

>Kim Song-ch'il "In Front of History: An Historian's Diary of the Korean War" 김성철 (1993) 역사 앞에서: 한 사학자의 6.25일기. 서울 창작과 비평사

author lived 1913-1951,

[during the North Korean occupation of Seoul]

July 26, 1950

Today was the day of our village's election of a People's Committee that had been propagandized so much through newspaper, radio, sound truck, and rally as the so-called election for People's Committees at all levels. They said electing our representatives by our own hand is the most democratic method, and I had been hearing democratic elections, democratic elections ad nauseum. So I saw it with my own eyes, and I was able to find out precisely what this thing really was, thanks to my having become one of the people of the People's Republic.

They had been saying from a few days ago that the election in Chongnung-ri [Queen's Tomb Village] would be done on the 27th, and they put up wall posters, and the Provisional People's Committee went about doing educational propaganda, so I had a great deal of interest in coming to see what sort of people were inclined to be candidates. My expectation that candidates would be published beforehand was because I didn't know very well the form of democratic elections. The election that they said would be on the 27th they suddenly announced on the afternoon of the 25th would be moved up to five in the morning on the 26th. It was plausible that the point of the break of dawn and being in the mountains was to avoid the scorching sun and also to avoid [American] airplanes, but I wonder if there isn't reason to feel that they are avoiding something by doing the date first one way then the other. Rather than what I had thought, I wonder if they might not have established security yet.

Being under orders, perhaps I should abstain?

At dawn this morning when it was still dark the [village] section leader pounded on our gate telling us to come out as if pressing us with demands. Kith and kin were mobilized hugging or carrying piggy back half-asleep little children. The village seemed to empty and head for the valley of the Queen's Tomb¹⁾. And so ten thousand and some voters gathered on the grassy patch in front of the tomb before it struck five. We came bringing pieces of paper called attendance checks with the section

1) Chongnung is the tomb of Queen Sindok (1356-1396) who was the second queen of King T'aejo, founder of the Choson Dynasty located in today's Songbuk District of Seoul. The tomb itself is in a mountain ravine, while the village was below.

leader's name on them that had been divided among us. We gave them up at the entrance to the election grounds and that was it. These pieces of paper that we proffered seemed to be the only proof demonstrating exercise of one's right to vote, and the attendees simply sat or stood tightly packed without any order. Perhaps because of worries about bombing, there were occasional groups that quietly slipped out the back having apparently left their children at home, and this didn't appear to cause any concern.

In this way the curtain of the historic election of the plenum of voters in Songhwang-ni was opened . . . these are the words of the special report in People's Daily [Inminbo].

A stage was erected in front of the T-shaped Pavillion [of the royal tomb]. The Master of Ceremonies first made introductory remarks, and then we went into a young friend's status report on current affairs, which began with a long introduction dissecting international affairs that was a long-winded explanation of Choson's latest situation ending that the Korean War was instigated due to robber American imperialists and the running dog Syngman Rhee traitorous gang who made a fratricidal conflagration break out, and so our peace-loving People's Republic finally had no choice but to counter-attack--at this there were guffaws that burst out among young men in my vicinity--reading this long status report leading to today's glorious election took about 30 minutes.

To introduce you from the beginning of the counter-attack in somewhat more detail . . . Our brave People's Army of the finest children of our people completely liberated Seoul only 60 hours after the counter-attack began, and rescued the groaning one and a half million citizens of Seoul from the barbarous oppression of the Syngman Rhee gang, and pushing further south liberated in less than a month Taejon, their biggest stronghold to completely control Kyonggi Province and Ch'ungch'ong Province. Now they are sweeping through Cholla Province and in the midst of driving into Kyongsang Province, so the day when those brazen invading American imperialists are driven into the sea is not far off . . . , and so forth.

Then we went into the election of the officers, and when the master-of-ceremonies asked what method we should use, from the crowd there was agreement to "leave it to the master-of-ceremonies," and approving shouts of "good" "that's good" erupted. The master-of-ceremonies said, "Well then . . ." and without hesitation called out seven person's names. And so unknown faces ascended the stage, and arranged themselves sitting in a row.

Next a person among the crowd or a candidate stood up and said "I nominate

so-and-so" and the secretary said "good" and seemed to write a name down. And another person stood up and nominated another candidate, and again "that's good". . . it was when some ten or so were nominated this way that the master-of-ceremonies blocked the nomination of somebody by yet another person, and said, "Since nine candidates for seven elected positions have already been nominated, why don't we bring nominations to a close with these," and again the sound of, "good" "that's right". And with that nominations came to an end. However what occurred to me as strange was that the calling out of the nominee by the nominator sometimes was shouted loudly, but sometimes was indistinct even to me who was sitting comparatively closely and yet couldn't clearly make out the name. The young recording secretaries sitting on the stage skillfully heard everything well, however, and didn't have the slightest hesitation. It was truly unbelievable, almost miraculous.

Now I understood for the first time what electing seven persons meant. I had been such a foolish voter.

Next was what they called the debate of the candidates. Would this too be some sort of sport?

Candidates accompanied by their nominators ascended the stage one by one and introduced a brief career sketch. As if printed in a book they were a string of abstract phrases saying they were of poor farmer or worker origin had come through bitter struggle and hard battle for the sake of the people, and finally they revealed their membership in the South Korean Labor Party [Namnodang]. And then there was loud applause from one sector.

The beekeeper So Chong-uk was also nominated as a candidate, and he cut a conspicuous figure in his introduction. Among his living assets was how he came to raise bees because of his deep conviction that bee's social life is like our ideal society . . . Somebody said, "Ladies and gentlemen if you become users of honey and come to Mr. So he'll pass out a little bit of honey for free" (big laugh).

In this way our section leader Yi Yun-gi also became a candidate, and his daughter Fatso Girl (ttungttungbo saeksi) became a nominee and was made some sort of female champion candidate. Two of Mr. Yi's younger brothers, underground workers who had been in and out of jail, squeezed into the crowd were actively yelling "That's right", "That's good", and his little daughter who is still attending elementary school was standing behind waiting holding a wreath, the activity of a truly brilliant democratic family.

We wondered if this amount of stale introduction of career sketches was coming to an

and, but no. At the very end when they introduced the candidate, one Mr. Kong, one of Mr. So's younger brothers called out from the crowd, "Clarify Mr. Kong's party affiliation." At that point the nominee who had just descended from the stage mounted it again, and said, "It's Korean Independence Party" [Handoktang]. At that somebody in the crowd said, "The Korean Independence Party is a hostile political party, and we can't select as our representative a person belonging to such a political party." And again a section of the crowd yelled, "That's right" "That's right".

With that a young man to one side raised his hand, called to the master-of-ceremonies, and obtained the right to speak. I looked him over and unexpectedly it was the pale face of the noodle house boy who was newly enrolled in the linguistics department of our school. Formerly when he attended Yangjong Middle School²⁾ he had gotten involved in the left wing and received an indefinite punishment, and so rumors spread around the village that he was a young man who had not gone through the police.[?? 132]. He acted like he wanted to say something, "We should select our representative on the basis of character. What's this idea that we have to stick only to party membership? What's more, talking about Mr. Kong, when he was deputy chair of the People's Committee of Chongnung-ri he worked day and night at democratic construction. And speaking about the Korean Independence Party, aren't they the patriotic political party that took part in North-South negotiations?" And almost before he could finish there was thunderous applause. There was even stomping of feet from somewhere. This foolish young man was rounded up by the Interior Ministry (naemuso) this afternoon, but at this moment he was at the summit of popularity.

And then another person came out and began speaking. "This is wrong. The Korean Independence Party in the past cooperated with the American Military Government and is clearly responsible for the crime of being used to sell out our country to robber American imperialism together with the Syngman Rhee traitorous gang. To have a person steeped in such a unpatriotic party as our representative is something we cannot put up with. We don't have to have only South Korean Labor Party alone, but the South Korean Labor Party fought for the sake of our country, and you have to know too that it is the true party of our people that can fight for the sake of our people." And when another person came out and started saying, "The crime of the Korean Independence Party . . ." Mr. Kong stood up to decline nomination saying, "I withdraw as a candidate at this place", and only then did this intense debate end. And so eight candidates for a seven person election emerged.

After that the actual election.

2) In those days Middle School went from 7th to 11th grade. So this person was a college student at this time.

I was deliberating in my mind at this point "Should I vote for Mr. So?, Should I vote for Mr. Yi? Or could I abstain?" when the master of ceremonies called the candidates forward one by one saying, "How about this one" and from this corner and that corner the sound of "good," "good". "OK, so those opposed to this person raise your hand." and some ignoramus from one corner raises his hand and hears rebukes from people near him and lowers it again. . .

So in this way Yi Yun-gi was unanimously elected, and welcome with applause. The next person also was elected with the absolute support of 100% of the voters. And in this way the election got sped along until they got to the female candidate and opposing hands greatly multiplied. A count was requested, but also during the count the hands went up and down as neighboring people rebuked [nay-sayers] and harangued them so that raising and lowering was haphazard. How they counted hand and came up with a number was nothing less than miraculous.

At this point, however, would opposition hands make for a bit of difficulty? From the beginning, however, they used the method of not asking supporters to raise their hands and asking opponents to raise theirs with this probably in mind. At first nobody knew the reason for this [method], and then after a bit they got discouraged and raised their hands and then didn't, but from the turn of the female candidate on they even raised their hands looking nervously around, and having raised them got daggers looked at them and furtively lowered them, but when it came the turn of the utterly shabby-looking female party member hand got rashly raised. Seeing everybody enthusiastically raising their hands, and this time for some reason raising them so that you and I all seemed to be raising them, an absolute majority raised their hands . . . a sign of opposition!

This time's female party member was not inferior to the others whether in career or in the enthusiasm of her nominators on the part of society, and also, since all were candidates who suddenly appeared, the great majority of the crowd had absolutely no way to have knowledge about or judge them, so what could it be, this bold expression of opposition like this? To guess, it would appear that her appearance, the situation, was so shabby that confidence allowed them to not permit the conceit that "no matter how it's done you're my representative", and it was also quiet dissatisfaction with the election process up to this point, so the energy for all to contemptuously raise their hands seems to have just broken out. Crowd psychology is a really mysterious thing. In any case the people did something that outwardly seemed to be standing tall. (훤치레하고 볼 일이다)

Be that as it may, seeing the situation turn out this way the master-of-ceremonies

and chairman were completely flustered . . . And then the "proceedings' progress expediting group" (I have tried naming them like this here. They seemed to watch extremely deeply for a time, and their group's existence was obvious enough, and actions apparent enough, that one could count them by hand,) Right when a person seemed about to denigrate the female candidate they would propose some action, but I observed that it wasn't like that at all and the affair would hit a snag.

The master-of-ceremonies and the presiding officers took turns standing up saying that this comrade is putting her life on the line fighting for the people . . . and repeatedly emphasized that she is the most appropriate representative of our people--of course not saying concretely in this way and that way how she fought and is fighting. Their characteristic seemed to be that they would merely elaborate with abstract, exalted, and beautifying phrases--In this situation the "'proceedings' progress expediting group" among the crowd let us know what was meant and whether to raise our hands, and if someone recklessly raised hands after the others would suggest whether he would bear the responsibility . . . and in this way maneuvered materially and immaterially to give us a brilliant education. Amidst all this one person then another began to lower their hands. As we had to keep our hands up for a long time lowering them became a physiological necessity. And so in counting the numbers of hands raised, since they counted slowly scowling directly at persons one-by-one in this place and that place, in a situation in which people's hands were going up and down, there was no way to figure it out from looking, yet even so the master-of-ceremonies miraculously pulled out a number and said the number opposing was a few tens of voters (I didn't hear the number clearly) and announced that this comrade, too, was elected by an absolute majority of the voters.

After that the seven committee members mutually elect the committee chair, and these are presented with flower wreaths, and the children of the elementary school . . . nay, the children of the elementary school sang the People's Song in chorus. When did these chick-like lips learn to sing so well:

The bloodstained traces of Changbaek³⁾ ridges
The bloodstained traces of the Yalu River
Even today o'er flower-wreathed free Choson
The vividly shining holy traces
Ah! Our general for whose name we long
Ah! General Kim Il Sung whose name is so brilliant.

While listening to the Song of General Kim Il Sung, I thought, "Ah! We should forget

3) The Changbaek Rangers (known as Changbai in Chinese) are on the southern Manchuria/North Korea border where Kim Il Sung and his anti-Japanese guerillas were active in the early 1930s.

in an instant". Since there had been eight candidates (among nine people one person voluntarily withdrew) and seven had been elected, there was this silly business of what process one candidate had lost through, I hadn't left my place for even a moment, and I had looked and listened zealously from beginning to end. Well, in the end they say these nominal so-called voters had without knowing it determined election or defeat? Perchance oh so carefully I asked the old person by my side, but he didn't know either. To him, like me, it was idiocy. According to that crowd's oppositional expression that woman candidate a moment ago [was opposed] by a majority, but she too was declared elected by absolute majority support, and by looking at when she later received a flower wreath, she clearly was crammed in with out other honorable representatives, and it was truly a work that I saw but couldn't understand.

After the choral singing of the people's song was finished the closing curtain of the historic democratic election came down with three cheers of manse! for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for General Kim Il Sung, and for Marshall Stalin. Even during the election we heard a couple of American planes float in the sky, but luckily there were no bombs, and the huge pictures of General Kim Il Sung and Marshall Stalin fastened to the pillars of the pavilion had protected us from beginning to end.

July 27, 1950

The circumstances of our Village People's Committee election at daybreak yesterday appears in big letters in this evening's Choson People's Paper [조선인민보].

In "In Songhwangni's mass meeting of all the voters the curtain was raised on historic democratic elections" they start out saying "the candidates made bright by careers of bloody struggle make their appearance amid enthusiastic cheers", and then finish with "with the devoted support of the entire people a firm foundation is laid for people's government".

As for the noodle house boy promoting the Korean Independence Party at the election grounds yesterday who had the sole ownership of popularity, yesterday afternoon when they appeared from Internal Affairs by this means the entire family was send down lock, stock and barrel to their native district of Yongin. They were agile in concealing their traces but also this is a world in which the spread of news is also quick.

Up until this time I have lived without listening to the radio much. It might be because I'm insensitive to modern civilization, but first of all since I've become a family man I haven't had the wherewithal to purchase a good machine with which I

can listen as I wish to foreign broadcasts, and because I'm not inclined to want to buy a radio and listen randomly to the broadcasts of this place. However the more the children have grown the more I have felt the need for a radio, and also finally last year I received some manuscript income and bought a radio suitable for short wave, and on the way carrying it home I got caught in the crackdown on Master Chong Myonggyo Sodong Sowon and ended up having my things confiscated. That's because at that time you had to have the authorities' permission to have a short wave radio. According to my friends if you went through the procedures even a person like me could get permission to listen to short wave, but in addition in these quarrelous times I thought I might be suspected of listening to broadcasts from the north and so several times made to go to the Songdong Police Station but ended up not going.

Just before June 25th [date of start of the Korean War] I got an urge and asked Master Yongch'ul to buy a non-short wave one for me, and right now I am using it in a weird way. Morning and evening I listen to "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea People's Army Central Command Report," or I can listen to the broadcast political recantation statements [chonhyang] of those who have turned themselves into the authorities. I supposed none of them are able to write their drafts as they please, but nevertheless compared to the contents of former Republic of Korea Interior Department Secretary Kim Hyosok's unnecessarily obsequious and disgraceful piece of opinion, An Chae-hong, Cho So-ang and so forth, the so-called neutral party's broadcasts on the contrary slandered the Republic of Korea less, and praised the People's Republic less fulsomely, than Kim Hyosok, and so I liked hearing them. This is a question dependent on their personality, but I wondered if it isn't also because neutrality is a precious thing. And also it is widely rumored that since ordinarily only persons who curry favor with persons write [recantations], if the person who curries favor well with Mr. A flip flops, then isn't he also able to curry favor with Mr. B?

The broadcast of Dr. Kim Kyusik was mournful even in its tone, and also he said no offensive words about persons to intentionally please the ears of a certain side, and since it was like an explosion coming from his deepest person it moved listeners.

July 28th, 1950

Mr. Son Unsong came. He said he had received a message that he should leave the school since there is expected to be screenings tomorrow. He let out his anger saying, "Screenings? What screenings! It'll be those guys who, insulting us the whole time, dismiss us after a while even though they haven't bothered to prepare a bunch of lame excuses, won't it?"

While I chimed in saying, "Sizing us up and insulting us is their business, is what

attracts their interest," I also felt as uneasy as a rat hiding in a hole about what sort of person Mr. Son is. Even while living in the same village we had gone along without knowing one another at all, and I hadn't know that just before June 25th he had transferred from Songgyun'gwan to our school. We had come to know each others' house as a consequence of connection with our present school and had barely visited each more than a couple of times. His plain style and serious personality being trustworthy this sort of talk comes out even today.

Among Mr. Son's remarks were some interesting comparisons. "Communist party members are like the slaves that built the Egyptian pyramids.

July 29th, 1950

Since there is a screening today and he said we must go together I went to the school early this morning. And probably for the same reason today all the teachers had walked over. Except for those "still advancing south", those captured by the Interior Ministry or the Political Security Bureau, or those who had reason to be captured and had fled everybody seemed to be taking part. Since I was the latest to come in I sat in the empty seat they told me to sit in and was in the seat behind Yi Myongson and Yu Ungho. It had become a little bit awkward but it was something we had to go through with.

This screening, screening that they talked about, what they called screening in general was who had done what, and Mr. Yi got up first saying he had expected to get screened today, but because of circumstances in the Education Ministry it was put off until tomorrow, and assuming that since we were already gathered, he proposed we make progress on different