

REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR AND PEACE IN POST-KOREAN WAR NORTH KOREAN LITERATURE

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1 War and Peace: Peace in Europe and Asia

In the May 1966 issue of *Chosŏn Munhak*, the monthly literary journal of the Chosŏn Writers' Union, a poem by an unknown writer was published. The poem expressed a persistent will to live in spite of the unfathomably distressed human condition. It was among a collection of poems found in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1954, and not only offered European readers testimony on the calamity of the Holocaust but also, with its depiction of the inhumanity of war, infuriated readers in a distant, developing socialist country in Asia. This translated poem into Korean from German, "A Piece of Poem," was accompanied by a short introduction by the editorial committee of *Chosŏn Munhak*, which stated its author to be an unknown antifascist, imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen camp in Hitler's Germany.¹ The historiography of the antifascist, more precisely anti-imperialist, struggles in North Korea that mythologized the Kim Il Sung-led Manchurian anti-Japanese imperialist guerrilla struggles as the single, unitary origin had been established as the state narrative by the late 1960s. The poem could be printed since it was several months before the "monolithic ideological system of the Party" was set in place in the middle of 1967. In the context of the April 19th Uprising in South Korea in 1960, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and the escalating Vietnam War throughout the 1960s, a certain way of representing peace was being constructed in North Korean literature. That said, it should be noted that this particular construct, from which peace was considered and practiced, was shaped through the active interplay among diverse discourses of representing peace during the 1950s.

Up until early 1967 *Chosŏn Munhak* had dedicated some of its pages to translations of foreign literature, mainly from the Soviet Union and other socialist states. The publication of translated literature reached its height in the 1950s, when the post-Korean War socialist reconstruction of the North Korean economy and society was underway, based on the models of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies in Eastern Europe. References to Soviet aesthetic discourses and canons, along with Eastern European socialist realism, as examples of advanced literature and art were a common feature of *Chosŏn Munhak* in the 1950s and occupied a significant amount of space in every issue. Not only did this have a great impact in the formation of a Korean version of socialist realism, but it

1 Anonymous 1966.

also had a significant influence in the ways North Korean literature approached the theme of war and peace, which is the object of this study.

In post-Korean War North Korean literature of the 1950s, the theme of war and peace was signified and represented in at least two different ways. One implied that peace – that is, the 1953 armistice agreement – was the necessary condition for the peaceful construction of a socialist society and upheld its significance, while acknowledging its temporary status. The other argued for a resolution to war to establish a genuine, persisting peace against global imperialist forces. The former sense of peace differentiated itself from the latter, in that it highlighted the end state of violence and turned to new (socialist) constructions, leaving aside the problem of “justice” for the time being.² Although it should be noted that this was only possible after declaring the fundamental victory of “us” over “them,” what is interesting is that this type of narrative of peace essentially differed from those that would sacrifice the truce for justice in its radical sense. Given that justice is yet to be fulfilled in the anti-imperialist war from the perspective of North Korea, the latter sense of peace, which prioritizes justice over the end state of war, could never escape the burden of another war.

What concerns us here is that the ways of imagining and representing peace had diverged during the 1950s, in the specific context of heightened peace movements across Europe and Asia. The ideals of “peace” and “democracy,” which the Soviet states and Eastern European people’s democracies identified themselves with, had a powerful appeal on a global scale. Nonetheless, what each state meant by them varied according to their geopolitical contexts. Post-Korean War North Korea was one of the focal points where ideas and practices of “peace” were contested, from the belligerent wartime literature that justified the experiences of war, to the discourses, under the banner of “peace movements” and “socialist friendship,” shared with the Eastern European countries, to the emerging discourses on the national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa. What complicated the representation of peace was that it was highly associated with attitudes and policies toward the external influences that North Korea developed in a specific context.

Previous scholarship on North Korean literature in the 1950s has not examined how “peace” was imagined and represented in regard to its socialist friendship with the Soviet states and Eastern European peoples’ democracies.³ While many have acknowledged proletarian internationalism as a key subject of the period, few scholarly works on North

2 Kim 2015.

3 For recent historical studies that examine the global peace movement and its impact on the North Korean peace movement, see Cheng 2013; Chŏng 2014a, 2014b; Institute for Korean Historical Studies 2010; Kim 2012, 2015. The present study looks at literary discourses in order to bring to light the proactive interchanges between the peace movement in a global context and in North Korea.

Korean literature have examined its influences on and interactions with ideas of peace. This paper focuses on the changing narratives at play in the development of the North Korean version of “peace” in the 1950s. The 1950s in North Korea is a period of great significance in that the decade reveals many vigorous, turbulent debates in various academic fields, in close connection with practical, social, and economic changes taking place in the country.⁴ The examination of the debates within the broader context of interactions with the Soviet and people’s democratic states in Europe will contribute to a deeper understanding of the development and the implication of alternatives contested in the debates. Specifically, an examination of the concept of “peace” narrated and represented in 1950s North Korean literature will reveal that there was actually more than one alternative before the emergence of a top-down single ideological scheme in the late 1960s.⁵ It will also offer meaningful insights into the present-day peace processes in the Korean Peninsula, since learning the old, excluded, and forgotten options may help facilitate new thinking about past concepts of “peace” based on North Korea’s own discursive history.

In what follows, I will examine how post-World War II global peace movements affected post-Korean War North Korean literature (Section 2). I will then review the ways in which 1950s North Korean literature represented ideas of peace from three different perspectives: first, placing the Korean War in the context of global history (Section 3); second, promoting a peace as a necessary condition for postwar socialism-building (Section 4); third, advocating a peace, different from the former, as something that can only be attained by national liberation struggle, independence, and integration (Section 5).

2 Global Peace Movements and Post-Korean War North Korean Literature

In the mid-1950s post-Korean War North Korean literature began to construct a Korean version of socialist realism, at the time the prevailing method of artistic representation in the Soviet and socialist world. Soviet “advanced” socialist literature and literary work emerging from the Eastern European peoples’ democracies had an enormous impact on the development of a Koreanized socialist realism. These external influences ranged from the establishment of new directions in both content and form, to the reevaluation of past literary conventions, languages, and styles, to the development of new writer’s organiza-

4 For historical studies that highlight the dynamic processes at play in the early formation of the North Korean socialist system during the 1950s, see Institute for Korean Historical Studies 1998; Sö 2005.

5 By the late 1960s North Korea had undergone major political and ideological restructuring, establishing the “monolithic ideological system of the Party.” See Lee 1995; Wada 2002.

tions and emergence of new reading publics.⁶ The problem of peace, whose political salience after World War II made it top of every socialist or people's democratic states' agenda, was also widely debated in the process of the Koreanization of socialist realism.

Although by the late 1960s foreign literary discourses and practices were not blankly welcomed but rather carefully selected and applied, or even partially negated, in the 1950s North Korean literature showed a relatively free reception of Soviet and Eastern European cultural discourses and practices.⁷ The reception of contemporary debates regarding the direction of socialist realism in the post-Stalin Soviet Union and Eastern European states is a good illustration of how North Korean literature adapted to foreign trends and diversified socialist realism in its own style. During 1954 and 1955 a regular feature series of *Chosŏn Munhak* entitled "World Literature News" – dedicated mainly to other socialist and people's democratic literature – reported the events of writers' congresses in the socialist bloc. The Second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954 followed a series of other congresses held in the Soviet republics and people's democracies in Eastern Europe.⁸ The influence of the 1954 Soviet writers' congress was limited by a series of North Korean critiques circumscribing the critical debates about the methods of socialist realism and criticizing in advance "revisionist" streams as damaging to the ongoing world revolution.⁹

"Peace" was the foremost subject consistently represented in the translated literatures or the critiques related to them. Among them were articles by the *Chosŏn Munhak* editing committee introducing readers to the recipients of the Stalin Peace Prize as well as the International Peace Prize presented by the World Peace Council.¹⁰ Accompanying these biographies were some original works in translation, giving readers the opportunity to read the work of these internationally acclaimed authors as well as learning about their lives. Those authors whose works were featured included not only Soviet writers but also writers from Western and Eastern Europe, and even the United States.¹¹ Since *Chosŏn Munhak* represented the Chosŏn Writers' Union, the single authoritative writers' organi-

6 See Kim 2018, esp. chaps. 5–6, for the making of readers and the "red" writers of North Korean literature.

7 Chŏng 2010; Yu 2011.

8 Anonymous 1954a, 133–136; 1954b, 143–146; 1956a, 185; 1956b, 191. The *Chosŏn Munhak* series covered not only the Soviet writers' congress but also the activities by the Chosŏn Writers' Union in showcasing the lessons of the Soviet congress for the North Korean context. See Anonymous 1955a, 189; 1955b, 199.

9 Kim 2017.

10 The bios included Stalin Peace Prize winners Johannes R. Becher, Guo Moruo, Jorge Amado, Howard Fast, Pablo Neruda, Anna Seghers, Leon Kruczkowski, and Ilya Ehrenburg.

11 Including Mulk Raj Anand, Nâzım Hikmet, Guo Moruo, Howard Fast, Pablo Neruda, Anna Seghers, Ilya Ehrenburg, Monica Felton, and Michael Gold.

zation, the editorial decisions of its committee had great significance. The series of introductions and translations of winners of international peace awards suggest that the theme of “peace” was promoted in earnest with the supervision of the Chosŏn Writers’ Union.

Due to the state’s intense propagation of the international peace movement, an ordinary North Korean reader in the 1950s must have been very well informed about these international peace awards and the activities of the winners. During the Korean War, the North Korean media had dedicated an extravagant amount of column inches to informing the masses of the contemporary peace movements taking place on the other side of the globe.¹² Kim (2015) has argued that the pressure from the waves of peace movements in postwar Europe, which Stalin prioritized over the national liberation struggles in Asia, made it inevitable that North Korea would fabricate the story that South Korea attacked first. Chŏng (2014b), on the other hand, highlights the distinctiveness of North Korean peace movements in comparison with the global peace movements. He argues that North Korean representations of peace oscillated between aligning with global peace movements and aligning with national liberation struggles. This characteristic of wartime propaganda that emphasized global peace movements in North Korea continued in representations of peace in post-Korean War North Korean literature.

3 War as the Common Experience: Defining the Global Historical Status of the Korean War

How was peace narrated and represented in post-Korean War North Korean literature? During the 1950s *Chosŏn Munhak* published discourses by other nations on the Korean War and on post-Korean War reconstruction. In parallel, diverse works from the North Korean side were also printed, narrating the experiences of friendship visits to other socialist and people’s democratic states. These representations by North Korean authors and socialist brethren in Europe indicate, in combination, how the theme of war and peace was understood and expressed in the literature of the period. These discourses led readers to grasp the fact that peace is a concept that all humanity shares and the result of the heroic struggles against the appalling tragedies of two world wars. That the disaster of war was a universal experience, and that a new history of victory could be written in overcoming that disaster, was confirmed as the basic tenet of post-Korean War literature.

The theme of war was powerful. Traumatic war experiences were still vivid in North Korean minds and the construction of authoritative narratives on war that people could relate to was urgent. Literature depicting wartime experiences and heroes was in high

12 Chŏng 2014a.

demand. Readers wanted to reflect on the unspeakable hardships and sacrifices experienced, and to find a direction for the future based on evaluations of the past. What is notable is that the representation of war was guided by the framework adapted from Soviet socialist realist literature.¹³ Shaped by a shared schema of wartime literature – informed by the Soviet war literature that emerged during the “Great Fatherland War” (the Second World War) – post-Korean War literature emerged. Moreover, that shared framework mediated by Soviet socialist realism enabled active communication between the people’s democracies in Eastern Europe and the young Asian people’s democratic state that had just signed an armistice with its neighbor.

According to the accounts of the Korean War published in *Chosŏn Munhak*, the brutality and tremendous cost of war was not the burden solely of the North Korean people but a common adversity to all peace-loving humanity. From this perspective, North Korea was the frontline of peace-loving humanity, armed with high ideals, and its people had forged a historic solidarity with all other peace- and democracy-loving peoples of the world against the terror facing humanity. This narrative was common both in the works of writers from other socialist countries who wrote on North Korea and in the works of North Korean writers themselves.¹⁴ The representations of the Korean War, within or without, were well orchestrated in the name of proletarian internationalism.

In a series of three poems including “Mind of Chosŏn,” Chŏng Ha Ch’ŏn adeptly depicts what this internationalism was like for North Koreans and their friends. The first poem, “Two Britains,” and the second, “History,” describe friendships across national borders and solidarity for peace against war and oppression.

Walking without a coat in rainy days
 He was a railway worker from Britain.
 Since was the same our hometown of heart
 We soon became close.
 Having meals together
 Sharing things casually
 He asked about the Korean War
 Then told how he and his friends, the engineers
 Not to send the tanks to Korea
 Had put on strikes.

[...]

13 Kim 2018.

14 Milchev 1955; Porumbacu 1954; Vaptsarov 1954.

At dawn, in the Bucharest station,
 Sharing goodbyes and saying
 Please come for once
 Not to the wealthy Britain but to the Britain I live in
 Though that Britain, poor and desolate,
 You will see what he has,
 Much more valuable properties than the wealthy Britain boasts
 And through the struggle without a break
 How he grew up to be a new Britain.¹⁵

In “Two Britains,” the poetic persona sings for an internationalist brotherhood, based on the worldview of the “two camps” of capitalism and communism. In the poem a North Korean traveler to Romania befriends a railroad worker from one side of the “two Britains,” which comprises the working-class, anti-war Britain and the capitalist, warmongering one. The two share a will to world peace and the liberation of the proletariat, and thus an internationalist bond is established, despite the very distinct geographical backgrounds. Thus Chông’s “Two Britains,” in the image of a personal friendship between North Korean traveler and British worker, situates the Korean War firmly in the global context of class struggle and peace movements. The implication of the “two Britains” and of a friendship between North Korean traveler and British proletariat is that they belong to a community in spite of other differences.

The second poem, “History,” also demonstrates the link between the struggles of North Korea’s national liberation and events on the other side of the globe.

How even sunshine crosses it
 So high was the wall
 At the gate two layers of iron-barred windows
 From the outside separated all.
 We had to walk again
 A long corridor like a cave
 Here prisoners would walk day and night
 Treading on a stream of light...

But indeed there was the light
 In prison suits whether heading to a torture chamber
 Or to an execution chamber with a gun pointed at back
 Inside their hearts walking in here

15 Chông 1957a. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of quotations from non-English sources are mine.

Prison cells greeted us in the dark
 The walls without windows, the thick rocks
 There, at the end of the corridor on the second floor
 Was the room where Gheorghiu-Dej was prisoned.

A lamp on the bed in the room
 What could I tell?
 On the lamp, in this short piece
 That delivered the fire of Lenin's from heart to heart

[...]

Here is the Prison Doftdana
 Today this is not a prison
 But a museum we see over
 History has walked this path.

Belgian landlords and German gestapos
 As well as the king's gendarme
 As did the Japanese police in our homeland
 Here encircled their own "century"

However, those days are gone
 The guide now tells the old tales
 Birds across the high wall
 Spacious yards with all the blossoms

Isn't it joyful?
 Writing not on prison but on a museum
 Isn't it also joyful!
 Thinking on the day we will see over in our own museum
 The conducts of who still desires to oppress people in prison.¹⁶

Here a deeper bond is expressed based on the common experience of historical struggles against imperialist wars. The poetic self, on a tour of Doftdana prison in Romania, where the antifascist communist Gheorghiu-Dej had been imprisoned from 1933 to 1944, empathizes with the once fettered fighters and imagines that their unconquerable visions are also the lights of hope for the North Korean people. To the North Korean traveler persona, the Romanian's struggle for liberation and peace paralleled the struggles in his own homeland. The Doftdana prisoners, symbolizing Romanian national liberation struggle

16 Chông 1957b.

against both the old regime and foreign forces like Belgium and Germany, illustrate how human history is constituted by an accumulation of struggles for freedom and independence. More importantly, the North Korea's own history of colonization and war correspond with this "historical law" of class struggles, placing North Korea on the same historical track as people's democracies in Eastern Europe. In this sense, the poetic hero sympathizes with the Romanian struggle and becomes invigorated by the realization that past repression and exploitation in North Korea would also one day be displayed in a museum, according to the "laws of history."

Chông Ha Ch'ôn was not alone in situating the Korean War and post-Korean War North Korea in the context of global history. In the May 1957 issue of *Chosôn Munhak*, Han Myông Ch'ôn's series of poems, based on his friendship visit to Czechoslovakia, invited readers to reflect upon the tragedy of war and the opportunity to build a socialist future from its ashes. "Poems on the Visit to Czechoslovakia" by Han consisted of four poems: "The Lark of Lidice," "A Lover Who Was Afraid of Mice," "A Beautiful Smile," and "To an Engine Driver." The first, "The Lark of Lidice," vividly contrasts the village of Lidice destroyed by the German army in World War II with North Korea devastated by the Korean War. In the first line of the poem, the poet exclaims how similar Lidice and his own hometown are, despite their geographical distance. Listening to the lark singing in the village, where tombs remind of horrible events, "the poet from East Sea" interprets the lark's song into his own thoughts on war and peace.

Along with the sun
 Along with spring
 Lark, you are everywhere
 Like a singing phoenix

The warbling sound in the middle of the sky
 "When I was in flame
 My young daughter called me
 Mother! Mother!"

"The voice cutting through my heart!
 Yes, I am here! I am Here!
 I shouted till the end
 And became a lark, till today..."

"I am here! I am here!"
 O, the lark of Lidice!
 The poet from East Sea knows
 From whose soul you were born

How noble the name is!
 "Mother! Mother!"

Mother called by the name of the homeland
 She did not go anywhere

On her heart
 Wheat fields are green
 Her daughters and sons sing
 The immortal song, the song of the future...

Nobody would dare to take the song away
 Even enemies worse than
 Hitler's villains
 Shall not start the fire of war again

Inside every large and small cannon of them
 Now you could build nests
 O, the lark of Lidice!
 Sing, peace, peace...¹⁷

Sympathizing with the sacrificed souls of Lidice, the North Korean poet highlights the significance of protecting the homeland through a metaphor of a mother. Then from the home country, symbolized by the massacred “mother,” reborn as a lark of Lidice, the scene moves to the present peaceful reconstruction. Now “mother” is “called by the name of homeland” and new landscapes of collective farms come into view. The new visions of a peaceful socialist utopia not only remain in Lidice but also expand to North Korea, the poet’s homeland.

Han’s second and third poem describe the past days of Czechoslovakia. “A Lover Who Was Afraid of Mice” depicts an old Slovakian couple, who had endured severe poverty, now enjoying new happiness brought about by the collective farms. Their village, Zurina, is introduced much like Changjin Kapsan,¹⁸ and thus invokes a degree of familiarity among Korean readers with the characters of the Slovakian countryside.¹⁹ The old is

17 Han 1957a.

18 Both Changjin and Kapsan would remind a sense of countryside aloof in the highland to the contemporary post-Korean War readers of North Korea. They belong to Kaema Upland, the place of which is characteristic for its severe cold winter and the mountainous terrain, which allow only “fire-field farming”. The name of Changjin is most famous as the battlefield of one of the most horrendous fight in the Korean War, “Battle of Changjin Reservoir”. While, Kapsan is most remembered by Kim Sowöl (one of the most known early modern Korean poet)’s posthumous poem, “Samsu Kapsan for Kim Ansö”, as a place burdening the poetic self with deep sorrow by obstructing him/her to return home.

19 Han 1957b.

contrasted with the new in an image in which an old folk song is sung and played with a new instrument. Folk songs had their own status within socialist realist literature, linked to the genre's emphasis on "socialist content" in "national forms," and were already considered a "people's art."²⁰ Given this context, the poem's subtitle, "Listening to Folk Songs," made the scene more familiar to the North Korean readers. The portrayal of a grandmother singing a folk song with her granddaughter's piano contrasts with the image of former times when she would have sung the same song with her husband's flute. The image of the old flute versus the piano itself shows how drastically the everyday lives of people had changed during the era of socialist reconstruction.

4 Peace as the Prerequisite for Peaceful Socialism-Building: Promoting Socialist Friendships and Reconstruction

During the 1950s one of the most frequently visited themes by North Korean writers was the socialist friendships and solidarity that underpinned postwar socialism-building. Since the Korean War had been represented as the forefront of world peace-building against US imperialism and capitalist exploitation, postwar reconstructions in the North were also narrated as reconstructions of peace, with firm socialist assistance. After three years of war, soldiers returned home and peaceful reconstructions of the destroyed homeland became the state's first priority. In the years following the war, a range of assistance initiatives provided by the Soviet bloc was extensively propagated by the North Korean media. A series of travelogues, poems, short novels, and essays were published in *Chosŏn Munhak*, again by both North Korean writers and those from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who visited North Korea after the war. These literary works developed from the exchanges of groups of writers across the Eurasian continent, and an examination of them illustrates how the theme of peace was represented in the context of socialist friendship, directly associated with the urgent task of postwar reconstruction.

The first thing we encounter in these works is that the postwar reconstruction of North Korea progressed on the basis of a shared framework of Soviet-induced peace and development. The reconstruction of infrastructure such as factories, farms, and the city center of Pyongyang, followed the Soviet model – and so did the reconstruction of cultural and artistic production. This not to say that North Korean culture lacked its own creativity and innovation in adopting the Soviet model, but rather that model acted as a common denominator that facilitated communication among peoples of different countries. During the three-year of the official postwar reconstruction of North Korea, the common grammar of Soviet socialism and peoples' democracies enabled both North

20 Kwŏn and Chŏng 1990; Lee 2006: 2002; Nam 2004; Pak 2003.

Koreans and their socialist friends to actively engage with and learn from one another. This is perhaps best illustrated by an exchange of essays and poems between the German writer Max Zimmering and his North Korean counterpart Cho Ryŏngch'ul. The exchange reads like a dialogue between friends who had established an intense bond. This bond was based on the common ideals of peace and peaceful reconstruction under the umbrella of the Soviet Union.

According to his essay printed in the March 1955 issue of *Chosŏn Munhak*, Zimmering visited North Korea as a delegate of the National Front of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for a tour to several sites of post-Korean War reconstruction.²¹ In the introduction, Zimmering states that until 1945, ten years before he wrote the essay, his knowledge of North Korea was severely limited. But after 1945, when both Germany and Korea were liberated by the Red Army, the two countries “abruptly became close, like twin brothers at their mother’s bosom.”²² He continues:

‘Yes, we suddenly became quite close. When we read about your accomplishments in reconstructing the country, we were joyful. This was like our own fulfillment. The names we didn’t know before suddenly became familiar. Whoever called the name of Kim Il Sung or Pak Chŏng Ae, it was now like they were calling the names of Wilhelm Pieck or Rosa Thaelmann, or some other renowned person beloved by our people.’²³

The essay comprises three parts. First, Zimmering advocates the Korean War as a war for the protection of peace. He then moves on to the present state of reconstruction in North Korea, and lastly, endorses the proletarian internationalism he witnessed with his own eyes in North Korea during socialist reconstruction. Zimmering accuses the Rhee Süng-man government of South Korea and the United States for beginning the war and highlights the responsibility of the United States for the destruction of Korea. These allegations seem to follow from his position on the US occupation and division of Germany.

Then the US military machines pushed through right to the middle of Korea, where a broad way to happiness, knowledge, and culture had been opened up. If there had been another MacArthur or Ridgeway, our country would have shared the same destiny as Korea.

21 At the end of his essay the *Chosŏn Munhak* editors note that Zimmering’s visit took place in January 1955. According to them he visited North Korea as a chair of delegates representing the committee of assistance for North Korea and Vietnam, under the national council of the National Front of the GDR.

22 Zimmering 1955, 130.

23 Zimmering 1955, 130.

Any German with eyes and ears and a sound mind would know that, for a people forcibly divided by the Elbe river, which is, for the Korean people, the 38th parallel, the Korean War fought against the US generals and their followers was, in fact, a war to protect peace.²⁴

Having affirmed the Korean War's historical status as a "just war," Zimmering moves onto the main theme of his essay: proletarian internationalism in North Korea. He describes an episode with a Swedish writer and pacifist in which he replied to the pacifist's invitation to Sweden with "[b]ut in today's international context, the route to Pyongyang is shorter to the way to Stockholm."²⁵ Realizing the importance of this remark after his own visit to Pyongyang, he once again stresses the worldwide nature of the new solidarity:

Geographical reality is changing thus. One heartbeat, one thought, and the same hope for the future, makes so many peoples across the world stand fast with the Soviets, opening a single path of light before them. I walked across Stalin Square [in Berlin] on the 20th of December to the airport. And again, I walked along Stalin Street in Pyongyang. I felt as if I was walking on an endless path, the path of peace and socialism, one that encompasses the whole world, with no limits.²⁶

Zimmering lists the achievements of reconstruction – from Pyongyang Mill Factory to the Hungnam Carbide Plant, from newly reconstructed libraries and museums to workers' residences in Pyongyang – and praises North Korea for rebuilding from the desolate remains of war. While upholding it as "the model of proletarian internationalism," in the rest of the essay he focuses on the international solidarity he found in North Korea. He depicts groups of people from diverse socialist countries in Eastern Europe and assures readers that socialist friendships were in full bloom in assisting the construction of socialism in North Korea. Fittingly, Zimmering concludes his essay by rhetorically uniting the people of Eastern Europe and the people of North Korea in describing their common contributions to the interests of the people. The practices of their international solidarity are highlighted by reference to Stalin's statement on the role of the people in establishing peace.²⁷

Cho Ryöngch'ul's series of poems "In Germany," comprised of three poems, "Berlin," "Raising the Cup to Friendship," and "Glory to the Poet," narrates the poet's experiences and emotions after a visit to the GDR. The last poem is dedicated to Friedrich Schiller and the other two represent the socialist friendships the poet felt. "Berlin," portraying the city landscape, matches perfectly with Zimmering's essay on his visit to Pyongyang.

24 Zimmering 1955, 131.

25 Zimmering 1955, 131.

26 Zimmering 1955, 131–132.

27 Zimmering 1955, 132.

Berlin, thou art where the sunset fires in the west
 At the end of the land far away
 How far where thou art
 My Pyongyang is with thee as always..

[...]

Checking for my appearance at Marx-Engels Square
 Taking off my hat at the new-born street, the Stalin street
 In my eyes bowing with a courtesy
 The song for friendship from afar Pyongyang..

[...]

Go to the high forest
 There Thälmann's name is
 And so are many other fighters.

On the day thy destiny was liberated
 To Berlin, to Berlin
 On that day the waves of justice flowed
 The black flag of fascism
 Ditched deep in the swamp of Europe
 High on the roofs of churches in Berlin
 On the day the Red flag flies

The Spree river, thou must have seen
 High in the sky of May
 The Red daybreak of new days
 That the two geniuses of Germany prophesized

O, under this red dawn
 Under the sun of Lenin-Stalin
 Didn't we get blessings for new days?
 Us like the flowers blossomed in one tree...

The city of peoples, that bravely stood
 It was never without the value of those old days with blood
 At the Stalin street
 I saw the rewarding labors of new Germany

Wherever I go, the most beautiful human lives
 The happiest path the humans could ever possess
 On this new, shining and vast street
 I meet kindhearted people

Then why today, again
 Do we have to say sorrow
 Who indeed does want this,
 This separation of people who cannot live like this

There shadowed by the Middle-Age castle gate,
 There it is still a dark night
 There the god of war, still
 Collecting the crushed black wings of fascism...
 Until when
 Will it spread the sorrow of nation...

In Germany, in Chosŏn, or in Vietnam
 However,
 The world has already been awake long
 Golden wings and the sun of new days
 Destroys all the ghosts there.²⁸

Evidently, Cho's poem shares with Zimmering's essay some common narrative themes, not least the Soviet emancipation of North Korea/Germany and the bright visions of both countries for the future. In parallel with Zimmering's account of North Korean socialist reconstruction, Cho exclaims the "rewarding labors of new Germany" that he saw "at the Stalin street." While actually separate streets in North Korea and Germany, the same-named "Stalin street" symbolically diminishes the distance between the two writers, visiting each other's home country. Walking along the "Stalin street" in each other's homeland, Cho and Zimmering attribute this comradely interchange to the Soviet Union, filled with a faith in the essential goodness of their shared socialist system. Moreover, the special bondage between these writers reveals that they both underscored the woe of both countries, bridging the vast geographical divide. Positing Pyongyang and (East) Berlin as a frontline for peacemaking and welfare, Cho promises "golden wings and the sun of new days," contrasting with the capitalist West, where "a dark night" continues.

Zimmering's essay and Cho's poem, reading like a dialogue between the two socialist writers in the 1950s, suggest that there is a common framework for understanding and narrating postwar socialism-building. There were several key features common to narra-

28 Cho 1955, 99. My translation reflects the archaic language of the original. Although an in-depth study is needed, it is enough here to point out that Cho Ryŏngch'ul had acknowledged the contemporary trend of modernizing traditional genres, including the *danshi* (short poem) and *shijo* (a genre of traditional Korean poetry) in the late 1950s. Cho (1958, 125–126) was very conscious of the significance of "creative" adaptations of traditional genres to meet modern needs.

tives on the theme of socialist friendship and its effect on postwar reconstruction. For the basic criteria of the travelogue form attributed to friendship visits, we can refer to the one by Arkadij Perventsev published in the May 1956 issue of *Chosŏn Munhak*.²⁹ In Perventsev's account of his visit to North Korea in March 1956, we detect an ideal-type narrative of socialist friendship. According to the *Chosŏn Munhak* editing committee, Perventsev had already published his impressions on his first visit to North Korea during the Korean War in a collection of essays titled *To Chosŏn*.³⁰

The key themes that emerge from Perventsev's account include: the recognition of the Korean War as a just war, which placed it in the context of the global history of struggle against oppression and exploitation; the sacrifices in wartime of the Korean people (as well as other peoples including the Soviet people); the accomplishments of the newly reconstructed postwar economy and culture; the significance of peace in postwar socialism-building; the role of socialist friendships in the consolidation of peace; and the status of the people as a basis of socialist friendship and the driving force of historical evolution. In particular, Perventsev emphasized the power of the Korean people as the core of support both for socialism-building and for socialist solidarity. The Korean people, by undertaking not only the historical struggles against the imperialist invaders but also the heroic work of postwar reconstruction, were hand in hand with the Soviet people and other peoples in the world and would contribute to the liberation of the whole humanity. It is notable that this idea in Perventsev's travelogue appears in both Zimmering's essay and Cho's poem.³¹ The literature on the socialist friendship visits exhibits variations of a common framework: due respect to the Soviet and East European peoples; and praise of the great efforts given to reconstruction by the Korean people.

5 Peace as the Goal to be Attained by the National Liberation Struggles: Endorsing Postcolonial Alliances on a Global Scale

The period of 1958–1959 was one of the most critical points in the making of Koreanized socialist realism. The important political event in the arena of literature and art during this period was the upsurge of the “struggles against the bourgeois proclivities.” Instigated by a speech given by Kim Il Sung on October 14, 1958, urging the need to eliminate remnant bourgeois proclivities,³² the struggles had made the intelligentsia alert and (re)armed them with revolutionary zeal and socialist patriotism. Criticisms of all genres of

29 Perventsev 1956.

30 Perventsev 1956, 110.

31 Perventsev 1956, 109.

32 Kim 1981, 551–559.

literature were organized by the Chosŏn Writers' Union, which monitored previous literary works and performances for bourgeois tendencies.³³ Along with more radicalized censorship of content, new measures for the management and organization of writers were also introduced. As for *Chosŏn Munhak*, significant changes were made in relation to the editing committee.³⁴ The most salient was that whereas previous individual committee members were listed as the journal's masthead (with the chief editor at the top), what now appeared was the simple description "the editing committee of the *Chosŏn Munhak*." This change demonstrated a larger, new trend inclined toward the collectivist coordination of literary activities over the recognition of individuals. Among the other changes were a greater emphasis on the development of "national characters" in socialist realist literature, and increasing representations of Korean revolutionary histories, including the earlier-mentioned anti-Japanese guerilla struggles in 1930s Manchuria and the "War for the Liberation of the Fatherland" in the 1950s, as the Korean War would become officially known as in the North.

In this changing landscape, which demanded increased revolutionary alertness and socialist patriotism, literary representations of war and peace started to diverge. This comparatively different route was, nevertheless, not entirely a new track but a position inherent in the Koreanized version of socialism. Works became more assertive, prioritizing solidarity with postcolonial countries fighting anti-imperialist struggles. Thus we see the two different logics of peacemaking during the late 1950s. On the one hand, peace was aligned with postwar reconstruction against the backdrop of the ceasefire. As we saw in Section 4, in this narrative the project of socialism-building became imperative after the end of the war in 1953 and foreign assistance in the name of socialist solidarity and friendship played a vital role in pushing the reconstruction of North Korea. On the other hand, peace went hand in hand with the worldwide struggles of national liberation. In this representation of peace, the direction of internationalist solidarity was toward not the Soviet bloc but the so-called "Third World," encompassing the newly decolonized and postcolonial states of Asia and Africa. This narrative also underscored the task of national integration, and thus the liberation of the South from US imperial rule and unification of the Korean Peninsula.

From the late 1950s, the literature on travels to other socialist and people's democratic states expanded to include interactions with Third World postcolonial states. In a word, the focus of concern gradually shifted from solidarity with Soviet and East European brethren to the newly independent states of Asia and Africa. The socialist friendship and solidarity discussed in 1954–1955 were diversified and expanded to embrace states, like Vietnam, struggling for national liberation. By the early 1960s, the struggle for na-

33 Kim 1994, 2000.

34 Kim 2016.

tional independence and wellbeing was the priority for forming and consolidating international solidarity. However, just a few years before that, in the late 1950s, we see a broad spectrum of literary works that communicate both concepts of peace, and many rooted in either camp refusing to be swayed by the other.

A series of poems published in 1956 called “From Vietnam” – comprised of five poems, “The Flag of the Regiment of the Capital,” “In Front of a Son,” “A Fist of Earth,” “The Red Ties,” and “Ciao Vietnam – Goodbyes to Vietnam” – written by the poet Cho Hak Rae, champions the ideals of proletarian internationalism as well as anti-imperialist national liberation.³⁵ In these poems a form of partnership between beneficiary and provider, somewhat similar to that seen in the relations between the Soviets and the East European countries, is observed in the friendship between North Korea and Vietnam. Although the latter relationships appear more equal than the former, the feelings expressed of gratitude, being supported by the internationalist friendship, are more intense.³⁶ Thus, “a soldier from Chosŏn,” could be presented with the flag of the regiments defending the capital of Vietnam as a token of gratitude and friendship – as the Korean writers themselves presented their own flag of the Chosŏn Writers’ Union to the Soviet Writers’ Union.³⁷

However, the more important point found in Cho’s poems is the very special bond “a soldier from Chosŏn” feels toward his “war comrades of Vietnam.”³⁸

O, this flag! This flag
 As did our unit’s five-star blue-and-red flag
 Must have experienced a number of battles where even clouds flamed,
 Must have flown at the high spots, after storming the enemies at every battle...

True! As war comrades of Vietnam told
 This flag flew from the rows of the August Revolution,
 And flew from the post of victory of Dien Bien Phu
 As our flag of the unit has flown at the battles of the 1,211 High Area.

[...]

35 Cho 1956.

36 This is not to demonstrate that there was, in reality, inequality and power dynamics in the relationships among the countries practicing the internationalism here. Rather, the emotions narrated either by the “beneficiary” or by the “provider” of the socialist friendship, indicate that the lesson and impact of the friendship project were significant for the both sides.

37 Anonymous 1955b.

38 Cho 1956, 128–129.

O, if I was not from the Chosŏn front,
 A soldier who fought and won in the war against the enemy, the US imperialists,
 How would I feel this happiness, this truth
 How would I have this joy and this tear.

Running through the mountains and fields that stormed
 Embracing this unit flag the heroic comrades fought with their lives
 You and I, only Chosŏn and Vietnam could feel
 This sensation, the truth of the flag urging again toward the unification...³⁹

Cho's poem gains greater weight from the fact that he himself was a Korean People's Army soldier who went to Vietnam to build solidarity between the Asian socialist countries, which had had common struggles against the imperialists. Cho's work not only reads as celebrating the bond between socialist friends but can also be interpreted as direct participation in the internationalist front as a soldier-poet. The deep solidarity North Korea shared with Vietnam originated from the shared sense of liberation against imperialist invasion – for Korea, from the Japanese and the United States, for Vietnam, the French army and then the United States. Moreover, what made Vietnam much dearer to North Korea was that both national liberation struggles were in progress, and both had the unification of a divided nation as the endgame (Vietnam overtook Korea in that respect in 1976). Still, in the late 1950s, this was enough for North Korea to build a special attachment to Vietnam. In "A Fist of Earth," there is an image of an old lady in South Vietnam imploring the squad leader heading to the North to liberate the South Vietnamese.

This is my heart.
 This fist of the earth is true hearts and minds of the entire Southern part.
 This earth! Please liberate this trodden earth!
 This land on which I have to live in tears...

[...]

O, we two countries that have the stolen land, the Southern part,
 Brothers! Take your fists! Towards the unification of the Fatherland!⁴⁰

How readers in North Korea would have read this old lady's image of South Vietnam is not that hard to imagine. Cho's poems were printed in June 1956, right after the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party, in which Kim Il Sung delivered an address on the peaceful unification of the nation.⁴¹ Several poems and critiques of Kim's declaration

39 Cho 1956, 129.

40 Cho 1956.

41 Kim 1956.

for peaceful national unification followed in *Chosŏn Munhak*.⁴² In this context of new discourses on Korean unification, Cho's poem in praise of the solidarity with Vietnam to liberate their own Southern kin would have contributed to another concept of peace, one that emphasizes the relentless efforts to create an independent and unified nation-state.

In Cho's poems, we can sense the gradual changes in which the status of the Third World had improved, thereby giving a boost to the relevant literature and practices devoted to the affairs of Asia and Africa around the end of the 1950s. The principal event associated with this gradual process was the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress, which Han Sŏrya, then chair of the Chosŏn Writers' Union, took part in. Prior to the event, details of the congress were given in the section of *Chosŏn Munhak* dedicated to news about the Chosŏn Writers' Union, along with news about the Asian Writers' Congress, connected with the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress.⁴³ Later, Han's address to the congress, his essay on his experiences of the event, and an essay by Sŏ Man Il, another delegate, were published.⁴⁴

Han, in the January 1959 issue of *Chosŏn Munhak*, insisted that writers renew their efforts for cultural revolution in North Korea and illustrated the new emphasis on solidarity with and among postcolonial states in their fight against imperialism and colonialism.⁴⁵ Han's argument is specifically noteworthy for its timing. In 1958–1959, the schism between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China began to grow and, in domestic politics, the radical campaigns against internal bourgeois tendencies progressed. Against the backdrop of increasing tension between the Chinese and the Soviets, the stream of North Korean literature represented by writers like Han continued the cause of solidarity, especially from the perspective of the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist project. In his essay, Han depicts some of the gatherings he participated in before the congress, including meetings in Beijing and Moscow.

First, on his impressions in Beijing, he states that the prevailing atmosphere in China was one of fiery class struggle. He compares China's struggles with North Korea's own ideological and political struggles since the Korean Workers' Party's 1956 August plenum,⁴⁶ and stresses the implication of class struggle to the ideological front, particularly on the consistent revolutionary struggles to liberate and unite the other half of the nation. In Han's words, the ideological purity attained from the campaigns contributed to the "holy tasks of leading all the oppressed peoples, including the Southern part of Chosŏn, into bright light and happiness."⁴⁷ As for the Chinese counterpart, it was for the liberation of

42 Hong 1956; Pak 1956.

43 Anonymous 1956c, 209–212.

44 Han 1957; Sŏ 1957.

45 Han 1959.

46 Han 1959, 43.

47 Han 1959, 43.

Taiwan, then under US military assault, that North Korean writers should stand tall on and fight for with their pens. He argues that the writers' struggle would have a genuine impact on the global project of fighting against the imperialist threat to humanity, and claims that, with more conviction, these endeavors would defeat the United States with the full support of all good people in the world.⁴⁸

Second, on the lesson from Moscow, Han gives an account of a conversation he shared with Nikolai Tikhonov about the necessity to annihilate the "pest," or the revisionist or bourgeois forces obstructing the progress of "peace and democracy."⁴⁹ He maintains that the very fact that the "artificial satellite 3" (Sputnik 3) was possessed by "people who desired the perpetual peace of humanity and have taken the front of a new history, enabled the ideal of peace to diffuse globally at a surprising speed, thereby making the conviction of its conclusive victory to be all the people's common sense."⁵⁰ After highlighting the blooming forces around the global peace movement, he focuses on the decontamination of the "pest." This work of purifying the "pest" is emphasized in the context of the "revisionists" emerging in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Han insists on the gravity of extending and deepening the peace movement, over which the dual evil influences of the "pest" of revisionism and "poisonous germ" of imperialism should be eliminated.⁵¹

The two lessons Han learned in Beijing and Moscow converged and culminated in the accounts of the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress itself. The "pests" Tikhonov warned of revealed themselves in the form of an unknown delegate who impeded the congress in various ways. According to Han, the attack by the delegate most harshly criticized by other participants of the congress was his request to delete the phrase "colonialism" and substitute it with "domination by foreign forces."⁵² In contrast to the mainstream discourses and practices in the congress that were associated with anti-colonialism, the delegate complained about upholding such ideals in an attempt to communicate his objection to the Soviet handling of Hungary and Yugoslavia.⁵³ Noting that the strongest reactions against the revisionist delegate's efforts to weaken the objection to colonialism were from

48 Han 1959, 44.

49 Nikolai Semenovich Tikhonov was chair of the Soviet Writers' Union during 1944–1946 and awarded the Lenin Peace Prize in 1957. He served as the first chairman of the Soviet Peace Committee from 1949 to 1979.

50 Han 1959, 44.

51 Han argued that the very existence of revisionism itself was evidence of the proliferation of the world peace movement, and that by eradicating the new danger, the final victory of world peace could be attained.

52 Han 1959, 47–51.

53 Han 1959, 48.

the African delegates, Han once again underscores the importance of anti-colonialism to strengthening the global peace movement.⁵⁴

With the endorsement of anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa a key argument, Han concludes his essay with a request that North Korean writers arm themselves with revolutionary alertness guided by the Party spirit.⁵⁵ In this the insights from Moscow and Beijing coincided, since Han required of North Korean writers the two different, but related, qualifications of a “Party’s writer.” One was that the Party’s writer should fight against any remnant bourgeois tendencies inside themselves in order to promote the cultural revolution that would correspond with the socialist economic development of Korea. The other was that the Party’s writer should establish his or herself as an educator of the new vision and contribute to global anti-colonial struggles by means of high (socialist) culture. In a word, Han pronounced that North Korean literature should aim to accomplish the national liberation struggles on the global scale while pressing on with the battles against the “pest,” domestic and global.

In Han’s 1959 essay we find that another direction of the representation of peace was established which diverged from the concept of peace previously highlighted in the representation of peaceful postwar socialist reconstruction and friendship. In this representation, the concept of peace was expanded to include more active significations, advocating the struggles to achieve national independence and integration as form of justice. Recognizing the Korean War as a war for an authentic peace, postwar North Korean literature thus could follow two routes: the pursuit of “peace” as an end state of violence with a focus on postwar reconstruction, or the insistence of “peace” as the realization of the revolutionary ideal on a global scale that encompassed as yet unliberated peoples. Han’s essay symbolized the turn to the latter at the end of the 1950s, from a balanced coexistence of two different representations of peace.

The examination of past alternatives for the representation of peace has a considerable signification in terms of the ongoing peace processes in Korea today. The establishment of an authoritative concept of peace in 1960s North Korean literature was possible by positing anti-colonial, national liberation struggles as the core value of world peace movements. At the same time, it was possible by transforming the liberation and integration of South Korea as part of the internationalist task of uninterrupted struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Compared with that, the weakened logic of peace emphasized the end state of war and the impossibility of victory in the near future and, in so doing, acknowledged the separate, albeit temporary, status between North and South. For us to create a new imagination of peace that would convince the North Korean side today,

54 Han 1959, 57.

55 Han 1959, 56–58.

it would be helpful to go back to a time when there were more options than we now assume. An understanding of the alternatives that had existed before the selection and crystallization of a certain way of considering peace in North Korea in the 1960s, would contribute to an attempt to disintegrate and reconstruct the ways Koreans have conventionally thought about and believed in peace.

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