

From Hwang Changyöp: I Witnessed History's Truth (Na nŭn yöksa ũi chilli rŭl poatta). Seoul: Hanul 1999

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Chapter 2: In a Liberated Fatherland (pp 65-82)

Liberation and Homecoming

August 15th 1945. Since they said the Japanese Emperor would make a radio broadcast we conscripted laborers put down our tools and gathered in front of the radio, but because of static we were completely unable to understand what was being said.

August 16th we went into Samch'ök Ŭp¹, and white-clad Koreans formed a sea of humanity sharing the joy of liberation.

Along with the joy of liberation I was consumed with worry. The worry led off with wondering how I, who knew nothing, could dedicate his life for the sake of an independent fatherland. Nevertheless, the fact that we had been liberated from oppression was more than anything else a joyful event. It was as if we were leaping out of the heavy chains we had carried around with us up until now, and it was also as if my spirits that had been repressed were constantly growing toward the heavens.

At that time our group of conscripted workers had been reduced from 26 to eight, and with the help of leaders in Samch'ök we got to decide to leave for Seoul by coal-fired truck on August 17th. On the morning of that day we had gone exultantly around Samch'ök on the truck flying the T'aegŭkki² yelling "Long live independence", but then had been picked up by the Japanese military police, had our T'aegŭkki confiscated, and underwent insults. The military police pulled out their pistols and threatened to shoot us dead. We, who were unarmed, decided that there was no need to die a dog's death opposing men made malicious by sudden defeat, and so put up no resistance, and returned to the inn where we had lodged for the past two days.

I've forgotten his given name, but at that time among our party was a friend with the surname Son who was always fighting. He was a friend whom I had known from our days working our way through school in Tokyo, and he was so skilled at fighting that even if he came out to a labor site he fought so much that the supervisor would just give him a day's wages and beg him to please go home. In Japan he was known as Kondō Takeshi.

He suggested that in the meantime we should teach a lesson to the Chosŏn police officer who had been keeping watch over us and bullying us, and then leave. We all endorsed his

¹ Hwang had been conscripted in Japan in January 1944 and was sent to Korea to work in a coal mine in Samch'ök, Kangwŏn Province. An Ŭp is a small town that is the administrative center of a township.

² The T'aegŭkki, or "Flag of the Great Ultimate" is the current South Korean flag with the Yin-yang figure in the center (Great Ultimate) surrounded by four hexagrams from the *Ijing*.

proposal. In the end it turned out that the Chosŏn police officer was going up to Ch'unch'ŏn³ by the same means we were.

The police detective came over to the inn so he could board the truck. He was around 35 years old and looked as agile as if he were a Judo black belt. However, there were eight of us, and each of us had a dagger, so we surrounded the officer without any fear. Son was the first to speak.

“As a traitor to the nation you must be punished.”

At that the officer replied coolly without blinking an eye, “I’ve done you no harm. If you want to kill me I will have no choice but to defend myself.”

And then he pulled out a pistol. We trusted our little daggers, but when he pulled out a pistol we had to stop. Son started out again.

“It’s not that we’re going to kill you. It’s that we want you to personally acknowledge the crimes you have committed.”

“While it is true that I watched over you as a police officer, I had no choice because of orders. But I didn’t actually harm you. You can’t act indiscriminately just because Japan has been defeated.”

Rather it was he who was lecturing us. Son, knew enough to avoid getting shot, and so brought it to a close.

“Fine, let’s talk about this problem again in the future if we have the opportunity.”

And so we mildly let the guy go. Son said to us, “It’s difficult to punish him here so I just sent him off. But since he’s going with us, let’s go a bit and look for an opportunity to kill him in an out of the way place.

This time, too, we all assented.

The truck with the eight of us and the police officer started out for Seoul. When it started to get dark we glanced at each other. The truck was ascending a windy road surrounded by pine fields. We concealed our daggers and waited for Son’s signal.

Just then a police jeep suddenly pulled up behind us. When it signaled with its headlights the police officer waved his hand. The police jeep stopped the truck. And then the police officer jumped nimbly out and climbed into the jeep and went off into the distance as if mocking us. We looked at the police car like a dog that has chased a chicken stares at the roof, and then looked at each other sharing expressions of dejection. This was a partial self portrait of our giddiness and despair upon meeting liberation.

³ Ch'unch'ŏn is the capital of Kangwŏn Province.

Arriving in Ch'unch'ŏn it was ten o'clock at night when we found an inn. A young man who had been taken off as a conscript in Seoul's Yongsan Division⁴, and who had decked a Japanese squad leader and deserted heard the news that conscripted students who had been living in Samch'ŏk had come to the inn, and he sought us out. He told us about his experience as a conscript and asked us young men how we wanted to be in the future.

Several of us beginning with Son gave him advice, but I hadn't been able to even decide on my own course yet, and so I remained silent. All in our party were thinking that having gone off as conscripts was like performing some great deed. And more than anything we were anxious to be able to do great things in the future as members of the intelligentsia.

The next day we boarded the electric train to go down to Seoul, and I was moved that the electric train was operated by Koreans. However, when I arrived in Seoul I was greatly disappointed. This was because in the police stations and police boxes the Japanese police had installed machine guns and had complete hold on public order in the city. To me, who had thought that with liberation alone our world would come, the fact that the Japanese police still had responsibility for maintaining order gave me somehow a bitter taste.

Starting with Son, the students whose hometowns were in the south went to different lodgings, and I, following a hometown friend, incurred a debt by going to this friend's older brother's house. I've forgotten the name of the school, but this friend's brother was a professor at a one-department university. While I was at that house my friend and his brother were going to see Yŏ Unhyŏng,⁵ going to see somebody else, but I found it tedious to follow them around, and decided to return to P'yŏngyang alone, so on August 20th 1945 I left for P'yŏngyang.

When I reached home the daily life of my aged parents was pretty much the same as what I had heard at the time of my conscription. One wing of the house was leaning forward and seemed about to fall over, so father had cut an acacia tree to prop it up in two places instead of pillars, water leaked into the stove, and so they had set up a cauldron in the courtyard to make rice.⁶ Daily life at my sister-in-law's house in Sŭngho Village was pretty much the same as there. However, the daily life of my second brother-in-law who was a truck driver was nevertheless on the OK side.

⁴ Yongsan was the major camp for Japan's military presence in Seoul, and subsequently became the center for the American military in Seoul.

⁵ Yŏ Unhyŏng was a prominent leftist leader who had been entrusted by the Japanese authorities to work toward Korean rule, and was busy organizing the Korean People's Republic so as to present the American forces with a *fait accompli* when they arrived in late September. However, the KPR was never recognized by the American occupation authorities.

⁶ In a Korean farmhouse of that period, the stove in the kitchen was normally built of clay with a metal cauldron set in the top, and a fire hole underneath. When a fire was lit in the fire hole it heated the water in the built-in cauldron, with the smoke exiting through a chimney on the other side of the rooms with heated floors. In this case the fire hole was damp and couldn't be used, so they set up the metal cauldron in the courtyard presumably building an open air fire underneath to heat water and cook rice.

Student Support Soldiers and conscripts who had returned after having been taken away, actively came out to confiscate the property of Japanese. They strutted around with armbands labeled Security Corps and wearing Japanese swords.

Our family living was only too poverty-stricken, and I was in a position where I had to find some sort of work right away to help my parents. Yun Pyŏng-sŏn, a graduate of my same Ordinary School had joined the Communist Party and was participating in important organizational work. He looked me up and asked me what I was planning to do.

“I want to study some more.”

“Stop your study right now, and let’s participate in the new politics. How can you think of more schooling during this confusion?”

“In any case I’ll go to P’yŏngyang once and then decide.”

When I had parted with my comrades in Seoul I had promised to return to my hometown and cast about for a way to continue my education.

Going to P’yŏngyang I looked up my alma mater P’yŏngyang Commercial School, and there I was able to meet some senior colleagues.

“You’ve finally arrived safely. Now the Japanese teachers have all gone away and made it so we can’t operate the school. Changyŏp, you ought to help with school matters.”

And so from August 23rd my rail trip from Seoul to P’yŏngyang came to an end. Ah, if I had gone to Seoul at that time my fate would have been greatly different. However, at that time I didn’t have enough courage to cross illegally over the 38th parallel, and I also wasn’t in a position to understand Seoul properly. Besides, more than anything leaving my old parents and going to Seoul alone would not be proper, and so on no account did I harbor such a thought.

In P’yŏngyang leftist elements were suddenly starting to greatly increase, and there were many people who wanted to convince me of the rightness of Communist party theory. Rather than follow blindly I made up my mind to observe conditions while teaching the students at my alma mater, and so I joined the dormitory.

P’yŏngyang Commercial School occupied a hillock at Mansudae⁷ and behind it was the provincial administrative building. The provincial administrative building was the finest building in P’yŏngyang. And so the Soviet army made the provincial administrative building their headquarters, and allotted to the North Korean authorities P’yŏngyang City Hall. And they used the Tax Office Building as the headquarters of the Communist Party.

⁷ Mansudae “10,000 view terrace” is a district of western P’yŏngyang on a cliff overlooking the Taedong River that is the home village of Kim Il Sung, and houses many important North Korean institutions.

I used my spare time from teaching students to read the Japanese Kawakami Hajime's *A Story of Poverty*, *The Communist Manifesto*, or *Anti-Dühring* etc. However, understanding came slowly. And of course I didn't have the ability to refute them. The teachers were inadequate because they had to teach a variety of subjects, and I was exceedingly busy. First of all because of my fate of being known as a champion at calculation I taught calculation, and also the course they called social science (the rudiments of communist theory), and sometimes I also taught algebra or geometry.

At the school there were many newly entered students, and there were those who couldn't study but were accepted because they were said to be good at soccer or basketball, so the student body was quite complicated. And there were not a few students among them who were older than me.

One day a Soviet army jeep pulled into the play yard of the school, and the officers rushed into the principal's office. They were going to have us give up our school to the Soviet Army headquarters. And so they told us we had to go to the location of a Japanese girl's school in the vicinity of P'yöngyang Station, and so we went there having been given one-sided notice. We had to do as we had been ordered.

When we started to move the school Soviet army officers walked around meddling, and even confiscated the school supplies that we had sold to the students. We asked them not to, telling them that the supplies were necessary for the students, but they didn't listen. I wondered if to the Soviet army even school supplies were tempting war booty, but had no choice but to relinquish them.

Even though the location of the Japanese school was inferior to P'yöngyang Commercial School, the building was in better shape. Moreover we were overjoyed that books were plentiful. Seeing the building was spacious, along with the Commercial School, the Supreme Court, and Judicial Training Center came in. There was also a dormitory, so I was made the superintendent of the dormitory.

At the school there were quite a few teachers who were older and better educated than I. Nevertheless the students followed only me, and rather than it being because I was their senior colleague it was because I loved them truly without hypocrisy. At my first work place and alma mater P'yöngyang Commercial School I indeed worked devotedly.

At that time there were many cases of the Soviet soldiers seizing people on the street and asking them to introduce them to girls, or while asking for money harass them for no reason or even assault them. Even I was seized by Soviet soldiers several times on my way home after going out at night. Each time I slipped away just barely avoiding inciting them, but in truth even at these times there were students guarding me from the distant sidelines. They were members of the soccer and boxing programs, and knowing that they had formed a team to follow me and save me in emergencies, rather than happiness I felt a burning surge of emotion.

The Soviet soldiers that perpetrated these sorts of incident I heard later were mainly prisoner brigades. They committed robbery or rape, etc. and worst of all even shot persons to death. There was an incident even to the extent of a gang of eight entering a house and gang rapping a 3rd year female student, messing up her body.

After I became a teacher my hometown family members got to draw rations and were able to find some comfort again. When land reform came father transferred his fields in Ihyŏn Village to my maternal uncle, and in his village received a two-person portion of land⁸ and said he would make a living by farming.

I Become a Cell Chairman

I was a teacher, but at the same time I was indeed as poor as a church mouse. I didn't have a single set of clothes that I could put on to make me neat and respectable, and I didn't even have a fountain pen that I sorely needed. Among the students were three, Yun Chaehong, Yi Myŏno, and Pak Chŏngho, that I most looked out for. Yun's father had been a patrolman⁹ during the Japanese colonial period, and from the time of liberation developed weak lungs and was recuperating at his house in Chŭngsan County. Also, his paternal aunt's house being in P'yŏngyang, his aunt would occasionally prepare food and bring it over to the school. We who ate mainly corn on the cob used to wait earnestly for Yun's aunt to come.

Yun's considerateness didn't stop there, and knowing that I didn't have any clothes worth wearing, he even brought me the patrolman's uniform that his father had worn, only cutting off the epaulets. My senior colleague at the Commercial High School¹⁰, Kim Tŏgwŏn gave me a fountain pen as a gift that I wrote with gratefully.

The people were still filled with alarm. There were two horse carts in the storeroom to the side of the dormitory, and in addition there were many other items of use. But as life became more and more difficult, everybody ended up getting ripped off never knowing who carried things away.

Next to the school was a relocation camp for Japanese. At times the Soviet soldiers used to come there and violently demand women, and there were also times when they got the wrong building and they came to our school dormitory. It was dangerous because the Soviet soldiers couldn't talk with us very well, and being drunk they hit people or waved their guns wildly around.

One night at the time when we fastened the gate of the dormitory and went to bed we could hear the coming sound of Soviet soldiers making a ruckus. Afraid they would see

⁸ In the North Korean land reform in the spring of 1946, land was confiscated from landlords without compensation, and distributed for free to peasants on a point system based on the amount of labor they had in their households.

⁹ *Sunsa*, lowest level of the colonial constabulary.

¹⁰ The school in P'yŏngyang Hwang had attended and where he initially taught after Liberation.

our lights and come to commit violence we turned out the lights and pretended to be asleep. The Soviet soldiers kept pounding on our gate cursing all the while in loud voices. We hid cowering in the coal shed. Since school was out the rest of the students had gone home, and there were only the four of us, Yun Chaehong, Yi Myŏno, Pak Chŏngho, and I.

When we didn't open the gate it seemed to be quiet but then after a minute we heard again the sound of pounding on the gate. We were just holding our breath. After a while the Soviet soldiers who had been beating on our gate left and everything became quiet. We carefully tiptoed back into the room, soothed our alarmed hearts and went to sleep.

The next day we opened the door and peered out. The storage shed door had been left open. Inside was a set of bedding, and a Soviet officer's winter overcoat. The Soviet soldiers had apparently swiped these things and left them in our storage shed, so maybe the night before a military search party had gone out to capture those soldiers and had made a ruckus like that. When we didn't open the gate, they couldn't discover the items, and just left. Since we were short of quilts and I didn't even have an overcoat, I finally died the overcoat black and wore it, and we covered ourselves together with the quilt. P'yŏngyang School of Commerce got this school building in the fall of 1945 and was there until the summer of 1946.

Right around that time I came to work together with Song Hanhyŏk who was a teacher in a People's [elementary] School in Chŭngsan County after returning from being a student conscript in the Japanese army. Although up until that time both Song Hanhyŏk and I had not joined any political party, we had participated in teacher training, heard lectures, and even read communist books. And so since we were already going to become party members we thought it best that we join the Communist Party rather than the New People's Party.¹¹

So we asked some Communist Party members with whom we were regularly acquainted whether we could join the party.

“How long did you do labor? Why do you want to join the Communist Party?”

They were questioning us closely as if it were a cross-examination. Song Hanhyŏk and I had expected that we would only have to say we wanted to join the party and they would welcome us with open arms, but when we were unexpectedly treated so unkindly, we gave up our plans to join the party. Even so, we never considered joining the New People's Party.

Not too long after Song Hanhyŏk arrived the school was reorganized into a Economics Technical School, and at the same time that it was both divided into the three departments

¹¹ The two leftist parties in North Korea at that time were the Communist Party North Korea Branch, which was increasingly under the control of Kim Il Sung and his Kapsan faction, and the New People's Party which, until it merged with the Communist Party to form the Korean Workers Party in the fall of 1946, was dominated by the Yanan group who had repatriated from working with the Chinese Communist Party in Yanan.

of economics, management, and accounting, and was changed to a coeducational system. The teachers that we had come to love at that time were turned over to Kim Il Sung University that was newly being established, and we were moved to the building of the school affiliated with the Teacher's College in Munsu Village of East P'yŏngyang. I can still vividly remember getting my things together, and riding a horse cart together with Song Hanhyŏk sliding about all the way in a day of pouring rain.

Although the building into which we newly moved wasn't as good as the school we had used before, it was on the clean side for a People's School¹². Together with my disciple Yun Chaeyong I cooked in the night watchman's office. Since Song Hanhyŏk had married and put together his own household I was the only one among the teachers who didn't have a house. And so I had to take care of watching the school. I had to cook but I didn't prepare a meal each time. At most I roasted some corn on the cob and ate it chattering noisily with the students.

At that place, too, thieves were always coming in until finally in the middle of the night it reached the extent that they came into the night watchman's office while we were sleeping and even stole the clothes we had taken off and set aside. I lost the fountain pen that my senior colleague had given me and the clothes that Yun Chaehong had brought for me. The thieves even depressed us by swiping the school's glass. So one day some soccer players hid themselves away and caught the rascals.

They marched the rascals to their place of residence in Yŏnmot-tong. They were living in an old store house using straw for quilts. When I saw that scene it occurred to me that their thievery wasn't irrational, so I lectured them not to keep snatching our glass and left them as they were.

With the arrival of fall a dormitory was furnished at a place not far from the school, and I once again was dormitory supervisor. At the same time as they reorganized the school as a professional school of economics, the director of the school got changed, and teachers responsible to the party had gotten assigned. At about that time the Communist Party and the New People's Party merged to form the North Korean Workers Party.¹³ The new school director was Shim Chaeyun, who as a person of South Korean origin had been in the communist movement in Japan and then been active in China's Yanan. Shim's appearance was neat and refined, and he sang well. He fancied himself a splendid revolutionary and an authority on philosophy. And he claimed that his not himself being a cadre was because the M-L faction (Marxist-Leninist faction), starting with Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik, was caught up in factional feeling and rejected him.¹⁴

¹² Elementary School.

¹³ This would have been the autumn of 1946.

¹⁴ The M-L faction led by Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik tended to consist of persons with a similar life history to Shim Chaeyun—South Korean origin, education in Japan, flight to Yanan in the late thirties. Thus the faction that rejected Shim was precisely the one to which he would have normally been expected to belong. The M-L faction tended to favor united front tactics.

He was close to the communists of Tokyo Imperial University origin like Kim Tuyong. Director Kim spoke well, was steady in appearance, and made a good impression on the young men. I respected him as a senior colleague and he also protected me. He had a love of detail and if he was working late into the night he would even buy me snacks. He recommended to me that I study philosophy. However I could already see that he had merely read a few Chinese materials and his knowledge of philosophy was trivial. I knew this because he rejected Greek philosophy or classical German philosophy as idealist philosophy.

The party cell chairman was Ch'oe Kyubong who claimed to have enlisted in the Japanese army as a student assistant soldier, deserted and then fought against the Japanese in Yanan. His home town was in North P'yŏngan Province. The cell chairman in intimidating tone encouraged me to join the party. School director Kim also recommended I join the party. I didn't find entering the party that unwelcome, and, since my teacher comrades also cajoled me saying that if I wanted to become a teacher I would have to join the party, I put in an application to join the party. And so going through screening by the district party I joined the Korean Workers Party on November 16, 1946.

My sŏngbun of origin¹⁵ that was recorded on the application was middle peasant, and my social sŏngbun was clerk.¹⁶ My colleagues warned me about recording myself this way.

“You did labor while working your way through school in Japan, were conscripted and labored for one year and 6 months, so what's going to happen if you write it that way? Those who have a worker sŏngbun will rise in the future and it is much more beneficial so change it to that.

“What kind of labor is it to be forcibly conscripted to labor? I don't have any desire to rise in the world, so it's fine.”

I answered that way and put in my application.

While giving me my party card the district party chairman emphasized that since this party card is like that of Comrade Kim Il Sung its an extremely glorious party card.

One day in February 1947 cell chairman Ch'oe Kyubong was promoted to the Social Safety Bureau.¹⁷ The district party asked School Director Shim and Ch'oe Kyubong whom they should appoint as cell chairman, and they recommended me positively saying I was the only appropriate incumbent. And so three months after I joined the party I had suddenly become the party cell chairman of the Economics Technical School. Since that time I've continued with busy days.

¹⁵ Social origin, or *ch'ulsin sŏngbun*, was used by the party to determine one's social class origin, and thus one's suitability for party membership.

¹⁶ In North Korea the term “clerk” *samuwŏn* is used for most white collar occupations.

¹⁷ The Social Safety Bureau (*sahoe anjŏn bu*) was involved with internal security.

As dormitory supervisory I had to take care of student dormitory life, and class time also increased. This was because the cell chairman had been made responsible for courses intended as student cultivation. We were also mobilized in the illiteracy eradication campaign. However an even bigger burden was the district party meeting. The district party called a meeting almost every day. In many cases the meeting started in the evening and continued until dawn. The content of the great majority of meetings had nothing to do with school education.

Among the cell chairmen there were quite a few people from the surrounding villages, and so meetings frequently proceeded with criticism of them. From telling them they must catch many rats, warning them about wasting grain, telling them they must push ahead more strongly in the class struggle with reactionaries, to telling them they had to prevent theft, and so forth they would have endless meetings dealing with trivial matters to the point that I truly became disgusted.

They would have meetings until late at night and would tell us to go home only when dawn approached, and when the cell committee chairmen from distant places protested as meetings became too frequent, the party provided them with trucks. However because for me the meeting place was close to the dormitory I walked home. While I walked home alone at dawn I was discontented wondering why communists treated people so badly this way, but even so I didn't want to speak ill of the communist party. If you ask why, it was because they were working so earnestly. And after a while I myself was coming to resemble them. When I assembled the teachers in the school to transmit the district party's instructions, the speech mannerism of those involved in the district party came out without my being conscious of it. And in trying it out this way I began to feel like an enthusiastic earnest party member myself. Among the students the following rumor circulated:

“Since teacher Hwang has become a party cell chairman he's become a thorough red.”

However, I hadn't changed. As I promised, I never participated in the oppression of students who opposed communism, and I never secretly informed on anybody. Among the students were mixed in a group who scattered leaflets or went on strike at the drop of a hat. When those things happened I patiently explained through a family visit that the student should show up and study. I would explain, and if a handbill saying they wouldn't attend school was delivered to me, I didn't get cowed and repeated the procedure. This is because I knew that the majority of students supported me.

The students refused to take exams, or openly cheated, but the teachers were unable to block their collective actions. The students who wanted to earnestly study had requested that I proctor the examinations of the graduating class, and so I had entered the classroom as proctor. However, my heart was heavy. The reason was that I was their senior colleague and envied by them, but if mutinous students showed up, even though I would first, having discovered disgraceful cheating, punish them, within a short while it would be tantamount to handicapping graduating students.

Wanting to prevent something bad however I could, I entered the classroom and first spoke for about 15 minutes.

“Students, the exams are something that has been put into place by the state. So take them fairly and squarely. Cheating is a cowardly act. If you don’t know the answer, turn in a blank piece of paper and don’t betray your self-respect. I’m your senior colleague and your teacher, but so far as this hour is concerned I am an exam committee member appointed by the state. Thus I bear the responsibility for controlling cheating. I will faithfully carry out this responsibility. Please don’t misunderstand me on this point.”

The students heeded my words with thanks, even. There was not a single student who cheated during my hour. However, it was discomfoting that several students turned in blank exams. I sought out the teacher in charge of the students and let them know my opinion that it would be best if the students take the exams separately and be given a diploma.

I emphasized that the students should have great hopes. Hadn’t I wasted a lot of time uselessly trying to become a computation teacher for want of such advice during my schooldays? If I had done English or mathematics I could have spent more usefully those hours I spent trying to become a computation teacher.

When I came to Seoul and met some old time students of mine¹⁸ they all said that my telling them at that time to have great hopes had been a help. And, when they asked me to write again as a keepsake the [Chinese] slogan that I had written at the time “A teacher ought not to go three days without having great expectations of his counterparts”, I wrote it down again for them.

I was harassed while rushing hither and thither working without a plan as things came up, and then suddenly I had to think about my future. And so I wanted first of all to study communist materials. In order to study more skillfully I returned to my old lifestyle when I was working my way through school, and read books while eating uncooked rice and sleeping only just a little.

School Director Shim recommended that in my study of communism I not just read any book as I came across it, but select books to read on Marxism, but although I read Lenin’s “On Materialism and Empirical Criticism”, Stalin’s “Fundamentals of Leninism”, and “Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism”, I didn’t understand them, and I didn’t get much return for the time I invested.

After eating uncooked food for five months I only suffered by getting dysentery, and so took the American medicine Diazine that frequently appeared on the city streets and improved right away. I was just about over my dysentery when I ended up relapsing into

¹⁸ Here Hwang is reminiscing not about P’yŏngyang in 1946, but about meeting with former students of his in South Korea after his defection to South Korea in 1997. Some of these students would have surreptitiously crossed the 38th parallel to the South in the 1946-1949 period, and some may have retreated with UN troops that had occupied most of the North (including P’yŏngyang) in the fall of 1950.

malaria. On the electric tram I had such bad tremors that a Soviet officer came up to me and asked me why I was trembling.

Among the cell chairmen was the director of Sadong Coalmine Hospital. We were meeting and he noticed that I was sick, and so he took me to the hospital and gave me a shot. He told me that generally after one round of shots the tremors would completely stop, but I became clean after only one shot. Later on when I was studying in the Soviet Union the malaria recurred, but there they were able to completely cure it, so I didn't have to go to the hospital again for that illness.

I took up the study of English again, and also began studying Russian. At the district party I was responsible for the party school and so they gave a variety of courses to me. There wasn't enough time complete these courses. However to the extent that I could I worked solidly without complaining once. The vice-chair of the district party occasionally evaluated my work as good at the gatherings of the cell chairmen.

My Encounter with Marxism

In February 1948 I got to enter the six month theoretical class at the Central Party School. This gave important momentum to my ideological development. This class was a training class for university teachers in charge of lecturing on Marxism-Leninism (lectures on the history of the Soviet Communist Party). The people who entered this class were all being recognized as high level.

This school used the location of Sungsil Technical College¹⁹ and some of the buildings were used as classrooms while others were used as dormitories. In order to make up for my backward education I relied on not sleeping. And so I got the nickname of night school student. I organized a philosophy study group with comrades who were interested in philosophy and we studied Engels' "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classic German Philosophy".²⁰ Through this study I came to the point of recognizing that Marxism carried my philosophy. But on the other hand I also felt that Marxism didn't have an authentic humanist view.

The lecturers who guided us were for the most part Koreans from the Soviet Union. The headmaster was a person named Kim Sūngha and he did lectures in philosophy from textbooks published in the Soviet Union. From this time on the training time was

¹⁹ Soongsil Academy had been founded in P'yōngyang by the Northern Presbyterian missionary J. M. Baird. The Presbyterian mission in P'yōngyang developed very successfully, and by 1908 a four year college curriculum had been developed and it had become Soongsil College, the first in Korea. In 1925 the Japanese forced the school to reduce its curriculum from 4 years to 2 years, turning it into a technical college. The university voluntarily closed its doors in 1938 to protest Japanese government pressure on curriculum and the establishment of state Shinto. The college was refounded in Seoul by North Korean refugees in 1954.

²⁰ The works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin were available in Japanese translation at the time, but did not become available in Korean even in the North until after the Korean War. Hwang doesn't say what language he read the works in. Later on it would have been Russian, but during this period he was probably reading them in Japanese.

extended one month. And so our theory class wasn't able to graduate until the end of August. Although our graduation marks were similar those who stood ahead in this or that career were placed at Kim Il Sung University. It was not long after I was placed that I was summoned out of the blue to the Central Cadre Bureau.

“Comrade, I'm sorry but the wife of Ch'oe Ch'angik has been dispatched to the preparatory course of Kim Il Sung University, and she is always asking us to send her to a Teacher Training College, so we don't know what to do. Pardon us, but please go for a time to the preparatory course at Kim U. Then we will send you right away to the university that you want.”

They were requesting of me at the Cadre Bureau to instead be at Kim Il Sung University. Ch'oe Ch'angik was a member of the Political Bureau and leader of the Yanan faction²¹. I didn't say another word and went over to the preparatory course at Kim Il Sung University. No matter what the reason I had found an opportunity to continue my studies.

As a consequence of having been dragged off as a conscript I had not been able to formally graduate from college. So I was at a stage at which I had really been thirsting for study. In the preparatory course I took charge of lectures on social science and logic, and also split my time to take the entrance exam for graduate school, which I passed. And so I was able to study in the Department of Philosophy.

I, who had come by leaving the Economics Technical School where I had also inherited the post of cell chairman from Song Hanhyök, by chance was put in charge of cell tasks. Even though I had been busy I took the field exams necessary to qualify for college graduation at spare intervals. Because at that time the main building had already been completed the graduate students were studying at the main building.

I took a room in a large tile-roofed house near the university and cooked for myself. The male house head was always running around doing some task, and inside a young wife and child kept house. In the room opposite mine were male and female students who were also cooking for themselves, and I occupied a little room in the midst of them. I did meals together with the students. As a bachelor teacher, female students would look me up, and also occasionally people would introduce me to women. But as just another student I hardened my resolution to devote myself to study, and as I was busy I had no time to even think about marriage.

I was newly appointed to the university party committee. The university's side wanted me and the Lecturer in Philosophy to translate together the syllabus of an Associate Professor of Philosophy who had come from the Soviet Union. I accumulated ability in

²¹ Ch'oe Ch'angik was a prominent member of the Yanan Group of communists. He was educated at Waseda University, and after fleeing to North China after imprisonment in Korea, he returned to P'yöngyang early in 1946 to help found the New People's Party that merged with the Communist Party to form the Korean Workers Party in the fall of that year. In 1948 Ch'oe was a member of the KWP Central Committee and the Supreme People's Assembly. He was later involved in an attempt to curb Kim Il Sung's autocratic authority in 1956, and was purged in 1957.

Russian and at the same time did my work. But to burnish my Russian ability I often as not had to spend the entire night.

It's a later story, but when I studied overseas at the Graduate School of Moscow State University I had the occasion to hear lectures together with this associate professor, and I was quite surprised that his level was so low. Finally this professor, not being able to keep up with the course, ending up dropping out in mid-course. But at that time it was before I knew his ability, and I suffered many hardships translating his syllabus.

In the summer of 1949 I translated the Soviet philosopher, Asmus's *Logic*. But later, after learning more Russian, I myself blushed at the clumsiness of the translation. And yet I tried my best when I translated in those days.

Right about the time that I completed the first year course at the graduate school of Kim Il Sung University I was unexpectedly recommended for overseas study in the Soviet Union. Although I was worried about leaving my aged parents and going to a distant foreign country, the joy of being able to continue my studies was stronger.

Song Hanhyök, who had heard the news that I had been recommended for overseas study in the Soviet Union, visited me and begged me to help him be able to study at the graduate school of Kim Il Sung University. Because I recognized his ability I visited the university party chairman and recommended Song Hanhyök. It was asking a cordial favor at the time of my departure for overseas study, and perhaps for that reason the university party chairman granted my request.

Song Hanhyök passed the entrance examination for the graduate school of Kim U, and studied there for a month. But because the Economics Technical School found it difficult to run without Song Hanhyök, when they asked him to return his mind wavered and he stayed the course and then wavered again and he gave up the graduate school to which he had been admitted and ended up returning to the Economics Technical School.