

# **Ecstasy of Sensing Body: Between an Individual's Desires and the Ethics of the State**

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## **1. Introduction**

No society stays unchanged, stalled quietly. In a country with a strong one-man rule like North Korea, the transition of power is expected to bring changes to various fields such as politics, economy, society, and culture. Changes brought to North Korea after Kim Jong-un's seizure of power resulted from a combination of the international political environment and internal factors and also were made in the process. Mass game and art performance "Shining Fatherland" specifies the names and positions of participants in its closing credits, bring out masses of public as key players who produce the show, instead of putting them aside as passive spectators. Although individuals may appear to be a mass dissolved in a group, the names in the ending credits identify each individual who is not dissolved by anonymity.<sup>1</sup> The reason why the Manlima Movement, which appropriates the Cheollima Movement, failed to create a successful role model like Cheollima leaders may be related to the technology of the self of North Korean society, which gazes at its desires and adjusts the way of existence. If North Korean society recognizes and realizes itself as a main agent in a way of existence, different from the past, this can be seen as the "individualization," or the emergence, of "individuals," which are distinguished from collectivism that North Korean society has used as a driving force for a long time.

Unlike collectivism, which is the political orientation of a state, individualization gives life to the public at the individual level. Individualization physically embodies the body of an individual, and accordingly, the body is re-recognized as a component of the self. The collapse of the rationing system, which supported individuals' life and livelihood, has undermined state-centered values and beliefs that propped up individuals in the existential and ontological aspects. Individuals' economic power have been identified with the ability to create cracks in the state's mobilization system. In North Korean society with weakened state control, market activities chosen for survival help the public to contemplate their individualistic ego and individualized body.

Under the principle of nationalism, an individual falls into the dual logic of existence and absence. Changes in North Korea can be detected in North Korean defectors' recent interviews that say North Koreans imitate the hairstyle and fashion of actors appearing in South

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<sup>1</sup> Yee Ji Sun, "Nationalism and Cultural Performance of the Kim Jong-un Era," *Journal of East Asian Cultures* vol. 81, 2020, p.131.

Korean soap dramas, even though they fail to pass customs censorship and have to write a letter of apology. Interest in various consumer goods has moved from necessities for survival to beauty products, clothing, and accessories for improving and adorning the body. Collectivism forms an ethical, working body loyal to the state. On the other hand, in the process of improving their appearance, sprucing themselves up, and pursuing “beauty,” individuals, who defy social rules and express themselves, do not hesitate to reveal their suppressed personal desires by dividing their obedient body.<sup>2</sup>

When the establishment of a “socialist civilized nation” was presented as a national vision, women's clothing and grooming changed in response to this. A socialist civilized nation, which first appeared at the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea, can be defined as a nation that creates and enjoys a high level of creativity and culture based on socialist culture. However, requesting of women to “dress up and behave yourselves in an elegant and sound way”<sup>3</sup> is not greatly different from the existing patterns of control. However, women’s interest in appearance, grooming and clothing in everyday life has grown so high that it is hard to suppress any more. *Joseon Women*, the paper of the Democratic Women’s Union, appears to maintain its basic stance of controlling women's bodies so that they are in harmony with a sound socialist culture, yet partially approve individuals’ personal preferences and tastes. While remaining cautious against non-socialist trends by saying, “Dressing and grooming is not just a matter of formality, but a sign that shows a person's ideological and mental state,”<sup>4</sup> the paper leaves room for women to express themselves and show their originality by stressing that “women should smartly wear clothes suitable to their taste, fully arousing cultural sentiment.”<sup>5</sup>

Then, how are individuals, who are based on the technology of the self, represented in North Korean society? Can private desires and tastes be publicly revealed in North Korea where the state power is exerted like in the panopticon? How do the official publications of the country existing under the ubiquitous eyes of the state describe new individuals? Aren’t there any secrets leaked unwittingly by those who obey the state's rules and censorship system?

This paper assumes that North Korean literature has the identity of the Party literature, but the writers unconsciously express individuals’ existence and individualization in their writings. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine what kinds of cracks the realization of the body, the surface of the self, are causing to the ethical, obedient body formed by collectivism. The cracks in the body contain individual perceptions, the self-awareness of individual egos, and the process of changes in North Korea. Tzvetan Todorov said that “individuals were reproduced” only when a unique human with unique characteristics in a certain space and time in reality was drawn for the appreciation of other individuals. He regarded the “reproduction of an individual” as “praises to the individual,” as a humanistic thinking based on love for humans and life as they are.<sup>6</sup>

If reproducing an individual is perceiving life as it is, it can be viewed as the reproduction of senses. Senses are one of the ways to perceive the world. The five senses of taste, smell, sight, hearing, and touch are the contact points for the understanding and

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<sup>2</sup> Cho Jeong-ah, Yee Ji Sun, and Yi Hee-young, *North Korean Women’s Daily Lives and Gender Politics*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2019, p.242.

<sup>3</sup> “Dress up and behave yourselves in an elegant and sound way required for the establishment of a socialist civilized powerhouse,” *Choson Women*, November 2016, p.53.

<sup>4</sup> “Keep your winter clothes suitable for the requirements of the military-first era,” *Choson Women*, December 2014, p.52.

<sup>5</sup> “Women’s smart and cultural fashion for the fall season,” *Choson Women*, November 2016, p.40.

<sup>6</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, Bernard Foucroulle, and Robert Legros, *La Naissance de l'individu dans l'art* (Jeon Seong-ja, Trans.), Écrite, 2006, pp.7-9.

acceptance of the world. The world understood through the senses is input into the brain and accumulated as continuous information. Senses are personal and subjective because they are individual experiences, yet are also social experiences because they are related to the context of the time and space, the cultural state, and sometimes to race, class, and gender. In addition, the senses felt by an individual through the body are what the panoramic eyes of the state cannot sense, and the representation of individual's self-awareness and unconsciousness.

An individual's personal preferences, tastes, and desires for self-expression in everyday life appear on the surface of the body through grooming and fashion. On the other hand, in literature, a public language system, they are represented as subjective senses inside the body. The senses cause cracks in the ethical body, the spots where an individual is found. In particular, the first-person protagonist point of view senses the inner flow from "my" perspective, and shows the inner and emotional reactions closely. If following the story from the first-person protagonist point of view, a reader can see changes in perception and viewpoints different from before. In this respect, Ryom Ye-song's short story "I Love You" (2018) and Park Kwang's short story "The Affectionate Place" (2019) are worthy of notice.

## **2. The Body Captured by Senses**

— Focusing on Ryom Ye-song's "I Love You" (2018)

Ryom Ye-song's "I Love You" is about Hong Yu-jong, a researcher who is always obsessed with being number one. Since she was a child, she has dreamed of becoming a person who is named first and march at the head of a row because she hated the situations in which, due to her small body, she had to walk at the back of a row and her name was listed at the end of the roll book. She graduated from the First Middle School of the province with the highest honors, and entered the college of natural sciences at the top of her class. She is the head of hair perm solution research team at an organic chemistry research center, for which she is now working. She is also the only unmarried team leader there, and was expected to be the next chief of the daily necessities research department. When the director of the research center compliments by saying, "We have finally developed our own perm solutions," and tries to announce a pilot production, a voice is heard. It was the voice of Kim Jong-in, unexpectedly appointed as the chief of the daily necessities research department. He raises an objection to the result of Yu-jong and suggests deferring the trial production. Jong-in, who competed for the top position with Yu-jong in college, came as the department chief, giving her a sense of inferiority and causing discord.

To Yu-jong, who is satisfied with localized products, Jong-in is seen as a person who pursues foreign things. His foreign items and refined appearance lead Yu-jong to misunderstand him. At this time, the person who resolves Yu-jong's misunderstanding and clearly shows the national doctrine is her professor in charge of college. The professor, a minor character, appears as a mediator between "I" and Jong-in, and conveys what Jong-in has not expressed much enough. The professor explains Jong-in's social and ideological beliefs to help Yu-jong to better understand him while keeping the national doctrine in a pure state. The professor's words play a role in allowing the writer to deliver the national doctrine and guiding Yu-jong to seek ways to accept Jong-in's belief system as "mine." The professor's words are not those of a character, and belong to the public language system through which the author delivers what the state has authorized.

Ryom's "I Love You" has already attracted attention for its narrative strategies and techniques different from before. In this story, Kim Seong-su reads the inner landscape of young men and women in Pyongyang of 2018. In addition, Kim evaluates this as a moving

story about science and technology as well as a romantic narrative that a young man and woman confirm their love and become proud of their nation through the development of perm solutions.<sup>7</sup> Oh Chang-eun analyzes that a sense of sovereignty conflicts with the competition with the world surrounding the development of “our own perm solutions,” and concludes that women’s desire for beauty is revealed as a “narrative of leakage,” revealing the gap between the desire for consumption in everyday life and the state’s official doctrine.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Oh Tae-ho captures the liveliness of North Korean literature by paying attention to the fact that the characters in this story are created in stereoscopic manner as their inner side competes and conflicts with the Party’s literary ideology. He also evaluates that the delicate capture of emotions, such as the North Korean society’s desire for elitism and the reality of psychological descriptions, is the major attractions of the story.<sup>9</sup> While Oh Chang-eun focuses on a viewpoint of communication with the world, Oh Tae-ho believes that the logic of self-prosperity is led to the elitism. These studies conclude in unison that this story is an attractive work in general since globalization, elitism, self-prosperity, and emphasis on science and technology have taken shape into everyday narratives, and in this process, the romantic narrative of young people is accompanied by excellent descriptions of emotions.

The words of the professor and mediator between Yu-jong and Jong-in who are confronting with each other, the behavior of Jong-in, and the passion of Yu-jong successfully demonstrate North Korea’s national desire to pursue globalization in the industrial sector and excel in competition with the world. However, the unique feature of Ryom’s story is that its characters perceive the other through their senses. It would be interesting to see how the characters in this work perceive and sense others from a microscopical manner, rather than examining the progress of the narrative itself in the large frame.

### 1) Fashion, a sense of style

How the first-person protagonist Hong Yu-jong perceives Kim Jong-in, how her emotions change, and how her memories of the past are recalled all start from senses. At the beginning of the story, Yu-jong recognizes the voice, somewhat familiar, soft yet firm, saying, “May I ask a question?” before she perceives Jong-in.

At the moment, my body was stiffened like a stone.

A young man in an elegantly tailored black suit with a black shirt, neatly wearing a russet striped tie, was looking at me.

Eyes shining calmly and intelligently from a face that looks like a girl.

...

His appearance changed beyond recognition.

The old image of a college student from farming stock, who had always looked stuffy, had disappeared as if it had been washed away, and the refined and handsome appearance was both surprising and awkward to me.

— An excerpt from “I Love You” by Ryom Ye-song (*Joseon Literature*, March 2018)

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<sup>7</sup> Kim Seong-su, “The People’s Love and Happiness of Daily Lives,” Research Society of South and North Korean Literature and Arts, *Renewal of Senses, the People Putting on Make-up*, Sallimteo, 2020, pp.17-25.

<sup>8</sup> Oh Chang-eun, “A Study on North Korea’s Doctrine of Self-Prosperity and the People’s Responses in Life,” *The Journal of the Humanities for Unification* vol. 80, 2019, pp.99-104.

<sup>9</sup> Oh Tae-ho, “Contemplation of Indicative Changes in North Korean Novels of the Kim Jung-un Era,” *The Studies of Language and Literature* vol. 103, 2020, pp.223-230.

The first thing that catches Yu-jong's gaze is not his face, but the clothes he wears. When she looks at the face of a man wearing a black shirt and suit and a russet striped tie, she immediately gets to know who he is. The image of a “college student from farming stock, who had always looked stuffy,” has disappeared as if it was washed away, and I feel surprised and awkward at the “refined and handsome appearance.”

At a sudden, the man looked down at his watch.

It was a watch that looked exceptionally classy. A bitter smile appeared somehow on my lips.

There was nothing that reminded me of him in college.

— An excerpt from “I Love You” by Ryom Ye-song (*Joseon Literature*, March 2018)

The luxury watch that looks extraordinarily classy completely erases his plain and ordinary image of the past. Clothing is a means of expressing individuality. Depending on what kind of sense of value one has, accessories or clothing worn on the body can vary. Jong-in in college, Yu-jong remembers, was a person who quietly saw students talking, and not the kind of person who started a conversation first or actively socialized. He looked so indistinctly that he was seen as part of the flow of a crowd if he was walking with other college students. Jong-in's refined clothes and high-end watch are separated from his image in Yu-jong's memories, making him look like a different person. His image as a townie, not as a country man, his refined appearance, not a stuffy look, and his active characteristics of aggressively raising opposition, not the passive personality of just listening to others, are in harmony with his outfit. In addition, his high-end watch continues to rack Yu-jong's nerves.

Human beings have a desire to confirm and expand their identity and status through clothing.<sup>10</sup> Having stylish clothes and luxury watches is a consumption pattern, yet also seems to be the result of a Diderot effect. This refers to the process that a series of desires arouse, as well as a consumption pattern, in which those who have acquired a new item, purchase another one that matches the new one for the esthetic harmony. The fashion surrounding Jung-in's body indicates a lifestyle change that puts aesthetic values above the instrumental practicality.

Feeling defiance against Jong-in who is “imbued with an exotic vibe” after studying abroad, Yu-jong again has a conflict with him although she successfully completes the test of an adjuvant reagent. Yu-jong produces a result evaluated positively by everyone, but Jong-in rejects it for the reason that it is not world class. He even advises Yu-jong to raise her standard. Despite their chilled relationship, Yu-jong clearly senses Jong-in with her eyes. She perceives Jong-in, who doesn't share any word with her, as a “dazzling white collar and black shoes that sparkle without any stain.” Yu-jong feels “a strange pain spread all over her body” when she sees Jong-in talking with a “beautiful yet innocent” girl in a white suit with her wavy hair down. The “beautiful girl” wearing white shoes with pointed toes, “a white suit,” and “a white shoulder bag” is a person who has been commissioned to analyze the indicators for comparing North Korea's perm solutions with other countries'. However, this girl is the trigger that leads Yu-jong to feel painful jealousy.

## 2) Sensitivity of problematic sense of smell

The most intense sense in this story is the sense of smell. Smell is a very tempting and provocative sensation, but it stimulates imagination in the silent sensory organ that is difficult

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<sup>10</sup> Park Jong-seong, *Fashion and Power: Another Rule and Obedience*, Seoul National University Publishing Culture Center, 2010, p.42.

to describe in language.<sup>11</sup> While the sense of sight has been worshiped as a sense that leads rationality and civilization, the sense of smell has long been silenced as it was defined as a sense of madness and barbarism.<sup>12</sup> However, since the sense of smell is a primitive sense, it makes people promptly react to biological beings. That is why the sense of smell is triggered first before Yu-jong rationally judges Jong-in.

A light perfume scent was coming from him, a strange scent that I never had smelled in college.

My heart hurt when I looked at the trademark of the umbrella.

Because of these people who turn their eyes only to foreign things after having studied abroad and drunken water of a foreign country, heartbreakingly, the things of my country, the things of my country created with great efforts and struggles, are being ignored!

— An excerpt from “I Love You” by Ryom Ye-song (*Joseon Literature*, March 2018)

The “subtle scent of perfume,” which reveals the presence of Jong-in, means a new “olfactory identity”<sup>13</sup> that he has built up. Smell, which has an effect on the physical, psychological, and social level, evokes intense emotional reactions,<sup>14</sup> which in the story are expressed as “bizarre” scents that smell “subtly.” In addition, Jong-in's perfume embodies a consumption culture that creates an image of a managed, attractive body. When gross domestic production per capita rises, sensory consumption usually shifts from taste to smell.<sup>15</sup> A man who uses perfume has an urban and sophisticated vibe. The charming scent, classy clothes, and elegance remove the old and ordinary image of the past as a man from a farming family. Furthermore, Jong-in's perfume is seen as evidence that after studying abroad, he prefers foreign things and disparages domestic things.

The clothes, umbrella, and watch caught in her eyes can be put aside if she thinks rationally. However, the perfume, the “bizarre scent” from him, stimulates her sense of smell that is difficult to block. Oh Tae-ho interpreted this as a pheromone. The “essence of appeal” is as a carrier of desire, and therefore undoubtedly a powerful stimulant.<sup>16</sup> This becomes a medium that makes Yu-jong sense Jong-in in a sensual way. At the same time, this “bizarre scent” represents a discord between herself who doubts his morality and herself who is nevertheless fascinated with him. She feels “bizarre” because she instinctively senses his attractiveness. Jong-in's scent transcends her psychological boundary and moves to the realm of emotions and sensuality.<sup>17</sup> Besides, when Yu-jong senses Jong-in, she smells the perfume scent first. The scent of his perfume that has a powerful physical and emotional influence on her distinctly demonstrates his presence before she visually recognizes him. The scent left behind is the trace

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<sup>11</sup> Lyall Watson, *Jacobson's Organ: And the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (Lee Han-gi, Trans.), Inner World Publishing, 2002, p.17.

<sup>12</sup> Constance Classen et al., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Kim Jin-ok, Trans.), Hyunsil Book, 2002, p.13.

<sup>13</sup> Constance Classen et al., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Kim Jin-ok, Trans.), Hyunsil Book, 2002, pp.223-236.

<sup>14</sup> Constance Classen et al., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Kim Jin-ok, Trans.), Hyunsil Book, 2002, p.10.

<sup>15</sup> Moon Seong-rim, *Conscious*, Mediasup, 2020, p.00.

<sup>16</sup> Lyall Watson, *Jacobson's Organ: And the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (Lee Han-gi, Trans.), Inner World Publishing, 2002, p.86-87.

<sup>17</sup> Constance Classen et al., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Kim Jin-ok, Trans.), Hyunsil Book, 2002, pp.14-17.

of a specific path that an individual chooses within the world.<sup>18</sup> This path is where Yu-jong heads to Jong-in, and the path to the goal that Yu-jong's perm solution aims at. So, while Jong-in's perfume scent means advanced foreign cultures, Yu-jong is symbolized as a strong reagent smell.

The soreness I felt to see the girls secretly avoiding me due to my smell of reagents when I unexpectedly went to an amusement park on a holiday. I cried with that soreness that I was shunned off by the girls though I desperately try for their beauty.

— An excerpt from “I Love You” by Ryom Ye-song (*Joseon Literature*, March 2018)

Jong-in stops trial production of Yu-jong's adjuvant because she failed to solve the problems of smell and hair waves. Yu-jong's mother tries to cover up the smell by “spraying perfume on her daughter's clothes which smell only of reagents.” Evaluating Yu-jong's perm solution, a hairdresser says, “Domestic perm solutions have quite strong smell and cannot produce beautiful waves. They just mess up your hairstyle.” The harmful smell is a sign that domestic hair solutions have lower quality than foreign ones, and also means a limitation of North Korean products. If North Korea does not solve this, it will not be able to overcome the marginal and inferior technology capability.

Jong-in's perfume scent and Yu-jong's reagent smell tell the hierarchy of smells. Metonymically, the strong reagent smell reminds of North Korea, which has not been able to keep up with the world's advanced technology, while the attractive perfume scent associates foreign countries with improved technology. No matter how much perfume her mother puts on her clothes that smell of reagents, the smell does not disappear. The smell clung to Yu-jong was unpleasant to other people, so she had to skip the picnic. The politics of smell can be summarized in George Orwell's words, “The lower classes smell.” Just as classes are divided by smell, the smell of perm solutions acts as a standard that measures the globalization of technology.

It is another sense of smell that evokes new memories and emotions in the story. When Yu-jong returns after having traveled all over the country to solve the problems with her perm solution, an orchard with red apples, full enough to bend branches, comes into view through the laboratory window.

Suddenly, a wave of warm memories came quietly with a deep apple scent.

For a dormitory student who had a great deal of help from other classmates, summer vacation was the only chance he had to show his good faith for them.

A box of apples he brought every summer vacation without forgetting.

— An excerpt from “I Love You” by Ryom Ye-song (*Joseon Literature*, March 2018)

It was the day that Jong-in brought apples from his hometown and gave them to classmates, so Yu-jong also ate with relish. When she was about to go home in the evening, she met Jong-in, who was hovering around with a cowardly smile. Blushed, he handed an apple over to her, saying that there was a big one left at the bottom after giving all away. When she recalled the scent at the sight of apples through the window, Yu-jong remembered Jong-in smiling like a cow, boasting of apples from his hometown.

Nothing remains in people's memory than the smell. With the smell of something,

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<sup>18</sup> Constance Classen et al., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Kim Jin-ok, Trans.), Hyunsil Book, 2002, p.158.

memories associated with the smell come to mind because the sense of smell is the only sensation that cannot be blocked.<sup>19</sup> At the moment when the scent of apples brought back the memories she has forgotten so far, the apples create the “Proustian effect.” The effect originating from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* refers to the reproduction of the landscape in memory with details and richness as the smell recalls the memory.<sup>20</sup> It is because smell is not an intellectual but emotional sense, and is an unconscious perception. Also, while Jong-in's perfume is artificial and exotic, the apple scent is a natural and local. For Yu-jong, “the scent of apples that has remained in my heart for a long time” is a country-centered sense of smell for localization.

Yu-jong has her hair permed with the hair solution she has developed, but she fails terribly. In the process, Yu-jong gets a hint to solve the problem, but Jong-in feels pain. In any case, the story ends with a discussion on “how to industrialize our own perm solutions.” The romance of the two ended with an aftertaste. The smell problem, which implies inferior technology, is not led to the utopia of scent, unlike in Huxley's *Brave New World*. However, Ryom's "I Love You" is a story that demonstrates how senses penetrate the realm of life, exerts influence on individuals' perception and memories, and emotionally connects life styles with each other. The politics and hierarchies of smell, and the network of memories related to smell form an important context of the story. Unlike the time when the other is recognized and evaluated with his or her moral character and spirit, now a person is sensed at the material level, for example, through Jong-in's clothes, shoes, watch and umbrella, and this shows the change of lifestyle in North Korea.

### 3. Sense of Lonely and Solitary Emotions

— Focusing on Park Kwang's “The Affectionate Place” (2019)

Park Kwang's “The Affectionate Place” tells the process in which a branch school teacher heads to Lighthouse Island. “I”, the youngest person on the island, receives an emergency mission from the lighthouse chief and goes to the land to pick up a teacher who is an unmarried woman. On their journey to the island, they encounter a rainstorm, but arrive safely. The name of “me” is Song-un, and the name of the woman is Cho-hyang. Their names are called only in the recall scenes, and even it happens rarely. The two, who boarded a boat without introducing themselves, do not call each other. The lighter is so small that they can hear the other's voice and communicate with each other even if they don't call the other. The person who represents the public language in this story is the female teacher.

I am a person who wants to go out onto the land. In order to escape from the island, I conduct a research on electromagnetic radio signals that aims to develop in a modern way the sound signal device used in Lighthouse Island. I think that if the research is successful, I will become a researcher or technical instructor of a higher-tier organization, instead of a lighthouse keeper on a secluded island. However, I turn off the lighthouse light during the test of components for the electromagnetic radio signal equipment, and made a mistake of failing to deliver a maritime alert at a right time. At that night when the maritime alert was issued, I have no regard of the extinguished lighthouse light because I think there would be no ships out there.

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<sup>19</sup> Lyall Watson, *Jacobson's Organ: And the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (Lee Han-gi, Trans.), Inner World Publishing, 2002, pp.20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Lyall Watson, *Jacobson's Organ: And the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (Lee Han-gi, Trans.), Inner World Publishing, 2002, pp.234-235.



I mean the light we send is the love our motherland sends to her sons and daughters. So the light of the lighthouse must never go out. Never even for a split moment.

I don't know exactly what you are thinking, comrade. But while working here, I hope you will work conscientiously.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

For the lighthouse chief, a lighthouse is the love that the motherland sends to her sons and daughters. It is the light that should be kept on. Criticizing my complacent attitude, the lighthouse chief advises me to work conscientiously. His thoughts are almost the same as the sense of duty the female teacher has for the branch school on the island. The bottom line is that I, who don't feel worth working on the harsh Lighthouse Island, not visible even on a map, am impressed by the teacher who takes responsibility for teaching students at the branch school. She comes to the island despite nasty weather, and this is likened to the educational benefits provided by the state even to remote areas. The light of a lighthouse and the educational benefits by the state are metonymically compared with “light.” Just as a lighthouse illuminates the seaway with a light, education, like light, is a national benefit that takes care of every child, without anyone left alienated.

A sense of lighthouse light is like a sense of enlightenment through education. Just as light drives away fears of the dark, education opens the eyes of ignorance. The potted rose moss she carries with care symbolizes the nation's educational benefits and generosity. When I received a letter of dispatch and was deployed to this island, I also had a sense of self-fulfillment about my own sacrifice, a sense of self-reliance for myself who takes the road not taken by others, and a feeling of self-display that I want to show off this to others. I came here as I received a bouquet of farewells with a determined resolution, but what I feel now is solitude and loneliness, different from the beginning, and I think I have to leave the island to pursue my dreams, hopes and ambitions. The teacher says that she has brought the rose moss because “Rose moss seems to grow cling to soil because it feels grateful to the soil for helping the seed sprout and grow. Probably, due to the rose moss' commendable thinking, the soil also lets various kinds of flowers bloom.” According to her words, rose moss sprouting, taking root and blooming does not result from its will. In other words, “I” internalize the will of the nation/Party because I owe my growth to the nation/Party, and the nation/Party sees me as praiseworthy, allowing my ability to blossom. She also contemplated about whether to come into the island, but strengthens her will while watching the flowers.

I left with a firm resolution, but I can't believe myself.

I'm trying to enroot this rose moss, the flower of my heart, and take care of my heart.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

At her words, I feel ashamed “as if an ugly thing was reflected on a clear mirror.” As I am overwhelmed by her noble spirit cherished by her whom I only saw as a young and innocent girl, I suddenly realizes the truth of life. My life shines as much as I love my country, and the motherland always brightens the lives of its true sons and daughters with every care without forgetting anyone. At the end of the story, she feels like a “teacher who has newly enlightened me about the philosophy of life.”

This story is described as a monologue or autobiographical novel. It contains “my mood swings and desires, unlike the existing positive protagonists. Interestingly, the way of sensing the other, the female teacher, changes according to my emotions. In particular, for “me,”

the teacher is an object of observation and a being who is sensed with sight.

### 1) Voyeuristic gaze and sensuality

I am grumbling as I, as the youngest one on the island, has received an immediate mission to pick up a female teacher by lighter in a situation where nasty sea weather has continued for several days and the motor boat broke down. I see a “young girl” waiting for a boat at the quayside with a pink overcoat fluttering in the sea breeze.

She was slim and not very tall, namely, her body makes her look fragile.

Only her face was cute, reddish like a peach that started ripening.

I felt little awkward to call such a young girl “teacher.”

(They had said she was dispatched just after graduating from the teachers school. She is just a greenhorn as a teacher. Was such a young and childlike girl so stubborn to really leave for the Lighthouse Island in this nasty weather?)

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

I don’t hide my “unpleasant” expression since the teacher, who sticks to the idea of coming to the island, even if she has to swim to the island, is so young, although I am not satisfied with my situation on the island in which I evasively waste time. In my view, she is not perceived as a “teacher” but as a “young girl.” I judge her as a “greenhorn” when I see her fragile appearance with a slender body and a cute and reddish face like a peach.

The lighter that I and the girl are on is a small boat like a skiff. The sea, on which I head to the island while rowing, is an open space, yet also a closed space. The sea surrounds the boat like a huge barrier, and the boat restrains the movement of the two. They cannot leave the boat to go anywhere else, and no one can visit the boat until they reach the island. In an isolated space with a blocked path, the female teacher is an object to be observed and sensed.

The girl rose up and waved her hand towards the seagull.

An innocent smile lingered on her face.

At that moment, I felt the joyful dizziness.

A beautiful and pure flower unexpectedly blooming on a shabby lighter, and I, a lonely lighthouse keeper, rowing a boat while watching the flower right next to it.

It didn’t feel real at all.

How amazing I would feel if life were always so beautiful and full of joy.

After a good while, my situation came to mind, so I revealed my unpleasant feelings while smiling bitterly.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

Seeing the “innocent smile” on the face of the girl who waves her hand to a seagull, I feel a “joyous dizziness.” As I think that the girl is like a beautiful and pure flower that is unexpectedly blooming on a shabby lighter, and I am a “lonely” lighthouse keeper who is rowing a row, I feel like it is not real. I believe that the master of my own destiny is me, and I want to leave the island as I succeed in developing the electromagnetic radio signal equipment, but things do not go my way. “The mind wandering for no reason” is expressed in grumbling, and the lighthouse chief who has the authority over personnel matters does not care about what is on my mind. Her appearance, which suddenly fills my empty space as a “lonely lighthouse

keeper,” comes with a “joyous dizziness.” I feel dizzy and think it is unreal, like the Stendhal syndrome, a state of intense excitement into which one falls due to the shock and inspiration experienced when he or she sees a work of art. I sense beauty, joy, and fullness in her, but the reality of “my situation” with loneliness, lack, and dissatisfaction evokes bitter smile and unpleasant feelings.

In addition, the girl who says she has been on a boat at a campsite is like an “innocent girl,” so I feel “her naivety has pleased my heart.” To me, Cho-hyang acts as the signified, or *signifié*, of a “girl,” rather than that of a “teacher.” Apart from my joy, she shows a “terrified facial expression.” The girl, unprotected under my gaze, makes me “feel joy” with her innocence and naivety.

I tell her that it is difficult to make a flower garden because of the sea breeze and the weather, but say that sweetbrier grows well, with worries about whether the girl who carefully carries the potted rose moss may be disappointed. However, sweetbrier was cut off by the storm that struck a double of days ago. And I “suddenly” become depressed. At the same time, feelings of compassion for the girl grow, creating worries in my mind. I think that I have managed to live here for three years, and how long this “delicate and beautiful girl” will be able to endure.

The rocky Lighthouse Island with a circumference of about 5 *li* is a “solitary place” only with sea breezes, salt, fog, and the sounds of waves and seagulls. I feel resentment at those who sent a “greenhorn,” who seem to have grown up in a city, to this desolate rocky island. At the same time, I recall that the recent “social good custom” that graduates from educational universities and teachers colleges volunteer to work at branch schools of remote villages in mountains or on islands. The scene of those graduates leaving while receiving a “noisy farewell” from professors and students of their schools is often seen on television. I think most of them I saw were “strong-looking men and women,” not a “delicate and vulnerable girl who looks around as if she was scared on a boat.” I think she may be just a “child” who came to the island as she was seduced by a temporary impulse or social evaluation. And when I look at the girl again, I get the impressions like the Stendhal syndrome, the feeling I felt a little while ago.

How cute are the clear eyes shining exceptionally brightly in the clean, urban face, the reddish cheeks, the red lips and the dimples that dent in the cheeks every time she smiles?

Besides, the hair flowing on her fresh white neck.

In a word, her smell attracted me strangely.

My face turned red abruptly.

It was extremely lucky that the female teacher did not see my red face.

I felt sorry that I had meanly misunderstood this innocent girl in my own way.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

At first sight, she was a cute girl like a “peach,” but my gaze is now moving to her eyes, cheeks, red lips, white neck, and hair. And as the “girl’s scent” attracts my heart strangely, my face is burning. I feel sorry that I may have meanly misunderstood an innocent girl in my own way.

My gaze at the girl is voyeuristic. The relationship between the girl and me rowing in a narrow boat creates power. Her uncomfortable posture and anxiety result not only from the environment where the water gets deeper and the waves rise, but also from insecurity of being in an isolated space with a strange man. It is because she cannot escape from my gaze, and I control the means of transportation. When I see the girl, I feel innocence and sensuality as well. What caught my eyes is her body. To me, she is an object as a “young girl,” a “greenhorn,” a “child,” and an “innocent girl” with an “innocent smile,” and at the same time, an object with

erotic body. My sorry for having “meanly misunderstood her” is on the surface interpreted that I thought she came to the island due to her impulsive desire to show off, but what is between the lines is related to my erotic desires. The “meanness” is about my voyeuristic gaze toward her, about sensually sensing her body. Fredric Jameson provocatively stated that “the visual essentially has the nature of pornography.”<sup>21</sup> In this story, the visual thing that makes me so fascinated is the girl. As a subject of desire, I try to narrow the distance from her, the object of desire, but she does not easily allow me that distance.

## 2) Sense of loneliness and solitude

When asking the reason why she came to the Lighthouse Island, I ask her a curious question of whether she hated leaving her home. And she answers, “You are really asking me everything.” “Her arrogant and chilly response” makes me think that she is not a shy girl who hides her own feelings but is relatively outgoing and daring. She says that she came to the island even though she knew she could live “in a quiet place like a bird trapped in a birdhouse.”

She laughed bashfully as if it was embarrassing to reveal herself too much to me.  
I liked the girl was honest and unaffected.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

My judgement on her is adjusted again that she is a girl with a shy, honest and unaffected personality. So, I ask the honest girl about the troubles that make me lose my way. When asked about what to do if she really feels such loneliness, she answers that everyone on the island is good and the branch school is as well equipped as schools in cities. I also tell her that there is delicacy that can be enjoyed on the island and people on the island “live in harmony as they take care of and help each other, like a real family.”

She was innocent, without knowing what the other thinks.  
I let out a sign quietly.

If the island was as great as in a story, so great that one became attached to it, would I live like an uprooted tree.

— An excerpt from “The Affectionate Place” by Park Kwang (*Joseon Literature*, December 2019)

I again evaluate the girl as “innocent,” and consider my life on the island an “uprooted tree.” Lighthouse Island, a small island even in the West Sea, is a place difficult to identify on a map, a rough place only with winds, fog, and fierce waves all year round, and a place hard to live in. On the island, there are four lighthouse keepers including me, a radio operator, a doctor, and their families living. Everyone stays in harmony, but I am the only one that sometimes feels “I somehow don’t like this island.” I feel “lonely when I hear from other lighthouse keepers’ house wives talking friendly and children laughing.”

Hearing is a universal and primitive sense. For animals, sound is a sensation associated with survival. The light of the lighthouse, the electromagnetic radio signal equipment, and the sound signal device are all means of communication to inform danger for safety. However, I am alienated from this communication process. My experiment failed, and I made a mistake in the work as a lighthouse keeper. Besides, I don’t have a family to talk with.

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<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (Nam In-yeong, Trans.), Hannarae Publishing, 2003, p.13.

Sound is a sensation that is difficult to selectively block. Hearing, a one-dimensional sense, detects danger and delivers information like signal devices of Lighthouse Island. It also conveys emotional meaning. My loneliness stems from being alienated from the “wives talking friendly” and “children laughing,” unlike others. The different sounds made while communicating with family members have emotional meaning that gives a sense of security through communications.

Watching the rainbow appearing in the clouds, I prepare for the imminent danger. And again, I “regret” that I would have refused this mission. The stronger the storm, the deeper my thoughts. The emergence of the female teacher arouses some confusing thoughts. I define that watching her makes me feel “mean and uncomfortable feelings” because this teacher is determined to come to the island for three students despite bad weather, but I want to leave the island while leaving the light of the motherland behind. At the same time, I ask myself, “I have to go if it’s the right way. Isn’t there any more obligation or reason I have to live in that post,” while I justify myself, saying, “Aren’t my dream, my hope much bigger than what I am doing here. I have the right to make my ambition come true.”

As the wind gets strong and the waves rise, the story shows my psychological conflict with an interior monologue. Looking at her, I feel uncomfortable, but at the same time, but I also look into my desire to live up to my ambitions. Even though I have tried not to hurt her feelings with words sounding depressing and heavy, I confess that “what is really hard for me to endure is solitude that comes when I feel lonely.” The boredom of the monotonous life on the island that I confessed to my colleges was frowned upon as a “useless thought.” Her reaction is not so different. The girl, who talks just as she recites poems, asks back, “Isn’t there a lighthouse, the light of the motherland” I smile a forced smile at the innocence of the girl who does not know the loneliness and solitude yet. When I reveal “my real thinking that dominates my body and mind,” asking if she will be able to not know solitude even after she lives like me for three years, the girl gives me a look closer to anger. I regret so much since I am very embarrassed and ashamed that I have offended the beautiful girl at the first meeting with useless words.

Confession is a narrative technique designed to persuade readers the integrity of a character’s life. “I” who confess is a designed narrator.<sup>22</sup> My loneliness and solitude described by the writer cannot be understood by Cho-hyang, colleagues, and the lighthouse chief. The stronger the storm, the more unstable my mentality. Me being nervous and my interior monologue confirm my existence in my personal phase, and indicate my state of sometimes yearning for the recognition of others and sometimes being lonely and solitary.

My attitude of opposing and at the same time accepting the words of the female teacher aims to control North Korean literature’s restoring force to return to the official language system. In North Korean literature, personal depression, loneliness, and solitude are unfamiliar materials. The hardship and ordeals experienced by individuals are something to be overcome in macroscopic discourses on the fate of the nation and the future of the state, and the psychology of a human being who suffers a nervous disease is not addressed in the discourses. This story tries to rein back my mind, gaze and fleshy desire seeking for deviation with a well-organized answer of the female teacher, but “my” mentality named depression and solitude is subconsciously refracted. Moreover, my gaze at the female teacher is an expression of longing. It connotes a language of frustration and despair that I cannot help but tell the loneliness and solitude of myself isolated on the island.

In this story, I constantly confess my loneliness and solitude. Solitude refers to the

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<sup>22</sup> Kang Yu-jung, “The Narrative Techniques of Autobiographical Narrative and a Matter of Sympathy,” *The Journal of Korean Fiction Research* Vol. 67, 2017, p.292.

mentality experienced by an individual in a situation where he or she is isolated and disconnected from society. Believing that the inner state of isolation and solitude may stem from the inconsistency between one's presence and consciousness, Hannah Arendt distinguishes this from loneliness. Isolation appears when the political realm of life, in which people pursue and act for common interests together, is destroyed, and as a result, they lose the opportunities to unleash abilities. Isolation of not belonging to the world is a hopeless experience. Solitude refers to a state in which one is alone of his or her own volition and has a face-to-face conversation with him or herself. At this time, solitude allows people to communicate with and reflect on themselves through contemplation. Solitude requires exchanges with others, and enables people to confirm their identity through contacts with others. On the other hand, loneliness is a state of self-loss, in which one has failed to find the meaning of existence, and thus is floating.

I stick to the development of the electromagnetic radio signal equipment because once I succeed, I will be able to get the recognition of surrounding people and go out onto the land to "live a hectic life and forge various relationships with others" as I want. Life on the island is so monotonous and lonely for me who seek for exchanges with others. I end up confessing that though "I am the master of my destiny," I can't endure the "solitude that comes when I feel lonely." I came to this island after receiving a letter of dispatch in a euphoriant state of self-sacrifice. However, as the isolated environment creates a monotonous and lonely life, I seek to escape from here. Life in the city and the relationship I left behind emerge as what I eagerly longing for. In the landscape of a harmonious large family created by those on the island, I am isolated. Even a teacher who worked before the young girl was a married woman heavy with child. The land has become my nostalgia, and this proves that my present life is isolated. The thought, "If I evasively waste time like this, another year will pass while I am no aware of it," makes me feel anxious and helpless. As the passage for receiving the recognition of others is blocked, I feel even lonelier.

In this respect, the female teacher who will be living alone is likely to become the other who understands my loneliness. So, without knowing it, I speak my mind and talk about solitude, but eventually, my loneliness leads to the lack of understanding. This is because I came to the island intoxicated with self-sacrifice, but she came here with a "noble spirit." The love of the motherland, of which rose moss reminds in a metonymic manner, is just a catalyst to influence Song-un, the narrator. My existence is confirmed as the state wants through her, and the control of the state is rearranged as her sense of duty and idealism. At the end of the story, my worries have evaporated at some point as I confirm the attention and love of the state that shine everywhere like sunlight. However, that doesn't mean my worries are resolved. The tension created between me and her on the boat disappears when the storm stops and they arrive at the island. This story ends as in this process, she is dissolved into a "teacher" to me, and the two maintain their ethical and psychological distance. It is because in the story, "I" consistently sense her through sight, but Cho-hyang maintains a public distance with me until the end. It is the result of one-sided observation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Posters, movies, literature, magazines, and other North Korean media that can be encountered in everyday life describe "exemplary" characters and guide the public to learn from them. Most of North Korean literature and arts write narratives focusing on characters who internalize national policies and doctrines. Characters who enthusiastically perform the mission assigned by the state appear and propagate the national doctrines and Party goals, and this is regarded

as the essence of North Korean literature. It is because the state and the Party hold the key to operating North Korean literature and arts, and dominate their production and distribution. Writers are in a position to rapidly reflect the Supreme Leader's ruling ideology, state policies, and the Party's political line, in line with the obligation to faithfully serve as the trumpet of propaganda.

In general, individuals who are read in North Korean literature are individuals who represent the aspirations of their groups. Although secular, they are not vulgar, and prioritize the interests of groups and the welfare of the community over their own advancement. Well-created protagonists may be far removed from the daily experiences of North Koreans. Such protagonists may be created by the desire that reduces the centrifugal force applied to those who are growing apart from the center and returns them to the center that the state regards as ideal. Nevertheless, between the lines of North Korean literature, there are subtle conflicts with the layers of the state and the Party's doctrines.

So, if a change is detected in the creation of a character, attention should be drawn to the factors that drive the "change." If the cracks caused by the dynamism of life around the protagonists are caught in North Korean literature, if different ways of character creation from before and new types of characters that have not seen before appear, they can be an important key to detecting changes in North Korea.

The two stories reviewed above attract attention because what ideal protagonists have remained silent about so far forms part of the characters of those stories. Individuals can be captured from the daily life of the periphery, the fluctuations of emotions, and fragments of desires that must be concealed because they are subjective and selfish. The clothes, jewelry, and hair style worn on the skin are bound by Panopticon's disciplinary mechanisms, but the sensations under the skin are signs of subjectivity and individuality. The sensory experiences, as well as melancholy and lonely feelings and solitude that the first-person protagonist go through are subjective areas belonging to individuals, which cannot be standardized and ideally embodied. "My" self-consciousness and my body whose inner side is refracted are distinguished from the "body as machine" that is mobilized for social progress and development. The ethical body that practices national doctrines is still treated as important, but nevertheless, undisciplined senses and sensibilities were written in the language of literature. In this respect, the sensations that Yu-jong in "I Love You" felt, and the depression that Song-un in "The Affectionate Place" was not able to control signify individuals found in North Korea.