is *Frontline Literature: Literature Wartime Edition* [*Chŏnsŏn munhak: munhak*

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<sup>24</sup> Cho Yŏnhyŏn, *The Korean literary scene I experienced* (*Nae-ga saraon Han’guk mundan*) (Seoul: Yŏmunsa, 1977), pp. 278-279. This social division ran so deep that a political party was established called the Free Challyu Party (Chayu challyudang) who even won seats during the wartime elections in 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Before the establishment of this institution several civilian private groups had already started to mete out reprisal killings, which led to the announcement of a prohibition on death sentencing by civilian groups on December 1, 1950.

<sup>26</sup> Cho, p. 279.

*chŏnship'an*] that was published in October 1950. According to the magazine, the names that appear on the published list came about after deliberations during a special meeting of the NACO on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August to “investigate which collaborators in the cultural field had defiled the uprighteous spirit of the Korean nation and betrayed the fatherland.”<sup>27</sup> On the list one can find the obvious candidates for such “honors” like novelists Han Sŏrya, Yi T’aejun, Yi Kiyŏng, Pak Seyŏng, Han Hyo, Pak Ch’anmo, poets Yi Wŏnjo, Kam Namch’ŏn, Min Pyŏnggyun, Nam Kungman, Cho Kich’ŏn, playwright Ham Sedŏk, literary critics An Mak and An Hamgwang. Also appearing on the list, however, are such writers as Yi Muyŏng, Kwak Hashin, Chŏng Pisŏk, Yŏm Sangsŏp, Hwang Sunwŏn, Son Sohŭi, Pak Yŏngjun, Kim Kwangju, poets Pak Kyeju, Kim Yŏngsu, Yang Chudong, Yi Ponggu, Chang Manyŏng, No Ch’ŏnmyŏng and literary critic Paek Ch’ŏl. The list is preceded by a scathing admonition in which the aforementioned people are severely criticized and urged to repent for their sins:

You are a wicked bunch who are not able to look up to the heavens! Listen carefully, and you will hear the rain of fire descending to mete out your heavenly punishment. [...] It is every father’s emotion to regard bad sons with even more pity, therefore how can we not lament your transgressions? [...] Since it is still not too late, repent for your past evils and come back to your father’s embrace. [...] Return fallen

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<sup>27</sup> *Chŏnsŏn munhak: munhak chŏnship'an* (October 1950), p. 51.

children of the Great Han! Return under the heavens of the Great Han where the bright rainbow of peace and democracy shines forever!<sup>28</sup>

It is obvious that the list was formed without any knowledge on the circumstances of the writers present in Seoul, as writer Kim Kwangju for example had managed to stay hidden from the North Korean authorities during the whole three-month period, but here he was still earmarked as a collaborator.

Even though the magazine was quickly seized by the Korean Writers Association, the authorities still made use of this list in their investigations aimed at writers. The Military Investigative Police soon requested the NACO to forward a full list of collaborators to them, with the suspected authors divided into three types: A, B, or C. Type A would signify an active collaborator, B a voluntary collaborator, and C a passive collaborator. The NACO thereafter quickly established a special committee to create a new list that would focus on the writers who had participated in the Writers League, which meant all but about ten writers from the *Challyup'a*. Even though the committee members consisted of several people who belonged to the *Challyup'a* group themselves, only Cho Yŏnhyŏn and Kim Tongni were in a position to present a strong rebuttal during these proceedings, as they were the only ones who without a doubt had not collaborated, since they had been living in hiding. Cho Yŏnhyŏn recalls that during the meeting

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<sup>28</sup> Idem., pp. 49-50.

the opinions were split between the two opposing groups: “While the *Togangp’a* members were of the opinion that there should be severe punishments, the *Challyup’a* stance was that, except for a few special cases, none should be prosecuted.”<sup>29</sup> One poet from the *Togangp’a*, whose real name is not mentioned by Cho Yŏnhyŏn, was of the opinion that twenty writers belonged to the A category, another twenty to B, and just ten writers to the C category. When Kim Tongni and Cho Yŏnhyŏn voiced their strong objections to this proposal, the poet became so angry that he threw an ink bottle to their heads.<sup>30</sup> When the meeting came to an end a list was eventually drawn up which was not very different from the angry poet’s proposal.<sup>31</sup>

The initial developments in the prosecution of collaborating writers, therefore, were not looking favorable for the *Challyup’a*. This was, however, soon about to change. Right after sending the list, the investigative police committee asked the NACO to send a representative who could assist them in their investigation. During the NACO meeting to decide upon who would be sent, it was Cho Yŏnhyŏn who was chosen as the representative, since he had a close relationship with both prosecutors that were involved with the case. One of the prosecutors, Chŏng Hŭit’aek, had even spent time hiding together with Cho in a small hot attic during the occupation of Seoul, and they were very close friends.<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Cho’s close connections with the prosecutors, he was in a perfect

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<sup>29</sup> Cho, p. 280.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

position to solve the collaboration problem according to his own vision. His pre-war conviction that the enrichment of Korea's literature would require the inclusion of every writer in society had not changed. The prosecutors, therefore, quickly came to the decision that in regards to literary transgressions of the writers, no one on the list would in principle be punished. Thus most of the suspected writers under investigation escaped prison sentences altogether.

### **Search for redemption: Female poet No Ch'önmyöng and confessional writings**

A few writers, however, were sentenced, but according to Cho Yönhyon these were prosecuted through organisations other than the NACO.<sup>33</sup> One of the more famous examples of the people getting prison sentences for collaborationist activities during the three month occupation of Seoul is that of poetess No Ch'önmyöng.<sup>34</sup> She was tried by a military court under suspicion of joining the communist Writers League organization out of her own free will and participating actively in its propaganda activities. For these transgressions the prosecutor in her case even sought the death penalty.<sup>35</sup> During her trial No Ch'önmyöng explained her actions by telling that her reasons for joining the Writers League

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>34</sup> No Ch'önmyöng (1912-1957) is best known for her poem "The deer" ("Sasüm").

<sup>35</sup> *Tonga ilbo*, 29 October 1950.

was to protect herself from harm, and because she saw no escape from the circumstances that she found herself in. She also told the judges that if she had truly been active in the organization, she could have given up right-wing poetess Mo Yunsuk's whereabouts for who the North Korean authorities were looking, but she had not done so.<sup>36</sup> The prosecutor rebutted that the unforgivable part of her actions was that "she had the chance to flee after the war had broken out, but that she still decided to join the Writers League, even though she knew what sort of an organization it was and what kind of activities she was supposed to do there, and that she did these things with enthusiasm."<sup>37</sup> Eventually she escaped the death penalty, but was still sentenced to twenty years in prison. After a few months in prison she asked some old writer friends to get her released, which was taken up by Kim Kwangsöp, Yi Hön'gu and Kim Sangyong who lobbied for her release. Through their actions No Ch'önmyöng was released on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1951 after having spent five months in prison.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



3 No Ch'ŏnmyŏng

During her prison time she wrote several poems about her experiences there and the frustration she felt with the “friends” around her, who remained passive or had become hostile towards her. In “Farewell” (“Kobyŏl”) she mentions how people who used to praise her, now shun her completely. “People who the day before threw praise and flowers towards me / who sent me thunderous applause / now regard me with contempt or indifferently and just pass me by...”<sup>38</sup> In another poem “Who understands this fight?” (“Nuga arajunŭn chŏnt'unya”) she tells of how she felt forsaken by both states and that she could not understand the situation in which she found herself. “Why did I

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<sup>38</sup> No Ch'ŏnmyŏng, *Han'guk hyŏndae siin yŏn'gu 16: No Ch'ŏnmyŏng*, (Seoul: Munhak segyesa (1997), p. 200.

receive this hardship? / Who understands this fight? / being held up at gunpoint by the red army / being held up at gunpoint by South Korea / Covered in the state's deep glow / I even went to prison. / This is absurd, it is like a dream / Truly it is like a dream..."<sup>39</sup>

What is evident in her prison writings, is that she is longing for redemption and to become accepted into the South Korean state again. Her confessional essay "I made a misjudgment" ("Osan-i itta", 1952) which describes her experiences in Seoul and the reasons why she joined the Writers League served to clear her name. Here she explains that she joined the organization out of fear since she felt that she could be arrested at any moment, without any close friends of hers knowing about it. Therefore, in order to feel safe among the many other South Korean writers who were also participating in the league, she decided to join up as well. "If I was to die, I would rather die in a place where there were many people that knew me. Not only this, but also in case I was kidnapped, I would feel much more at ease when my colleagues would know about my capture. The time that I was at the Writers League together with many other South Korean writers, was the time I felt most safe."<sup>40</sup>

In order to show her allegiance one notices in her poetry that she feels it is necessary to make it exactly clear to the reader which country she is talking about. It explains why South Korean

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>40</sup> No Ch'ŏnmyŏng, "A misjudgement" ("Osan-i itta"), in *Biographical essays: Becoming a nameless woman (Chajŏn esei: irŭm-ŏmnŭn yŏin-i toeŏ)* (Seoul: Sŏnbi, 1991), p. 160.

signifiers like the state (*Taehanminguk*), or the flag (*t'aegŭkki*) are explicitly mentioned.<sup>41</sup> This is in sharp contrast with the poetry of another female poet, Mo Yunsuk, who has always been regarded as a pro-right writer due to her many activities in the NACO.<sup>42</sup> When Mo talks about the South Korean state in her poetry, she can remain more ambiguous, for example by calling the South Korean soldiers “our soldiers” (*uri pyŏngsa-dŭl*). Another interesting feature that appears when comparing No’s wartime poetry to that of Mo Yunsuk is the way both poets phrase their emotions. As Kim Chinhŭi points out in her analysis of No Ch’ŏnmyŏng’s poem “Hope” (“Hŭimang”), she phrases her sentences cautiously and insecurely, by using sentence endings like “probably”, “it looks like”, “is it? / would it?”, or by making use of repetitions like “being provoked again and again”, and “I look at it and look again”.<sup>43</sup> Comparing this to the style used by Mo Yunsuk in her poem “The day we have been waiting for” (“Kidaridŏn kŭ nal”), one sees that Mo’s use of language is more self-confident and that she uses grammatical verb endings that convey more authority.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Poems in which these terms appear are “The blue sky of my heart” (“Maŭm-ŭi p’urŭn hanŭr-ŭl”), “Northwards! Northwards!” (“Pug-ŭro pug-ŭro”) and “Separation” (“Isan”).

<sup>42</sup> Mo Yunsuk read out patriotic poetry on the radio as the North Korean army invaded Seoul and remained in hiding until Seoul was retaken three months later by the UN army.

<sup>43</sup> Kim Chinhŭi, “Liberation and war in Mo Yunsuk and No Chŏnmyŏng’s poetry: Focusing on the liberation and war period” (Mo Yunsuk-kwa No Ch’ŏnmyŏng shi-e nat’anan ‘haebang’-gwa ‘chŏnjaeng’ - haebang ihu-put’ŏ chŏnjaengkkaji-ŭi shi-rŭl chungshim-ŭro), *Korean poetry studies (Han’guk shihak yŏn’gu)* 28 (August 2010), p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> By making use of the verb ending ~*nora*.

Even writers who had not been prosecuted and sentenced for their involvement in the Writers League still carried the stigma of having been brandished as a 'leftist' writer. According to Ko Ŭn these writers even were not allowed to be active in society for some time.<sup>45</sup> One of the stronger critical opinions against these writers was voiced by the poet Cho Yŏngam (who incidentally would make a good candidate for being the angry ink-bottle-throwing poet mentioned earlier). In the *Literary Arts (Munye)* magazine of December 1950, in an essay entitled "To the collaborationist Challyu writers - A word of warning before the trial of the Guidance League", he left no doubt what he thought of the writers who had been part of the Writers League. "You have left an indelible stain on the history of the Korean nation that now is coming into its own. There is only one way to go for you. Leave a record of your misdeeds and atone for your sins. Female prostitute writers who are worthy enough should become a nun, or, Buddha willing, become a Buddhist nun, or what would also be fine is to seek out a holy male writer or poet and live with him..."<sup>46</sup> The mentioning here of giving specific "advice" on what female writers in particular are able to do to repent for their transgressions is a clear jab at the trial and imprisonment of No Ch'ŏnmyŏng and essayist Cho Kyŏnghŭi.

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<sup>45</sup> Ko Ŭn, *The 1950s (1950 nyŏnda)* (Seoul: Hyangyŏn, 2005), p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> Cho Yŏngam, "To the collaborationist Challyu writers - A word of warning for the trial of the Guidance League" ("Challyuhan puyŏk munindŭr-ege - Podoyŏnmaeng chaep'an-ŭl kyŏnggohanda"), *Literature* (December 1950), pp. 74-75.

To try to ease the tensions between the different social groups and to reintegrate these stigmatized writers back to an active social role, one finds several essays and publications during the Korean War that deal with the experiences of these writers during the three month occupation period by North Korea. These writings helped to introduce the experiences of the *Challyup'a* in public discourse and had the propaganda function to make their experiences an example to others of the inhumanness and dangers that communism brings. At the same time these writings served for the writer as a confessional by giving a self-critical account of their activities. One notable publication of this ilk was *Nine people's accounts of their three months under communist rule* (*Chökhwa samsak kuinjip*), published in April 1951. All contributors to the volume were people who were suspected of collaborating. O Chedo explains well in his contribution, that the writings in this publication should be seen as confessionals to come clean about their past deeds. "All memoirs of this three month period of hardship show that, as the degree of collaboration deepens, the degree of regret also becomes inversely proportional. I am sincerely grateful that these feelings of deep regret and pity, and the uncharacteristic behavior and actions are expressed well and honestly [by all contributors in the volume]."<sup>47</sup>

Yang Chudong tells in this volume how communism is an infectious disease, that forever disappears once you gain immunity

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<sup>47</sup> O Chedo ed. *Nine people's accounts of their three months under Communist rule* (*Chökhwa samsak kuinjip*), (Kukche podoyönmaeng, 1951), pp. 142-143.

from its effects.<sup>48</sup> In his opinion the communist propaganda makes the intelligentsia delusional, to believe in its slogans for a short moment. He confesses that he had joined the Writers League organization, but he decided to do this out of fear. As for the degree in which someone could be called a communist, he saw several different groups during the three-month period. The first group were those who were true believers. These people are in his opinion not part of the Korean nation and should be eradicated from society completely.<sup>49</sup> The second and largest group were the confused ones who were partly believing in the communist ideology. These people followed communism for several reasons: either out of fear, because they were blinded by its propaganda, or because they were opportunists who sought to gain something from the situation. In order to reintegrate this second group back in society, Yang Chudong proposes to reeducate them and put them in an organization stronger than that of the Guidance League.<sup>50</sup> He closes his confessional by promising that he will be an anti-communist from now on.<sup>51</sup>

A similar strategy of defining their experiences under communist rule can also be seen in the other contributors' writings. They argue that it was the rule of fear implemented by the North that led to their decision, against their own will, to comply to the demands of the North Korean state. Literary critic Paek Ch'öl, for example,

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<sup>48</sup> Yang Chudong, *Kongnan-üi kyohun* [Lessons drawn from the red disturbance], in *Nine people's accounts of three months under Communist rule*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

bases his confession on the premise that he was an orphaned child without a father, who was always looking with fear and hope towards the southern sky.<sup>52</sup> His attachment to life led him to join the Writers League. The same was the case for Ch'oe Chŏnghŭi who joined out of fear of death.<sup>53</sup> She confesses that she helped out with the production of wall newspapers and participated in parades, but that while doing this she loathed the work itself. She tells that it was her son Ikcho who joined the South Korean army who taught and guided her into learning about loving the fatherland.<sup>54</sup>

Even though almost every person in the literary field was cleared from any wrongdoings, or had repented for their sins, the literary field remained divided for the remainder of the Korean War along the lines of the *Togangp'a* and the *Challyup'a*. In the November 6, 1953 issue of the *Kyŏngnyang shinmun* literary critic Yi Pongnae wrote of the war period:

A few days ago I asked [novelist] Kim Song's honest opinion about the past three years. He became melancholic and said: "There were only personal attacks and slander." Others whom I asked all gave the same answer. Instead of concerning themselves about the crisis of our literature...the only thing they were doing was to emotionally condemn

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 52. One of her wartime stories deals with a son joining the army and the lesson that the mother learns from this about loving the fatherland. See "One night before marching out" ("Ch'ultong chŏnya").

the behavior and attitudes of a few writers who had made an incidental mistake.<sup>55</sup>

One of such personal attacks appears in the magazine *The free arts* (*Chayu yesul*) which was published in November 1952. Here it is again Cho Yöngam who wrote a biting accusation of literary critic Paek Ch'öl in his contribution "An overview of the literary field during the Korean War" (Tongnanjung-üi mundan kaegwan). Here he calls Paek a "running dog" for both the Japanese and the communists, accusing him of always choosing the side of the enemy.<sup>56</sup> This led to Paek filing a lawsuit against Cho for defamation and he defended himself against these accusations one year later in the magazine *The new world* (*Shinch'önji*) of November 1953. Cho Yöngam and Im Künjjae are portrayed by Paek as people who possess no knowledge of literary matters, and are just "mentally challenged children", and "brokers of the literary field," seeking power for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Another example of the accusations of collaboration going back and forth throughout the literary field was seen after the government had promulgated their plan of a Cultural Protection Law in February 1952. The goal of this law was to establish a National Academy of Science and a National Academy of Arts. For artists to be eligible to vote for members of these institutions,

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<sup>55</sup> Yi Pongnae, *Kyönghyang shinmun*, 6 November 1953.

<sup>56</sup> Cho Yöngam, "An overview of the literary field during the Korean War" (Tongnanjung-üi mundan kaegwan) *The free arts* (*Chayu yesul*).

<sup>57</sup> Paek Ch'öl, "My conduct and morals as a writer" (Munhakcharosö-üi na-üi ch'öse-wa kü moral), *The new world* (*Shinch'önji*) (November 1953).

however, the government had set strict rules on who was considered to be an eligible artist. Either someone had to have a university diploma and have worked as an artist for the past three years, or, if the diploma requirements could not be met, have been active for ten years or more.<sup>58</sup> It would not be until after the war that the first elections were held, but in the meantime there were frequent arguments in the cultural field about these rules and regulations. When the elections were finally held in March 1954, the NACO quickly responded with a petition in which one of their problems with some of the chosen members was the fact that they were “shameless pro-Japanese fellows and communist collaborators”.

### **Summary**

All throughout the war and even after the signing of the armistice, writers would accuse each other of pro-communist (and in relation to this, pro-Japanese) sympathies. This was mainly caused by the experiences of the first three months of the war. When Seoul was recaptured by the UN army on September 29, 1950, South Korean intellectuals became divided between a group of people who had fled southwards together with the army, and those who had stayed behind and were subjected to North Korean rule. The writers in this second group were initially all accused of pro-communist activities and a few of them were even convicted in court. This created a shockwave throughout the whole literary

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<sup>58</sup> Cho Yŏnhyŏn, *Tonga ilbo*, 5 April 1953.

field. In order to redeem themselves, and to publicly show that they had no connections to the communist ideology, many decided to frequently write favorably about the South's ideology. Due to the volatile atmosphere in society to seek out communist reactionaries and the easy suspicion that could befall one's person, many writers were forced to become a staunch anti-communist. Another method to show one's true allegiance was to join one of the writer organisations that were setup under the auspices of the government. Kim Ch'öl argues that becoming a member of one of these organisations was a necessity in order to be shielded from getting labeled as a reactionary element.<sup>59</sup> When looking for what motivated the writers to write for a specific regime, one therefore has to come to the conclusion that in some cases (and maybe even in most cases), it was not a free choice but a necessity to write propaganda literature, so that one would not have to fear being ostracized from society.

That this period remained an issue after the war had ended becomes clear when one reads sources from the period when South Korean society became more open in the wake of the April 19, 1960 uprising against Syngman Rhee's authoritarian regime. Literary critic Yi Yongil was in this period quick to write his true opinion about the heretofore powerful *Togangp'a* writers: "The writer-politicians created their own boss system after Seoul was liberated and organized a struggle between groups. Their slogan of: 'How long have you been a patriot?' is not possible anymore after April

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<sup>59</sup> Kim Ch'öl, p. 36.

19. We dance on your dead bodies.”<sup>60</sup> The motivations for most writers to write for the South Korean state during the Korean War cannot simply be explained with patriotism or for getting basic commodities to stay alive. Considering the precarious anti-communist atmosphere in South Korean society and the developments early on in the Korean War it became a necessity for many to redeem themselves, or to remove any doubts on them being in any way favorable to the communist ideology. Writing anti-communist propaganda literature was to them the only means to achieve this.

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<sup>60</sup> *Kyŏnghyang shinmun*, 17th May 1960.