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# The Border of Division and Politics of Encounter:
## *A Study of Hwang Sok-yong's Visit to North Korea in 1980s*

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**Abstract**

*This paper analyzes Hwang Sok-yong's visit to North Korea in 1989 and his associated travelogue to examine the popular view of South Korean society toward North Korea in the 1980s as well as changes in inter-Korean relations. The novelist Hwang became the first South Korean writer to visit the North since the division of Korea. His unauthorized visit to North Korea was a culturally and historically significant event that showed how the new détente created in the 1980s was projected on the Korean Peninsula in a transformative way. Additionally, his travel journal contributed to changing the way South Koreans perceived the cultural signs of North Korea and how they pictured their northern counterpart. Hwang's travelogue warrants serious research in that it brought a new perspective to the discourse on North Korea through the previously unimaginable concept of "visiting North Korea" and laid a foundation upon which the genealogy of the North Korea travelogue could be rewritten after the lengthy hiatus following the establishment of our independent government in 1948. This paper aims to delve into the case of Hwang to illustrate how the South's perception of the border between the two Koreas was being reconstructed based on the politics of encounter and the imagination of actual contact.*

**Keywords:** South Korea, North Korea travelogue, Cold War, anti-communism, new détente, the writer, Hwang Sok-yong

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## Introduction: The Year 1989, A Starting Point of Transition

In 1989, as Olympic fever waned, a shocking incident occurred, turning Korean society upside down. This was a famous writer's visit to North Korea. At the time, one writer commented that nobody had imagined he would be the first South Korean writer to step on North Korean soil.[1] The stated purpose of his visit was to end the tragedy of national division and establish inter-Korean relations in literature and art.[2]

Amidst a dynamically changing situation on the Korean Peninsula, Hwang Sok-yong became "the first South Korean writer to visit North Korea since the nation's division" (CRH 1993, 173).[3] Whereas Choi In-hun traveled to North Korea only through the person of his protagonist in his 1960 novel *Gwangjang* (The Square), Hwang went beyond the literary world and took the bold step of visiting North Korea in reality. He then narrated his experience in North Korea as a North Korea travelogue, *Saram-i salgo isseonne* (There Lived People), the first of its kind since the provisional government established in the wake of Korea's liberation in 1945. Instead of seeking freedom to write in the South, he transgressed the rules and norms that had denied access to the North and stepped into that "different world" (Choi 1960, 239) called North Korea. Hwang went to North Korea by crossing this "unrealistic fantasy"-like border that had been cruelly declared as "the line that can never be crossed" (H. Kim 1993, 376).

For decades after the division of Korea, it was unimaginable for a South Korean to visit North Korea and return home. Through Korea's liberation and the Korean War, North Korea gradually became a powerful symbol of the *enemy*, rather than *us*. Furthermore, an upsurge in anti-communism permeated our society, outrightly rejecting or placing a taboo on whatever represented, literally or figuratively, North Korea. Just as North Korea

1. "1wol jungsun buteo bangbuk yaegi" (Stories about North Korea Visit Circulating since Mid-January), *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 28, 1989.
2. "Nambuk munye gyoryu iruryeo bangbuk" (Visit to North Korea to Facilitate Inter-Korean Relations in Literature and Art), *Hankyoreh*, April 11, 1989.
3. This was originally published as an interview, "Nambuk dokjarobuteo hamkke sarangbatgo sipda" (I Want to be Loved by the Readers of the Two Koreas), in *Sindonga*, June 1989.

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conveniently used the term *reactionaries* as form of stigmatization, *pro-communist* had become an ostensibly hostile word unacceptable in the South.[4] In particular, under the military regime that took power through a coup d'état on May 16, 1961, the nation witnessed a series of espionage cases (East Berlin incident of 1967 and People's Revolutionary Party incident of 1968), which explicitly reaffirmed the fact that the door to North Korea was shut tight to South Koreans. These cases reminded people that anyone visiting North Korea could be classified as a dissident at any time and that their visit might be used as a critical legal basis for prosecution, even for capital punishment, significantly shifting people's perceptions of North Korea. Contrary to the trend of globalization, North Korea remained the only place that South Korean people could not visit.

Anti-communist ideology that functioned as a form of social discipline had an immense effect on writers' creative activities. Even the domains of fiction and imagination were not seen as safe havens. Starting in 1964, a new legal means of control, the "literary trial," began to restrict not only freedom of expression, creation, and the press, but also writers' lives. We can easily picture the struggles of the writers who had no alternative but to internalize the complex mechanism of self-censorship while constantly thinking about how far they might go in defying it in pursuit of their art. Meanwhile, as its name suggests, the "writers spy group" incident of 1974 reflects the harsh reality Korean writers faced. The authorities kept a close eye on what they wrote and where they published. Going one step further, the government even kept track of the places they visited and people they met. The above incident conveyed the message that simple everyday activities could constitute grounds for judicial judgment.

Given such a social and political climate, it was quite unusual for Hwang to attempt to visit North Korea in the 1980s, when anti-communist ideology continued to wield its power as a primary means of social control. In reality, not in imagination, the novelist Hwang vividly depicted what he had experienced in North Korea, which explained the changing times in the 1980s in the most dramatic manner. While "an era for new identity

4. "Jugeum-ui sewol" (Years of Death), *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 5, 1962.

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formation" opened during the 1980s via "the great awakening," Hwang's visit to North Korea proved that the *awakening*, which changed the course of history, and the dynamics of inter-Korean relations, was intimately connected to the perception of the absolute other of North Korea (J. Kim 1999, 20).

Recognizing the range of implications outlined above, this paper examines visits to North Korea by several figures, including Hwang, in the 1980s and explores the political and literary meanings of several North Korea travelogues that appeared during this time. In other words, this paper focuses on the need to reinterpret Hwang's visit to North Korea and his travelogue alongside the great waves of change as a single cultural and historical event.

Hwang began his career as a writer when his *Ipseok bugeun* (In the Vicinity of the Menhir) won a prize in a literary contest for new writers organized by the journal *Sasanggye* 思想界 in 1962. His unique style began taking shape in earnest when he published *Gaekji* (Strange Land) in 1971. In the 1970s, he was at the forefront of engagement literature in Korean literary fields while writing novels with strong realistic characters and striving to look at the world from the perspective of the general public. He was also one of the writers who took a keen interest in the division of Korea. His concern about "the scars of war and the ghosts of the Cold War that remained on the Korean Peninsula" (Hwang 2001, 262) served as a central literary theme in many of his works. Not only did he write novels that explored the historical aspect of inter-Korean relations and incorporated the effects of a Cold War ideology on people's lives, but he also delivered his messages through social activities.

Despite extensive endeavors to shed light on the works of Hwang, his visit to North Korea in 1989, one of the most critical and meaningful periods of his life, has not been the focus of academic research. His North Korea travelogue helps one understand his other creative work and the nature of his social activities. In addition, the travelogue is significant in that it facilitates our understanding of how his novel *Sonnim* (The Guest 2001), which deals with the Sincheon massacre, and his memoir *Suin 1 & 2* (The Prisoner 1 & 2 2017), a reconstruction of episodes about his visit to North

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Korea, came into being. In a broader sense, this research is necessary for identifying the causal relationship between Korean writers and literature and the flow of social reforms in the 1980s.

Consequently, this paper analyzes Hwang's North Korea visit and the publication of his North Korea travelogue in the 1980s to examine how the perception of the border between the two Koreas was being reconstructed in Korean society at the time based on the politics of encounter and the imagination of *actual contact*. Part two of this article outlines the background to and objectives of his visit and analyzes its historical meaning. Part three then delves into Hwang's North Korea travelogue to discuss what made him write the travelogue and the literary characteristics and social meanings of the text.

These analyses and discussions will ultimately enable us to answer the following questions. Did North Korea show its *real face* to the writer who had entered North Korea to personally witness its reality? What was the *truth* he faced upon removing the curtain that had surrounded the *unknown North Korea* (CRH 1993, 17)?

## Visit to North Korea, Exile, Imprisonment: Pure Nature of Politics without Purpose

Before and after the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the government found it necessary to change its stance toward North Korea. Furthermore, with increasing economic cooperation with communist countries, the Korean Peninsula experienced a major turning point. Gorbachev, who was appointed general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, launched perestroika in 1986, which portended obvious changes in the socialist block, a strong signal of the coming post-Cold War era. Summit meetings between the US and the Soviet Union led the world towards a new détente, which in turn changed the international environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula.

At the time, Korea witnessed a drastically changing situation both at home and abroad. The June 29 Declaration of 1987 amended the

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Constitution to provide for the direct election of the president, transforming the political landscape and triggering new developments in inter-Korean relations.[5] The July 7 Declaration (Special Presidential Declaration for National Self-esteem, Unification and Prosperity) announced just before the Olympics was an official expression of the Korean government's willingness to leverage its political and economic confidence to break from its heretofore rigid attitude toward North Korea, represented by the notion of destroying communism for unification, and to seek improvement in its ties with socialist states, including North Korea, to ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. It presented a six-point action plan that included inter-Korean exchanges and trade, inter-Korean travel by overseas compatriots, and separate family reunions, ultimately reestablishing inter-Korean relations.

Capitalizing on the improving social atmosphere toward North Korea and heightened enthusiasm for unification inspired by the July 7 Declaration, culture and art communities started to actively pursue cultural exchanges between South and North. At the head of this pursuit was the Association of Authors of National Literature (Minjok munhak jakgahoeui),[6] which proposed cultural exchanges between the two Koreas for the first time since the division of the Korean Peninsula. Many literary groups followed suit, highlighting the need to promote cultural exchange.[7] On July 2, 1988, marking the 16th anniversary of the July 4 South-North Joint Communique (July 4, 1972), the first of its kind regarding unification,

5. President Roh Tae-woo's administration announced "Unification Plans" on September 11, 1989. These plans served as the basis for the unification policies of subsequent administrations. On August 15, 1994, the Kim Young-sam administration, while inheriting Roh's "Unification Plans" and reflecting inter-Korean relations at the time, announced revised "Unification Plans." The unification plans of the current Moon administration follow in this genealogy.
6. The Association of Authors of National Literature was established on September 17, 1987. It derived from an expansion and reorganization of the existing Council of Authors for the Practice of Freedom (Jayu silcheon munin hyeopuihoe). Kim Jeong-han was elected as president and Ko Un and Baek Nak-chung as vice presidents, with many progressive writers participating in the association.
7. "Nambuk munin mannam irwojilkka" (Inter-Korean Writers' Meeting to Happen?), *Dong-A Ilbo*, March 6, 1989.

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the Association of Authors of National Literature issued a statement emphasizing that writers from South and North should engage in literary exchanges as the same Koreans and writers. On February 17, 1989, North Korea sent an official letter in the name of the Central Committee of the Chosun Writers Alliance (Joseon jakga dongmaeng jungang wiwonhoe), giving their consent to holding the inter-Korean writers' meeting. The Association of Authors of National Literature immediately welcomed North Korea's affirmative response and sought assistance from the Korean government while organizing an arrangement committee and making every effort to actualize the meeting.

At the time, Hwang was a member of this arrangement committee composed of writers, critics, and scholars. Several years earlier, Hwang had traveled to Europe, the United States, and Japan to build an extensive personal network at home and abroad with the help of those involved in democratic unification movements, as well as foreign political and cultural figures. These human resources were utilized to create a channel through which he could communicate with the North. In 1989, Hwang realized that his efforts left something to be desired and decided to travel to North Korea himself. With the possibility of the Korean government allowing the inter-Korean writers' meeting to be held at a private level a remote one, Hwang reasoned that someone had to shoulder the responsibility of directly negotiating with their counterparts in North Korea. He looked upon himself as the right special envoy, and this decision was testimony to his extraordinariness and unrivaled courage.

Of course, we should keep in mind that his decision coincided with the rapid spread of domestic unification movements into universities, opposition groups, and religious communities. In the early 1980s, overseas Koreans were allowed to visit North Korea, and North Korea journals were translated and introduced to Korea. The publication of North Korea travelogues by Korean scholars residing in the US served as a momentum for the entrance of other North Korea-related books onto the market, even leading to texts originally published in North Korea, such as the selected writings of Kim Il-sung (Lim 2015a, 92). This means that people saw the ideological Maginot Line of publication collapsing (Lee 1989, 7). These

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developments were significant enough to inspire Hwang.

On February 28, 1989, when the flow of political and cultural upheaval culminated, Hwang left Korea for Japan under the pretext of attending a book launch party for the Japanese edition of his novel *Mugi-ui geuneul* (The Shadow of Arms; 1983–1987). Arriving in Japan, he sought ways to deliver his intentions to North Korea. While meeting a wide array of people to gauge the possibility of his visit, he was told by Jung Kyung-mo in Shibuya that he was preparing for the visit of Moon Ik-hwan, a South Korean pastor, to North Korea. Not only culture and art circles, but also other sectors were assessing the possibility of North Korea visits.[8] This situation surprised and embarrassed Hwang because he knew that any linkage of his visit to Moon could have grave repercussions. Moon's visit to North Korea as the head of the National Democratic Movement Federation (established on January 21, 1989) could be viewed as having political purposes. Therefore, it was imperative for Hwang to distance himself from Moon, while ensuring that his intention to visit North Korea would have as its sole purpose that of "cultural exchanges" and would be something "popular" that advocated more flexible and broader communication (Hwang 2017a, 217). He thought that this motive would protect him, to a large degree, from the application of the National Security Law.

Invitation

> In response to your request to visit Pyongyang, your parents' hometown, and to meet your relatives and our cultural artists, we are delighted to welcome your visit.
>
> March 12, 1989
> Federation of Chosun Literature and Arts
> Central Committee (CRH, 1993, 395)

8. In 1989, not only Hwang Sok-yong but also Moon Ik-hwan and Lim Soo-kyung visited North Korea and returned home. Lim Soo-kyung participated in the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students held in Pyongyang as a representative of the National Council of Student Representatives in the South.

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The invitation sent by North Korea merits our attention with its significant connotations. First, it clearly states that the purpose of Hwang's visit is to see his hometown and meet cultural artists in the North. Another point that attracts our attention is the host. This invitation was issued in the name of the Central Committee of the Federation of Chosun Literature and Arts (Joseon munhak yesul chongdongmaeng jungang wiwonhoe). Whereas Moon Ik-hwan was officially invited by North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland, Hwang wanted an invitation from an organization far more flexible and far less tinged with politics to fit the aim of his visit. The two facts explicitly mentioned in the invitation—namely, the purpose of his visit and the host—tell us that Hwang's visit to North Korea had nothing to do with any political ideology-driven motive. This reflects how the writer desperately needed an invitation that could free him from accusations of political action. He left for North Korea before Moon with this unguaranteed belief.

One interesting thing is that intimations of his circumstances are found in his *Saram-i salgo isseonne* (There Lived People). His *Suin 1*,[9] copies exactly the first page of the text of *Saram-i salgo isseonne*, which was also published in the June 1989 issue of *Sindonga* magazine. However, there is one difference between these two texts, and the difference revolves around Moon's visit to North Korea, as follows:

> The guide said to Hwang, "We have prepared a small event since your visit is an informal one. I hope you understand." (CRH 1993, 23)

> The guide said to Hwang, "Your visit is off the record until Pastor Moon's party arrives. I hope you understand [why this is] a small event." (Hwang 2017a, 180)

Both these passages depict the day Hwang arrived at Pyongyang's Sunan International Airport, and the subtle difference between them is intriguing.

9. *Suin* (The Prisoner), published in 2017, is composed of two volumes, in which Hwang Sok-yong describes, in memoir style, the period from his coming to the South in 1947 to his imprisonment following his visit to North Korea.

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Hwang flew a civil aircraft of the People's Republic of China to Beijing on Saturday, March 18, 1989. He met a guide from North Korea at the airport on the day he arrived in Beijing. Because the plane from Beijing to Pyongyang was on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays, he stayed in Beijing for two days and then went to North Korea on Air Koryo. The plane landed at Sunan International Airport where he was welcomed by many figures, despite the informality of visit. Hwang exchanged greetings with several artists, including Baek In-joon, chairperson of the Federation of Chosun Literature and Arts, Choi Young-hwa, vice-chairperson of the same federation, and Choi Seung-chul, a novelist, before heading to his lodgings.

We need to examine the above two passages with the relevant context in mind. These sentences demonstrate that, in 1989, Hwang simply stated the welcoming party on the day of his arrival was a reflection of the informal nature of his visit. However, in his memoir published many years later, he provides the reason his visit was informal. As demonstrated by the above quotes, Moon Ik-hwan does not appear in what Hwang wrote immediately after his visit. However, in his memoir published in 2017, 28 years after the event, "until Pastor Moon's party arrives" is added. In the process of copying a section of his previously published *Saram-i salgo isseonne* and pasting it onto his memoir, he freed the parenthetical comment that had been intentionally bottled up or suppressed. This underscores something that continued to be left blank by the writer, who spoke out actively regarding his visit to North Korea in 1989.

This case is also significant because it helps us focus on the concept of "visiting North Korea" (*bangbuk*). Going north over the border was called "defection," and those who went to North Korea and returned to the South were branded as "spies" when their actions were uncovered. Since the 1950s, the experience of family separation, loss of hometown, and refuge has played a pivotal role in instilling anti-communism into the minds of people in the South. Anyone with a history of "defection to North Korea" or "defection to the South" was suspected of being unreliable in the respective country, which meant their lives were at the mercy of their governments (K. Kim 2010, 65–66). Defection to North Korea was interpreted as an anti-state crime and unforgivable national treachery.

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Hwang utilized the concept of "visiting North Korea" to justify his actions, which was an unprecedented political attempt to assume the authority to characterize his actions before the nation's judgment regarding the nature of his act. Hwang referred to the act of going north over the border, or his unauthorized visit to North Korea, as "visiting North Korea." He actively generated the meaning of his actions, plunging himself into the struggle for hegemony over the discourse. This attempt can be signified as a kind of "counter-hegemonic practice" in that it disrupts the discourse system of power.[10] It also activated many political implications inherent in the act of visiting North Korea, such as presenting North Korea as an equal partner, acknowledging its system, and reconstructing the contexts surrounding unification discourses. In addition, the presence of Hwang and others who subsequently visited North Korea developed a new situation wherein "South Korean civilians emerged as one of the integral axes of inter-Korea relations" or "another agent had been added to inter-Korean relations," which is consequential" (M. Kim 2016, 170).

It is also worth noting that, despite the political implications inherent in the very act of "visiting North Korea," Hwang adamantly placed a heavy weight on the "non-political" aspect of his action. This can translate into the inevitable efforts made by a writer from an anti-communist country to preserve himself.

> Leaving Tokyo, I made myself clear on my visit to North Korea out of fear that my action might be misunderstood or used politically by either side. […] I plan to visit North Korea to live up to the desire of the South Korean people for unification. I am not a politician, nor do I follow any specific ideology. I am just a writer of divided Korea. Therefore, as a South Korean writer living in an era of division, I have an intense aspiration for unification and I have a duty to take action toward it. […] My visit to North Korea is a first step in crossing the abyss of distrust and enmity that has separated the two Koreas ever further over the past half century and in setting stepping stones toward oneness. (CRH 1993, 32–33)

10. All hegemonic orders can be challenged by counter-hegemonic practices that attempt to dislocate the existing order and create other forms of hegemony (Mouffe 2020, 206–207).

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As this demonstrates, Hwang made various efforts so that his visit to North Korea would not be reduced to the classic sense of treason against the state. The above passage illustrates this point well. Hwang states it was natural for a South Korean writer living in an era of division to aspire for unification, adding that he decided to visit North Korea to contribute to fulfilling the people's desire for unification. While underscoring that they stood on the threshold of the future at the cusp of the new century, he also emphasized the significance of his visit as a meaningful "practice" (*silcheon*) as a step toward achieving peace and the unification of the Korean Peninsula (CRH 1993, 32–33). Hwang predicted that his visit would pave the way for exchanges of artists, helping to eradicate biased mutual perceptions in both countries and to lay the emotional foundation for unification.

In fact, the word "practice" as used by Hwang contains a political message, because it has a definite purpose and is the product of his will to change the existing unification discourse. Nonetheless, through his writings and interviews, he strove to imprint people's minds with his identity as an artist and to accentuate his *purity*. According to him, his visit to North Korea was motivated purely by good intentions without any political motive. By this he was trying to create two effects. One was to reduce the political elements implied by his visit, and the other was to paradoxically give prominence to the special meaning of his visit to North Korea.

However, what he did during that time did not correspond at all with the *pure purpose* and *good intentions*. Through the 1980s, Hwang steadily strengthened his identity not just as an artist but as a socio-political activist. He contributed to the writing of *Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age* (*Jugeum-eul neomeo, sidae-ui eodum-eul neomeo*), the first systematic written account of the 1985 Gwangju Democratization Movement, thus demonstrating his political stance. Moreover, taking advantage of his participation in the event hosted by the city of Berlin in 1985, he traveled in Japan, Europe, and North America for a year, meeting a diverse array of people. During this period, he happened to "discover North Korea," whose trace had to that point never existed in his mind (CRH 1993, 227).[11] In 1988,

11. "Naneun jakga-ui yangsim-euro i jari-e seotda" (I Stood Here with the Conscience of the

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drawing on a growing national sentiment toward unification, he actively engaged in promoting inter-Korean writers' meetings and literary and artistic exchanges.

Among many activities and events, the one that had a major impact on his decision to visit North Korea was the International PEN Congress held in Seoul in 1988. In his capacity as a member of the Association of Authors of National Literature, he interacted with writers from all over the world. Susan Sontag, president of PEN America, came to Korea, and she was particularly interested in the nation's movement for the release of imprisoned writers. She even sent a letter of protest to the Korean government calling for the release of the poet Kim Nam-ju, who was incarcerated in early 1988 for his involvement in the incident of the Preparatory Committee for the Liberation Front of South Korea.[12] Hwang worked alongside foreign writers, including Susan Sontag, and domestic progressive writers such as Ko Un and Baek Nak-chung for the release of imprisoned Korean writers. These figures made all-out efforts to pass a "Resolution Urging the Release of Imprisoned Korean Writers" (Hanguk gusok munin seokbang chokgu gyeoruian) at the International PEN Congress, but it failed to pass due to opposition.

In this way, Hwang's activities in the 1980s demonstrated that he was more of a political figure. It is ironic that he utilized *purity* as a key strategic word when explaining his visit to North Korea. He believed in the special effect he might have as a writer in relation to his visit to North Korea, unlike politicians or government officials. More specifically, he wanted to share his belief with readers of his North Korea travelogue. In *Saram-i salgo isseonne*, Hwang presents himself as a person who perceives North Korea not from a pragmatic or biased perspective, but from the viewpoint of the general public (CRH 1993, 16), and regards himself as a being not lopsided toward a specific ideology. He portrays himself as a member of a so-called "cultural

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Writer), an interview originally published in *Sahoe pyeongnon* (Social Critique), September 1991.

12. "Mi pen keulleop siin Kim Namju-ssi seokbang chokgu" (American PEN Club Urges Release of Poet Kim Nam-ju), *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 28, 1988.

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mission."

However, Hwang's notion that his visit to North Korea should be free of political purpose is self-contradicting. His visit may have had nothing to do with politics, as he put it, but the action of visiting North Korea itself, the way of signifying the action, and further, the effect the action-related discourses provoked were highly political. If he actually believed that literature could transcend politics, wouldn't this not only be highly romantic, but ultimately political? Propositions like "artists are beyond ideology" or "artists should not be shackled by politics" stimulate the vision that art can stand on its own, separated from ideology and politics. Hwang's emphasis on purely artistic activities, free from ideology and system, rests on such a notion.

This imagining is in itself fictional, but this does not mean it is ineffective. Hwang's visit to North Korea gained him more fame in Korea, and despite his being an offender, gave him greater symbolic status than he had previously enjoyed. Issues related to Hwang accounted for the lion's share of items published in leading Korean media published in 1989. At the time, all influential newspapers, including the *Chosun ilbo*, *Dong-a ilbo*, *Kyunghyang sinmun*, and the newcomer *Hankyoreh*, covered Hwang's visit to North Korea extensively. In this regard, his strategy to showcase the opposition between pure purpose and political motivation proved somewhat effective. He tried to leverage the apolitical appearance and innocence required of artists by the general public to justify his activities in North Korea (Spurr 1993, 9). Unfortunately for Hwang, the government was not so naive as to buy his story.

The South Korean government made the first move to inform the nation that Hwang's visit to North Korea was extremely political. Although Korean society had experienced drastic changes thanks to democratization movements, from the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement to the democratic protests of June 10, 1987, the nation still had a long way to go before it would allow its citizens to travel to North Korea. The visits of Hwang and Moon to North Korea were immediately ruled as clear violations of the law, and relevant measures were taken in a timely manner: a decision to conduct an arrest investigation by the Ministry of Justice and prosecutors

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concerned, an agreement on legal sanctions among the Ministry of Defense and military chiefs, an investigation into opposition groups, including the National Democratic Movement Federation, and the inauguration of the Public Security Joint Investigation Headquarters.[13] Even before Hwang returned home, the Public Security Joint Investigation Headquarters made several public announcements that it would arrest Hwang under Article 6-1 (infiltration, escape) and Article 8 (meeting, communication) of the National Security Law.[14] In the end, when his expectation that people would believe in his pure and good intentions was betrayed, Hwang was doomed to take on the identity of political offender.[15]

This time, too, Hwang approached his situation politically. If he had returned to Korea immediately, he would have been imprisoned as an offender and may have suffered the disgrace of being labeled a spy. His decision to delay his return was a meaningful strategy considering previous cases. At the time of the 1967 East Berlin incident, the Korean government had tried to lure two artists (Yun I-sang and Lee Ung-no), then residing overseas, back to Korea to incarcerate them. When asked by the government about the reason for their visit to North Korea, they strongly presented their

13. "Nuga jayu minjujuui-reul pagoehaneunga" (Who Destroys Liberal Democracy?), *Hankyoreh*, April 9, 1989.
14. Hwang Sok-yong left Korea after having arranged a safeguard measure. He had a series of discussions on the possibility of his visit to North Korea with some politicians and government officials to use the "false charges" (*bulgojijoe*) to his advantage. False charges had been frequently brought up whenever there was an espionage case in South Korean society. Anyone who had known of Hwang's plan to visit North Korea could be punished under the National Security Law if discovered. In fact, after Hwang's visit to North Korea, the Korean government began its investigation into those who had contacted Hwang. At the time, there was some controversy over the application of "false charges" against them.
15. In Korea, political offenders are different from other criminal offenders, but there is much gray area between them. The criteria determining political offenders based on their actions (thoughts) were quite flexible. The terms referring to political offenders included "anti-government offender" (*banjeongbu sabeom*), "anti-state offender" (*bangukga sabeom*), "thought criminal" (*sasangbeom*), and "rebel" (*banyeokja*). In practice, the ruling power at the time determined whether someone was a political offender. All the above terms were evenly applied to political offenders associated with North Korea (D. Kim 2009, 155–156).

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pure intentions with no strings attached.[16] However, having no ulterior motive was insufficient to persuade the authorities of their innocence.

Beginning with the 1967 East Berlin incident, espionage cases in Korea were widely covered in the media, with some of them sensational enough to make headlines. South Koreans who followed the cases accompanied the defendants into an "imaginary theater of punishment" (*Burchell* et al. 2014, 352). Although Yun I-sang and Lee Ung-no were released when the President Park yielded to both domestic and international pressure and exercised his right to pardon, they were unable to have their identity and honor restored and were eventually deported from Korea.[17] Little had changed over the intervening twenty years, and Hwang was destined to stand in the court of an anti-communist government being treated as a spy (CRH 1993, 399). [18] To postpone this encounter with fate (though he rejected this expression), he became "an exiled writer,"[19] choosing to remain abroad.

Up until then, the Korean government had denied prisoners the right to create. As Yun I-sang, Lee Ung-no, and Hwang confessed, the pain that artists suffer as prisoners goes far beyond physical restrictions and confinement. For artists, being unable to engage in creative activity was the most unbearable punishment. The prison system in Korea at the time, through its rigid regulations and censorship, strictly limited the incarcerated person's freedom to read and write (J. Choi 2011, 203–204). By the 1980s, the situation had not improved much. Under such circumstances, instead of returning to Korea, where the right to create was not guaranteed for

16. The reasons behind Composer Yun I-sang's visit to North Korea include a longing to see old friends, his curiosity about the changes in North Korea after division, and his artistic desire to appreciate the *Gangseo gobun sasindo* (Gangseo tomb murals) in person (Lee 1998, 224).
17. For more on the East Berlin incident, refer to Lim (2015b, 108–110).
18. "Ilbon-eul tteonamyeonseo (1989-nyeon 5-wol 19-il donggyeong-eseo)" (Leaving Japan [from Tokyo on May 19, 1989]), in CRH (1993).
19. In an interview in *Sahoe pyeongnon* (Social Critique) in October 1991, Hwang Sok-yong objected to being called an "exiled writer" because accepting the status of an exiled writer meant acknowledging the National Security Law and admitting his crime (CRH 1993, 244).

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prisoners, Hwang chose to become a writer in exile to buy time to create his objective North Korea travelogue (CRH 1993, 402).[20]

Contrary to initial expectations, Hwang's visit to North Korea became an extended journey. After a lengthy detour (South Korea → Japan → China → North Korea → China → Japan → Germany → United States → South Korea), Hwang finally set foot back in South Korea in 1993.[21] His exile, spanning four years, also provided him the opportunity to write up his North Korea travelogue. While his exile was the best choice for him to preserve his right to speak, his travelogue of North Korea written overseas and sent to Korea served as the optimal resource in his struggle with authorities for hegemony over the discourse. Not until he completed the travelogue and its commentaries that could affect the direction of public opinion did Hwang return to Korea. On April 27, 1993, he arrived at Gimpo International Airport, where he was arrested for violating the National Security Law to become the prisoner of his memoir's title. He was sentenced to five years in prison.[22] This helped Hwang gain the status of political writer while enjoying a high reputation in both the national history of literature and the history of the unification movement.[23]

## Discovery of People and Daily Life: Performativity of the Record on North Korea

As explained in the preceding section, following his visit to North Korea, Hwang stayed abroad for several years. He left North Korea and arrived in

20. "Ilbon-eul tteonamyeonseo (1989-nyeon 5-wol 19-il donggyeong-eseo)" (Leaving Japan [from Tokyo on May 19, 1989]), in CRH (1993).
21. While in Germany, Hwang Sok-yong stayed at the home of Yun I-sang. When the Berlin Wall collapsed on November 9, 1989, Hwang was writing his travelogue of North Korea at a place provided by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).
22. At the final trial held on September 27, 1994, Hwang Sok-yong was sentenced to seven years in prison and seven years of suspension.
23. "Jakga Hwang Seogyeong-eul gidarimyeo" (Waiting for the Writer Hwang Sok-yong), in CRH (1993).

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Beijing on April 24, 1989, and then entered Japan on April 27. He then went to Germany, where he composed a detailed written record of his experiences in North Korea. He published his writing through various media in Korea and gladly accepted their interview requests. In foreign countries, he enthusiastically continued to engage in locutionary acts. He said that these acts were designed to inform the public on the objective facts about North Korea, but at the same time, he had in mind saving his life. The act of writing also functioned as a means to participate, as the subject of utterance, in the process of "his visit to North Korea" developing into an incident and, further, for him to proactively lead the situation. In previous cases, central figures involved in North Korea-related incidents were often excluded or deprived of the opportunity to speak out as those incidents progressed. Unlike these cases, Hwang preserved his right to speak and steadily gained hegemony over the discourse.

If so, what was it that he tried to write while assuming the risk of provisional exile status? The style and content of his North Korea travelogue are of help in contemplating the potential implications of his visit to North Korea and the narrative of his experience. The book, *Saram-i salgo isseonne* (There Lived People), was published in 1993 and is composed of a preface, main body, and appendix. The preface comprises three pieces of writing. The first is a recommendation of the book by the Committee for the Release of Hwang Sok-yong. On August 5, 1993, the Committee for the Release of Hwang Sok-yong was established with Shin Kyeong-nim, Yeom Mu-yung, Kang Yeon-kyun, and Kim Won-il as co-chairs and about 450 people from all walks of life named as members. Contrary to the situation in 1988, the poet Kim Nam-ju became the head of the working committee and worked for the release of Hwang. The second piece is a letter Hwang wrote in prison, outlining the significance of his visit to North Korea. The last piece of the preface is a message for the International PEN Congress that was to be held in Spain in September 1993, and which was read to all PEN club members throughout the world.

The body of the book consists of three chapters, with each chapter is subdivided into sub-chapters. The contents of each sub-chapter are from Hwang's writings published in various media from 1989 to 1992. However,

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these writings were subject to censorship when they were published. Targeting the publishing companies that planned to publish Hwang's North Korea travelogue, the Korean government conducted searches and seizures and prosecuted persons in charge. On November 23, 1989, Lee Si-young, editor-in-chief of *Changjak-gwa bipyeong* (Creation and Criticism), was led away by government agents on his way home. Two days later, an arrest warrant was issued to him for violating the National Security Law on the grounds of "production and sale of enemy-benefitting expressions, meetings, and communication, and the provision of convenience." This was because a manuscript of Hwang had been published in the winter 1989 issue of *Changjak-gwa bipyeong*. This case clearly shows that the censorship and control of the Korean government remained firm and steadfast, even as late as 1989.[24]

The appendix contains a total of eight reference documents, including ones related to his visit to North Korea, his trials, and movements for his release. These materials are useful for the readers to develop insights into the full picture surrounding Hwang's visit to North Korea.

The overall structure is not neatly organized, because Hwang did not initially intend to publish these contents in the form of a book. Most of the contents were written by Hwang, but it was the Committee for the Release of Hwang Sok-yong that organized them into a book. This book had to be published as part of the movement for the release of Hwang; therefore, timeliness took precedence over fine details and editing.

While keeping this overall structure in mind, one needs to pay attention to the body, the core of the book. Section One of the body, *Saram-i salgo isseonne,* is the compilation of pieces of writing published in *Sindonga* after his visit to North Korea. The title of Section One summarizes the key theme that runs through the book, which deserves a profound discussion. In the absence of context, the title "There Lived People" evokes an idyllic and

24. Following the incidents of Director Lee Man-hee's film *Chilin-ui yeoporo* (The Seven Female POWs) and Nam Jung-hyun's novel *Bunji* (The Land of Excrement) in the mid-1960s, any writer who created seditious works, and any publisher that published them, were summoned, tried, and even faced legal punishment. Methods to control culture in the 1960s continued to prevail even into the 1980s.

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lyrical feeling. However, when one associates the title with the content of the travelogue of North Korea, one can readily recognize how political the title is. At this juncture, it is necessary to raise a question of why the author chose the word "people" (*saram*) as an way of representing North Korea anew. His North Korea travelogue has us ponder how we approach the political nature of the word "people."

> In fact, I went to North Korea while admitting the differences in ideology and system, and as I reiterated before, I said I would record my experience by putting myself in the shoes of people in North Korean society. (CRH 1993, 76)

Hwang's North Korea travelogue follows the style of a typical journal, starting with his itinerary: his journey to North Korea, his schedule after arriving in Pyongyang, the atmosphere of his lodging, and places he visited and people he met during his stay. However, as was the case with *Soryeong ihaeng* (Travelogue of the Soviet Union), written by Lee Tae-jun following his visit to the USSR in 1946, Hwang's travelogue of North Korea, clearly driven by a sense of purpose, exhibits some unique features. As shown above, Hwang declared that he would record his experience by putting himself in the shoes of people in North Korean society and promised to be faithful to his role as an objective observer. His witnessing and describing North Korea firsthand appear to showcase his commitment to delivering an accurate impression of North Korea. Nevertheless, he had an obvious, hidden purpose of changing perceptions of North Korea in one way or another.

Hwang employed several meaningful strategies to effectively realize his purpose, including vivid descriptions, specific explanations, superior analogies and expressions, and his seemingly objective approach of keeping some distance from the objects being observed. Particularly, vivid and graphic descriptions produce special effects of making the readers unaware of the author's specific purpose, or inducing them to forget it and immerse themselves in the text. From the start, the author depicts the landscape of North Korea in detail. He carefully records the characteristics and histories

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of all the places he visited together with his impressions and feelings of those places—downtown Pyongyang, the subway, Pyongyang triumphal arch, the Juche Tower, Patriotic Martyr's Cemetery, National Martyrs' Cemetery, Moranbong, Kim Il-sung University, the Children's Palace, and Chungsanri cooperative farm. Utilizing his trademark skillful and engaging style, Hwang takes the readers with him to the places and walks them through every nook and cranny of North Korea. Throughout the text, we sense his strong will to meticulously record every place and object that came into his sight and every person he encountered.

Furthermore, Hwang absorbed himself in portraying the common aspects of the people he met during his stay. It is noteworthy that the author reveals people's names, their social roles and status, and even their personal information, including family, personality, and values. Moreover, in the text, we often find the narrator, Hwang, describing healthiness, one of the attributes associated with the socialist human type. He portrayed youngsters with sound body and mind and lively and optimistic children, and contrasts them with the snobbism in a capitalist South Korean society. The images of these people are harmoniously combined with portrayals of the daily routines of a peaceful socialist state. By depicting a father and a son casting long and short fishing rods and workers playing musical instruments and singing together, the author conveys his eyewitness account of a society in which principles reign over labor and play in a strict manner (CRH 1993, 40–43).

> That is not the case [of North Korea being a strange or mysterious place]. That is also a place where people live. (CRH 1993, 65)

> Everything that happens in places where people live is what happens in the city of Pyongyang. (CRH 1993, 40)

If there is any effect these descriptions have, it is to help us meet these "innocent people" and to awaken us to the fact that North Korea has its own "daily lives" (CRH 1993, 28). What the author ultimately wants to convey through the reproduction of daily lives is the amazing revelation that North

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Koreans, in the routines of their daily lives, are no different from us as people. At this point, it is worth noting that Hwang repeatedly emphasizes the importance of not assessing North Korea from a Western point of view. His rationale lies in the fact that this Western view has dominated Korean society national division, to such an extent that South Koreans no longer recognize North Koreans as *people*. The reader, with the help of this guide who takes them to the heart of the daily lives of North Koreans, finds themself at the house of a famous novelist in Pyongyang or with the family of a middle-aged worker. In effect, the final destination of these numerous descriptions is nothing less than the strange and new proposition "they are like us" (CRH 1993, 47). The author shouts in the dense forest of words, "Life exists here!" More specifically, Hwang went to North Korea to face this reality.

His statement that he found "people" in North Korea invited great repercussions in South Korean society, where anti-communism was firmly entrenched. The statement aimed at casting doubt on the methodological prototypicality in reproducing North Korea and denouncing the powerful for their uniform representations of our northern counterpart. Accordingly, "people" he suggested tells us the incredibly skewed perception of South Korean society toward North Korea. Following the Korean War in 1950, North Korea emerged as a powerful enemy, and the concepts of puppet regime, hell, and psychopathy constituted the image of North Korea. By the 1980s, the economic superiority of South Korea began to add another layer of *poverty* onto the image of North Korea. To South Koreans, North Korea transformed itself from a *brutal and heinous aggressor* to a *giant entity to embody the abnormal* and to move toward a *backward past*.

Hwang's visit to North Korea coincided with a period when symbolic images of North Korea were about to undergo marked change. He performed the task of discovering the true nature of North Korea by writing his travelogue. For Hwang, visiting North Korea went beyond the general sense of a visit to enter into the daily lives of its people. But for this particular meaning, his travelogue could not have been of any significant importance. Hwang faithfully carried out his assigned task in the text. He had the ambitious objective of reproducing even small details in the text, including

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the appearance and behavior of Pyongyang people, labor and leisure, modes of transportation, urban landscaping and residential environments, cultural life, and everyday conversations and jokes. What he wrote was used to construct an account of daily lives in North Korea.

Hwang's travelogue of North Korea was significant at the time by its new view of North Korea. However, we should not overlook the fact that his text recounts only the tip of the iceberg of everyday life in North Korea. To be exact, what he saw was the lives of Pyongyang people. His travelogue leads the readers to believe that they are being informed about the lives of ordinary North Koreans. It is an illusion, however, which is attributable to the author's ability to tell a story. He did not walk into the lives of ordinary people. Therefore, this *true encounter* with the North Koran *other* is in fact very romantic and even fictional in nature, for such an encounter was not destined to happen in the first place.

The year 1989, when Hwang visited North Korea, saw some intimations of immense economic hardships down the road. Starting in the late 1970s, there appeared signs of food shortages in North Korea. To cope with this crisis, the North Korean regime directed all its resources to Kim Il Sung's personality cult (Kwon and Chung 2013, 184). The maximized self-dramatization of conspicuous power was the clearest signal of the crisis facing North Korean society. The nation's crises worsened around the 1990s. In the early 1990s, North Korea's economic conditions deteriorated, which in turn led to economic recession. With the collapse of the national distribution system, the problems of hunger, poverty, and public security became prevalent, threatening the survival of the North Koran people. Furthermore, as the market replaced the role of the state, many changes occurred in the economic activities of the nation's citizens.[25]

Although Hwang visited North Korea when these symptoms of crisis were clearly signaling coming disaster, he either could not witness such

25. By 1990, urban farmers' markets had established themselves as essential places for residents to ensure their livelihoods and procure daily necessities. Around this time, the *jangmadang*, a type of marketplace, appeared, providing North Korean residents with economic spaces for their self-reliance amid the weakening rations system (Choi and Koo 2005, 72–73).

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developments or did not describe them. He interpreted such South Korean comments as "there are few people in Pyongyang," "people are dressed shabbily," or "their products are of poor quality" as the result of lopsided evaluations based on eyes accustomed to *our version* of ideology. Hwang also added that to perceive North Korea from a balanced perspective, we needed the opportunity to look at the object being observed *as it is*. Pyongyang, seen again through this effort, becomes in Hwang's text as follows:

> All idle areas are public entertainment facilities, green zones, and parks. There are many monumental structures and statues. Public transportation is effectively controlled. Fuel for cooking and heating is collectively secured. Each dwelling unit forms a single community regardless of status and occupation. (CRH 1993, 38)

Public places for citizens, effectively controlled traffic, equitable housing, and lively weekends bring to mind secure lives and peaceful daily routines. Hwang writes that people in North Korea lead free, lively, and satisfying lives while depicting the following images: young men and women learning the North Korean version of folk dance in the square, students practicing dance, people waiting for an appointment at a soft drink or confectionary store, and department stores and movie theaters crowded with people.

Hwang's travelogue of North Korea provides a rare opportunity to critically look back on the past, when North Korea could only be communicated through the graphic personal experience of a *red hell*, and thus change our perception of North Korea. He makes us reflect on ourselves and our inability to speak out objectively and teaches us how to acknowledge North Korea. *Acknowledgement* in this sense is similar to the epistemological way of accepting difference as it is, and in this Hwang's travelogue was definitely a meaningful attempt (CRH 1993, 65).

On the flip side, *reunderstanding* North Korea as a place "where people live" (CRH 1993, 65) is largely nationalistic and, therefore, political. Hwang, while preaching the justification of unification, calls attention to the "national homogeneity" or "community confirmation" underlying his visit

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to North Korea (CRH 1993, 65). He had no doubt that the establishment of a "unified nation-state" was in the future (CRH 1993, 408).[26] In that sense, his visit was actually a first step toward restoring the damaged community or relationship. He even equated his version of unification as beyond simply the "oneness of South and North," to the "rebirth of a new nation" (CRH 1993, 101). The message that runs through the text is "Where else in the world is there 'the other' who is so similar to us?" Hwang's visit to North Korea has its origin in his clear sense of purpose toward "we must become a whole one" (CRH 1993, 227).[27]

Hwang's effort to discover North Korea necessitated his encountering "another self in a different form" (CRH 1993, 227).[28] In this context, his shift in thinking or recognizing North Koreans as *people* seems to be the only way to accept the other of North Korea, which had heretofore been psychologically unacceptable due to the South's long-held status as an anti-communist nation. Further, it could be interpreted as a practical action meant to break from the "legacy of hatred and distrust left behind by history" (CRH 1993, 65). Nonetheless, the word "people" also serves as a linguistic device to suture conflicts and rifts and, therefore, becomes problematic. Like the term "humanity," the word "people" may also be seen as an expression that reifies and falsifies critical issues (Butler 2013, 180). Hwang had a valid point when he said, "It is necessary to be wary of conceptualization, make efforts to understand their own circumstances and situations, and thus accept differences" (CRH 1993, 67). However, understanding their own circumstances and situations cannot be an excuse for justifying the irregularities and contradictions inherent in North Korean society at the time. Following a loud and long explanation of the ideal aspects of North Korea, a tiny voice is barely heard to say, "I haven't lived here, so I do not know exactly what is going on here and what the true face of North Korea is" (CRH 1993, 47). Is not that tiny confession closest to the truth?

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26. "Gwiguk seongmyeongseo (1993-nyeon 4-wol 23-il nyuyok-eseo)" (Return Statement [in New York on April 23, 1993]), in CRH (1993).
27. Interview first published in *Sahoe pyeongnon* (Social Critique) in September 1991.
28. Interview first published in *Sahoe pyeongnon* (Social Critique) in September 1991.

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Meanwhile, the author's attempt to encounter North Koreans on an equal footing under the name of the "people" can be viewed as progressive in the light of the period context. Yet, the author's approach toward gender issues betrays his typical conservative perception. When portraying North Korean women, the author is neither a South Korean tamed by capitalism nor a socialist-oriented North Korean. In the text, he appears to wear a patriarchal mask. According to him, a very natural beauty that a Pyongyang woman holds is that of "a shy and submissive woman who, upon hearing a joke, blushes, turns her head, and barely smiles with her voice sinking to a whisper" (CRH 1993, 52). Hwang said he would describe North Korea from the perspective of the North Korean people, but his point of view that identifies the uncontaminated nature and the pure past is heavily tinged with the hierarchical perception of civilizationists, which is blatantly expressed when dealing with gender issues.

In this connection, we need to ask how much this new notion of "people live in North Korea" could contribute to an accurate understanding of North Korea. This concept is significant because it can lead us to confront the problematicity of the proposition. The problematicity in this case involves the old yet viable concept of *North Korea is hell*. However, such a proposition as "people live in North Korea" cannot be established without ignorance or concealment of North Korea. The proposition ('people live in North Korea') is also the product of a discourse and, therefore, is both realistic and fictional. The two propositions, "North Korea is hell" and "people live in North Korea," are also rhetorical. Hwang's travelogue of North Korea, faithful to a sense of purpose, enables readers to experience how North Korea can be represented in another way. Likewise, the truth he wanted to see and approach as close as possible was not something fixed that had already existed. Rather, it was constantly being constructed by the observer's viewpoint, like a living creature.[29]

29. "Nam-gwa buk dongsi deungjang soseol sseugo sipda" (Hope to Write a Novel in which Both Koreas Appear Simultaneously), *Hankyoreh*, May 11, 1989.

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## Politics of Encounter: In the Name of Neither the *Enemy* nor *Us*

> How precarious was the freedom I longed for as a writer while living in the prison of a divided Korean Peninsula, comparable to a prison of time, a prison of language, and a museum of the Cold War! (Hwang 2017b, 448)

Hwang's visit to North Korea called our attention to the fact that divided Korea was a product of a Cold-War hegemony. The state of division of the Korean Peninsula has long been structuralized through power relations, which tells us how the state of division is maintained through continuous efforts, and more importantly, reminds us that the present state of division is subject to change without prior notice. That is, the state of division signifies the possibility of changes in hegemonic structures. Through diverse cultural devices, Hwang's travelogue of North Korea caused a rift in the repeatedly reproduced discourses and images of North Korea and invited North Korea into our society in a new way, through a fierce battle against the system of representation specifically formulated to hold North Korea in the name of the *enemy*. Of course, this attempt made Hwang realize the precarity of the freedom for which he longed.

> Brother! You finally came home. (Hwang 2001, 255)

Hwang's novel *Sonnim* (The Guest), published in 2001, was conceived during his residence in Berlin that emerged as a result of his visit to North Korea. The author witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and mapped out his work while watching the disintegration of the Cold War system. The title word "*sonnim*" is similar in meaning to the expression, "*hohwan mama*" 虎患媽媽 (lit. tiger calamity and smallpox), which was coined by the common people during the Joseon period to evoke the twin fears of tigers and smallpox.[30] It refers to something fearful that is invisible in our daily lives,

30. "*Hohwan mama*" can be literally translated as "disasters caused by tigers and smallpox." More figuratively, it implies an unwelcome guest that brings disaster. "*Mama*" was a household word for smallpox. The word "*sonnim*" (guest) could carry the same meaning as "*mama*."

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but which can at any moment swoop down and destroy us. Hwang's guest can also be of use in explaining the way the *other*, such as North Korea, exists in South Korean society. To us, North Korea has long been nothing but a ghost that brings fear. According to Hwang, he wrote this novel with the intention of wiping away with a single stroke the scars of war and the ghost of the Cold War that remained on the Korean Peninsula and ushering in a new century of reconciliation and coexistence. Such an attempt allows us to explore the possibility of calling the hostile other by another name besides "guest" (Hwang 2001, 262).

Whereas his attempt was very significant, it has some limitations in that it binds North Korea to nationalist ideology, which makes it impossible to imagine another potential hospitality. "The complete and perfect encounter" that the author had dreamed of was never meant to be achieved in the first place. When the meaning of the encounter is confined strictly to the process of recovering a whole nation, other possibilities disappear. As shown in the above passage from the novel, Hwang believed that only when we meet in the name of "brother" can we return to the complete and perfect state (the past). The past here is the time after liberation from Japan and before national division. When he argues that unification is to belatedly follow in the sequence "colony-liberation-nation-state" (CRH 1993, 6) and that this sequence is the very way for us to achieve "total independence" (CRH 1993, 408), he is nothing more or less than an ardent nationalist. If he is right, then we still have not escaped the colonial time and are searching for a past of unification that we have never experienced. The problem with this justifiable perception is that it makes us constantly assume the existence of the "true enemy" that can replace North Korea while locking North Korea into a system of representation.

If the *true encounter* can be conceived as Hwang desired, the moment it is achieved will paradoxically be the very moment we stop calling the other "brother." Likewise, it is not until we cease to lend significance to our encounter with them as an *act of going back*, that we are likely to encounter the absolute other of North Korea. In this sense, Hwang's travelogue of North Korea presents both the possibility and impossibility of this encounter.

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