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Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: The Person Behind the Myths

Tatiana Gabroussenko

The article questions the traditional perceptions and revisionist reinterpretations of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, a Soviet Korean poet and literary official who played a special role in early North Korean history. The article analyzes the figure of Cho in the historical context of the epoch, adds some previously unknown data, and reflects on Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's legacy and impact on the North Korean literary world. The argument is largely based on information from new primary sources (Cho's personal dossier, his letters, private papers, interviews with the poet's friends and relatives) and an analysis of the original texts of his works.

One cannot discuss the early history of literary politics in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) without considering a factor that played a special role in the developments of the era—the cultural impact of North Korea's “big brother,” the Soviet Union. This influence was especially significant in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when traditional Korean cultural priorities and attitudes were redefined according to the spirit of the official Soviet aesthetic doctrine, the so-called socialist realism.¹

Soviet cultural influence infiltrated North Korea via various channels: translations of Soviet literature, personal contacts between North Korean and Soviet officials, and the distribution of Soviet cultural materials, films, and so forth. However, the most important role in this process of “communization” of Korea was played by the Soviet Koreans who were dispatched by Moscow authorities to North Korea soon after liberation.

The task of the Soviet Koreans was to promote communist ideas and assist the formation of pro-Soviet institutions in the nascent North Korean state.² These loyal Soviet party members, often with good education and useful experiences, were promoted to major positions in the North Korean establishment.

According to Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, in 1945–1951 the Soviet Koreans “occupied as many as two hundred key posts.”³ The creation of a “socialist realist” North Korean literature and arts was among their primary political missions, and they fulfilled this mission admirably.

Being of Soviet upbringing and mentality, but with a strong sense of belonging to the Korean community and possessing a good command of the Korean language, the Russianized Koreans exercised a profound influence on the North Korean literary world in the late 1940s, bringing with them new standards of political behavior, new norms of interaction, and new methods of creative work. A majority of the Soviet Koreans who dealt with North Korean literature and the arts were employed as political supervisors, officials in the ideological bureaucracy, or as journalists in the official press—and here one should mention Ki Sök-pok, Chŏng Ryul, and Pak Ch’ang-ok in particular. Some produced works of fiction and poetry themselves: Chŏng Ryul, Kang T’ae-su, Chŏng Tong-hyök, Yim Ha, and Kim Il-yŏng are good examples of this phenomenon.⁴ was made by The Soviet Koreans who worked at the *Chosŏn sinmun* newspaper, which was published by the Soviet military in Korea, had a particularly crucial impact on the nascent intellectual world of North Korea. These Soviet writers and literary-ideological bureaucrats maintained close connections with the then powerful “Soviet faction” in the North Korean leadership.⁵

Of all the Soviet Koreans who dealt with the affairs of literature and culture in the DPRK, one person held a special place. This was Cho Ki-ch’ŏn (1913–1951), the Soviet Korean who is often perceived as a founding father of North Korean poetry.

Cho was one of the first Soviet Koreans to enter the country with the Soviet troops in August 1945. His stay in North Korea was relatively short: less than six years from his arrival in late August 1945 to July 1951, when he was killed in an American air raid. Yet in these final six Korean years of his life, Cho Ki-ch’ŏn managed to become a leading authority in the Pyongyang literary world, achieved recognition among young North Korean readers, and forged good relations with the political leader of the country, Kim Il Sung, which allowed him to exert a profound influence on North Korean literary politics as well as on literature.

These six years cemented the reputation of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn as an official eulogist for the new society who left no doubt about his orthodox communist beliefs and his unwavering loyalty to the Soviet Stalinist model. The quintessence of this perception is conveyed in Cho’s byname, “Korea’s Maiakovskii,” which was first coined by Chŏng Ryul and then quickly picked up by Soviet and North Korean critics and journalists. This byname implied such qualities as a wholehearted devotion to communist ideals, a decisive break with the old literary style, and passionate social activism—characteristics usually ascribed to Cho’s alleged Soviet archetype, Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893–1930), the

founding father of official Soviet literature.⁶ The byname also implied an emulation of the famous images and similes that appeared in Maiakovskii's poems, such as the equation of a communist writer's pen with a bayonet and so forth, which often occurred in Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poetry.⁷ It is notable that this epithet, initially applied to the poet in his lifetime, has been widely used in both a positive and a negative way.⁸

Until his death in 1951, Cho's literary career had been steadily rising. Even today, when the achievements and contributions of most Soviet Koreans have long been erased from the official history, Cho's works continue to be recognized by the DPRK officialdom,⁹ and the poet is considered to be one of the founding fathers of North Korean literature.¹⁰ It could be said that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn managed to fit himself into the North Korean canon better than any of his Soviet Korean colleagues.

In my opinion, this congruence of the poet with DPRK literary and political standards was the primary reason why, in North Korea, Cho's name soon became surrounded by biographical myths, mostly aimed at playing down his Soviet (that is, foreign) connections and stressing his real or imagined "Koreanness"—in accordance with the DPRK official line of proving the alleged "pure Korean" origins of any cultural phenomena they believed to be valuable.¹¹ Thus, it comes as no surprise that in time the epithet "Korea's Maiakovskii," in reference to the now "pure Korean" Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, disappeared from North Korean discourse. Recent references to the poet, such as *The History of Korean Literature*, published in Pyongyang in 1994,¹² contain no comparisons of this kind.

It is worth noting, however, that South Korean academics also contributed to the mythmaking about Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, either by supporting the Pyongyang myths or by creating their own fiction, driven by political agendas fashionable in Seoul. In some recent South Korean publications we find not only the DPRK-inspired image of Cho as a Korean nationalist,¹³ but also Cho as the partisan of pure poetry, Cho allegedly suffering under the pressure of dictatorship, or Cho romantically "fascinated by [communist] ideology" but tragically deceived in his overtly poetical expectations.¹⁴ In his article "Puk-ŭi hwip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn" [The North Korean "poet of the Whistle"], South Korean scholar Yi Ch'ang-ju, a director of Pukpang Yŏn'gusŏ (The North Research Institute), went even further and attributed to this symbolic founding figure of North Korean literature "an attempt to flee from the North."¹⁵ In this way, Seoul scholars strive to "domesticate" Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's legacy and make him appear more like the conventional positive image of a poet as it is normally presented in South Korea.

The present article questions these revisionist reinterpretations, as well as earlier academics' misconceptions about Cho Ki-ch'ŏn that are popular in Pyongyang, Seoul, and Moscow scholarship. I will analyze Cho's life and activity in the historical context of the epoch, add some previously unknown facts

regarding his life and activity, and reflect on Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's impact and legacy in the North Korean literary world.

My argument is largely based on newly available primary sources, which I discovered during my research trips to Russia and Central Asia. This new material includes Cho's personal dossier, a copy of which was kept by his family, and his letters and private papers. Of great assistance in reconstructing the image of Cho's life and personality were interviews with people who were once close to Cho, especially his only son, Yurii Cho,¹⁶ and his friend and then highly positioned North Korean literary official, Chŏng Ryul. An interview with Elena Davydova, a Russian-Korean translator and North Korean citizen now living in Pyongyang, sheds light on the perception of the poet by the contemporary North Korean literary establishment and its current attitude toward Cho's legacy.¹⁷ I feel particularly grateful to Yurii Cho, who gave me access to some important materials from the family archive: Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personal file,¹⁸ the letters of Cho's university girlfriend Liia Grigorievna Yudolevitch to Yurii Cho¹⁹ containing memoirs regarding the poet, and Cho Ki-chŏn's final letter, sent to his wife from Pyongyang on April 13, 1951.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: The Pre-Korean Experience

The first myth surrounding Cho Ki-ch'ŏn concerns the poet's birthplace and his early childhood. The South Korean *Dictionary of North Korean Literature* insists that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was born in Hwaryŏng county, in the province of Hamgyŏng-pukto,²⁰ on the 6th of November 1913. It is also stated that while still a child his family "fled the oppression of the Japanese colonial authorities" in Korea and moved to Siberia. This statement has been reiterated in a number of South Korean publications. For instance, Yun Chae-kŏn and Pak Sang-ch'ŏn, in their collective work, affirmed that "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn had gone abroad to the Soviet Union for study and returned home after Liberation. This can explain why he produced so many pro-Soviet works."²¹ The authors of *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, published in English, went even further—they implied that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was allegedly, along with Yi Ki-yŏng and Han Sŏr-ya, a member of the Korean Proletarian Artist Federation (KAPF), the group of leftist writers that operated in Korea in the late 1920s and early 1930s!²²

However, Cho Ki-chŏn's personal file and interviews present us with an entirely different picture. According to this official Soviet data, Cho was born in 1913 in Ael'tugeu village in the Vladivostok district of the Russian Far East²³ to a family of poor Korean peasants. Yurii Cho, a son of the poet, and Chŏng Ryul, a disciple and close friend of Cho from the Soviet period, confidently confirm this.²⁴ Both stated that Cho Ki-chŏn was born in Russia and had never been to Korea before he entered the country with the Soviet Army in 1945.

In all probability, this widely used incorrect information concerning Cho

Ki-chŏn's birthplace originated from North Korean sources. The North Korean *Anthology of Cho Ki-chŏn*, published in 1952, soon after the poet's death, states that: "Cho Ki-chŏn, a fighting poet and a son of the Korean nation, was born on the 6th of February, 1913 in Hwaryŏng district, in the province of Hamgyŏng-pukto, to a family of poor peasants. In his childhood he joined the struggle against Japanese imperialism and for that reason moved to a progressive country, the Soviet Union. There he displayed his talents in acquiring the progressive culture of the Soviet Union."²⁵ In this early statement we already see the obvious signs of myth-making. The background attributed here is that of the common North Korean heroic image: he is supposed to be both a native and poor, subjected to oppression but determined to resist. The North Korean authors display no concern that their hero was obviously too young to make the conscious choice of a "progressive country" as a destination.

The story of the alleged Korean birthplace of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn grew to epic proportions in a monograph written in 1953 by Yi Chŏng-gu, an influential North Korean scholar. This supposedly scholarly work is imbued with lengthy passages on the imaginary past of Cho. Describing the Soviet period of Cho Ki-chŏn's life, for instance, Yi Chŏng-gu writes:

When he was giving lectures at the university or deep at night, when he felt tired of writing poems, familiar scenes rose before his eyes, scenes he had never forgotten. Beautiful Korean landscapes, faces of the people from his hometown which he missed so badly—they all sparkled in his head like lightning. At that moment an impulsive hatred rose in his heart, hatred against the Japanese colonial authorities who had pushed his family out of their native land.²⁶

This paragraph, with minor alterations, was included in the recently published *History of Korean Literature*.²⁷

Another contemporary document distributed by the North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also attests to the fact that this officially endorsed biography of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn has remained unchanged in the DPRK. The article "Famous Korean Poet" describes Cho's early years as follows:

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was a passionate poet produced by Korea. Born in Hoeryong, North Hamgyŏng Province, he was well-known in the surrounding areas for his outstanding poetic talent from childhood. However, he was unable to bring his talent to bloom as he was forced to live abroad as part of a stateless nation. It was not until Liberation (15 August 1945) of the country that he could realize his dream.²⁸

Hence, as we have seen, North Korean scholarship sustains the myth created in the late 1940s. Also, by omitting the date of Cho's alleged departure from Korea, the anonymous KCNA author intentionally gives the impression that Cho left the country as an accomplished poet or, at least, as an adult.

These fantastic claims were fully endorsed in the works of Soviet academics. In the 1950s and 1960s the Soviet scholars were obliged, in the first in-

stance, to follow the line of the official North Korean media, and, secondly, to play down the Soviet involvement with the North. The very presence of the Soviet Koreans in the DPRK was seen as a major secret in the USSR at the time, and if one of them appeared in Soviet publications then his or her Soviet past could not be mentioned. A Soviet-Korean scholar wrote in 1954: “The remarkable event in the poet’s life was his arrival in the Soviet Union, where he came as a youngster. It is not incidental that Cho, who returned to his home country after a long stay in the USSR, became a leader of Korean socialist realist poetry.”²⁹

All the mythologists of Cho’s biography, who misinform the reader in order to ensure the poet’s insertion into the Korean cultural discourse, missed one important fact: the Soviet origin of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn by no means implied a lack of “Koreanness” in his life or upbringing. The peculiarity of the poet’s circumstances was that the Soviet-born Cho Ki-ch’ŏn was indeed reared as a Korean, not as a Russian. This was not unusual given the situation in his native milieu, the Korean community in the Russian Far East in the early twentieth century.

From the late 1860s until their forcible resettlement in 1937, the Korean community in, first, Russia, then the Soviet Far East, was numerous and steadily increasing.³⁰ The Koreans largely lived in their own villages and had limited interaction with the surrounding Russian communities. They also possessed a solid system of national education. German Kim, a leading authority on the history of the Soviet Korean community, wrote:

Up to the moment of their forcible resettlement from the Far Eastern region, Koreans exercised their rights to receive education in their native language. Korean schools operated at all levels, and there were also Korean technical colleges and a Korean Teachers College. The non-Korean universities had departments and faculties where instruction was in Korean.³¹

Recollecting his youth in the Far Eastern region in the early 1930s, Chŏng Ryul confirmed that the system of primary and secondary Korean education in the 1920s and 1930s had been able to provide a good grounding in the natural sciences and the Korean language, albeit lacking in some aspects of the traditional humanities curriculum such as calligraphy, Chinese characters, and Korean history and literature. Nevertheless, this deficiency was partially compensated for by home education within Korean families. Soviet Koreans also had many opportunities to acquaint themselves with traditional and modern Korean literature because until the mid-1930s, new publications were imported to Russia from Korea in large quantities.³² In most families, including Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s, parents taught their children Chinese characters as well.³³

Cho Ki-ch’ŏn was graduated from a Korean school in the Soviet Far East. His friend Chŏng Ryul and his son Yurii Cho confirm that Cho spoke Korean,

not Russian, at home and in everyday life.³⁴ Chŏng also recalls Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as a well-educated Korean, who often used quotations from modern and classical Korean literature. However, the life of the Soviet Koreans was not isolated from the influence of the politicized environment and special culture of the USSR. Thus, from the time the seventeen-year-old Cho published his first Korean poem in a local Korean newspaper, *Sŏnbong* ("Avant-garde"),³⁵ through his subsequent contributions from 1930 to 1933, his poems bore such telling titles as "The Morning of the Construction," "To the Advanced Workers," "The Military Field Study," and "Paris Commune." These verses were unabashedly political and propagandist and were replete with the hyperbolized Maiakovskii-style images that later became so typical of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's Pyongyang poetry.³⁶ North Korean scholar Yi Chŏng-gu asserts that these early verses brought Cho Ki-ch'ŏn popularity among the local readership,³⁷ but such statements are hard to verify.

Cho continued his Korean study in the Korean Teachers College (Rus. *Tehnikum*) in Voroshilov-Ussuriisk (1928–1931), a place where many future Korean teachers received their education at the time. In 1928–1932, Cho was a member of the Communist Youth League (Rus. *Komsomol*), and in 1946 he became a candidate for the Communist Party (candidate card # 8234828). From 1931 to 1933, Cho attended "editors' courses" in Khabarovsk, where young educated Koreans were trained to become editors in the Korean-language press.

Cho's subsequent education was in Russian. From 1933 to 1937, he attended the Faculty of Literature of the Pedagogic University named after Gorkii and located in Omsk.³⁸ These years appear to have matured the "Russian" side of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personality. The facts on this period are well documented in the letters of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's girlfriend, Liia Yudovich, a student at the same university.³⁹ She first met Cho in 1933 in class, helped him with his Russian, and became his constant companion in the classroom and "one of his closest friends."

Like Chŏng Ryul, Liia describes Cho as a "popular student who was loved by his peers." However, her explanation of this popularity may seem peculiar to the modern reader. In support of her argument, Liia writes, for instance, that "He was a marvellous man—very committed, with a steady political world view. . . . He became our dearest comrade." She admiringly reports that Marxist philosophy was one of Cho's favorite subjects and that he was quite adept at polemics and eagerly took part in the numerous political disputes popular at the time. Liia highlights the same traits that Chŏn Ryul stresses: his gentleness in everyday life, but his ability to change radically during public meetings and political discussions, when he was suddenly transformed into a fervent orator and an emotional propagandist of Communist ideas. This behavior may have appeared awkward to his North Korean colleagues, but his Soviet and Soviet Korean friends perceived it as a sign of laudable "Communist spontaneity" and his "Maiakovskii-

style” passion. The strongly politicized university atmosphere gave an added impetus to this “non-Korean” mode of behavior. Here are some other quotations from Liia’s letters that illustrate the “Soviet” side of Cho’s character:

Cho was a man of principle; he was very honest and direct. He never made excuses, even for friends. I recollect one incident which clearly demonstrated this. Books and teaching materials in the university library were in short supply so we used them in turn. One day it so happened that I borrowed a book out of turn. I remember what a dressing-down he gave me! He shamed me for my unfair behavior. His accusation was justified and I was not hurt, I just felt awfully ashamed of myself.

He was a man with inner pride. When he felt offended he acted emotionally and he would boil, seethe with indignation.

These attributes would now scarcely sound like loving descriptions of a former boyfriend (which is what, in fact, they were), nor would they fit today’s expectations of popular behavior. However, they convey the Soviet atmosphere of those years when lovers called each other “comrade” and when a “steady, uncompromising political worldview” was considered the best personal trait of a fellow student. As Liia Yudolevich herself wrote:

We are the generation of the 1930s, those remarkable and wonderful years. My comrades and I have always been proud of our contemporaries as symbolized by Pavel Korchagin. Those years were full of hardships—no paper, no good clothes—but it was a beautiful time. All the country lived under the slogans “Let’s do it!” [“Dayosch!” in Russian] “Let’s do Kusbass!”, “Let’s do Magnitka.” . . . It was so exiting.⁴⁰

Liia described Cho as a gifted student who read books in Russian very quickly and gave brilliant presentations. In her opinion, this skill could be partly explained by his previous experience as a journalist in the newspapers of the Far East. Liia also stressed that Cho was very concerned about Korea, his “dream country”:

He loved the Korean people very much, and his later personal fate is no surprise to me. He told me a lot about the life of Korean farming folks and said that he would go to fight for a better life for the Korean peasantry. . . . He used to write poems about Korea in the library after we had finished studying. He would sit nearby and write with great concentration. Sometimes he raised his head and would start to relate emotionally how difficult the life of a Korean peasant was. He insisted that they had to fight against the Japanese yoke. . . . He talked about the industriousness of the Korean people and described poor old Korean men who were exhausted by labor. He depicted the scene *as if he had seen it with his own eyes*. I was touched by his ardency, by the sincerity of his invectives. He told me he was going to write an epic poem about Korea. (emphasis added)

As we can see, Cho’s ideas of Korea and the Korean fight for liberation, though compassionate, were bookish, inspired by the Soviet press and stories that he had heard from other people, not from personal experience.⁴¹

After graduation, the friends parted and Liia had no accurate information about Cho’s life thereafter. She heard later that he had entered university in

Moscow, but this information was incorrect. Cho, indeed, badly wanted to study in a Moscow university, but a turn in Soviet policy frustrated his plans.

In 1937, Cho returned to the Far East, where he got a teaching job in the Korean Pedagogical Institute (a four-year college). According to his file, Cho worked there from August 1937 to August 1938. However, in 1937 all ethnic Koreans from the Soviet Far East were relocated to Central Asia. The Korean Pedagogical Institute was also moved from Vladivostok to Kzyl-Orda in Khazakhstan.⁴² It was here, where Cho taught world literature, that he met Chŏng Ryul, a student at the time. As Chŏng Ryul recalls, in 1938 when Russian became the language of instruction in the Korean Pedagogical University, Cho became very upset at the practice and even expressed resentment at the forcible resettlement of Koreans, a very dangerous sentiment at the time.⁴³

The following year marked a significant episode in Cho's life—his temporary imprisonment. According to both Chŏng Ryul and Cho Yurii, in 1938 Cho decided to continue his education as a postgraduate student in the Moscow Literature University. In the summer of 1938, during the school vacation, he collected all the necessary papers in Kzyl-Orda and left for Moscow. But he was not even allowed to apply for admission: a new law restricted the movement of Koreans and prohibited them from leaving the officially defined settlements in Central Asia. As soon as Cho arrived in Moscow and showed his documents at the reception center of the Literature University, he was arrested for violating the registration law.⁴⁴ In accordance with Stalinist judicial practice, Cho could have been executed on a charge of spying, but fortunately one of his high-ranking Korean friends, Cho Tong-kyu, who at the time held an influential position in the NKVD (the former name of the KGB), intervened on his behalf and arranged for Cho's release after several months in prison. In addition, he somehow managed to erase the records of this incident from Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personal files.

As one might expect, Cho hid the entire incident from his friends. Only his family knew about it. Cho Yurii keeps a photo of his father taken soon after his release—with a short haircut, which was a telltale sign of a Soviet ex-prisoner. After this incident, Cho returned to Kzyl-Orda. When Chŏng Ryul met him there, Cho explained that he had been prohibited from entering Moscow University because of the new legal status of Koreans. At the time, Cho appeared very disappointed and bitterly confided to Chŏng Ryul: "Now I do not believe in the so-called Leninist national policy any more. The alleged freedom for all the nations in the USSR is a fiction. Nobody here needs us Koreans. They do not want our language and schools; they do not want us either."⁴⁵ However, this critical perception, which bordered on rebellion, did not influence Cho's later life.

Cho abandoned his dreams of studying in Moscow or Leningrad. From August 1938 to December 1941, he worked as a teacher in the Pedagogic University of Kzyl-Orda (Kazakhstan). This was essentially the same Korean Pedagog-

ical Institute that in 1938 had been renamed and transformed into a Russian-language school. He then returned to journalism.⁴⁶ From December 1941 to September 1942, Cho worked as a translator in a local newspaper in Kzyl-Orda, after which he was drafted into the Soviet Army. From September 1942 to December 1943, he served in the Soviet 25th Army as an “instructing writer” in the editing office (Rus. instructor-literator redaktzii) at the army’s headquarters, which at the time was located in Voroshilov-Ussuriisk. From November 1943 to July 1945, he served in the Political Department of the Pacific Navy as a “writer in the editing office” (Rus. literator redaktzii) in Khabarovsk. From August to October 1945, Cho served in the Political Department of the Primorskii Military District as a chief of department of local affairs in the editing office (Korean language) (Rus. nachal’nik otdela mestnoi zhizni redaktzii). From October 1945, he worked as a “writer” in the editing office (Rus. literator redaktzii) of the Political Department of the First Far Eastern front.⁴⁷

A recent article in *Han’guk ilbo* insists that Cho was forcibly recruited into the Red Army.⁴⁸ This is scarcely plausible. At the time, a brutal but popular war was being waged with Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union (1941–1945) and most males in the country were subject to military service and most of them were willing to fight. According to Yurii Cho, his father was happy to learn that he had been recruited, for it meant that he was trusted in spite of such taints in his biography as a brief imprisonment and an “unreliable” nationality in particular. Indeed, many other ethnic Koreans who were recruited during the war perceived the draft as a sign of their acquittal and even privilege, since most Soviet Koreans were barred from military service as representatives of an “unreliable ethnic group.”⁴⁹

In his file, Cho notes that he “took part in the campaign against the Japanese imperialists as a writer and editor in the Korean language” (Rus. literator redaktzii na koreaiskom yasyke). The military regulations prevented Cho from sharing much information about this period of his life with his family. However, it is clear from his curriculum vitae that his main activity was related to psychological operations, which were then run by the network of “7th departments” within the political departments of the Soviet Army. Chŏng Ryul, a former marine who took part in amphibious operations on the Korean coast, recalls the convincing, touching, and skillfully written propaganda leaflets the Red Army spread over Korea during those days. After Liberation and already in Korea, Chŏng Ryul found out that the author of those leaflets was none other than Cho Ki-ch’ŏn. The South Korean scholar Yi Ki-Pong also mentions Cho’s name among those Soviet Korean editors who had supposedly translated the first speech of Kim Il Sung into Korean. This is probable but cannot be proven beyond doubt at this stage. The future North Korean leader delivered this speech (actually written by Soviet officers) when he made his first appearance before the Korean public in October 1945.⁵⁰

By this time, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn already had a family. In the late 1930s, he married Kim Hae-sŏn and had a son named Yurii (born April 24, 1939) by her. Yurii Cho vehemently denies that he ever had the Korean name “Cho Uk-chin” (which is mentioned in the article in *Han'guk ilbo*)⁵¹ or any other Korean name. The fact that Cho gave only a Russian name to his son testifies to the fact that at that stage Cho Ki-ch'ŏn associated his family's future with the USSR, not with Korea. However, the situation changed and in late summer 1945 the thirty-two-year-old Cho entered North Korea with the troops of the Soviet Army.

This was the first time Cho Ki-ch'ŏn had left the Soviet Union, the country of his birth and upbringing. Quite contrary to the above-mentioned academic assumptions, socialism, Communist ideas, and the Soviet way of life were not vague romantic “fascinations” for Cho but a real world in which he had been brought up and had known thoroughly, with all its bright and dark sides. At the time, it was instead Korea that was a “dream country” for Cho Ki-ch'ŏn.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in North Korea

Cho began his career in the Red Army's Korean-language newspaper *Chosŏn sinmun*. He published there a number of poems and also translated the Soviet poets Maiakovskii, Gribachev, and Dzhambul into Korean.⁵² He visited plants and villages (under the slogan “immersion in the masses”)⁵³ and wrote poems on the recent land reform and industrialization.⁵⁴ In addition he often gave lectures on Soviet literary theory and politics as well as on the history of world literature and took part in numerous literary conventions and discussions.⁵⁵

According to the recollections of Chŏng Ryul, Cho quickly immersed himself in this new atmosphere. He made a lot of Korean friends and took part in numerous political meetings and seminars in Pyongyang. Cho enjoyed his new status and responsibility while at the same time appreciating the material stability of his new life. Like other Soviet Koreans, Cho received a salary from both the Soviet Army and the Korean agencies he was working for. These arrangements made Soviet Koreans affluent by the standards of 1940s Pyongyang.⁵⁶

However, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's life in North Korea was seriously shadowed by the reality of the factional rivalry in North Korean literary circles, a factor that deserves special attention here.

Almost all North Korean writers belonged to one of several factions that were constantly fighting with each other. The three most influential factions were: ex-KAPF members; former South Korean writers who had moved to the North (Kor. *wolbuk chakka*); and Soviet Koreans.⁵⁷ Cho Ki-ch'ŏn became a leader of the Soviet Korean literary faction, which included all Soviet Koreans but also some local employees of the *Chosŏn sinmun* and a few “local” Korean associates. The “Soviet faction” in literature was closely connected to its political counterpart, the “Soviet faction” in the country's leadership, which at the time included a number of Soviet Koreans.

Like other factions, the Soviet Koreans were striving for influence in the North Korean literary scene. However, some serious impediments hindered this process. Firstly, the rather ambiguous attitude toward Russia and Russians in post-liberation Korea unavoidably affected the perception of Soviet Koreans as well. While before liberation Russia was associated in Korean minds with a great culture and major social achievements such as the eradication of national and class discrimination, when Korean citizens met the Soviet Russians face to face in 1945, these positive views changed. The Soviet troops on the Korean peninsula engaged in large-scale pillage, rape, and plunder,⁵⁸ and though the quick and harsh measures of the Soviet commanders led to a decline in such incidents in 1946,⁵⁹ the initial negative impression remained strong despite the powerful barrage of pro-Soviet propaganda. Bad feelings toward the Soviets were also reinforced by the increasing persecution of the Nationalist Right, whose leaders had a large number of supporters within the country. The rightists presented the situation in the North as a simple change of occupying power: the Soviet Russians simply replaced the Japanese, and this was a prism through which many locals viewed the Soviet Koreans as well.

Secondly, the sudden political rise of newcomers openly supported by foreign forces could not help but annoy local Koreans, including those who were otherwise inclined to support the emerging Communist government. Elena Davydova in her interview continually stressed the importance of the terms “aliens” and “outsiders” in the relationships between Soviet and native Koreans and between South and North Korean native writers. The irritation Korean intellectuals might have felt toward the Soviet Korean newcomers was further aggravated by the fact that, despite their being Koreans in language and appearance, Soviet Koreans’ behavior still often appeared “strange.”⁶⁰

A short-sighted policy of the Soviet authorities was also partially responsible for the alienation between the local and Soviet Koreans. The Soviet Koreans, who were supposed to be intermediaries between the Soviets and Koreans, were nevertheless treated as ordinary Soviet citizens abroad and were rigorously controlled in all their actions by Soviet agencies. “Excessive” interaction with the locals was a major concern for the Soviet officials who supervised Soviet citizens overseas. Chông Ryul recalls that Soviet Koreans were strictly discouraged from forming close relationships with local Koreans, and each contact with the locals had to be reported to so-called special agencies of the Soviet embassy. When celebrating birthdays, Chông Ryul had to give separate parties for Soviet and native Korean guests; marriages between Soviet Koreans and local Koreans were very rare. The children of Soviet Koreans in Pyongyang attended “Soviet Army schools” until 1953 and then went to “High School Number Six,” both of which were inaccessible to ordinary Koreans.⁶¹ In these schools, the language of instruction was Russian, and their curriculum closely followed the Soviet pattern. As a result, Soviet Korean children often spoke poor Korean and did not

communicate with the local Korean children. This practice vividly reminded Koreans of the segregated schools for Japanese children in colonial Korea.⁶²

The higher standard of living achieved by the Soviet Koreans was also serious grounds for resentment. Like the families of the colonial rulers, many Soviet Koreans employed Korean servants while their spouses were full-time housewives. Their less-affluent Korean colleagues were not able to spoil themselves in this way and were irritated by the contradiction between the official image of the Soviets as the repository of an altruistic and ascetic Communist spirit and the real people, who enjoyed a high level of material comfort and isolated themselves from the impoverished locals.⁶³

All these factors, greatly reinforced by the ingrained tradition of factionalism, inevitably alienated the native Koreans from their Soviet Korean colleagues. Although Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was modest in his daily life and eagerly made friends with local Koreans,⁶⁴ he could not avoid the estrangement either. In addition, his emotional fervor and intolerance in political disputes, treated as a virtue in the Stalinist Soviet Union, often set him against the locals.

Information about the initial period of Cho's Pyongyang life has been amply conveyed in the memoirs of Pak Nam-su (Hyŏn), Cho's colleague who defected to South Korea. Though Pak's work, indeed, represents an important historical resource, it is difficult to agree with Brian Myers's estimation of these memoirs as "surprisingly even-handed."⁶⁵ In my opinion, Pak's records should be treated with care for a number of reasons.

While in the North, Pak Nam-su maintained a high profile in the Pyongyang literary scene and eagerly demonstrated his loyalty to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, the Soviets, and other Communist superiors. Chŏng Ryul remembers the uneasy feeling he had every time the humble and quiet poet, in spite of his being several years older, would first respectfully bow to him.⁶⁶ Pak's literary activity in Pyongyang does not show any traces of dissent either. If we look at the anthology *Glory to Stalin: An Anthology Dedicated to Stalin's 70th Birthday* (*Yŏng-gwang-ŭi Ssŭttalin-ege: Ssŭttalin t'ansaeng 70-chunyŏn kinyŏm ch'ulp'an*), which was published in 1949 under the editorship of Han Sŏr-ya, we will notice that Pak Nam-su was one of the most enthusiastic contributors. His three poems (most other artists wrote only one or two) "A Paean to Stalin" (Sŭtalin ch'anga), "Tower" (T'ap) (referring to the Morangbong monument erected in Pyongyang to honor the Soviet army), and "A Photo" (Sajin) leave no doubt about the author's political intentions. In "A Paean to Stalin," Pak Nam-su called the Soviet dictator "a sun, a person whose name is reflected even in the hearts of Negroes and Arabs."⁶⁷ In "A Photo," the author sentimentally recollects a farewell exchange of photos with some "kind uncle Nikolai, an uncle in the Soviet Army, who waved his big hand which had defeated the Japanese." In the poem "Tower," Pak Nam-su eulogizes the "Soviet soldiers with red stars on their foreheads who liberated Korea."⁶⁸

No wonder Pak's North Korean colleagues were amazed to learn that he had defected to the South.⁶⁹ They would probably have been more stunned had they had an inkling of the anti-Communist, anti-Soviet, and rigorously nationalistic rhetoric Pak explored in his Seoul book published in 1952 (i.e., just three years after his "A Paean to Stalin"). Though providing some information that is corroborated by other sources, these memoirs were in too many ways a propaganda exercise, written to slander Pak's erstwhile partners, friends, and employers. For that reason, Pak's record contains a number of intentional falsifications, such as the stories about the alleged practice of "exchanging wives" in Russian families.

Two chapters of Pak's memoirs are almost exclusively devoted to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, while other parts of his book are dotted with remarks about the writer. The book's third chapter bears the sarcastic title "How a Genius Was Made" and deals with the most significant episodes of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's North Korean biography, his ascent in the Pyongyang literary scene and disputes over his *Paektusan* poem.

Every time Pak refers to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, he turns highly moralizing. He seems particularly offended by Cho's open obsequiousness to Kim Il Sung and his panegyrics to the Red Army, which, as Pak wrote with indignation, "never embarrassed" the poet, who used to insist that "literature must be national in form and democratic (read Communist) in content."⁷⁰ Pak's righteous exasperation can be taken at face value only if we choose to forget that in North Korea Pak once wrote verses on the same topics and with similar political fervor, but with less success.

Yet, some parts of Pak's criticism of Cho call for our particular attention. For instance, Pak asserts that before coming to Korea Cho, like the other Soviet Koreans, spoke bad, almost incomprehensible Korean,⁷¹ yet his works soon achieved model status in North Korea; they were published in many editions, used as study materials at universities and in literary circles, and awarded the so-called Festival Prize (a Korean analogue of the Soviet Stalin Prize, the nation's highest literary award).⁷² Explaining Cho's extraordinary success, Pak points not only to the support of Cho by the Soviets, but also by native Korean "assistants," especially Kim Cho-gyu (born in 1914). Kim Cho-gyu was employed at the *Chosŏn sinmun* as an "editor," but, Pak insists, his main task was to rewrite the allegedly unreadable works of Soviet Koreans.⁷³

To summarize Pak's assertions, the poems of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and other Soviet Korean writers were in fact written with the help of native Korean editors, since the Soviet Koreans did not know Korean well enough. This was hardly true. As we know, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's native language was Korean, not Russian. That is why Cho used to translate poems by Gribachev and Maiakovskii into Korean.⁷⁴ Like the other Soviet Koreans, moreover, Cho had never undertaken translations from Korean into Russian.⁷⁵ The system of Korean education in the

Soviet Union before 1937 provided opportunities for full training in the Korean language up to and including the tertiary level. The only problem of the Soviet Koreans was the enduring influence of their native Northeastern dialect, which might have been regarded with disdain by some Korean intellectuals.⁷⁶

Chŏng Ryul and Yurii Cho both recollect that Cho always wrote his own poems and did so openly, under the gaze of his family members and friends, often asking for their judgment. Yurii Cho recollects his father reading aloud the parts of his unfinished poems to his friends and family.⁷⁷ Chŏng Ryul remembers particularly that Cho used to read his freshly written verses to his wife, who, in Chŏng Ryul's opinion, "did not know a thing about poetry." Chŏng Ryul wondered why Cho listened to his wife's advice on such a lofty subject as poetry. Cho, convinced of the necessity of the "popular spirit" in socialist literature, used to answer: "If she understands, it means that everybody will understand. I must write in the most comprehensible manner possible."⁷⁸

Accustomed to discussing his verse, Cho could have sought Kim Chogyu's opinion and even accepted some editing. A Pyongyang native and a lyrical poet with close connections to the Soviet Koreans, Kim Cho-gyu was a well-educated man who once majored in English.⁷⁹ Being a personal friend of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and an employee of the *Chosŏn sinmun*,⁸⁰ Kim might in fact have been a good advisor. But it seems unlikely that he actually *rewrote* Cho's verse. The styles of both poets were very different. While Kim Cho-gyu wrote in quite a traditional manner, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poetic style was very distinctive. Pak Nam-su mentions Cho's specific writing technique and derides as "abnormal" and "unnatural."⁸¹ He thus contradicts himself: the very style of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, regardless of its quality, proves the originality of his writing.

Cho's specific manner was already apparent in the first verses he wrote in Pyongyang: "Tumangang" (1946)⁸² and "Ttang" (Land) (1946).⁸³ This style found its fullest expression in Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's poem *Paektusan*, which, on the one hand, brought wide popularity and fame to its author⁸⁴ but, on the other hand, ignited a number of political and aesthetic disputes in the North Korean literary world.

***Paektusan*: A Piece of Nationalist Propaganda or a Pro-Soviet Exercise?**

Paektusan, the long epic poem written in 1947 and published in the *Nodong sinmun* in 1948, was devoted to the theme of the anti-Japanese guerrilla activity of Kim Il Sung (in the poem "Commander Kim") and the Poch'ŏnbo raid of the Korean guerrillas in 1937. We know that the topic of the Korean anti-Japanese guerrilla movement had always fascinated Cho. Chŏng Ryul recollects that the immediate stimulus that prompted Cho to start to write *Paektusan* was his meeting with a former anti-Japanese guerrilla, Ch'oe Hyŏn.⁸⁵

In recent North Korean scholarship, *Paektusan* is presented exclusively

as a saga about the “Great Leader.” *The History of Korean Literature* cites the following words of Kim Jong Il: “The lyrical epic *Paektusan* was a song about the greatness and timeless successes of our Marshal, and the more we read it, the more uplifting and proud we become.”⁸⁶ The older generation of South Korean scholars also holds that the poem, first of all, worships Kim Il Sung and for that reason represents a typical piece of “personality cult” literature.⁸⁷ The younger generation of Seoul academics, mostly leftists of a *minjung* orientation, cannot agree with such a “reactionary” view. They argue that the real “*Paektusan* hero” is not Commander Kim but side-characters in the poem, such as partisans Ch’öl-ho, Kkot-pun, and Sök-jun, so this is a poem about the people, not the “Great Leader.” These scholars sometimes do not even bother to hide the political motivation that drives their argument: as Sin Tong-ho openly states, the perception of *Paektusan* as a piece of literature entirely about the Great Leader “is an impediment to the restoration of national unity.”⁸⁸

Argue as they might, most North and South Korean academics, on the whole, imply that *Paektusan* was a poem about *Koreans* (be they Korean “people” or the Korean “Great Leader”) who liberated Korea. Arguing for the *minjung* essence of *Paektusan*, the authors of *Pukhan 50 nyŏnſa* went as far as to claim that “The poem in fact asserted that neither the Soviet Union nor the USA liberated Korea, but the heroic anti-Japanese partisans.”⁸⁹

All these assessments, however, miss one important aspect of the problem: *Paektusan*, though written in Korean and, indeed, devoted to the topic of the Korean liberation movement, is totally saturated with Soviet allusions and parallels. (Of course, we talk here only about the original version of the poem, not about its heavily revised *chuch’e* editions, which were published well after the poet’s death.)

To begin with, the poem was dedicated “to the glorious *Soviet Army* that liberated Korea.”⁹⁰ Describing the landscape of the partisans’ fight, Cho mentions “the nameless rock of Changbaek mountain which became a symbol of the victory of the *Soviet warriors* in this land.”⁹¹

Chŏng Ryul reveals a characteristic debate between him and Cho over one episode of an unfinished poem. In the episode, the partisans, exhausted by four days of hunger in a mountain camp, catch local farmers’ cows. Commander Kim, after inspecting the tethers on the cows, orders the animals returned: “Since when did we turn into cow thieves? Since when do we steal the property of farmers? Look at the tethers! These are the cows of a Korean farmer, or of a Chinese farmer!” Nevertheless, a young partisan violates the order and kills one of the animals. Commander Kim accuses the boy of collaboration with the “Japanese bastards,” because such episodes erode the trust of the local poor in partisans. The partisan realizes the full depth of his moral degradation and prepares himself for immediate death, but Kim Il Sung shows him mercy and orders him to find the victim and compensate him for the damage.⁹²

Chŏng Ryul accused Cho of plagiarism because the same moralizing stories about stolen cows, pigs, and other peasant property, along with righteous commanders protecting the peasants' interests, could be found in a number of Soviet partisan novels such as Fadeev's *The Last of Udege*, *The Devastation*, and others.⁹³ Cho felt embarrassed and convinced his friend that he had never come across these particular episodes in Soviet fiction.⁹⁴ The episode remained untouched in the first version of *Paektusan*, with the characteristic words of Commander Kim persuading the guerrillas to save the local farmers' property in the following manner:

Comrades!
 If we want to become a big river, to become a sea,
 We should remember that our base is in the people
 Our strength is in the people!
 Have we forgotten the Soviet guerrillas
 Who became blood brothers with the people?
 If we forget this
 How can we become a mass movement?⁹⁵

The fourth chapter depicts the night in the partisans' camp and the vigilant Commander Kim in the following setting.

Just one person is not sleeping,
 He is seated near the fireplace
 And reading *The History of the Soviet Partisans*.
 He does not notice how the night is passing.
 When the hope of a spring day is flashing in the distance,
 And his soul is full of joy,
 He reads the book.
 As the clouds of anxiety cover his soul
 And despair enters his mind from some dark recess,
 He read this book,
 And acquires new strength, and spies his goal.
 When he suffers from hunger
 And has to cook leather belts to fill his belly,
 He reads the book.
 When the childhood memories of his distant home
 At the foot of the mountain, covered in pine-trees
 Comes to mind,
 The image of his much loved native house
 Which was destroyed so long ago,
 Or the image of his mother working in the kitchen on a spring day,
 The image of a sad, sighing mother appears before his eyes,
 He reads the book,
 And acquires new strength, and spies his goal.
 And this night he also thinks
 "Soviet Partisans!
 Chapaev, Schors, Lazo⁹⁶ . . .
 That's how they fought!"⁹⁷

The protagonist Commander Kim then refers to the USSR as “the country of freedom, the country of justice” which is the hope of all other peoples and the embodiment of progress.⁹⁸

Characteristically, Kim Il Sung is depicted here according to the popular Soviet pattern of the ever-vigilant and book-loving Stalin. While this officially endorsed image of Stalin had some connection with reality (Stalin, indeed, suffered from insomnia and was an avid reader), the real Kim Il Sung, who was much younger and never particularly fond of books, had little to do with the Commander Kim of Cho’s poem. Obviously, Cho Ki-ch’ŏn here strove to accommodate the aesthetic standards of the new socialist world, which were designed as a replica of the Soviet system.

After the successful raid, Commander Kim addresses his comrades with a speech in which he reminds them that:

Our strength is great
We are not alone:
There is a savior of all oppressed nations,
The Soviet Union!
It stands in the vanguard of the world,
And is led by the genius of Stalin.
The USSR is establishing the new morality in the universe.
With the sword of Justice
The aggressors will be beaten,
Unfairness will be annihilated!⁹⁹

In the epilogue, the author asks Mount Paektusan how it happened that “the sun which had once set is now rising again over this country.” The mountain answers that first came:

The Liberating Soviet Army
Which defeated the aggressors in the West and the East,
Brought light to the whole world,
Braving the gun-powder smoke and the thunder of bullets.
And only after that was it that
The person whom the nation longed so much for,
The son of the nation,
My consciousness and will,
My belief and my hope,
My partisan,
Commander Kim.¹⁰⁰

About contemporary liberated Korea, Mount Paektusan claims that

We see Commander Kim leading the nation,
With the big reliable hand of friendship and sincerity,
The hand of the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹

As we can see, Cho Ki-ch’ŏn, while worshipping Kim Il Sung as a brave national hero, depicts him not as an independent figure but as a kind of “Ko-

rean Stalin” who is expected to act under the wise protective shadow of the “big Stalin” in Moscow.

All the above-mentioned episodes cast doubt on the conventional picture of *Paektusan* as a piece of nationalist literature. However, this escaped the attention not only of the North Korean authors of *The History of Korean Literature*, who rely on the later editions of the poem, but also of those South Korean scholars who analyze the original version of *Paektusan*.¹⁰² Apparently, the *minjung* agenda makes its devotees insensitive to the fact that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, being a Soviet citizen and Soviet officer, was tightly controlled in his actions by the Soviet administration and simply could not write the poem from a Korean nationalistic point of view. Even if he had wanted to do so (which is a dubious proposition at best), his Soviet supervisors would never have allowed him to pursue a nationalist agenda. This is illustrated by one characteristic incident. At the preliminary readings of the epic in the Soviet embassy,¹⁰³ where the poem was read aloud and immediately translated into Russian, a certain official noticed that the author referred to Korea as “my native land” (Kor. *Kohyang*). The official’s politically motivated pique was expressed immediately: “Comrade Cho was born in the USSR. That is in fact his native land, Korea is not.”¹⁰⁴ The objection was indisputably accepted, and in the *Paektusan* edition of 1952, as well as in later editions, Korea is referred to as “the land of the ancestors” (*Chosang-ŭi ttang*).¹⁰⁵

Taking all this into consideration, we must admit that *Paektusan* scarcely fits into the frame of “pure Korean” nationalism.

Discussions over *Paektusan*

Paektusan was not only filled with Soviet references, but was also influenced by the aesthetics of Soviet literature, which sometimes seriously diverged from Korean literary traditions. This was one of the reasons why the contemporary public reaction to the poem in North Korea was mixed.

While many young people praised the poem as an exciting breakthrough in Korean literary style, a novel exercise in applying the Communist culture to domestic material (even Pak Nam-su, hardly an admirer of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, mentions the public interest to the poem),¹⁰⁶ the very novelty of *Paektusan* annoyed a significant part of the North Korean literary establishment. For example, the literary genre of *Paektusan* was defined as *sŏjŏng sŏsasi* (lyrical epic)¹⁰⁷ and sounded peculiar to some Korean intellectuals, who perceived it as an improbable mix of different styles.¹⁰⁸ Pak Nam-su, in particular, insisted that Cho, being a nonprofessional, was simply unable to write properly within the established borders of accepted Korean genres and in order to justify his own inadequacy invented this “eccentric style.”¹⁰⁹

The language of the poem was another source of public irritation. An Hamkwan, a member of the rival ex-KAPF faction, criticized *Paektusan*’s author for the frequent use of archaic images and outdated expressions. Indeed, the language

of the poem differed from the customary form of contemporary Korean poetry. For example, Cho depicts Kim Il Sung in the following manner:

O, Kim, you commander of the Korean partisans!
 The Japanese pirates of the Three Provinces tremble when they hear your name!
 O, you, ruler of Changpaek!
 You hold mountains in your bare hands!
 Mysterious rumors spread about your glorious name.
 They say you can cross a thousand miles in an instant
 Because you know the secret of shrinking the earth to move like lightning!
 They say that you, a glorified commander, were born
 When Venus had risen in the North,
 Above the waves of the Amnokkang, and shone mysteriously over the earth.
 O, you, Marshal Kim, you sovereign of Paektusan!¹¹⁰

In fact, this depiction of the leader owed much to the contemporary Soviet tradition. The portrayal of the Communist leader as a legendary hero of epic proportions had become an established practice in the Soviet art of later Stalinism, particularly in the poetry of the non-Russian republics. There, the regional minstrels of Stalin's cult, such as Dzambul Dzhabaev, Suleiman Stal'sky, and Leonidze, used to invent colorful designations for the Great Leader: "hero of the heroes, son of lightning and thunder," "Stalin who spawns thunderstorms in the sea," "the hope and light of humanity," and so on.¹¹¹ These epithets mostly referred to Stalin, but the same elevated tone can be found in the poetic images of Lenin and lesser Communist leaders, such as Ezhov, for instance.¹¹² This particular influence on Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's literary style may be ascribed to the Kazakh poet Dzambul Dzhabaev, widely known as one of the major and most servile eulogists of the Soviet leaders, who used particularly aggrandized hyperbole and intentional archaisms in his songs. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn lived and worked in Kazakhstan when Dzambul Dzhabaev was a local celebrity, and his long poems were widely translated into Russian and studied across this Soviet republic. Cho himself translated Dzambul's poetry (from Russian, not from the Kazakh original). The style might have been familiar to Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, brought up in the traditions of Soviet literature, but as An's argument testifies, it appeared quite foreign to many of his Korean colleagues.

The question of the inappropriateness of the poetical form of *Paektusan* developed into a heated discussion between Cho Ki-ch'ŏn and the critic An Hamgwang. However, the disagreement over artistic form and a clash of literary tastes were only a part of the problem here. The real implication of this confrontation between Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as a representative of the Soviet Koreans and An Hamgwang as a member of the rival ex-KAPF faction was a political rivalry between the two groups, and most contemporaries appeared to understand this. Pak Nam-su and Chŏng Ryul present contrary viewpoints on the discussion, but the information they provide largely coincides.

According to Chŏng Ryul, the question of the unsuitability of the poetical form of *Paektusan* was first raised at the meeting of Korean writers in the office of Kim Ch'ang-man, then head of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) Central Committee's Department of Propaganda in 1948. This department controlled and "guided" the entire cultural life of the country. The meeting began with a reading of *Paektusan*, followed by a discussion during which An Ham-gwang sharply criticized the poem. He described the style of *Paektusan* as "wooden" and "unnatural" and added that he saw no difference between this so-called poem and ordinary prose.

In fact, An Ham-gwang was not the first to compare the poem to prose. Chŏng Ryul cites a characteristically sarcastic remark by the prosaic Yu Hang-rim. During a presentation of the poem in 1948 in a restaurant on the banks of the Taedong river, Yu proposed a toast to the "good prose of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn," since, he explained, being a prosaic he preferred the nonverse style and felt happy to meet another prosaic colleague.¹¹³

As Chŏng notes, this biting remark from a jester of the North Korean literary world was ignored. But the assault of An Ham-gwang was different from the usual sarcasm of a colleague. An Ham-gwang not only ridiculed the style of Cho's poem but defined it as "non-Korean" and "non-national," thus striving to show that his Soviet Korean rival lacked national identity and was a stranger to the authentic Korean culture.¹¹⁴ An Ham-gwang also mentioned that there was a lack of engaging protagonists, except for Kim Il Sung, in the epic and concluded that the whole result could be called a fiasco.¹¹⁵ This challenge could not go unanswered.

Pak Nam-su recalls how Cho Ki-ch'ŏn retaliated:

You think that the poem is bad, do you? But they read it at the Headquarters of the Soviet Army, in the Council of the People's Commissar of North Korea, in the Labor Party, and everybody said it was good. How dare you contradict such high opinions? You, comrade, are not right. If you are against the opinion of the Headquarters of the Soviet Army, it means you are anti-Soviet. And if you are against the Council of the People's Commissar of North Korea, you are anti-government. Moreover, if you are against the opinion of the Labor Party, you are an anti-Party element.¹¹⁶

Chŏng Ryul does not remember this speech of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, yet Pak's quotation seems plausible. The style of Cho's arguments correlates with the traditions of the Soviet "literary discussions" when opponents, instead of discussing literary issues, used to defer to the real or imaginary support of political authorities.¹¹⁷

Yet no matter how elaborate Cho's polemical skills were, without senior endorsement they would not count for much. At the meeting, Cho received strong support from Kim Ch'ang-man, who upheld *Paektusan* unconditionally as "a new harvest in North Korean literature"¹¹⁸ and accused An Ham-gwang of act-

ing rudely toward his colleague.¹¹⁹ Both Chŏng Ryul and Pak Nam-su affirm that An's behavior was indeed quite aggressive and arrogant, but this was not the main reason behind Kim Ch'ang-man's support. Firstly, Kim understood that attacks on the Soviet Koreans were politically risky while the country remained under Soviet control and it was not yet a good time to alienate Soviet sponsors and supervisors.¹²⁰ Also, Kim Ch'ang-man was fully aware that Kim Il Sung, being the protagonist in the poem, was quite impressed by *Paektusan*. Neither exultant style nor the lofty epithets of the poem embarrassed the future "Sun of the Nation." After Kim Il Sung read the poem, he made Cho Ki-ch'ŏn one of his personal friends and even began to visit the poet's home.¹²¹ Thus, Kim Ch'ang-man rushed to declare that the poem's main protagonist, Marshal Kim, deserved the highest style possible and that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn established a new tradition to depict the Korean leader and his lofty deeds—the tradition that other Korean writers should follow.

Under these circumstances, An was doomed. Soon after the discussion, he lost his important official positions, including the post of first secretary of the NKFLA, and only the intercession of Han Sŏr-ya and Yi Ki-yŏng (both fellow ex-KAPF cadres) helped An later to be restored to the post of chairman of the Writers' Union and an editor of *Literature and Art*, the organ of the NKFLA.¹²²

After this discussion and the subsequent official endorsement of the poem, the standing of *Paektusan* and its author became unshakable. The poem was announced as a "new classic," an exemplary work to be studied and emulated. Immediately after its publication, the author received the first Festival Prize for the poem.¹²³ The poem was later staged at the State Theatre by dramatist Han T'ae-ch'ŏn, and Kim Il Sung personally approved the performance.¹²⁴

The brief debate over the poem was indicative of the ideological campaigns that tore apart the North Korean literary world in the years 1953–1960. The arguments opponents used in 1948, while not causing the same devastating effects, were of the same demagogic nature. The participants resorted to political accusation: An Ham-gwang accused his competitor of using "non-Korean" and "non-national" motives; Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in turn accused his opponent of harboring "anti-Party," "anti-government," and "anti-Soviet" sentiments; and Kim Ch'ang-man hinted that An did not show enough deference to Marshal Kim, and so on.

As mentioned above, *Paektusan* brought new form and new images into the North Korean literary tradition. *Sŏjŏng sŏsasi*, the "lyrical epic," has been widely used in North Korean literature, and the image of Kim Il Sung produced by Cho Ki-ch'ŏn played inspired numerous eulogists of the North Korean leader to depict Kim Il Sung as an intelligent, persistent, and unbending hero. Nevertheless, this initial approach to the Leader was gradually modified by the new image created by Han Sŏr-ya, Hŏng Sun-ch'ŏl, and other ex-KAPF members.

Their portrayal of Kim Il Sung as a naïve, spontaneous, passive figure, endowed with slightly feminine traits, has been perceptively analyzed by Brian Myers in his book on Han Sŏr-ya.¹²⁵ In the words of Chŏng Ryul, the Soviet Koreans working at the time in Pyongyang were indignant at the newly emerging image of the Korean leader. For them, it appeared bizarre and almost comical.¹²⁶

**Cho Ki-ch'ŏn after *Paektusan*: “Proletarian Poet”
or “Hidden Lyricist?”**

Between 1945 and 1950, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn composed a number of poems, including: *Tumangang* (*Tuman River*, 1946), about the suffering of Koreans under Japanese colonial rule; *Uri-ŭi kil* (*Our way*, 1949), which glorified Soviet-Korean friendship; and *Hangjaeng-ŭi yŏsu* (*Resistance in Yosu* 1950), about the South Korean communist underground.¹²⁷ All of these works were praised as pioneering and exemplary. So too was the lyrical epic *Ttang* (*Land*), written in response to the Party's order to extol the recent land reform of 1946. While many North Korean writers felt perplexed and bewildered by these openly political demands, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, equipped with his Soviet experience, immediately produced the required product.¹²⁸ Fulfilling the Party's order to “immerse [oneself] in the masses,” Cho Ki-ch'ŏn traveled around the country visiting farms and factories and in the summer of 1949 went to the Hamhŭng plant, where he “participated in the assembly of tools and machines and acquainted himself intimately with work and the everyday life of the workers.”¹²⁹ This was yet another exemplary action since many Korean authors “immersed themselves in the masses” rather reluctantly.¹³⁰

As a result of those trips, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn wrote poems glorifying socialist construction and industrialization. Some representative lines from Cho's long epic *Saeng'ai-ŭi Norae* (*The Song of Life*, June 1950), written after his visit to the Hamhŭng plant, illustrate the style of these writings:¹³¹

Steelworker Kim Yŏng-su is coming to the plant,
 . . .
 Smoke billows in front of him,
 The smoke is colored by the morning sunshine.
 It is the proud smoke of reconstruction.
 A creative energy is blazing there
 Pounding hearts,
 Hot breath,
 Developing muscles,
 The fire of patriotism is blazing there.
 It is the proud smoke of success.¹³²

The poem tells of the struggle of advanced workers striving to fulfill the production-plan quotas ahead of schedule. Needless to say, they have to overcome sabotage by “class enemies”—a common topic in Stalinist fiction. The

backward worker Tök-po is manipulated by a vicious former landlord and destroys the electric furnace in order to outstrip the opposing brigade in socialist competition. At the end of the poem, Tök-po “unbends his crushed soul,”¹³³ regrets his unforgivable behavior, and is rectified.

Like *Paektusan, The Song of Life* and other poems by Cho were saturated with the same exalted intonation and hyperbolic images that alienated his conservative readers in *Paektusan*. Pak Nam-su also mentions other exotic traits of Cho Ki-ch’ön, such as his steady manner of speaking, his unusual “Soviet” manner of declaring verse with his head tilted backward, and so forth.¹³⁴ Despite these foreign traits, however, Cho Ki-ch’ön was quite popular among the local Korean writers. Though native writers were shocked by Cho’s negative view of Dostoevskii, a traditional icon of Korean intellectuals,¹³⁵ the high intellectual level of Cho Ki-ch’ön’s public speeches and his substantial knowledge of contemporary Soviet and foreign literature could not help but impress them. “Everything he said was so exiting and interesting; he seemed like a visitor from some strange and mystical place. He gave the impression of being a very erudite person.”¹³⁶

The perception of Cho Ki-ch’ön as erudite by local Koreans was not accidental. In contrast to the early Russian Bolsheviks and their supporters, often graduates of the best universities, the education of most Korean leftist writers, who constituted Cho’s audience, tended to be rather fragmentary.¹³⁷ It is no wonder then that Cho Ki-ch’ön, with his profound philological education in two languages, became somewhat of an authority figure.

Typical for the time, Cho Ki-ch’ön’s works were permeated by politics and ideology, while lyrical themes were rare and secondary. The descriptions of landscapes or romantic relationships in Cho Ki-ch’ön’s poems were always supposed to convey some propagandistic message; nature approves or disapproves of the protagonists’ actions which are essentially political. Depending on the situation, mountains and rivers “cry” or “laugh”. One might refer to Cho’s poem *Hün pauie anjaso* (Sitting on the White Rock), written in July 1947 in the Küm-gansan People’s resort.¹³⁸ The protagonist is sitting on a white rock above a fast-flowing spring and “talking with the water.” At first glance, this is a bucolic picture, quite common and in tune with the Korean literary tradition. But we come to realize almost immediately that the protagonist is not simply enjoying his leisure. He puts his time to excellent use honoring his revolutionary spirit since he is learning to be as swift and tenacious as the flowing water and intends to break his enemies into pieces.

The love relationships in *Saengae-üi norae* serve as another example of this tendency. According to the Stalinist tradition, love is supposed to help the heroes fulfill production plans and fight enemies more successfully. This is seen in the way the author describes the passion of the two protagonists, the advanced workers Küm-sun and Yöng-su.

It is not just a “sweet love,”
 Which poets eulogize in their “songs of passion.”
 It is a relationship where both lovers stand hand in hand
 For the construction of democracy,
 For the creation of the Motherland.
 It is an exalted love of the new Korea and one which we must applaud.
 . . .
 Love is not about a supple bosom or starry eyes.
 Exalted love is a fight for the spring of a free Korea.¹³⁹

This is strongly reminiscent of the early Soviet philosophy of love, reflected in the famous poems of Maiakovskii, such as “A letter to Comrade Kostrov from Paris on the Essence of Love” (1929) (“To love does not mean simply to boil with passion. Love leaps over the mountains of bosoms and jungles of hair. To love means to rush into the backyard and chop the wood for the fire with the spackling axe enjoying your strength”) and “A Letter to Tatiana Yakovleva” (1929) (“The red color of my republics must shine even in my kissing, and hugging, and the trembling of the body that I love”).¹⁴⁰

The explicit ideological motifs of Cho's poetry and his “politically correct” social behavior made the poet fit perfectly into the contemporary pattern of a “Communist poet.” Yet, some recent works of South Korean scholars question the once indisputable reputation of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. Instead, Cho is increasingly perceived as the author of lyrical, seemingly nonpolitical poems such as “Hŭip'aram” (Whistle), “Suyang pŏtŭl” (Willow), and “Kŭne” (Swing), which became the lyrics of songs, popular in both the North Korean light music scene and among leftist students in the South. This approach is even reflected in the titles of recent South Korean publications about the poet (“The poet of the Whistle,” etc.).¹⁴¹ Some South Korean scholars have used these verses as grounds for asserting that the “real” Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was not a political “proletarian poet” at all, but a soft lyricist who has to be “rediscovered” today.

In the light of today's rapprochement between South and North Korea, the desire of South Korean intellectuals to find allies among former enemies and for this reason to “domesticate” Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's legacy is understandable. However, this “rediscovery” should not come at the price of distorting facts, which is often the case. In fact, neither “Whistle” nor “Swing” contradicts the conventional image of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as an overtly politicized “Communist poet.” Both Chŏng Ryul and Pak Nam-su (i.e., both friend and foe) ascribe the appearance of Cho's lyrical poems not to protest against official ideology, but to particular tendencies in the Korean literature of the period.

Pak Nam-su represents Cho's “Whistle” and “Swing” as the emulation of the lyrical poems written by the Soviet poet Isakovskii (1900–1973), who was very popular at the time in the USSR and widely translated in other Communist countries. According to Pak, the “quick-witted” Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sensed a new

social trend and rushed to use it. It was about at this time that the Soviet poet Grinachev came to Korea and wondered why Korean poets wrote only about politics and did not extol such eternal objects as, say, the moon or flowers. This opinion led to a wave of lyrical poems in Korea in 1947–48, such as “The First Snow” by Kim Sang-o and “Pine Tree” by Kim Sun-sök.¹⁴²

Chŏng Rylul generally agrees with such a perception. According to Chŏng, North Korean writers at first wrote only rigid and overtly “political” verses, which they believed to be the only acceptable variety of socialist realist poetry. The situation changed slightly after a group of Russian artists came to Korea and sang Russian romances in front of their Korean hosts. This performance shocked many Korean intellectuals, who used to ask their Soviet Korean colleagues: “Is it permitted to sing such sweet love songs in a Communist country?” The Soviet Koreans laughed and explained that love songs were an important part of Russian culture and that many new poems and songs on romantic themes were being created in the Soviet Union every day. Taking this as a green light, Korean intellectuals such as Min Pyŏn-gyun, Kim Cho-gyu, and Pak Seyŏng started to produce lyrical poems in abundance. In addition, translations of many Soviet lyrical verses appeared in Korea at this time. Some of these, such as Isakovskii’s “Katyusha” and Simonov’s “Wait for Me,” have become especially popular as the lyrics of North Korean pop songs. All these events rendered North Korean poetry more tender and eminently more readable.¹⁴³ However, this was just another manifestation of the eagerness of North Korean writers to follow the official line.

We should not overestimate the degree of political freedom expressed in these verses. Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s lyrical poems were anything but a concession to “pure art,” as the essay of the director of the Pukpang Yŏn’gusŏ (Research Institute on North Korea), Yi Ch’ang-ju,¹⁴⁴ and the above-mentioned article in *Han’guk ilbo* asserted.¹⁴⁵ Like the verses of Isakovskii, to which they have many textual similarities, Cho’s love songs faithfully reflect the current political demands. For instance, the protagonists of “Whistle” are not ordinary sweethearts but exemplary workers who, needless to say, exceed labor goals threefold and stay up late every night looking through study materials.¹⁴⁶

Today you again smiled purely,
And said that you have overfilled the production plan threefold,
But I do not envy your achievement,
I can do even better,
But I like your smile.
Why is it so pure?¹⁴⁷

The poem “Swing” depicts the spring folk festival Tano and the traditional entertainment of Korean girls being lifted up on a swing. But even this idyllic picture is saturated with propaganda. One of the swinging girls dreams of a distant Pyongyang, where the national flag waves in the wind, and of Kim Il Sung

University, where her boyfriend, yesterday's farmhand, is now happily studying.¹⁴⁸ The poem "Willow" is less politicized. It depicts a beautiful spring morning, the young willow growing under the window of the young protagonist and the rejuvenating mood he feels on watching the growing tree. But the author does not fail to notice that the spring mood is fruitful, since it invigorates the hero, helping him work productively all day.¹⁴⁹

These poems vividly remind one of Isakovskii, whose verses always described the "useful" relationships of "good" or "advanced" boys and girls.¹⁵⁰ Cho Ki-ch'ŏn borrowed not only the form of Isakovskii's poems, but also used the imagery of his verses, and this is one of the possible reasons why nowadays South Korean readers often misunderstand the message of Cho's poems. For instance, in recent Seoul newspaper articles, "Whistle" is described as "a song of unrequited love,"¹⁵¹ while the truth is precisely to the contrary: both protagonists are in love and the girl invitingly smiles at the boy, but he is too shy to open his heart. He simply sighs secretly, which in Korean eyes probably represents a picture of unhappy love. The imagery of the poem points to a popular Soviet song, "At Sunset I See a Boy Near My House," with lyrics by Isakovskii "At sunset I see a boy near my house. He just sighs and does not say a word. And I don't know why he sighs."¹⁵² Like Isakovskii, Cho depicts his female protagonist as a resolute and active figure in contrast to the timid boy. Both characters act in accordance with the Russian, not Korean, code of acceptable behavior, which might mislead Korean readers.

Thus the ideological constituent of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's lyrical poems is undeniable. It must be mentioned, however, that the inseparable political component of Cho's lyrical songs did not prevent them from being popular among the Korean public. The South Korean *Taehan maeil* newspaper sounds overly simplistic when it asserts that, since North Korean art is strictly politicized, "there are no popular songs in North Korea."¹⁵³ There definitely are popular songs in North Korea, and televised singing contests remain a favorite entertainment among North Korean audiences. The North Korean public, as the Soviet one before, is capable to ignoring the political content of a lyrical song and enjoying it as it is.¹⁵⁴

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn during the Korean War

On the 25th of June, 1950, the North Korean army invaded the South. Soon after the outbreak of war, Cho sent his family to Moscow while he remained in Pyongyang. The Soviet writer and official Chakovskii, cited in an article by L. K. Kim, claims that

from the beginning of the Korean War Cho rushed to fight, but was not allowed. He was needed in Pyongyang. The fighting people of Korea wanted his poetic voice, transmitted by radio and newspaper. But Cho eventually got his way and went to the front. So, for the first half of his journey he traveled as a civilian, and for the second half as an officer of the People's Army.¹⁵⁵

Soviet journalist Hohlov wrote that “only a few hours before his death Cho Ki-ch’ŏn sat in the front dug-out and wrote his new poem.”¹⁵⁶ Liia Yudovevich was completely certain that “Cho Ki-ch’ŏn died a hero, saving Korean children from burning houses.”¹⁵⁷ We can find similar claims in some North Korean materials, such as a memorial article on Cho Ki-ch’ŏn in *Munhak yesul*, #7 (1953). The article affirms that the poet “died, heroically fighting for the freedom and independence of Korea.”¹⁵⁸ In the second volume of *Cho Ki-ch’ŏn sŏnjip* (Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s Anthology), published in 1953, there is a remark that the poem “Korean Mother” was written in September 1950 in his “frontline notebook,”¹⁵⁹ which implies that the author was in the fighting line while writing the poem. The above-cited North Korean author of Cho’s biography, Yi Ch’ŏng-gu, also states explicitly that Cho engaged directly in the fighting. According to his testimony, when the Korean War started, “Cho Ki-ch’ŏn, who had always fought against American imperialism and reactionaries, donned the Army uniform and went to the front line on the Naktongan river in August 1950.”¹⁶⁰ Recently published KCNA articles confirm that this version of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s activities is still officially upheld in Pyongyang. In the article “Famous Korean Poet,” we find the following statement: “Cho Ki-ch’ŏn wrote his wartime poems while following the army during the Korean war, encouraging all the soldiers of the Korean People’s Army to win.”¹⁶¹

Some recent South Korean publications also imply that Cho Ki-ch’ŏn met a heroic death on the front line. One example is an article published in 1999 in *Han’guk ilbo*.¹⁶² In all probability, the South Korean journalist here is uncritically relying on North Korean publications.

It is noteworthy that North Korean authors do not specify exactly where Cho Ki-ch’ŏn allegedly engaged in combat or what military duties he performed. Such information would not be concealed for security reasons, since the movements of war correspondents, such as Kim Sa-ryang, were widely reported in the North Korean media.¹⁶³ No expert affirming Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s front-line activity can explain why the allegedly fighting poet, in fact, died in his Pyongyang office on the 31st of July, 1951.¹⁶⁴ All these scenarios were probably intended to embellish Cho Ki-ch’ŏn’s image, but they are not corroborated by factual materials.

Chŏng Ryul and Yurii Cho both deny Cho’s involvement in any military activity during the war. Chŏng Ryul claims that Cho spent the war in Pyongyang continuing his administrative duties, which included his work on the *Nodong sinmun* daily and in the Korean Federation of Literature and Art (KFLA), of which he became vice-president in March of 1951.¹⁶⁵ Cho was also producing new verse, such as “Chosŏnŭn Ssaunda” (Korea is Fighting; February 1951), “Chosŏn-ŭi ōmŏni” (Korean Mother; September 1950), “Pult’anŭn kŏriesŏ” (On the Burning Street; August 1950), “Na-ŭi koji” (My Heights; June 1951), “Ur-inŭn Chosŏn Ch’ŏngnyŏnida” (We are Korean Youth; April 1951), “Chugŏmŭn

wŏnsu-ege” (Death to the Enemies; December 1950), “Ch’ŏtsaebiyŏk-ŭl mat-myonsŏ” (Greeting the New Dawn; New Year’s Eve 1950), “Nunkil” (Snowy Path; January 1951), and “Pomnoraē” (Spring Song; February 1951), among others.¹⁶⁶ All these poems are essentially wartime propaganda, obviously meant to encourage North Korean soldiers; they are permeated with fervent patriotic rhetoric and preach righteous hatred against the enemies. In accordance with the general political line, Cho Ki-ch’ŏn represents the Korean War as a heroic fight by the entire Korean people against the nasty American occupiers—essentially a national liberation struggle. The life of antebellum North Korea is depicted as cloudless bliss. Here is how he describes it in “We are Korean Youth”:

We did not do a chore without a song
We did not start a day without a smile.
We stayed wide awake on spring nights,
Thinking about newly flourishing flowers,
All inside our beautiful dreams.¹⁶⁷

Cho Ki-ch’ŏn contrasted this paradise, full of flowers, love, and cheers, with today’s tragedy of Pyongyang, comparing the nightmarish American beasts to virtuous Korean patriots. It is a telltale sign that the enemies in his wartime poems are invariably Americans, sadistic “Yankees.” Their South Korean allies never appear. Like the previous verses of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn, his wartime poems are full of hyperbole, exaltation, and images of bloodthirsty enemies who are shown as the embodiment of cruelty and evil incarnate.¹⁶⁸

A child who lost his mother,
A child who is crawling along the street in tears,
Both children were pierced
With a hundred bullets
Which were targeted at them
By the blood-loving Yankees!
...
The animals were laughing madly
While poking people’s eyes out and tearing out their nails!
The animals carved [pictures of] atomic bombs
With their bayonets on people’s chests!¹⁶⁹

In 1950–1951 Cho Ki-ch’ŏn remained very prominent in the official circles of the Pyongyang bureaucracy. In a letter to his wife, he mentions that he is very busy “checking the innumerable works of other writers.”¹⁷⁰ For his “outstanding service to the country” he was decorated with the Order of the State Banner in the second degree in 1951.¹⁷¹ In March of 1951 he became a vice-chairman of the KFLA.¹⁷² In spite of the assertion of Professor Yi Ch’ang-ju that Cho accepted this appointment unwillingly, for “he had no choice,”¹⁷³ the new senior post made Cho very proud and happy. In a letter to his family in Moscow, Cho wrote:

Now I am working in the Korean Federation of Literature and Art as a vice-chairman. KFLA is a very influential organization, which determines the artistic life of all Korea. I had to take that position because the resolution on my assignment came from the very Central Committee of the Party. My responsibilities are very complex, but interesting. This is just the work for me! . . . You love my verse and can imagine what a high position I will gain in the future! . . . Every day when I return home from the KFLA office they send me a car. This is because I have a lot of work and have made a huge amount of progress.

Cho's excitement about his new appointment is obvious. As for the phrase "I had to take the position because it was the Central Committee's resolution," which caused Yi Ch'ang-ju to assert that the assignment ran contrary to Cho Ki-ch'ön's desire, we might cite the comments of Yurii Cho, the poet's son. According to him, Cho Ki-ch'ön found it necessary to console his wife, Kim Hae-sön, who was always anxious that her husband did not receive the distinction he supposedly deserved as the leading poet of North Korea. For that reason, Cho Ki-ch'ön explained his new additional responsibilities as an honorable burden hailing from the highest reaches of power. The rather strange reference to the car, which they allegedly sent to pick him up at the Federation, has the same roots. Yurii Cho supposes his father could have invented this fact in order to please his wife.¹⁷⁴

Neither Yurii Cho nor Chöng Ryul had doubts that Cho Ki-ch'ön was very pleased by his promotion. Both informants dispute the alleged conflict between Cho Ki-ch'ön and the North Korean regime and Cho's desire to escape. The grounds for this dubious assertion come from the above-cited final letter of Cho Ki-ch'ön, which, according to Yi Ch'ang-ju's reading, "was filled with repugnance towards the North Korean system."¹⁷⁵ This interpretation leans on one particular part of the letter, which constitutes the following direction to Kim Hae-sön: "Do not live in the Korean embassy again. Try to get an apartment through the Soviet Writer's Union. Do not bother the Korean embassy." Yi Ch'ang-ju reads this phrase as a hint of distrust toward North Korean officialdom. Adding this to Cho's alleged unwillingness to fulfill the duties of vice-chairman of the KFLA, Yi concluded that Cho was secretly hostile toward the North Korean regime. However, Yurii Cho is sure that the prohibition on living in the Korean embassy bears a completely different meaning and was connected to an embarrassing family situation.

According to Yurii, his mother, a very practical-minded person, when finding herself in Moscow with a child and with no help, acted in a way that Cho Ki-ch'ön could never have allowed himself to act: instead of independently trying to find a place to live, she went to the North Korean embassy and loudly demanded that they provide her with a house since her husband was at the moment "exhaustedly drudging for Korea." Officials had no choice but to let her live in the embassy for a while. Cho Ki-ch'ön judged the situation to be awk-

ward and for this reason asked his wife to seek support not from Korea but the Soviet Writers Union.¹⁷⁶

In the letter, there are no credible signs of any alleged “animosity toward the Kim Il Sung dictatorship.” In Pyongyang in 1951 the position of Soviet Koreans, and of Cho in particular, was favorable; and Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's personal relationship with the North Korean leader was quite friendly. The only person of Cho's acquaintance who indeed detested Kim Il Sung was the poet's wife, but her negative feelings were explained not by political but by material considerations: Kim Hae-sŏng was sure that the Korean leader, like the other bosses of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, underestimated her grand husband and did not render him all the rewards she thought he deserved.¹⁷⁷

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn was killed on the 31st of July, 1951, by a direct hit by a bomb while he was in his office on the banks of the Taedong River.¹⁷⁸ Chŏng Ryul, along with other top officials, attended his funeral in Pyongyang. Thus ended the life of the most influential Soviet Korean figure in early North Korean literature.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's Legacy

When Soviet authorities decided to send Cho Ki-ch'ŏn to North Korea in 1945, they hardly anticipated his future role as the founding father of socialist realist poetry in that country. Nonetheless, they expected that Cho, like his fellow Soviet Koreans, would contribute to the growth of Soviet influence. Time ultimately proved that he was an ideal choice for this purpose.

Though Cho Ki-ch'ŏn himself had experienced the forcible resettlement of Soviet Koreans as well as ethnic discrimination, he obviously did not draw any lasting political conclusions from this personal encounter with Stalinism. At the very least, any such conclusions he might have drawn failed to influence his literary, administrative, and political activities. Like millions of his Soviet contemporaries who were enthusiastic supporters of Stalin, he probably explained the tragedy of the Soviet Koreans as “mistakes” or the short-sightedness of some members of the Great Leader's entourage and did not blame The Father of the Peoples and the Stalinist system as a whole. Being brought up inside the Soviet reality, Cho Ki-ch'ŏn perceived communist ideology as the only correct and progressive way to live and was eager to share his knowledge with his Korean colleagues. Cho's aspiration to follow the examples of Maiakovskii, Isakovskii, and the other official Soviet authors, as well as the explicit ideological motifs of his works, must be explained by his sincere desire to create a new, supposedly “progressive” Korean literature.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's North Korean official and literary career was unquestionably successful. Like other Soviet Koreans, this success was instigated by the support of the Soviet authorities, who guided Cho in his activity and protected him against attacks of rival literary factions. Unlike many fellow Soviet

Koreans, however, Cho did not lose his official recognition afterward when Pyongyang relations with Moscow deteriorated. Perhaps, had he survived long enough to be around during the large-scale persecution of the Soviet Koreans in the mid-1950s, his name and his works might have suffered greatly. However, his wartime death in 1951 prevented Cho from being associated with purged politicians, many of whom were among his close friends and protectors. In the official North Korean history, the poet remained a trusted co-worker of the Great Leader and one of his early eulogizers.

Elena Davydova claims that there was a lengthy gap between late 1960s and the early 1980s during which the name of the poet almost disappeared from North Korean publications. The silence over was broken in the early 1980s when North Korean TV broadcast a documentary about Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. From that time on, his works began to be published again, though in heavily revised "chuch'e" editions.¹⁷⁹ The symbolic importance of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in North Korean culture was certainly too important to ignore—which is why the DPRK establishment decided to revive the poet's name. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn is one of the most honored figures in present-day North Korea.

Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's activity as a translator of the Soviet experience for North Korea lasted a mere six years but had far-reaching and ambivalent consequences. In one sense, the Soviet/Russian cultural influence, novel in many ways in comparison to the Korean national tradition, enriched the Korean intellectual atmosphere. For example, his *sŏjŏng sŏsasi* poetry style, once the object of Pak Nam-su's ridicule, has become common in contemporary North Korean poetry.¹⁸⁰ The potentially positive results of Cho's North Korean activity were eclipsed, however, by the shadow of Stalinist ideology, which at that time shaped Soviet culture and the world view of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn himself. Cho hailed from a country that saw the ideal writer as, first and foremost, a political propagandist and loyal interpreter of the current directions of the authorities, so he did his best to establish this same perception in Korea as well. Thus, Cho's literary and administrative activities helped to subjugate the North Korean arts to the political demands of the day. It is sufficient to mention that the poet became one of the earliest creators of the Kim Il Sung cult. The heavily loaded political rhetoric of Cho's writings left a lasting impact: the eulogies of the "smoke of construction," "exemplary workers," and, of course, curses for the "wicked Yankees" who "carve pictures of atomic bombs" on their victims' chests still remain in the inventory of North Korean poets.

The last, but not the least, negative consequence of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's North Korean activity was that, though the poet himself had never initiated political campaigns against his competitors, he was in fact one of the first writers to introduce the patterns of Stalinist demagoguery and political campaigning into Korean literary circles.

In general, the Pyongyang activity of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, a product of the So-

viet Stalinist system, exemplified the Stalinist literary tradition in its purest form and promoted the adoption of the Stalinist pattern in North Korean culture.

NOTES

1. Socialist realism is a vague doctrine that has been subjected to many variations throughout its sixty-odd year history. Its first official interpretation was offered in August 1934 at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. It states that “Socialist realism is the main method of Soviet literature and [literary] criticism. It demands a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. These qualities must be achieved through the ideological reformation of all the working people, nurturing them in the spirit of socialism.” See *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934. Stenographicheskii otchet. Prilozheniia* [The First Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. Stenographic record. Appendix] (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990, 24). Marshall Pihl formulated the essence of this literary-cum-political canon in a more straightforward way: “The doctrine of socialist realism, a Soviet aesthetic canon, holds that literature may not be a simple ‘realistic’ or ‘naturalistic’ reproduction of life but must describe reality as the party defines it.” See Marshall R. Pihl, “Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today,” *Korean Studies*, 1 (1977): 77.

Socialist realism was not a complete novelty to Korean intellectuals: before liberation it was associated with the KAPF, or so-called proletarian literature. After 1945, however, this doctrine was widely promoted as obligatory for *all* North Korean writers. Much like their Chinese and Eastern Bloc colleagues, North Korean literary officials pronounced socialist realism to be “the only method of creative activity in the field of literature and art, which is socialist in content and national in form.” In the First Charter of the General Federation of Korean Literature and Arts Unions, the fundamental function of the Federation was formulated as “to reward the working masses with Communist ideology and revolutionary tradition through literary and artistic activities under the leadership of the Workers’ Party of Korea.” See Ryu Hun, *Study of North Korea* (Seoul: Research Institute of International and External Affairs, 1966), 287.

2. Regarding Soviet Koreans in the initial period of the DPRK, see Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, the Formation of North Korea 1945–1960* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 110–35.

3. Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 1:383.

4. Interviews with Chŏng Ryul, Alma-ata (Kazakhstan), December 9–13, 2001. Chŏng Ryul (Chŏng Sang-jin, Chŏng Yuri Danilovich) from 1952 to 1955 was a deputy minister for culture in North Korea and now resides in Kazakhstan.

5. In the late 1940s this was a powerful political group, and its sponsorship as well as open support of the Soviet authorities greatly contributed to the rise of the Soviet Korean authors to prominence in the North. However, the very same connections that made them so powerful in the late 1940s eventually led to their demise in the mid-1950s when Kim Il Sung began to distance himself from his former sponsors in Moscow. Most of these people either disappeared in purges or fled Korea for Russia. Their exploits did not win much official recognition after the mid-1950s.

6. See, for instance, how the Soviet journalist N. Hohlov describes Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: “In Korea they call Cho Ki-ch'ŏn a ‘Korea’s Maiakovskii.’ It is a very precise definition! Both poets were so close spiritually. The grand revolutionary scale of Cho’s poetry, their grandiose topics, specific beat and rhythm system of his poetry—all these he inherited from Maiakovskii.” The Soviet journalist depicts Cho as a “strongly passion-

ate,” emotional person, a “revolutionary in Korean poetry,” who, like Maiakovskii, preferred new aesthetic forms and “burning political topics of the day” rather than eternal themes. See N. Hohlov, *Koreia nashih dnei* [The Korea of our times] (Moscow: Molo-daia gvardiia, 1956), 153–56. All these depictions are very close to the way Soviet contemporaries perceived Maiakovskii. See V. O. Perzhov and I. M. Serebrianskii, ed., *Maiakovskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* [Maiakovskii. Materials and research] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo “Gudozhstvennaia literature,” 1940); E. Usievich, *Vladimir Maiakovskii* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1950), 32.

7. V. N. Li, “Koreiskaia literatura pervykh let posle osvobodzheniia (1945–1950) [Korean literature in the first years after Liberation], in *Hudozhstvennyi opyt literatur sotsialisticheskikh stran* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), 341.

8. See, for instance, a detailed North Korean biography of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn written by Yi Ch'ŏng-gŭ soon after the poet's death: Yi Ch'ŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn ron* [Study of the poet Cho Ki-ch'ŏn] (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ong ch'ulp'ansa, 1953), or the Soviet article: L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Kich'ona” [The poetry of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn], in *Koreiskaia literatura* [Korean literature] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1959), 150–79. They use the term “Korean Maiakovskii” in a positive sense. On the contrary, a South Korean anti-Communist work written in 1986, in the days of the Cold War, represents Cho Ki-ch'ŏn as an arrogant foreign intruder into Korean literature—and its author, Yi Ki-pong, employs the same epithet. See Yi Ki-pong, *Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin* [North Korean men of literature and the arts] (Seoul: Sasayŏn, 1986), 219–24.

9. Sin Hyŏng-gi and O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa* [North Korean literary history] (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000), 29.

10. Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova (Pak Myŏng-sun), Yanji (China), July 6, 2000; “Famous Korean Poet,” distributed by Korean Central News Agency, July 5, 2001; *Chosŏn munhaksa* [A history of Korean literature] (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1994), 10: 60–79.

11. In the early 1950s, the North Korean press did not mention the foreign connections of the new regime's leaders, obviously in order to portray them as “authentic Koreans.” The Soviet origins of many North Korean officials were never mentioned in the press even when the “unbreakable friendship” of the USSR and North Korea was being widely extolled. For example, Kim Il Sung's four-year stay in the USSR during World War II was a secret in North Korea until very recently.

12. *Chosŏn munhaksa* [The history of Korean literature] (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1994), 10: 60–79.

13. Yim Yŏng-t'ae and Ko Yu-han, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa* [50 years of North Korean history] (Seoul: Tŭlnyŏk, 1999), 1: 144.

14. “Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng. ‘Na’ poda ‘uri’ kanyohan sunsujuŭija” [Re-illumination of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn: the purist who worshiped ‘us’ more than ‘I’], *Han'guk ilbo*, Aug. 8, 1992.

15. Yi Ch'ang-ju, “Puk-ŭi hwip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn” [The North Korean ‘poet of Whistle’], *Koryo Times: Weekly Magazine for the Foreign Korean Community*, Aug. 10, 1992: 21.

16. Interviews with Yurii Cho, Moscow (Russia), October–November 2001.

17. Interview by telephone with Elena Davydova.

18. “Lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov.” Official questionnaire, completed by Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, June 18, 1946. A copy is now kept in the author's archive. Such personal files were compiled in the former USSR every time a person took a new job. The file forms were filled out by the person himself and then checked by the employer. Often people

were given an extra form or two, to better prepare a draft. One such draft form was kept by Cho's family.

19. Private letters of Cho Ki-ch'ŏn's girlfriend Liia Grigorievna Yudolevitch, written to the poet's son, Yurii Cho, in 1976–77. The originals of the undated letters are now kept in the author's archive.

20. Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn* [A dictionary of North Korean literature] (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1995), 942.

21. Yun Chae-kŭn and Pak Sang-ch'ŏn, *Pukhan-ŭi hyŏndae munhak* [Contemporary North Korean literature] (Seoul: Koryŏwŏn, 1990), 2: 176.

22. Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt, with additional material by James Hoare, *Korea, A Historical and Cultural Dictionary* (Great Britain: Curzon, 1999), 260.

23. "Lichnyi listok."

24. Interview with Ch'ŏng Ryul.

25. *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip* (Pyongyang: Munhwa chŏnsŏn, 1952), 1: 1.

26. Yi Ch'ŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏnron* [A study of the poet Cho Ki-ch'ŏn] (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ong ch'ulp'ansa, 1953), 6.

27. *Chosŏn munhaksŏ*, 10: 60.

28. "Famous Korean Poet," distributed by KCNA, July 5, 2001.

29. A. N. Ten, *Ocherki sovremennoi koreiskoi literatury* [A study of contemporary Korean literature] (Leningrad: Herzen Institute, 1954), 459.

30. In 1917, 81,825 Koreans lived in the Far-Eastern region of Russia. They comprised one third of the total population of the region. In 1923 the number of Koreans in the region had grown to 120,982. See Kim German and Sim Yŏng-sop, *Istoriia prosveshcheniia koreitsev Rossii i Kazahstana* [History of the education of Koreans of Russia and Kazahstan] (Alma-Ata: Kazak universiteti, 2000), 93–96.

31. Kim and Sim, *Istoriia prosveshcheniia koreitsev Rossii i Kazahstana*, 113.

32. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

33. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

34. Interviews with Chŏng Ryul and Yurii Cho.

35. Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 942.

36. L. K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna," 150–51. Kim gives the Korean titles of Cho's poems in Russian translation.

37. Yi Chŏng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn ron*, 5.

38. Liia Yudolevich offers some curious details of Cho's arrival in Omsk. According to her information, Cho appeared in Omsk accidentally. He had been on his way from the Far East to Moscow with the intention of entering Moscow University when he was suddenly robbed of all his possessions at Omsk train station. Cho had no money to go further and had to work for the summer in a collective farm near Omsk to gain some funds. In autumn he approached the rector of Omsk University, Aleksandr Sergeevich Slivko, and asked him for assistance. The rector was touched by the boy's thirst for knowledge and helped Cho enter the university despite his poor Russian language skills. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn did not betray the trust and was graduated from the university with excellent marks (Letters of Liia Yudolevich).

39. Letters of Liia Yudolevich.

40. Major Soviet industrial projects of the early 1930s.

41. Stories about the anti-Japanese guerrillas, sometimes embellished, filtered across the Soviet-Korean border; and some exploits of the resistance fighters were described by the Soviet press. One of the people who particularly inspired Cho Ki-ch'ŏn in this regard was the famous Cho Myŏng-hŭi, a Korean nationalist writer who had arrived in the Soviet Far East in 1928. (Interview with Chŏng Ryul.)

42. "Lichnyi listok. . ."
43. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
44. Interview with Yurii Cho.
45. Interview with Chǒng Ryul
46. Letters of Liia Yudolevich.
47. Lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov. Copy kept in author's archive.
48. "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng. 'Na' poda 'uri' kangyohan sunsujuũija," 4.
49. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
50. Yi Ki-Pong, *Pukũ munhak-kwa yesurin*, 143.
51. "Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaechomyŏng. 'Na' poda 'uri' kangyohan sunsujuũija."
52. L. K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna," 146; Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajon*, 942–45.
53. L. K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna," 146–47.
54. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 60.
55. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 81–83.
56. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
57. Interview with Chǒng Ryul; Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 104–107.
58. Brian Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca, New York: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1994), 46; interview with Chǒng Ryul.
59. Chǒng Ryul testifies that the measures were, indeed, strict. He, for instance, witnessed an incident where a young Soviet soldier was executed in public for a stolen fountain pen. Chǒng also describes another characteristic episode. Once he raised the question of rapes at a meeting of the political department of the Soviet military base in Wŏnsan in October–November 1945. Chǒng Ryul argued that these crimes were destroying the authority of the Red Army and should be stopped immediately. An officer called Iagudin objected: "But you are lucky, you speak the language and can get any Korean woman you want. What should we do?" After this episode, Iagudin was dismissed. (Interview with Chǒng Ryul.)
60. Sŏng Hye-rang. *Tũngnamu chip* [A house covered by wisteria] (Seoul: Chisik nara, 2000), 56.
61. Andrei Lankov, *Severnaia Koreia: Vchera i Segodnia* [North Korea: Yesterday and today] (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1995), 174–75.
62. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
63. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
64. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
65. Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 4.
66. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
67. *Ibid.*, 28.
68. Han Sŏr-ya, ed., *Yŏnggwang-ũ Ssũttalinege: Ssũttalin t'ansaeng 70–chunyŏn kinyŏm ch'ulp'ansa* [Glory to Stalin: an anthology of works dedicated to the 70th birthday of Stalin] (Pyongyang: Pukchosŏn munhakyeshul ch'ongtongmaeng, 1949), 26–36, 167–70, 260.
69. Interview with Chǒng Ryul.
70. *Ibid.*, 81, 84.
71. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 78, 90.
72. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 88, 94.
73. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 78, 90.
74. Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajon*, 943.

75. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

76. Arrogance toward regional accents has deep roots in the Korean tradition. Another refugee, Yi Ch'ŏl-chu, referring to the Soviet Koreans and Ki Sŏk-pok in particular, also scorns his “clumsy Hamgyŏng dialect” in his memoirs. See Yi Chŏl-ju, *Pig-ŭi yesurin* [North Korean artists] (Seoul: Kyemongsa, 1966), 199, quoted in Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 88. Sŏng Hye-rang, writing her memoir in the late 1990s, also referred to the same accent as a telltale mark of Ki Sŏk-pok and other Soviet Koreans. Sŏng Hye-rang, *Tŭngnamu chip*, 170–71. As for the work of Pak Nam-su, in its other chapters, the Hamgyŏng-do natives are described with great irony as primitive and uneducated rustics. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 209.

77. Interview with Yurii Cho.

78. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

79. Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 197.

80. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

81. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 79, 86.

82. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 79.

83. L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna,” 153.

84. Yi Myŏng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 503–508.

85. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

86. *Chosŏn munhaksa*, 10: 70.

87. Kwŏn Yŏng-min, *Han'guk hyŏndae munhaksa* [History of contemporary Korean literature] (Seoul: Midŭmsa, 1993), 358–59; Yi Ki-pong, *Pukŭi munhakkwa yesulin* [North Korean literature and the artists] (Seoul: Sasayŏn, 1986), 221.

88. Sin Tong-ho, “Han'guksiesŏ nat'an an paektusa sangjing yŏn'gu” [A study of the symbolism of Paektusan in Korean poetry] (M.A. thesis, Chungang taehakkyo yesul taehakwŏn, 1999), 54.

89. Yim Yŏng-t'ae and Ko Yu-hwan, *Pukhan 50 nyŏnsa*, 1: 144.

90. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan” [Paektusan], in *Cho Ki-chŏn sŏnjip*, 1: 6.

91. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 13.

92. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 73–84.

93. A. Fadeev, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works] (Moscow: Pravda, 1987), 1: 2. Take, for instance, the episode when a peasant's melons were stolen by a careless young partisan, Morozko, in Fadeev's *Razgrom* [Devastation] (1927). The righteous commander Levinson uses the same tactic as Commander Kim—first, he raises the anger of the guerrilla collective toward the wrongdoer. The comrades berate the offender and threaten him with exile or even worse, causing the young partisan to feel deeply ashamed of himself. Then the commander and comrades show mercy and make a decision to help the peasants, and the victim of the robbery in particular, working together in the fields. See A. Fadeev, *Razgrom* [Devastation] (Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1972), 44–53.

94. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

95. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 82.

96. Names of popular Soviet partisan leaders from the Civil War (1917–1922) period.

97. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 69–71.

98. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 71–73.

99. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 140.

100. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 145–46.

101. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Paektusan,” 1: 148–49.

102. Sin Tong-ho, *Han'guksiesŏ nat'an an paektusa sangjing yŏn'gu*.

103. Without the approval of the Soviet embassy, North Korean literary officials did not dare publish this poem. (Interview with Chŏng Ryul.)

104. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

105. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, "Paektusan," 1: 10, 29.

106. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 91.

107. Soviet and North Korean scholars maintain that Cho Ki-ch'ŏn borrowed this form from Maiakovskii. See L. K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna", 167; Pak Chong-sik, "Sovremennaia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenia (formirovanie i stanovlenie sot-srealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena)" [Contemporary Korean literature after Liberation: The formation and development of socialist realism in Korean literature—the case of Yi Ki-yong] (doctoral thesis, Moscow: MGU, 1953). One may question this assumption, since the lyrical epic genre was popular in Russian and Soviet poetry apart from Maiakovskii. In any case, Korean contemporaries had little doubt about the foreign roots of the literary form of *Paektusan*.

108. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 91

109. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 96.

110. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn. "Paektusan," 1: 23–24.

111. G. Chermnin, *Obraz Stalina v sovetskoi hudozhestvennoi literature* [The image of Stalin in Soviet fiction] (Moscow: Pravda, 1950).

112. There is a very characteristic poem of Dzhambul Dzhambaev about "People's commissar Ezhov" (1937), where Ezhov, the chief of the NKVD secret police during the Great Purge of 1937–1938, is referred to as "a stern sword," an "eye of the country, which is clearer than a diamond," and so forth. (See <http://cray.onego.ru/~solvio/gostinaya/albom/literature/ezhov.html>).

113. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

114. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

115. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 86.

116. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 87.

117. For more information about "literary discussions" of Stalin's time in the USSR, see Evgenii Gromov, *Stalin: vlast' I iskusstvo* [Stalin: Power and the arts] (Moscow: Pespublica, 1998), 130–42. We encounter this same trend in North Korea, for example, during the discussion over Yi T'ae-jun's novel *Ch'ŏt ch'ŏnt'u* (First fight). Protecting the novel from the attacks of Han Hyo, another critic of the ex-KAPF faction, "a certain writer," cites the following words of Han Hyo: "Had I worked in the department of publishing affairs, this novel would never had been allowed to pass." He then proceeds to give a political interpretation of these words: "Does this mean that comrade Han Hyo is not satisfied with the management of the department? It sounds like he opposes the Party's opinion" (Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 117).

118. Sin Hyŏng-gi and O Sŏng-ho, *Pukhan munhaksa*, 29.

119. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 87

120. It is noteworthy that Kim Ch'ang-man himself was by no means pro-Soviet. In the late 1950s he would play a major role in the campaign against Soviet influence. For more details, see Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 149, 161.

121. Interview with Yurii Cho.

122. Yi Myŏn-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 762.

123. Brian Myers suggests that the prize was received in 1947 (Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature*, 51), but the Soviet sources maintain that it happened in 1948 (L. K. Kim, "Poeziia Cho Ki'ch'ŏna," 147). The later date sounds more convincing since the first publication of *Paektusan* in *Nodong sinmun* was in 1948.

124. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
125. Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 135–42.
126. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
127. Yi Myŏng-jae. *Pukhan munhak sajŏn*, 942–43.
128. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 59–60.
129. L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna,” 147.
130. Han Sŏr-ya, for instance, spent “just one day in the industrial zone of Sadong. He did not seek contacts with the workers, choosing instead to join students of the local engineering school on a class excursion to an adjacent mine.” Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 44, 54.
131. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Saengae ūi norae” [The song of life], in *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, 1: 153–360.
132. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Saengae ūi norae,” 161–63.
133. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Saengae ūi norae,” 235.
134. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 78.
135. As Pak reports, at one public meeting with Korean writers Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, in answer to a question by a member of the public, described the famous Russian novelist as a “reactionary,” which bewildered Korean writers (Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 81). However, Cho's response was no surprise since it reflected the then official Soviet view on Dostoevskii. See, for example, an article of D. Zaslavskii, “Protiv idealizatsii reaktсионnykh vzglyadov Dostoevskogo” [Against the idealization of reactionary worldview of Dostoevskii], *Kultura I zhizn'*, Dec. 20, 1947, 3–4.
136. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 83.
137. Myers, *Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature*, 20; interview with Chŏng Ryul.
138. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Hŭin pauie anjasŏ” [Sitting on the white rock], in *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, 2: 52–54.
139. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Saengae ūi norae” [The song of life], in *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, 1: 308–309.
140. Vladimir Maiakovskii, “Pis'mo tovarishchu Kostrovu o sushchnosti liubvi” [A letter to Comrade Kostrov from Paris about the essence of love], “Pis'mo Tatiane Iakovlevoi” [A letter to Tatiana Yakovleva], in *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected works] (Moscow: Pravda, 1973), 6: 150–57.
141. Yi Ch'ang-ju, “Puk-ŭi hwip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn,” 21.
142. Pak Nam-su, *Chŏkch'i 6 nyŏn pukhan mundan*, 129–30.
143. Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
144. Yi Ch'ang-ju, “Puk-ŭi hwip'aram siin Cho Ki-ch'ŏn,” 21.
145. “Cho Ki-ch'ŏn chaejomyŏng,” 4.
146. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Hwip'aram” [Whistle], in *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, 2: 69.
147. Cho Ki-ch'ŏn, “Hwip'aram,” 70.
148. () posmotret' koreiskie perevody !!! Ibid., 49; L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch'ŏna,” 154.
149. *Cho Ki-ch'ŏn sŏnjip*, 2: 47.
150. See, for instance, the poem of Mikhail Isakovskii, “Ya ne klala v pechku drov” [I did not Put Wood into the Stove] (1927). The poem is about a girl's separation from her ex-boyfriend. The girl, who initiates the parting, explains that “it is more fun to love a teacher” rather than waste time “lazily singing songs.” See Mihail Isakovskii, *Stihi, poemy i pesni* [Verses, poems and songs] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951), 1: 74–75. The protagonist of the famous song “Katyusha,” a young girl, is waiting for her boyfriend while he is serving in the

army “far away.” Not surprisingly, the boy is not a simple country lad but an advanced frontier guard, who is protecting the great Soviet land while Katyusha is “guarding their love.” See Isakovskii, *Stihi, poemy i pesni*, 217.

151. See, for instance, the article “Jjaksarang naeyong-üi ch’oedae hit’ü kok Hwip’aram” [The Great Hit “Whistle,” a Song of Unrequited Love], *Chungang ilbo*, Jan. 15, 1995, 17.

152. Mihail Isakovskii, “Na zakate hodit paren’” [At Sunset I See a Boy Near My House], in *Stihi, poemy i pesni*, 1: 215–16.

153. “Ch’oegün yuhaeng taejung kayo öttönge inna” [Which Modern Pop Songs Exist (in North Korea)?], *Taehan maeil*, Jan. 23, 1995, 13.

154. Probably the most illustrative example is the popular Soviet song *Lullaby* with words written by Isakovskii in 1940. Several generations of Russian mothers have sung it to rock their babies to sleep and still enjoy it. It is not widely known, however, that the last lines of Isakovskii’s *Lullaby* actually contain a politically wholesome message: “Sleep, my baby. Stalin will give you strength and show your way with his hand.” See Mihail Isakovskii, “Kolybel’naia” [Lullaby], in *Stihi, poemy i pesni* [Verses, poems and songs], 1: 241. Russians simply chose to forget the initial “political content” of the song and dropped the final, politically charged, lines.

155. L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch’öna,” 147.

156. N. Hohlov, Koreaia nashih dnei, 156.

157. Letters of Liia Yudolevich.

158. “Aeguk siin ko Cho Ki-ch’ön-ül ch’umohayö yugo ‘pihaenggi sanyangkkun-ül’ naemyönsö” [In memory of the late Cho Ki-ch’ön, the patriotic poet: his unpublished poem “[Enemy] plane hunters”], *Munhak yesul*, #7 (1953): 78.

159. *Cho Ki-ch’ön sönjip*, 2: 95.

160. Yi Ch’öng-gu, *Siin Cho Ki-ch’önron*, 12.

161. *Famous Korean poet*, distributed by KCNA, July 5, 2001.

162. Ko Ün “Koünüi si” [The poems of Ko Ün], *Han’guk ilbo*, Aug. 24, 1999, 33.

163. Kim Sa-ryang. “Zapiski voennogo korrespondenta” [Notes of a war correspondent], in *Koreia boretsia* [Korea is struggling] (Moscow: Isdatelstvo inostrannoi literatury, 1952), 137–50; Myers, *Han Sör-ya and North Korean Literature*, 73.

164. *Famous Korean poet*, distributed by the KCNA, July 5, 2001.

165. L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch’öna,” 147.

166. *Cho Ki-ch’ön sönjip*, vol. 2.

167. *Cho Ki-ch’ön sönjip*, 2: 137.

168. L. K. Kim, “Poeziia Cho Ki-ch’öna,” 162.

169. *Cho Ki-ch’ön sönjip*, 2: 132–33.

170. The last letter of Cho Ki-ch’ön to his wife, kept in the family archive. Copy of the letter is now in the author’s personal archive.

171. L. K. Kim, “Poesiia Cho Ki-ch’öna,” 147.

172. L. K. Kim, “Poesiia Cho Ki-ch’öna,” 147

173. Yi Chang-ju, “Puk-üi hwip’aram siin Cho Ki-ch’ön,” 21.

174. Interview with Yurii Cho.

175. Yi Ch’ang-ju, “Puk-üi hwip’aram siin Chi Ki-ch’ön,” 21.

176. Interview with Yurii Cho.

177. Interview with Yurii Cho.

178. Interview with Chöng Ryul; Yi Myöng-jae, *Pukhan munhak sajön*, 943.

179. Interview with Elena Davydova.

180. See, for instance, the anthology *Yöngyöghan Noül*, published in Pyongyang in 1998.