

한중문학과 문화대혁명의 트라우마

Korean-Chinese Literature and the Trauma of the Cultural Revolution

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국문요약

본 논문은 유머가 어떻게 새롭게 나타나는 현실을 받아 들이기 위한 수단으로 기능하는지, 그리고 유머가 어떻게 정체성과 사회 안에서 쌓인 미해결 상태의 모순들을 극복하기 위한 수단으로서 기능하는지에 대해서 연구한다. 본 연구는 한국계 중국인 작가들이 자국민들의 변화하고 있는 도덕적 잣대를 풍자하고 비평하기 위해서 뿐만 아니라 그들 자신의 인식론적 정체성을 의문시하기 위하여 유머를 사용한다고 주장한다.

Abstract

In this paper I will show how humor functioned as a means to try to come to terms with this newly emerging reality, and as a means to (briefly) overcome the unresolved contradictions that were building up within their identity and in their society. I will argue that Korean-Chinese authors used humor not only to lampoon and criticize the shifting moral compass of their fellow citizens, but to question their own epistemic identity as well.

Introduction

In the tumultuous history of the People's Republic of China, there is arguably no period that gave such a jolt to the Korean-Chinese community's sense of its lack of political agency and an attack on its identity than the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Only a few English language studies have been pursued on this period. Jeanyong Lee argues how the Cultural Revolution led to a Han Chinese takeover of Korean-Chinese political institutions, the suppression of Korean Chinese ethnic identity and the forced assimilation into Han Chinese culture. Dong Jo Shin has more recently pursued

a similar argument, by claiming how the Han Chinese takeover of power during the Cultural Revolution negatively affected the Korean-Chinese political status, institutional power, and psychological perception of their prospects in the Chinese political system. Hyun Ok Park shows how the memory of the Cultural Revolution influences the Korean-Chinese understanding of the capitalist present and how the period is understood by the Korean-Chinese community not as a Han vs. Chosonjok struggle, but as intraethnic violence instead. In this paper I would like to focus on how the Cultural Revolution has been featured in Korean-Chinese literary works from the 1980s. I argue that, unlike the assertions by the previous studies on this topic, their works show how the greatest trauma for the Korean-Chinese was not the attack they received from the Han-Chinese majority, but that they were more traumatized by the breakdown of social cohesion among the Korean-Chinese themselves, who would pursue relentless attacks on each other that led to the death and imprisonment of many of their own people, sometimes even that of the members of their own family.

The Pre-ambule to the Cultural Revolution

The year 1956 proved to be a pivotal year for the communist block. Nikita Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist speech On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences made to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 25 February 1956 led to shockwaves throughout the communist block which would shape political policies and international relations for the next decades. The Poznan protests of 1956 in Poland, the abortive student revolt in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956, the Bucharest student movement of 1956 in Romania, are just a few examples of the unrest caused by Khrushchev's speech. The speech was a major cause of the Sino-Soviet split when China started to condemn Khrushchev as a revisionist. Wary of the possibility of similar protests, the Chinese communist party sought ways to channel and suppress such anti-communist sentiments in their society.

To start of such a movement Mao Zedong started the Hundred Flowers Campaign in late 1956 that enticed the people to voice their opinions about the country's problems in or-

der to promote new forms of arts and new cultural institutions. Intellectuals, however, were wary to give too strong criticism and the issues that were therefore brought forward were relatively unimportant. By the spring of 1957, therefore, Mao urged the intellectuals that criticism was „preferred“. This set off an avalanche of critique against the government, as intellectuals began to voice their concerns without any taboo. People spoke out by putting posters around campuses, rallying in the streets, holding meetings for CPC members, and by publishing magazine articles.

The Korean-Chinese reception of the Hundred Flowers Campaign was very positive: They took the opportunity of this brief period of “free speech“ to showcase their own traditional culture openly and to work on establishing a cultural identity that was not solely based on their political identity, but on their ethnic identity as well. This can be clearly seen in a small column appearing in the literary magazine Arirang to report on the successful folk tale competition that was held in the city of Hunch'un. The participants were ravishing about the opportunity to hear old Korean tales and the organizers explained that the evening was „an excellent example by the audience to discover and hear folk tales from their own people (Minjok).¹⁾ In a later issue of Arirang writer Kim Ch'angköl even criticizes the stunted use of Chinese in some literary works he read and argued for a more pure way of writing in the Korean language.²⁾ The most obvious example of how Korean intellectuals were driven by the Hundred Flowers Campaign to establish their own ethnic identity can be seen in a report about the second folk tale competition that was held in Yongjŏng when the author exclaims that: „thanks to the Hundred Flowers Campaign the study of our people's heritage has started to thrive in Yanbian and will certainly yield positive results in the near future.³⁾

Whereas the Korean-Chinese intellectuals used the opportunity to establish their own identity, Han Chinese intellectuals started to openly criticise the communist party and even Mao Zedong himself. When this happened, Mao was quick to suppress the movement and by July 1957 he shifted to punish its participants by launching the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-1959). Many were labelled as rightists in this period, often without clear evidence, and most of the accused were intellectuals.

The Korean-Chinese intellectuals again shifted their focus accordingly, and started to crack down on perceived rightist elements in their community. Their attacks often took

the shape of targeting prominent Korean-Chinese novelists and playwrights by accusing them of transgressions against socialism, and were often tied in with accusing them of pro-Japanese activities during the colonial period. In the field of culture it was novelist Ch'oe Chŏngyŏn for his story <The Returning Soldier (Kwihwanbyŏng)>, novelist Yun Kŭmch'ŏl for his story <The Relationship between the Uncle and Nephew (Sukjilgan)>, novelist Ch'oe Hyŏnsuk's <Kim Sun'gi(Kimsun'gi)> and playwright Hwang Bongryong's <The Son of Changbaek Mountain(changbaekŭi adŭl)> who were targeted for attacks. That these attacks were mostly “created” out of thin air without any truthful base can be seen by how one of the accusers Ri Honggyu started his essay in a vicious attack against writer Kim Hakch'ŏl: “As I got the request from Arirang Magazine (to write this essay) and I was sitting at my desk, I naturally remembered the awful conversation I had several months ago with Kim Hakch'ŏl.⁴⁾

By stating that he had received a “request” from the magazine to critique someone, his critique shows clearly how it was demanded that at least some were labeled as rightists, even if there was no basis for a genuine accusation. The Anti-Rightist campaign shows very clearly how the Korean-Chinese intellectuals did not have any qualms in accusing their own colleagues.

The Cultural Revolution and its Aftermath

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), however, was of a different caliber: Korean culture was seen as counterproductive to the Cultural Revolution and a fierce attack on Korean culture was waged. Chŏng Pallyong mentions how the traditional farm dance (Nongakmu) was forbidden as the „wearing of a Qing soldier's hat and shaking one's head showed distrust in the leadership of the socialist party.⁵⁾ The Korean language and publications in Korean were also forbidden. Korean-Chinese were often accused to be spies for either of the Koreas or to have been collaborating with the Japanese during the Colonial Period. Ch'oe Samryong writes how Han-Chinese scholars had published a book in 1964 where novelist An Sugil's work was discussed as an example of the pro-Japanese nature of the Korean-Chinese in Yanbian. They did not know that An Sugil had moved to

South Korea after 1945 and was not residing in Yanbian anymore. This sort of information must have certainly been used against the chosonjok once the cultural revolution broke out. In this way the pro-Japanese literature left its legacy and had an influence on the Korean-Chinese, even if they themselves were not directly involved.

Accusations that were leveled at some one would now often lead to imprisonment or even to a death sentence. In the field of culture this led to the purge of Poets Kim Ch'öl, Im Hyowŏn, Kim Ch'angsŏk, writers Yun Kŭmch'öl, Ch'oe Hyönsuk, Hyŏn Ryongsun, Kim Hakch'öl, Kim Ch'angkŏl, and playwrights Hwang Bongryong and Pak Yŏngil among others.

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and Chinese society became more open to discuss the transgressions of the past, the Korean-Chinese intellectuals in the field of culture immediately set out to mend the infighting of the past decade in order to form a more coherent community by strengthening their ethnic identity. On a meeting held from October 20 to October 25, 1978, it was decided that all cultural organisations would be reinstated, but that they would be combined under the umbrella of one overarching association. Other efforts to alleviate the tensions were done by holding several other conferences where the victims of the attacks, for example the aforementioned Kim Ch'angkŏl and Kim Ch'öl were able to speak to their accusers how wronged they felt by them.

Scar Literature

In Korean-Chinese literature, the theme of Anti-japaneseness became the rallying cry to enhance the cultural identity of the Korean-Chinese by showing pride in Korean-Chinese achievements and their right to live and have political agency within Chinese society. Before such literature could be written, however, the first task was to come to terms with the Cultural Revolution. Right after the Cultural Revolution ended numerous stories were published that investigated the trauma of the cultural revolution period and tried to address the cause of it.

It was a new generation of Korean-Chinese writers that started to use their writings to

bear witness to the trauma that was caused in the previous decade. These writers wanted to show the impact of the Cultural Revolution on their community, but more importantly to their identity. For them, the period had shown that the seemingly tight-knit status of belonging to the same ethnicity seemingly held no meaning when it came to a coveted advancement in social status. Family members would attack each other to show their righteousness in the eyes of the state and to avert reprisals against themselves.

This literature was placed in a trend that had started in 1977 with the publication of Liu Xinwu's short story "The Class Teacher" and which would come to be known as "Scar Literature" (Sangch'ŏ munhak). In Korean-Chinese literature the following works are part of this genre: Pak Ch'ŏnsu's <I who became a Ghost> (wŏnhoni doen na, 1979), U Kwanghun's <The Lonely Grave> (oeroun mudŏm, 1979), Chŏng Seborg's <Words I would have liked to Say> (hagosip'tŏn mal, 1980), Yun Rimho's <The Fighter's Sadness> (t'usaŭi sŭlp'ŭm, 1980), Ri Wŏngil's <The Heart of the People> (paeksŏngŭi maŭm, 1981), and Ryu Wŏnmu's <The Silk Blanket>(pidanibul, 1982).

Pak Ch'ŏnsu's <I who became a Ghost> was the first story that dealt with the trauma of the Korean-Chinese and was an instant success among its readers. In the story we read the thoughts and feelings of an old civil servant who had died at the hands of his accusers and is now roaming through the house of his family as a ghost. Here he sees how his wife and children are coping with his loss. His oldest son shows incomprehension as to the reason why his father was accused when he had always stayed loyal to his communist ideals. Mother is still a faithful wife who refuses to submit to the accusations leveled at her husband, even when she is daily subjected to fierce interrogations from which she returns home late at night.

Even though the story leaves it open which ethnicity the accusers had, it does show how the Cultural Revolution was by some interpreted as a fight between the old generation of established politicians and the new generation who vied for power. The young generation are portrayed as having been led astray by the so-called Gang of Four, who in the official explanation to the causes and effects of the Cultural Revolution are used to shift the blame to these elite members of the political system.

In U Kwanghun's <A Lonely Grave> we also see how the blame is put solely on the Gang

of Four. The story follows the love between a Han-Chinese girl and a Korean-Chinese man who get separated during the Cultural Revolution. Eventually the girl dies at the hands of her father in his anger of her political disloyalty, while the Korean-Chinese man is accused by his own mother and spends three years in prison. Even though the story follows the official explanation of “making sense” of the trauma of the Cultural Revolution by putting the blame on the Gang of Four, we see here how this is used as an extra layer that was required to be added to talk about the Cultural Revolution, as we could see earlier how the attacks on prominent Korean-Chinese writers already started years before the Cultural Revolution and the literary magazines of the time show that the attacks came at the hands of fellow Korean-Chinese intellectuals. This story tries to address how it actually was the intraethnic fighting that caused the tragedies, as the Korean-Chinese mother reported her own son, while the Han-Chinese father killed his own daughter. Most of the stories that are part of the Scar literature genre choose the trope of the love between men and women or the love within the family that was distorted by politics. In order to heal the wounds of the trauma, however, the stories end on a positive note where it is love that can heal such political divisions. The stories do not try to go into detail too deeply about the causes of the Cultural Revolution, but serve the purpose of voicing some impressions and feelings to start the healing process of the traumatic experiences.

If one wants to read a direct inquiry into the causes of the Cultural Revolution it is Korean-Chinese author Pak Sönsök's works in particular that one has to turn to, as he has consistently used his writings to show the lasting effects the Cultural Revolution has had on the Korean-Chinese community, his family and himself in particular. He has stated that it his mission to not let the madness and anarchy that reigned within the Korean-Chinese community be forgotten⁶⁾ His works show how once close-knit family ties could dissolve within the span of a few months, mostly by changes in propagandistic discourse that even corrupted the daily usage of the Korean language, in accordance with the aphorism of George Orwell, who wrote, „If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.“

In Pak Sönsök's novella <Blood and Tears> (P'i-wa unmyöng, 1985) we see an example of this when the main character visits a Korean-Chinese engagement party:

The people were all singing from the Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung. They were all songs about „Taking the decision to prepare for sacrifice“ or „who among us is friend and who is foe?“ If they were a bit different it was the like of „when we kill the enemy with knives...“ Since all other songs were forbidden there was nothing to sing. This was supposed to be an engagement party and a place for entertainment, but the atmosphere was murderous without any laughter. Somebody sang our folk song „Balloon Flower“, but changed the lyrics by calling the white-colored balloon flower the „red-colored balloon flower.“ So finally there was some laughter. Pukman stopped the song as if a terrible thing had happened and reprimanded the singer severely:

“Be careful. You are not allowed to sing outdated songs. One should raise one’s political awareness. Never forget the class strife.”

The person who had sang the folk song protested:

“That is why I sang it was a red-colored balloon flower. The color red signifies the revolution, doesn’t it? The brick walls in the city center have also all been painted red for that reason.”

“A red-colored balloon flower does not exist!”

“Why not? If you paint it it will!”

In this scene we see how Pak criticizes the dumbing down of the Korean language for the sake of showing to others how politically correct one is. Even though reality does not have a red balloon flower, it is still “created” in an effort to show once allegiance to the state. Pak shows in his work how this deliberate weakening of expression of ideas could even lead to the erasure of one’s ethnic identity as folk songs were seen as politically suspect. Pak’s novella is an example of how language during the Cultural Revolution was being used as an empty signifier that could always shape a new „meaning“ to the one’s in power. Korean-Chinese poet Kim Munhŭi was also keenly aware of how people desperately tried to show their correctness, as can be seen in his satirical poem <To become a Leftist> (chwap’aga doegi wihay ǒ, 1979):

When going to the cinema he sits on the left

When sitting in the bus: again on the left

In the meeting room

Of course he sits on the seat on the left!

In order to become a „leftist

All done so that one can attain that „iron rice bowl...⁷⁾

Just like Pak Sonsök, Chinese novelist Murong Xuecun has also voiced the opinion that it was the efforts during the Cultural Revolution of the Communist Party to corrupt the Chinese Language that created the circumstances for the chaos that happened: “The Communist Party’s dumbing down of our language was a deliberate effort to debase public discourse. The Cultural Revolution took this to an extreme: Intellectual discussion, along with reason, were thrown out the window. In this atmosphere, words lose real meaning. The party can then use words to obfuscate and lie.⁸⁾ It is interesting to see how Korean-Chinese writers already came to this conclusion and were not afraid to voice their opinion in the early 1980s and it shows how their literature warrants more scholarly attention.

NOTE

1) Arirang 1957.4

2) Arirang 1957.7

3) Arirang 1957.8

4) Arirang 1957.11

5) Yŏnbyŏn Munye 1978.4, p. 54.

6) Killim Shinmun 17 July 2010. http://www.jlxcwb.com.cn/area/content/2010-07/17/content_12508.htm (last visited on October 22, 2020).

7) Yŏnbyŏn Munye 1979.6, p. 48.

8) New York Times 27 May 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/opinion/murong-xuecun-corrupting-the-chinese-language.html> (last visited on October 22, 2020).