

***Changgom* [Long Sword]**

Hong Tong-sik (Pyongyang: Kumsong Youth Publishing House); Vol 1, published in 2005, 448 pp; Vol. 2 published in 2006, 451 pps.

Reviewed by Stephen Mercado

Hong Tong-sik is a man of mystery who has written an intriguing work of historical spy fiction.^a An author from a nation seen as promoting domestic culture to bolster the regime while excluding all else has written a tale sprinkled with allusions to Western authors. A writer from a repressive regime infamous for isolating its citizens from the world has authored a spy novel almost surely based on intelligence literature published in Japan and the United States. In the tale's two volumes, Hong writes of intelligence operative Chon Haeng-il, codenamed Changgom [Long Sword], and his actions against Korea's enemies. In the first volume, the hero burrows into the heart of Japanese intelligence in Manchuria to thwart an Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) campaign against Kim Il Sung, leader of the fight to liberate Koreans from Japanese rule. In the second, Chon sabotages a US Army operation to seize all of Korea and destroy the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Hong's fiction, as good fiction usually does, rests on many facts, in this case deployed at length and with accuracy over the period from 1940 to 1950 as the Japanese sought to expand their empire, were defeated, and gave over their country and Korea to US occupation. Atop this foundation, the author has erected a plausible plot held together with patriotic propaganda. Unlikely to be translated any time soon into English or to go on sale in Seoul, the novel nevertheless is available for purchase outside of Korea and for reading in several libraries in the United States.

The Mysterious Author

Except for this work, Hong is unknown. Neither volume of this tale includes information about the author, something occasionally found in DPRK books. Nor does his name appear in the pages of the Pyongyang's *Rodong Sinmun*, Tokyo's *Choguk*, Seoul's *Minjok 21*, or any other periodical or book on North Korean literature.^b The only other place Hong's name appears is as the author of a graphic novel, also titled *Changgom*, published in 2004 by a different publishing house in Pyongyang.^c

^a Korean and Japanese names in this review appear in their traditional order, surname preceding given name. In writing Korean names, I am following the established McCune-Reischauer system but omitting the diacritical marks.

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

Although Hong lives under a regime known for strict censorship and enforced isolation, he refers in various passages to classics of global literature and writes of the world beyond his borders in far greater detail than some of his American contemporaries. In addition to citing the classic Korean tale of the virtuous maiden Chun-hyang, the author makes references to the poetry of Pushkin, the fiction of Stendhal, Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*, and Dumas' novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In its description of Japan, including its intelligence organs, Hong's story is far more detailed and accurate than that of, say, Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honor*.

Hong adds depth to his picture of Japan by mentioning landmarks, conglomerates, newspapers, historical events, and intelligence organizations. Clancy, by contrast, settled for a few tired clichés of American writers on Japan, including the defiling of fair American women by ruthless Japanese corporate executives.^a Nationalism may explain why neither author portrays Japanese villains in three dimensions, but Hong adds many more details while avoiding obvious errors in Japanese expressions and names.^b

Even though *Changgom* was printed by a youth publishing house, the novel reveals familiarity with foreign intelligence literature. Hong names specific IJA intelligence organs, from Second Bureau (Intelligence) of the Army General Staff in Tokyo to *tokumu kikan* (special service organs) in Manchuria. His references to US military intelligence officers in occupied Japan and Korea range from Maj. Gen. Charles Willoughby, Gen. Douglas MacArthur's G-2, to the less-known Col. Jack Canon, who operated in the shadows of occupied Japan as the director of the Canon Kikan.^c Other surprising details point to specific works found in few libraries anywhere, let alone, one imagines, in Pyongyang. One character in the book, a Japanese deserter from the IJA Nakano School for spies, names the school's founding officers and piles up details about Class 1. Such facts are found in few sources, and their presence suggests that Hong read the class alumni history.^d Elsewhere in the story, there are references to Lt. Col. Jay Vanderpool, who operated with Philippine guerrillas in the Second World War before arriving in Seoul, via the CIA, to direct covert military operations against Pyongyang. Hong

^b *Rodong Sinmun*, the ruling party's daily, has often run articles referring to the nation's writers. *Choguk*, a monthly magazine of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, also highlights DPRK literature. The March 2006 issue, for example, includes a profile of Hong Sok-jung, whose 2002 fictional biography of a famous Korean artist of the 16th century made him in 2004 the first novelist from the DPRK to win a Seoul literary prize and later became the 2007 inter-Korean film *Hwang Jin-i*. The pro-unification Seoul monthly *Minjok 21* frequently publishes articles on Pyongyang literature.

^c Pyongyang's Literature and Art Publishing House published the graphic novel *Changgom*.

^a *Debt of Honor* (1994) published a year before the first volume of *Changgom*, also has Japan as the enemy of the story. Another popular tale with Japanese villains is Michael Crichton's novel *Rising Sun* (1992), a thriller with a Japanese executive's murder of his blond American lover at the center of the plot.

^b *Debt of Honor*, despite the paucity of Japanese details in a novel with Japan as the enemy, includes such errors as referring to the Japanese Justice Ministry's Public Security Investigation Agency as the "Public Safety Investigation Division," calling Tokyo's landmark Okura Hotel the "Ocura," and locating Chitose, site of a Japanese military air base in Hokkaido, on the "Home Island" [sic], an incorrect reference to the main island of Honshu. Several Japanese names, and at least one Chinese man's name, are misspelled. In one of his few attempts at local color in the dialogue by the use of a Japanese word, the author misuses *dozo*, which means "please, go ahead," to have a character say "thank you." Hong's errors are pardonable, given the notorious difficulty of deciphering Japanese names. For example, Hong identifies a founder of the Army Nakano School as "Iwaba Goyu," an understandable misreading of the Chinese characters for Maj. Gen. Iwakuro Hideo.

^c Some authors have spelled Jack Canon's name "Cannon."

likely based his description of Vanderpool on such US intelligence histories as *White Tigers* or *Dark Moon*.^a

Hong's knowledge of Japanese and American intelligence literature points to a man who, if not a current or retired intelligence officer, has had access to a decent library or two. If Hong were a veteran intelligence officer, he could be said to be following in the footsteps of such Western writers as Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, and John LeCarré. If he is not, work in fields like diplomacy or international trade could have given him an interest in foreign intelligence works and access to publications in the field. The dullest explanation would be that he is simply a writer who did his homework by checking out books from the Grand People's Study House, Pyongyang's counterpart to the Library of Congress.^b If so, then one must assume that Pyongyang has one or more libraries whose shelves contain impressive collections of foreign works in such fields as history and politics.

Volume I: Thwarting Japanese Plans

The story begins in 1940 in Japanese-occupied Korea with the conviction of Korean operative Yun Chol for treasonous activity and his dispatch, along with a former student—the book's hero, Chon Haeng-il—to Seoul's notorious Sodaemun Prison. IJA officers stage a prison break for the two, presumably in the hope they will lead them to the headquarters of Korean resistance fighters and Kim Il Sung. The two elude the Japanese, but, trying to make their way to China are captured by Japanese pirates and thrown into the sea. With Yun near death, the two are fortuitously washed onto an island that serves as the pirates' lair, though they are not there. The dying Yun asks Chon to complete what had been his covert mission, to foil an IJA plan to find Kim Il Sung and destroy his hidden headquarters.

Chon gathers up pirate treasure, leaves the island, and takes on the identity of a deceased Japanese schoolmate by the name of Takashima Yoshio. By one plot twist and turn after another Chon, as Takashima, makes his way into Manchuria and burrows into the Intelligence Section of the Japanese Kwantung Army Headquarters (KAHIS), which, under General Nomura Pingo,^c is in charge of Operation SPHINX, the plan to do in Kim Il Sung. In this environment, Chon walks the mole's fine line between reporting on Japanese activity and exposure should Nomura come to suspect a Korean spy in his midst. At the same time, Chon must

^a Nakano Koyukai, ed. *Rikugun Nakano Gakko* (Army Nakano School). Printed in a limited edition in 1978, the book was not for commercial sale. If Hong lacked access to the alumni history, he could have found such details in a number of books on the Nakano School written in the 1960s and 1970s by the Japanese anarchist-turned-writer Hatakeyama Kiyoyuki. Such details are also found in this reviewer's own history, *The Shadow Warriors of Nakano* (2002), but Hong's errors suggest that he did not read it. His misreading the name of Maj. Gen. Iwakura strengthens the case for the author having had either direct access to Japanese intelligence literature or to Korean translations of the same.

^a Col. Ben S. Malcom, with Ron Martz, *White Tigers: My Secret War in North Korea* (Washington: Brassey's, 1996). Ed Evanhoe, *Dark Moon: Eighth Army Special Operations in the Korean War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

^b Journalists from a pro-Pyongyang magazine in Japan (*Choguk*, March 2006) wrote of the impressive residential library of Hong Sok-jung, the first DPRK novelist to win a literary prize in Seoul, holding "works of the world's literary masters." One can imagine that, as an approved novelist could have foreign fiction on his shelves, so someone working in diplomacy, intelligence, or some other favored position could enjoy owning or accessing foreign intelligence literature.

Intelligence as Portrayed in *Chang-gom*

Corrupt Spirit: Intelligence corrupts the spirit of those serving an unjust cause: Yamada Koichi, responsible for security in the Police Affairs Department of Japan's Government-General in Seoul, has developed a dark character over the years spent in espionage.

Having drunk water from the muddled stream of espionage for nearly half his life, even after vomiting it back up, he had changed into nothing but a man of suspicion, wariness, and deceit. (I:90)

Revolutionary Spirit: "Intelligence, corrupting those involved in injustice, is a tool for those with revolutionary spirit." The operative Yun Chol explains this to dispel the doubts of Chon Haeng-il and encourage him to undertake a covert mission:

Revolutionaries know nothing of compromise in executing their duties. Our revolutionaries are aware that they bear responsibility until the end. Thus, there is nothing that they cannot accomplish. They form the solid foundation. Our cause is invincible. It is because we comprehend this that, facing any barrier whatsoever, we feel no pessimism. Overflowing with revolutionary optimism, we go to fight. Think of it. Who would attempt to prevail over such conviction, such spiritual power! Haeng-il, the time will surely come when you, too, realize this. (I:99)

Intelligence for Life: Chon Haeng-il replies to the assertion of an American intelligence officer that he is still young enough to pursue his dream, interrupted by intelligence service, of becoming a psychologist. Chon Haeng-il suggests that only death ends the career of an intelligence operative:

"Once you've stepped onto the swamp path of intelligence, you can never leave it for the rest of your life. Like it or not, you have to run strenuously down this "romantic," fatal path until the drawing of your last breath." (II:56)

Offensive CI: The operative Hyon Myong-chin calls on Chon Haeng-il to find a way to conduct offensive counterintelligence, in this case by putting a mole in Japanese military intelligence headquarters in Manchuria to smash an Imperial Japanese Army plan to strike the Headquarters of the Revolution:

"Our plan to act first to defeat Operation SPHINX, by penetrating the den where our enemies are plotting, is the most active and rational method. The path we are facing is none other than that one. Do your best to look for a possible way to penetrate the Kwantung Army Headquarters Intelligence Section (KAHIS). But you are absolutely not to do anything risky." (I:220-21)

bear a long separation from his Korean fiancée while parrying the amorous advances of Nomura's smitten daughter, Yomiko.

Chon eventually does come under suspicion, however, and is imprisoned and tortured on Nomura's orders. Chon invents an explanation for the acts that had aroused suspicion, escapes the torture, and persuades Nomura to send him to Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, even as the Japanese Empire crumbles. Tokyo capitulates in August after Kim Il Sung gives his order to the Korean People's Revolutionary Army to begin a general offensive. The first volume ends in victory, with the freed hero, standing on a bank of the Sumida River in Tokyo, gazing at the blue sky in the direction of Korea saying, "Ah, Fatherland, my liberated Fatherland!"

Volume II: Sabotaging American Machinations

Chon's moment of triumph ends abruptly in the second volume as US soldiers snatch him off a Tokyo street and take him to a US Army safe house where they are holding Nomura. Chon is asked to convince Nomura to turn over to Willoughby's organization a cache of Japanese intelligence documents on China, Korea, and the Soviet Union. Impressing the Americans with his bearing and his fluency in English, Korean, and Japanese, Chon soon finds himself taken into their service and sent to a secret camp outside of Chicago to assess Korean agents undergoing espionage training for covert missions in North Korea.

From Chicago, Chon is sent back to Seoul, where he learns of a US Army plan, Operation DYNAMITE, to destroy the DPRK. As he had against the Japanese, he undertakes a secret effort to foil the scheme. The many plot twists include having to keep his distance from his fiancée, now running a bar catering to South Korean intelligence officers working for the Americans. Appearing at times are other Korean characters from the first volume. These include a disgraced newspaper editor and a pathetic intelligence collaborator abused and betrayed by his successive Japanese and American masters. In the end, Chon and his network manage to keep Pyongyang one step ahead of the US Army. In the end, Chon

© Nomura's given name is an example of Hong's difficulty with Japanese. The "ping" in "Pingo" likely comes from the Korean reading for 永, a common character for Japanese names; the "o," a common ending in a man's surname, should be 雄, 夫 or 男. The correct reading for the general's name would be Nomura Nagao. This mistake suggests that Hong has a feel for Japanese culture but a shaky grasp of the language.

suffers the loss of his fiancée, who dies to save him, and he escapes to the north on the eve of the outbreak of the Korean War with her brother, a man of shifting appearances who, in the final scene, reveals his true identity as a fellow DPRK operative.

Fiction Resting on Fact

Hong has constructed his story on details of historical events that occurred during the period 1940–50. These include, among many others, the IJA advance into French Indochina in 1940; Lt. Gen. John Hodge's instructions in 1945 banning Korean political organizations; the use of Japanese soldiers under Gen. Abe Nobuyuki to keep order in the US-occupied portion of Korea; the shuttering of the Korean Communist Party organ, *Haebang Ilbo*; and other acts that destroyed the legal left in Seoul before the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948.^a

Particulars of intelligence work depicted in the novel also rest on facts. In colonial Seoul, for example, Chon and a fellow Korean operative choose to meet in secret among the trees of Changchundan Park. The site was, in fact, a rendezvous for spies, according to the memoir of a Japanese police intelligence officer stationed in Seoul who recalled surprise at catching Soviet Consul-General Alexander Poliansky in the park with a Korean agent.^b Another example is the fictional character Nomura, who is clearly based in part on Lt. Gen. Arisue Seizo, the IJA's last intelligence chief, who turned over the IJA Second Bureau's files on the Soviet Union, China, and other subjects to US Army intelligence as part of a Japanese effort soon after the war to forge an alliance with the United States.^c

Availability

As with many works of North Korean literature, Beijing and Tokyo book vendors stock *Changgom*. The

^a On US military government policy in occupied Korea (1945-1948), see Kim Chang-yun, *Migunjonggi chianjongchaek yongu* [A Study of the Security Policy of the US Military Government in Korea]. No. 33 (2008), *Hanguk Kongan Haengjong Hakhoebo* [Bulletin of the Korean Association of Public Safety and Criminal Justice, <http://ka-pc.or.kr/books/33/1.pdf>].

^b Tsuboi Sachio, with Araki Nobuko, *Aru Chosen Sotokufu keisatsukan no kaiso* [Memoir of a Police Official of the Korean Government-General Office] (Tokyo: Soshisha, 2004), 114–15.

^c Lt. Gen. Arisue, who formed his own Arisue Kikan to work early in the occupation with General MacArthur's G-2, wrote at length about his activities in a number of memoirs, including *Arisue Kikancho no shuki: Shusen Hishi* [Memoir of the Chief of the Arisue Kikan: Secret History of the War's End] (Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo Shuppan, 1987).

OSINT: Japanese police intelligence officer Yamada Koichi in Seoul blackmails Mun Yong-Chon, chief editor of the Korean newspaper *Donga Ilbo*, into covertly working for him by threatening to turn him over to the Japanese military's dreaded Kempeitai for publishing a newspaper article on a Japanese organization spying in Manchuria under cover as a joint venture company. Yamada suggests to Mun that a great deal of intelligence makes its way into open sources:

"To date, 60 percent of leaked political, economic, and military secrets have flowed out through articles you all have written. In light of this, it is no accident that we take an interest in journalists." (I:92)

Radio Deception: Fellow operative Nam Su-kil informs Chon Haeng-il that the Americans have broken the code for radio instructions from headquarters. Chon replies that they will use this breach in communications security to deceive the enemy:

"They're not fools. So I think it would be better to continue broadcasting from Headquarters in that code."

Confused, Nam Su-kil raised his head sharply and looked at Haeng-il. Then, seeing the smile that lit Haeng-il's gaze, he suddenly grasped his meaning.

"We'll feed them disinformation."

"Right. We'll have to confound them. Both those guys and I will receive the broadcast instructions. As for interpreting those instructions, we're going to do so the opposite way they do. Hitting our mark there, if we devise our tactics well, we can really make them suffer." (II:320)

Summation: As Chon Haeng-il makes his way from South Korea to headquarters with a fellow operative, the United States and their Korean puppets in Seoul start the Korean War on 25 June 1950. The Korean People's Army counterattacks, liberating Seoul in only three days. The narrative links the efforts of the novel's hero, whose code name is Long Sword [Changgom], to the past fight against Tokyo and the ongoing struggle against Washington and Seoul:

The spirit of the resourceful Korean People's Army units soared to the sky.

Truly, it was a stirring reality.

This is indeed the mettle of Korea.

Yesterday, we brought down the flashing blade of Korea's long sword upon the heads of the Japanese imperialist villains. Today, we bring down in a flash that powerful long sword of Korea upon the heads of the US imperialist villains and their running dogs. (II:451)



Beijing Sunyong Scientific Technology Trade Company offers both volumes on its “Korean Publication” Web site for a combined price of EUR 15.50. The first volume of Hong’s earlier graphic novel goes for EUR 1.60.^a In Tokyo, fans of spy fiction can find both volumes of the novel for ¥2,800 yen at the Korea Book Center, a store run by the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan.^b In the United States, copies are available at the Library of Congress as well as in the libraries of Columbia University, Harvard University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Michigan.



^a The Beijing vendor’s Web page is at www.dprk-book.com.

^b Korea Book Center’s Web page is at www.krbook.net. The pro-Pyongyang association is more commonly known by its Japanese name, Chosen Soren.