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**Title:** Writing under wartime conditions: North and South Korean writers during the Korean war (1950-1953)  
**Issue Date:** 2015-01-15
Chapter Five

The Representation of Evil in North and South Korean Stories from the Korean War

No nation at war with another shall permit such acts of war as shall make mutual trust impossible during some future time of peace. [...] Some level of trust in the enemy’s way of thinking must be preserved even in the midst of war, for otherwise no peace can ever be concluded and the hostilities would become a war of extermination.²

Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*

Finding instances of mutual trust in the enemy’s way of thinking in a civil war can be difficult, especially when one has to search for such features in wartime literature. This is because the propagandist writer makes use of two different strategies to influence the reader. On the one hand he makes an appeal to the

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¹ An earlier version of this chapter has been published as “The Representation of the Enemy in North and South Korean Stories from the Korean War” in *Memory Studies Journal* 6.2 (April 2013).

readers to fight for the interest of the nation. This is the aspect that we have been looking at so far in the previous two chapters. On the other hand, the writer tries to make a systematic appeal to the readers’ sense of moral outrage in order to move them. This is commonly done by creating a stereotype, for example by stressing the enemy’s cruel and vicious nature, and flood public opinion with this preconceived and oversimplified image. By consistently inserting the stereotype in every available medium, the natural diversity of public opinion will eventually be overcome. Colin Moore argues in his work on propaganda prints that “even though the stereotype deviates grossly from individual reality”, the stereotype appeals to people since “the stereotype is so convenient, so much easier to use than an objective opinion based on the facts.”

The stereotype eventually will assume a life of its own and its practicality and pervasiveness in public discourse will attain more credence and power than any appeal to national interest could ever have achieved.

In this chapter I will look at the different stereotypes that are used in North and South Korean stories from the Korean War to describe the enemy and will show that the way in which they depict the enemy is an extension and elaboration of the paradigms that both countries had created during the Liberation Period. For South Korea, the experiences with large groups of insurgents within its own borders, notably the Yŏsu rebellion, their criticism

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of the enemy more into the ideological realm, so as to be able to cope with both the internal and external problems it was facing. For North Korea this was different. Having been able to quickly establish stable control over society, they could focus on a perceived external threat which during the Korean War focused almost exclusively on America as being an imperialist aggressor. The stories show that as war got more protracted the enhancement and maintenance of morale of the home front became a more difficult task in both societies, as the appearance of internal enemies became more frequent.

The evil characters appearing in the North and South Korean stories lack human traits, and are usually depicted for their barbarism and predatory behavior which are a consequence of their ideological dispositions, or because of their selfish greed. Next to these depictions of the enemy, however, there is certainly an attempt from both South and North Korean writers to keep a human face on the enemy in case Korea will be reunited. The strategy they try to employ in their depiction of the enemy side is to make a distinction between the people in power and the common people. The evil characters appearing in the stories are army officers or political leaders, who hold a firm grip over the normal population. Their actions are described in such a manner that it should become clear to the reader that these characters have no legitimate right to be part of the Korean nation. The common population, in contrast, are described as supporting the good
characters in the stories and are usually awaiting liberation from the hands of the evil characters.

**The South Korean representation of the enemy**

In South Korea the image of the communist enemy took firm shape after the suppression of the Yŏsu rebellion in October 1948. As soon as the army regained control of the Chŏlla region, the Ministry of Education asked the National Association of Cultural Organizations (NACO) to form two ‘writer investigation parties’ (*munin chosaban*) who would go to the volatile region to write about the situation. Pak Chonghwa (1901-1981), Kim Yŏngnang (1903-1950), Chŏng Pisŏk (1911-1991), Yi Hŏn’gu (1905-1982) and Kim Song (1909-1988) were chosen as representatives of the literary field to be part of one of these two groups.\(^4\) For six days they toured the area and wrote down what they had heard and experienced. Their writings were swiftly published in the major newspapers.\(^5\) Besides these newspaper publications, their stories were also collected in a book edited by the NACO entitled *Rebellion and the Resolve of the*

\(^4\) Kim Tŭkchung, “Yŏsusakŏn-e taehan ṭollonbodo-wa pan’gongdamnon-ŭi ch’angch’ul” (News reports on the Yŏsu rebellion and the creation of the anti-communist discourse) in Kim Tŭkchung et al. *Chugŭm-ŭrossŏ nara-rŭl chik’ija: 1950nyŏndaе, pan’gong, tongwŏn kamshi-ŭi shidae* (Let’s guard the nation with our lives: The 1950s, the period of anti-communism, mobilization and surveillance), (Seoul: Sŏnin, 2007): p. 94. The other people who were chosen were cartoonists Kim Kyut’aek and Ch’oe Yŏngsu, photographers Yi Sonyŏng and Ch’oe Hŭiyŏn, and painter Chŏng Honggŏ.

\(^5\) Pak Chonghwa’s story was published in the *Tonga ilbo* from 20 November 1948, Chŏng Pisŏk’s in the *Chosŏn ilbo* also from the same date onwards and Yi Hŏn’gu’s story could be found in the *Sŏul shinmun* of 16 November 1948.
Minjok (pallan-gwa minjog-ŭi kago, 1949), which contained forewords written by president Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) and poet Kim Kwangsŏp (1905-1977), who was then holding the position of head of the Presidential Secretariat.

A defector from the rebellious 14th Division gives an eye-witness account of the atrocities he experienced during the Yŏsu rebellion in 1948.

These publications played an important role in the way the population was informed about the situation in the tumultuous
Chŏlla region and helped to shape the public image of the rebels. In their reports the writers depict the perpetrators of the rebellion as cold-blooded savages who have no respect for life. In a poem titled “Despair” (chŏlmang) by Kim Yŏngnang, he describes the rebels as follows: “Completely drunk with the poison of evil, / they killed innocent civilians by cutting off pieces of flesh while they were still alive. / They killed them by gauging out their eyes while alive. / They severed their limbs not by a knife, but by bullets and then burnt their bodies.” Pak Chonghwa also stressed the immense cruelty of the rebels and asked himself where such behaviour could have possibly come from: “Which ideology teaches such brutal, cannibalistic, demon-like and savage behaviour that, when they see the blood of their own people, they jump on it like a pack of wolves, gauging out people’s eyes, crushing their bones and leaving more than 80 bullet holes on a corpse?” He continuous his account by saying that this kind of behaviour can certainly not be found in the ‘true nature’ (ponshim) of the Korean minjok and concludes therefore that it must be derived from some other source.

The communist ideology was to blame for this, and the writers describe the events on the peninsula as a struggle between different ideological elements in society. Kim Song described these competing ideologies and their differences like this:

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7 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
One [of the ideologies] is *minjok* nationalism, while the other is communist federalism.\(^8\) The former takes as its principal agent the *minjok*, which tradition has handed down for 5000 years. The latter, meanwhile, disregards the minjok and the state, and strives to be incorporated into the Soviet Union. The first aims to break through the boundaries that separate each *minjok* which will be mutually beneficial for all, while the second annihilates ethnicity and, while claiming they are liberating the classes, their actual goal is to rule them with an iron hand.\(^9\)

From this perception, it follows that the people in the South who adhered to communism were henceforth to be regarded as enemies of the Korean *minjok* who should be eradicated from society. Pak Chonghwa describes this attitude towards communism when he cites the words of an army officer who was charged with suppressing the rebellion: “When I saw their stubborn inhumane behaviour resembling that of cruel devils, I realized that these bastards do not belong to my *minjok* and, feeling a righteous sense of indignation, I immediately gave the order to open fire on them.”\(^{10}\) Thus it is made clear that communism and the inherent brutality it unleashes in its adherents are not compatible with the idea of the Korean nation. The words of another young army officer cited by Yi Hŏn’gu also convey this feeling: “The term ‘fratricidal war’ is not applicable to this incident, because the rebels

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\(^8\) Meant with ‘federalism’ is that North Korea is a satellite of the Soviet Union.
\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 122-123.
\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 52.
did not even pretend to regard us as being of the same people.”

What Yi’s words imply here is that since the rebels do not regard us as being of the same ethnicity, “we” should not do so either.

The lesson learnt from the Yŏsu rebellion was that a “national spirit” should be promoted among the population. Education of the people in ideology was seen by the writers as the most important cure for preventing future uprisings. Before the Korean War broke out, this plan was put in motion by the NACO with the organization of a ‘Rally of All Intellectuals to Promote the National Spirit’ (minjok chŏngshin angyang chŏn’guk munhwain kwŏlgi taehoe) and the publication of the magazine National Culture (minjok munhwa).

The communist enemy during war

When war broke out, the pre-war images of the communist enemy were regurgitated and extended to the North Korean enemy. When the North Korean enemy appears in stories, the ideological
differences between the two sides are again stressed. “A dark night” (“Amya”, 1952) written by Pak Yöngjun (1911-1976), deals with the ideological differences between two brothers. The story can briefly be summarized as follows: Captain Im can hardly believe his eyes when he discovers his younger brother Kyŏngjae among the captured North Korean prisoners of war. His brother had been forcefully drafted when the North Korean army occupied Seoul and had not heard from him since. Im is very happy to see him and a tearful reunion ensues. Kyŏngjae tells of his attempts to escape from the army and asks about the well-being of their parents.

The next day he wants to get his brother released, but hears that during his capture he had resisted fiercely and had even killed a soldier. Im feels ashamed and cannot fathom what had possessed his brother at the time. He would like to meet his brother again to ask him directly. Im seeks comfort from his superior officer who tells him: “Meet him if you want, but don’t feel too disappointed. [...] It doesn’t matter how strong your brotherly bond is. When your ideologies are different there is nothing that can be done about it.”

When they meet again, his brother’s demeanor changes completely when he is not able to give Im a satisfactory answer as to why of all prisoners only he had resisted his capture. His brother’s eyes change into those of a ‘poisonous snake’, and this makes Im realize that his brother is a faithful communist after all.

“You have become a true communist who does not care for parents, brothers or the minjok!”\(^{15}\) He leaves the prison crying, after which he again meets his superior who tells him: “We live in unhappy times. The dehumanizing communist ideology is a cruel gift. […] It is better to love your fellow soldiers. This will be the same as loving the minjok. Isn't that a greater love than personal attachment?”\(^{16}\) These words encourage him to forget about his brother and from now on he decides to put all his efforts into fighting for his country. Soon after he joins a battle, he sees two escaped prisoners running his way, one of whom is his brother. He hesitates for a second, but shoots them both.

The story stresses that, even when two people have grown up as brothers, differences in ideology cannot be overcome. What changed his brother is not explained clearly, but it can be assumed that it is the communist ideology. Just as in the pre-war period communism is depicted as an ideology which eradicates the minjok and leads to inhumane behaviour.\(^ {17}\) This depiction of communism also appears in another story written by Pak Yŏngjun, “The Partisan” (“Ppalch’isan”, 1952). Here, the narrator tells that he

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 27.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 27.
\(^{17}\) Two stories similar to “A dark night” that deal with South Korean soldiers capturing a Communist whom they were friends with before the outbreak of war are Chŏng Pisŏk’s “Member of the communist party” (“Tangwŏn”, 1952) and Hwang Sunwŏn’s “Cranes” (“Hak”, 1953). In the former, the prisoner escapes and kills his South Korean old friend “because he was a member of the Communist Party,” hinting at the inherent evilness of the Communist ideology. The latter story, therefore, may have been written in reaction to such negative wartime stories, as in this story the South Korean captor shows an act of kindness to his old friend by treating him as such. Hwang leaves it open whether he releases his prisoner and old friend, or will later hand him over to the authorities.
joined the communist cause out of youthful naivety, but that he soon found out its oppressive nature. As a partisan he fought heroically against the South Korean army and even earned medals for his deeds. When the tide of war changes in favor of the UN army, however, his devotion starts to waver. Around this time he also falls in love with a fellow comrade. From then on his love for humanity returns, something which according to the narrator is suppressed by communism and it made him realize the following: “How could I not feel moved by the grief of my countrymen, who have the same face, clothes, and speak the same language as I do? Communism prides itself on having as its goal to negate everything, but I believe they will never be able to cut out the sweet feeling of love which gives humans their nobility.”

The character Pak employs in this story gives an air of authority to the statements on communism, as he is depicted as having had a first-hand experience of living in communist North Korea. The clear message Pak communicates to his readers is that the communist ideology eradicates people’s feelings, which makes them commit hideous crimes even against one’s own countrymen. The methods used by communists to create such an effect are peer pressure and self-criticism sessions. “Whenever there was free time we held study or self-criticism sessions. This is the most important method of communism to make men into machines.”

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19 Ibid., p. 135.
narrator remarks that “Communism dissolves all types of people into one organism. It doesn’t matter how precious or how great a person is: individual thoughts cannot survive. The organism is absolute. And within this absolute being, whose principle it is to ignore all things, a great delusion is created.”

Pak aims to convince the reader, through metaphors like the above, that everyone in North Korea is enslaved by the system. There are also figures in society, however, who exercise absolute power over the people. For instance, elsewhere in the story the narrator remarks: “I have witnessed and experienced the reality of North Korean communist society: there is a wealthy class centered around high ranking party members who rule over an oppressed class that leads a more miserable life than laborers in a capitalist society. In North Korea, they are the bourgeoisie who rule over the oppressed classes.” A distinction is made between the common North Korean civilians and the North Korean politicians in power. An elite group in society forcefully controls the oppressed people, who are also coercing these oppressed people to fight for their regime.

By portraying large parts of the North Korean population as victims of the Northern regime, the writers and ideologues in the South kept them included in their view of who belonged to the Korean minjok. Kim Yŏngsu’s (1911-1977) “The Prisoner of War I Caught” (“Naega chabŭn p’oro”, 1952) is an example of a story of

20 Ibid., p. 134.
21 Ibid., p. 131.
such a victimized North Korean soldier who can still be part of the nation. The story is as follows. The first-person narrator has just captured a prisoner of war and leads him down the hill to the army camp. When he notices that the prisoner is trying to loosen his bonds, he grabs his wrists, only to discover a tattoo with “Long live the People’s Republic!” on it. He flies into a rage, grabs his knife in order to cut off the prisoner’s wrist and shouts: “Because of you People’s Republic bastards the fatherland is in ruins and the minjok has lost its way.... When the fatherland is lost and the minjok perishes, will you still shout these words?” The prisoner begs him not to kill him and tells him that he was forced to let these characters be engraved on his wrist, because of the immense pressure he was under from his working group and its chairman. The I refrains from killing him and instead lectures him that this is exactly what the dictatorship of communism and the fascism of Kim Il Sung lead to.

After delivering the prisoner, he has to stand guard again, and after his duty is over, he decides to return to the prisoner to continue his lecture “about fascism and what democracy is.” As he walks up to the prisoner with the intention to ask him whether he has already figured out by himself that he was misled by Kim Il Sung, he notices bandages around the prisoner’s wrists. The prisoner informs him with a smile that he ate the letters out of his wrists and that he has the feeling of truly being alive at this

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moment. Witnessing this scene, the I thinks to himself: “I have to fight! I have to fight! Also for the sake of the freedom of mankind.”

This wartime story, as well as others, tries to convey the idea to the reader that the common North Korean soldier or civilian does not believe in communism at all and is only fighting for the communist regime due to the oppression he has to endure. They depict this group as victims who are in need of liberation at the hands of the South Korean regime.

Thus, when the North Korean enemy appears in South Korean stories, the focus is foremost on the differences between the communist and democratic ideologies. The writers portray communism as containing an inherent flaw which leads people to commit barbarous atrocities. Such depictions need to convince the reader that communism is incompatible with the desires of the Korean minjok. This exclusion is further enhanced by the external appearance of some enemy characters. In Kim Song’s novel Living Forever, which I discussed in the previous chapter, the evil protagonist in the story, the North Korean army officer Chu Mongil, is described as having: “the face of a savage, while his voice is like the howl of a bloodsucking vampire from hell.” This description of his physical features suggests that the communist

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23 Ibid., p. 34.
ideology, with its inherent ruthlessness, is inscribed in the body, like race.

**The face of the Chinese enemy**

True racialisation of the enemy is present when Chinese soldiers are portrayed. In Yu Chuhyŏn’s (1921-1982) “A Woman’s Song” (“Yŏin-ŭi norae”, 1952) the Chinese soldiers that appear are depicted as less than human. One of the characters has a deformed nose, because of a bullet that has pierced it, while another is nicknamed Stumpy. These bodily defects suggest that they are closer to animals than human beings. This is further stressed by the depiction of their mental faculties. The Chinese commander’s behavior, for instance, is described as stemming from the fact that: “there was no wisdom to be found in him, just as in an animal.”²⁵

This animalistic nature also leads many of the Chinese characters to have a constant craving to rape Korean women, which even manifests itself when they are facing mortal danger. When the village is bombarded by UN aircraft, and many of the Chinese soldiers are dying, the Chinese commander cannot control his sexual urges any longer and tries to rape Yŏngi’s mother. Suddenly he discovers Yŏngi, who had remained hidden in the kitchen, after which he turns into “a devil, who had the bloodshot eyes of a

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²⁵ Yu Chuhyŏn, “Yŏin-ŭi norae” [A Woman’s Song], *Kŏlchak sosŏl shibin chip*, p. 72.
starving wolf seeing a young lamb.” 26 This same motif can be seen in Pak Yŏnhŭi’s (1918-1990) “Weapons and humanity” (“Mugi-wa in’gan”, 1953). Here the protagonist finds a mortally wounded Korean girl wearing a Chinese uniform after a fierce battle. Not far away from her, he finds the naked body of a Chinese soldier who, at the time of the attack, was raping the young girl. In Chŏng Pisŏk’s “A new pledge” (“Saeroun maengsŏ”, 1952) letters are sent by Yŏngae to her older brother in the army to report on the circumstances in the village after the Chinese arrive. Yŏngae’s letters describe the behavior of the Chinese soldiers and she lets her brother know that she is certain that the Chinese soldiers will rape her. She decides to commit suicide just before the village is retaken by the UN army unit of her older brother.

These images of vulnerable and young women being raped by the Chinese enemy, or by North Korean army officers as in Kim Song’s novel, were meant to evoke hatred in the reader, and also connoted the threat to “Korean purity” that the enemy posed. With its nationalistic rhetoric being based on a perceived pure bloodline that can be traced throughout the centuries of Korea’s history, the image of the rape of a Korean woman can therefore be seen as being a direct attack on the identity of the Korean nation.

North Korean images of the enemy

26 Ibid., p. 79.
In pre-war North Korea, a paradigm was created in which the US was seen as the new imperialist aggressor on Korean territory, whose ambition it was to make a colony out of Korea. The South Korean politicians in power were all pro-Japanese elements, who needed the US in order to rule, for they did not have the support of the people. A speech by Kim Il Sung to writers instructing them in their writing tasks shows this view:

> From the very first day of their occupation of south Korea the US imperialists repressed the democratic forces in south Korea indiscriminately and strung together pro-American and pro-Japanese collaborators and other reactionaries to form their puppet forces. [...] Cultural and propaganda workers should carry on the task of exposing the US imperialist aggressive manoeuvres and the atrocities committed by the Syngman Rhee puppet clique.²⁷

Even after American troops had withdrawn from South Korea and when skirmishes with South Korean troops were common along the 38th parallel, the stories written by North Korean writers kept stressing that the US remained the real enemy and had masterminded the South’s aggressive manoeuvres. Han Sŏrya’s (1900-1976) “At a guard post” (“Ch’oso-esŏ”, 1950) reflects this attitude. In the story the South Korean army keeps attacking

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villages just across the 38th parallel and massacres its villagers. Even though the attacks are carried out by South Korea, the all-knowing narrator of the story stresses that it is obvious that America is behind the attacks.

It has already become obvious through the interrogation of POWs that this so-called “army” of Syngman Rhee, or whatever name they are using, are all without exception thankfully taking orders from American officers and that their operations, movements, or battles are almost all directly commanded by them.  

In the story, the reason given for the American interest in Korea is that the ultimate aim is the killing of large parts of the North Korean population. A drunken American officer who appears in the story states that the US goal is to achieve this mutual killing by deliberately making the South Koreans attack the North.

“America needs the South Korean Army and therefore will provide Korea with officers and weapons. When the North Korean population reaches 5 million, they will be able to live happily. Therefore we should kill 2.5 million of them. The South Korean army will have to fight for this aim,” said the bigmouthed American officer in his drunkenness. The

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Minister of Foreign Affairs and the puppet army military official were praising him as if he were a genuine Messiah.  

For the protagonists in the story, therefore, it is America that is seen as the main enemy, who just happens to be helped out by a few South Korean politicians and army officers who are dancing to the Americans’ tune without questioning their motives. Just as in South Korea, a distinction is made between this group in power and the oppressed common civilians. In the story this comes about when, after beating off the main attack, they find pro-North Korean pamphlets in one of the pockets of a dead South Korean soldier. This makes the characters in the story realize that the common South Korean soldiers are unwillingly fighting against the North and that Rhee Syngman’s regime lacks legitimacy.

Wartime images of the American enemy

In accordance with the pre-war paradigm, the enemy in wartime stories is above all the American enemy in spite of the fact that the actual opponent was a coalition of sixteen countries and South Korea. Invectives leveled against the Americans are either of a bestial nature, “wild beasts” (yasu), “(crazy) dogs” (mich’in kae), “packs of wolves” (iri tte), or “wild dogs” (sŭngnyangī), or are of a demonic kind, by mentioning they are like “hungry ghosts” (agwi) or “devils” (angma). It is more common in North Korea’s wartime

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29 Ibid., p. 150.
literature though, to see the Americans being simply described as “those jerks” (ḵǔ nomdŭl) or as “American jerks” (miguk nomdŭl).

The focus of many stories is on the Americans’ cruel behaviour toward the Korean population. A typical story in this respect is Yi Pungmyŏng’s (1910-1988) story “Devils” (“Angma”, 1951). ‘Old man Pak’ is harassed by South Korean intelligence officers Hŏ Manse and Ku Maengho, together with an American named Jack and a Japanese called Yoshida. They question him about the whereabouts of his sons who both hold high positions in communist organizations. They taunt him and soon the American urges him to open a ‘present’ that they brought for him in a box. When he opens it, he discovers it contains the head of his eldest son. As they leave, they burn down Pak’s house and catch his wife and grandchild who were trying to flee the burning building. The next day the whole village is summoned. Hŏ Manse tells them that they are about to enjoy “a good spectacle.” At that moment they see old man Pak crawling on his hand and feet. On his back he carries the dead body of his grandchild, while the heads of his wife and eldest son hang around his neck. This scene infuriates the villagers and they take up arms. They kill the enemies and the story ends with old man Pak joining the partisan army to seek revenge.

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30 The appearance in this and several other North Korean wartime stories of Japanese characters who are actively helping or colluding with the Americans is used to enforce the image that the Americans are of the same nature as the Japanese, and reinforces the anti-colonialist/anti-imperialist paradigm that was set up during the Liberation Period (1945-1950).
Besides the massacres and killings, the Americans also are described as possessing a seemingly endless sexual lust for Korean women, as they are constantly trying to rape them. This is comparable to the way the Chinese enemy was described in South Korean stories during the war. In Ch’oe Myŏngik’s (1902-1972) “The train driver” (“Kigwansa”, 1951) there is a scene in which a girl gets raped by an American. In this story, Hyŏnjun is captured and put to work to drive a locomotive. One night he witnesses that the village where he is held, is set on fire by an American supervisor. Going outside he is immediately pushed back in again by a South Korean MP who just lets the American have his way. Looking through the window he sees how a young Korean woman is raped by the American and then killed. Two days later Hyŏnjun gets the assignment to transport a train with army personnel and ammunition to another town. He speeds up the train, and although he is shot by the American, he manages to remain conscious long enough to derail the train at a bridge, destroying the train completely and killing everyone on it.

Just as the Chinese soldiers are depicted for their sexual lust and inherent bestial qualities in South Korean stories, the American’s bestiality appears most explicitly in the story when the scene of the girl’s rape and murder is described. In this scene the American soldier suddenly changes into an animal and at that moment is said to be “crying out exactly like a wild beast” and a “two-legged
animal.” It is also mentioned that the American appears to be “a hideous creature, such as Hyŏnjun never before had seen in his life.”

In the story “Devils” this sexual craving of the Americans is hinted at in a scene where the villagers are gathered and the young women are forced to stand at the front for inspection:

“Show your faces!”, shouted Hŏ Manse in his loudest voice, since he would never want to offend Jack.

“Good! Very Good!”

Whenever Jack let out these words, Ku Maengho would write down that girl’s name and address in a notebook.

Just like the description of the Chinese enemy in South Korean wartime stories, the North Korean wartime stories as well use the image of young women as a means to evoke anger in the reader. The foreign male violating the female Korean body serves to strike a chord with the reader by hinting at the purity of the Korean bloodline which also in North Korean nationalist rhetoric runs through women’s bodies.

South Korean traitors and victims in the North Korean stories

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In “Devils” the South Korean characters are depicted merely as servants who cater to all the Americans’ needs. The same can be observed in “The train driver” as the South Korean MP does not do anything to stop the American soldier from destroying the village or raping and murdering the Korean girl. South Korean characters do not appear often in North Korean wartime stories, however, which puts the focus of who is the enemy during the Korean war solely on the American side. As we have seen before, South Korean characters that do appear are frequently described as lethargic side-kicks to the Americans who are only too obliging to let the Americans have their way. This depiction can also be seen in Kim Yŏngsŏk’s “Roar of anger” (“Noho”, 1952). The North Korean POWs in the story have nicknamed their South Korean guards and have given them names such as “Shepherd” and “Bulldog” to stress that they are merely running dogs for their American masters.

Just as we have seen in the South Korean wartime stories, a distinction is made between Koreans in powerful positions and the normal population. While in the South Korean stories this distinction is made by focusing on the evil characters who are in power, the North Korean stories focus almost exclusively on the experiences of the normal population who are all eagerly awaiting liberation at the hands of the People’s Army. One example of this can be found in “Honey” (“Kkul”, 1951) written by Kim Namch’ŏn (1911-1953). Here a soldier tells why he is still capable of fighting at the front. He tells of his experience in August 1950 near the
Naktong frontline. His infiltration group were on a mission to get information about the number of enemy troops and had dressed as farmers while the narrator himself took the guise of a South Korean soldier. On their way back an enemy division approached their position. Covering the retreat for his comrades the narrator held off the attack, but was wounded. He crawled to the yard of an eighty-year old grandmother. He told her he was a communist soldier and upon hearing this she took care of him. The soldier was on the verge of dying and kept losing consciousness. The grandmother sustained him during this time by feeding him honey. A few days later his comrades found him. He hears that the grandmother has lost both her son and grandson. Every now and then her grandson would come to her house and she would give him honey too. Having lost her own male heirs, she shifts her hopes to the communist soldiers and wishes them well. This is seen in the remark of the narrator at the end of the story when he says that “the grandmother is still waiting for her grandson to pass by her house,”33 drawing the comparison that the North Korean army are seen as being her own grandchildren now. The grandmother wishes the narrator will get well soon, so that he and the other communist soldiers can liberate the country.

When civilians residing in enemy territory such as the grandmother above are depicted, they all without fail have sons either fighting as partisans or in the North Korean army. This was

also the case in the story “Devils”, while in Hyŏn Tŏk’s “Revenge” it is mentioned that all men had become partisans just before the Americans arrived in the village. These instances all reinforce the image that the general population is in favor of the communist ideology and the People’s Army.

The issue of collaboration

Despite the appearance of a harmonious and coherent struggle against a ruthless enemy, instances of the presence of internal enemies in North Korean society can be found in North Korean wartime texts as well. Similarly to the depiction in South Korean wartime stories these elements in society are seen as selfish and egoistic. A speech delivered by Kim Il Sung on February 1, 1952, for example, contains criticism of peasants and bureaucrats who are selfishly trying to amass wealth, instead of working for the war effort:

Among the peasantry there are both progressive peasants and backward ones who look only after their own well-being without caring about the interests of the state. […] State revenue has dropped sharply as against peacetime, since we have been barred from peaceful construction for 19 months now. […] Nevertheless, some people do not take into account such grave circumstances but behave selfishly to preserve the same living conditions as in peacetime. Government
functionaries, unable to endure hardships and ideologically corrupt, often commit irregularities and violate financial discipline: they conduct trade hand in glove with profiteers, pilfer and sell off state goods.34

Hwang Kŏn’s novel “Happiness” contains a chapter in which the issue of selfishness and collaboration makes an appearance. One of the main characters of the story, Chŏngim, is surprised when her husband appears at the hospital where she is working. To her knowledge he had been fighting as a guerilla in the south and she had not heard from him since he left. He was captured by the Americans and severely tortured. He got a choice between living or dying. He tells her that at that moment a lot of thoughts ran through his head: that if he died like this he would not know about Korea’s reunification, not know about the fruits of his struggle, or see his wife and daughter again. He chose to live and started to collaborate with the Americans reluctantly. He would give them unimportant or false information while searching at the same time for a way to escape.

After hearing his story, Chŏngim is furious and urges him to turn himself in to the intelligence agency. She tells him that from this moment on she will not be his wife anymore until he has been tried in court. He leaves to give himself up. After he is gone, Chŏngim is not able to get him out of her mind. She regards him now as an

enemy, but at the same time cannot completely ignore the fact that he also was her husband who now has to face the people’s court. Eventually she decides that since it is wartime, she has to be a stronger person and she is resolved to hate him even more. A few weeks later during the retreat in September 1950 she suddenly meets her husband again. He is now wearing a brand new army uniform. He tells her that he has been cleared of any misconduct and that he has volunteered to be a partisan again. Chŏngim is very proud of him. Just before he leaves for the front he thanks her wholeheartedly for rebuking him that day.

The anger of the main character is caused by the husband’s decision to choose his own life over the greater good of the country. This selfish decision even leads him to work against the country by collaborating with the enemy. It is interesting to note a difference here in the way these subversive elements in society should be dealt with if you compare them with the South Korean wartime stories. Whereas in the South Korean stories such people were described as an affront to the Korean minjok who should be excluded, in the North Korean stories there is the possibility for these characters to mend their ways and become a part of the war effort again.

Something similar to this can be seen in Ŭm Hŭngsŏp’s (1906-1987) “Crossing the hill once more” (“Tashi nŏmnŭn kogae”, 1953). Yunsu has returned to his hometown and is keen to know what has happened to the village. When he asks about the family of “fatso
Ch’oe” his mother tells him that during the retreat some of Ch’oe’s family members, especially his eldest son, had helped the American enemy by rounding up villagers who were later executed. This angers Yunsu but on the other hand he is not surprised to hear this. Ch’oe’s eldest son had fled to the south right after liberation out of fear of being killed as a pro-Japanese traitor, since he had helped the Japanese as a town clerk to forcefully draft young men from the village into the imperial army. When a few days later Yunsu and some others volunteer to remove unexploded bombs from the fields, the wife of “fatso Ch’oe” also asks for their help. At first a surge of anger wells up in Yunsu, because of the family’s earlier transgressions, but he quickly controls himself and answers: “Don’t worry! I will remove it [the bomb], so that you can farm your land well again once more.”

In this story the act of collaboration by some family members does not necessarily mean that they are ostracized from village life or North Korean society altogether. These stories show that the possibility is left open for the characters to mend their wrong ways after which they can be included in society and, in extension, the minjok again. Not coincidentally, this attitude of forgiveness

35 A similar story can be found in Yi Pungmyŏng’s “Daughter of Korea” (“Chosŏn-ŭi ttal”, 1952) where a landlord tyrannized his tenants during the colonial period, but had quickly fled when Korea regained its independence. When the UN Army occupies large parts of North Korea during the war, however, this same landlord returns to the village with the South Korean army to reclaim his lands. This time the people rebel against his demands and they kill him. As a result the American and South Korean Army retaliate by burning down the village.

towards collaborators followed the wartime party directives of how to deal with the many acts of collusion that had taken place when the UN army had occupied North Korea. These North Korean wartime stories form a great contrast to the South Korean stories. While in the North Korean stories the characters are still able to remain part of the Korean nation even after collaborating with the enemy, in South Korean stories even a mere character flaw like being selfish or egoistic would be enough to be brandished as a traitor to the nation.

Summary

When the enemy appears in North Korean wartime stories, they are portrayed as cruel and barbarous to innocent civilians and serve to evoke feelings of hatred towards the enemy and a willingness to fight in the reader. In South Korea the cruellness and bestiality of the enemy is also stressed in some works, but the emphasis in descriptions of the enemy is mostly on the ideological corruptness of the communist ideology or the differences between both state ideologies.

In order to keep large parts of society included in their vision of what constituted the Korean nation (minjok), North and South Korean writers stressed that the people in power were oppressing their own citizens, and that the purpose of their struggle was to liberate these oppressed people. The evil characters appearing in

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South Korean stories were therefore usually army officers or political leaders. In North Korea this distinction of the oppressed people versus the people in power was created by focusing on a general population who were indirectly supporting the war by rooting for the communist leadership and by means of their own sons and daughters who were fighting in the communist army.

When reading the wartime stories from both states, one can see that the paradigms which had been established during the pre-war era were continued after the Korean War broke out. In North Korea the emphasis remained on the argument that it was foremost the American enemy that needed to be fought against. In South Korea the focus remained on the ideological incompatibility of communism with what in their mind constituted the Korean nation.

Internal enemies appear in the stories of both belligerent parties. In North Korean stories an idealized image is created of collaborators or profiteers who, after repenting, can become part of society and the nation again. The South Korean authors’ depiction of such people is much less lenient, and they even stress that people within one’s own society that try to enrich themselves at the cost of the masses need to be expunged from the minjok.

The prolonging of war meant that authors on both sides started to focus more on depicting their society’s internal problems. This had the visible effect that depictions of the enemy other in wartime stories gradually started to disappear. With the depiction of the
presence of good and evil elements within the enemy’s ranks fading from the readers’ gaze, it lead to a dissolution of the distinction between the good enemy and the evil enemy which had been present in the earlier wartime stories.