

Che-3 ui sinario [The Third Scenario]

Intelligence in Recent Public Literature

Che-3 ui sinario [The Third Scenario]

Kim Chin-myong. Seoul: Random House JoongAng, 2004. 2 volumes (252 pages, 266 pages)

Sin ui chugum [God's Death]

Kim Chin-myong. Seoul: Daesan, 2006. 2 volumes, each 254 pages.

Reviewed by Stephen Mercado

Kim Chin-myong is a popular and prolific Korean writer who has found a winning formula in novels that show the United States in a sinister light, ascribe the flow of current events to the hidden hands of plotters, and suggest that the Korean peninsula is ever at risk of invasion. His work both reflects and colors the views of many Koreans regarding Washington's policy toward East Asia, the role of the Central Intelligence Agency, and their nation's vulnerability. *Sin ui chugum* and *Che-3 ui sinario*, his most recent thrillers, illustrate Kim's worldview, which he has put forth in numerous media interviews.

Kim, who was born in Pusan in 1957, soared to the top of the Korean literary scene after years spent with little direction or success following his graduation from Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. After years of drifting, he suffered two successive business failures, the second of his own company. An avid reader, Kim also tried his hand at writing a suspense novel whose plot revolved around nuclear weapons. The book failed to attract attention when it appeared in 1992. He reworked the story and had it published the following year.

The refashioned tale of nuclear proliferation, *Mugunghwakkot i p'iotssumnida* [The Rose of Sharon Has Blossomed], made him South Korea's most successful novelist. The story of North and South Korea joining forces to defeat a Japanese invasion with a jointly-constructed atomic bomb became an immediate best seller and since its appearance has sold five million copies, a record for the Korean publishing industry. Since 1993, his books have invariably broken into national best-seller lists for fiction. *Hanul iyo, Ttang iyo* [Heaven and Earth], a novel published in 1998 that wove together the Korean financial hardship of the time with the author's perception that his nation was in a spiritual crisis, sold more than a million copies.

Kim Chin-myong may also be the most popular South Korean novelist north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Sales figures there are nonexistent, but a Seoul journalist found Kim fans in North Korea. A guide accompanying the journalist around North Korea in July 2005 asked him if he had read *Mugunghwakkot i p'iotssumnida*. After the journalist said he had, his guide claimed to have read the book as well and asserted that a "considerable number" of people in the North had read it too. Saying how impressive he found the story of the Korean people on both sides of the DMZ uniting without foreign interference to defend their land against invasion, the guide opined that the "South" would do well to produce more novels like it.

Che-3 ui sinario: Portraying a Sinister Ally

Pyongyang's censors are careful to limit the foreign literary works available to the public, but they would find little objectionable in Kim's dark portrait of the United States. The novelist repeatedly has described Washington as an overbearing ally at best and a threat to the peninsula at worst. Che-3 ui

scenario is just the latest to cast Washington as the villain. The story opens with a public prosecutor in Seoul investigating the murder of a South Korean novelist in Beijing. His investigation brings him into contact with a North Korean refugee and two Seoul university students working to uncover secret US plans against the peninsula. Operating from Thurmont, Maryland, near the presidential retreat at Camp David, the two students use an ingenious bugging device the refugee gave them to record President George W. Bush and several corporate executives plotting against the peninsula.

Kim's broad brushstrokes in *Che-3 ui sinario* produce a caricature of Washington politics in line with editorials sometimes seen in Seoul's media. In the novel, the US president comes across as a tool of American finance and the military-industrial complex. At Camp David, corporate leaders dress him down for almost accepting a proposal from Pyongyang to send the Korean People's Army (KPA) to Iraq as a means of easing tensions on the peninsula. Doing so, the executives explain, would leave Washington without an enemy at a time when the United States, no longer able to compete with Asia in the civilian sectors of the economy, absolutely required a foe to keep running America's giant arms industry. The future of Washington's tottering imperial structure, in other words, depended on fortifying the military-industrial complex. Kim names one of the three executives Morgan, an apparent tip of the hat to J. P. Morgan, financial tycoon of America's Gilded Age. A Pyongyang novelist could scarcely produce a portrait of the United States more in line with DPRK propaganda: Korea facing a threat to its existence from a puppet president and the plutocrats of the military-industrial complex pulling the strings.

The dark colors with which Kim paints the United States in *Che-3 ui sinario* includes the idea that assassination is a favored tool of Washington's in maintaining Seoul's subjugation to the alliance. Brief references to the imagined US role in President Park Chung-hee's assassination in 1979 surface in *Sin ui chugum* and *Che-3 ui sinario*. In the latter, Inspector Chang learns from a well-connected South Korean army general that Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner had turned KCIA Director Kim Chae-kyu against the president, who he had assassinated. That theme earlier appeared in *Hanbando* [Korean Peninsula, 1999]. In another earlier work, *Mugunghwakkot i p'iotssumnida*, a brilliant Korean nuclear physicist dies in an apparent highway accident, victim of the US determination to keep the atomic bomb out of Korean hands and to preserve Seoul's dependence on the US security blanket.

Sin ui chugum: Revealing a Hidden Hand

In the literary world of Kim Chin-myong, the covert acts of foreign powers, particularly China, Japan, and the United States, account for the turbulent flow of events threatening Korea. In *Sin ui chugum*, a Chinese general uses intelligence officers, academics, and gangsters in maneuvers to usurp for China the history of ancient Koguryo, whose kings in Pyongyang ruled territory extending as far as Beijing. In the story, the Chinese intend to use ancient claims of suzerainty over the northern half of the Korean peninsula to absorb North Korea. A Korean professor of archaeology in the University of California at Berkeley is the hero who joins forces with CIA personnel to discover a link between the Sino-Korean dispute over Koguryo and the sudden death of Kim Il-song in 1994, who, according to the novel, had suggested shortly before his death to former President Jimmy Carter that he would welcome the stationing in his country of the US Army's 2d Infantry Division as a way of escaping the Chinese orbit.

In *Sin ui chugum*, as in his other novels, the author works the day's headlines and a myriad of true details into the plot in much the same way as do Michael Crichton and Tom Clancy. The theme of usurping Korean heritage is based on a genuinely sensitive issue—played out most recently in disputes over placement of historic sites on UNESCO's World Cultural Historical List—on both sides of the DMZ in Korea. The Chinese codename for it in the story, “the Northeast Asia Project,” is also real—created by a team of Chinese academics in 2002 in an effort to establish that Koguryo was a part of Chinese history—and Kim warns of the potential consequences of the project in his preface to *Sin ui chugum*. He also addresses his suspicion that China really was somehow connected to the sudden death of Kim Il-song.

Other details abound in the novel. Kim Il-song did take former President Carter on a river cruise on his yacht in 1994, an excursion the novelist attributes in his story to Kim's anxiety over his pro-Chinese son or the possibility that the Chinese might intercept the conversation of the two leaders. When the novel's hero flies to Cambodia to find a key North Korean informant, he searches for the man in Korean restaurants in Phnom Penh and Seam Reap, cities in which two Pyongyang Naengmyong restaurants do indeed form part of a continental constellation established by Pyongyang to earn hard currency and possibly gather intelligence.

It is a pity that Kim is less careful in his references to intelligence work.

While the novelist puts the CIA on the side of good in *Sin ui chugum*, he fails to describe its personnel and practices in convincing ways. The first CIA operative to appear is Stanley, an officer operating under non-official cover (NOC) in Beijing. He supposedly works for an American news company as a foreign correspondent, presumably an unattractive cover for a NOC. Other characters are Clark, who flies from Washington to San Francisco to join the hero in puzzling out the mystery of Kim Il-song's death. There is also Elaine, a Chinese-American NOC working in Beijing as a private detective. After working within her cover to help the hero gather leads in China, she meets him in San Francisco in the company of Clark and is introduced as a CIA operative working on China and North Korea. Perhaps the silliest moment in the novel for aficionados of intelligence literature comes when Elaine introduces the hero, again seeking clues in China under an assumed identity, to a key DPRK defector; she gives each man the true name and identity of the other so that both can be "relaxed" in their conversation.

In nearly a dozen novels Kim Chin-myong has turned news from the headlines into imagined machinations by China, Japan, and the United States to dominate the Koreas. Should President Putin overcome the obstacles to Russia's renaissance as a great power and player on the peninsula, Kim may one day put Moscow at the center of a suspense novel. He may also turn increasingly to Korea's extraordinary past for inspiration. In 2005, he in effect presaged *Sin ui chugum* in publishing *Salsu*, the story of the heroic Gen. Ulji Mundok of Koguryo, who annihilated Chinese invaders at the Salsu River in the 7th century. Should Kim wish to return to historical fiction, he has some 5,000 years of Korean history from which to craft his novels.

I hope someone publishes Kim's works in English. When *Che-3 ui sinario* was published, talk surfaced in the Seoul media that it would appear in Japanese and English. The Japanese translation came out in November 2006—it was at least the third of his novels printed in Japanese. No English version has emerged. Although Kim's descriptions of the intelligence business are less than convincing, his stories are entertaining and fascinating reflections of Korean popular views about the peninsula and the great powers around it.

Kim Chin-myong's Novels, From First to Most Recent

P'ullutonyum ui haengbang [Plutonium's Whereabouts]. Seoul: Sillok, 1992.

Mugunghwakkot i p'iotssumnida [The Rose of Sharon Has Blossomed]. Seoul: Hainaim, 1993.

Kajuo ui nara [Kazuo's Country]. Seoul: Premium Books, 1995.

Hanul iyo, Ttang iyo [Heaven and Earth]. Seoul: Hainaim, 1998

Hanbando [Korean Peninsula]. Seoul: Hainaim, 1999.

K'oria dat k'om [Korea.com]. Seoul: Hainaim, 2000.

Hwangt'ae Chabi napch'i sagon [Abduction of the Crown Princess]. Seoul: Haenaem, 2001.

Pai K'oria [Buy Korean]. Seoul: Jaeum & Moeum, 2002.

Che-3 ui sinario [The Third Scenario]. Seoul: Random House JoongAng, 2004.

Tobaksa [The Gambler]. Seoul: Daesan, 2004.

Salsu. Seoul: Random House JoongAng, 2005.

Sin ui chugum [God's Death]. Seoul: Daesan, 2006.

Nabi ya ch'ongsan kaja [Butterfly, Let Us Go to the Green Mountain]. Seoul: Daekyo Bertelsmann, 2007.

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