

# From Intellectuals to Opportunists: Redefining the Satirical Archetype of the “Chameleon” in the Works of Ch’ae Mansik

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Perhaps one of the most remarkable characteristics of the work of Ch’ae Mansik is his capacity for satire within a deeply traumatic historical context. Although he is known as a satirist, academic studies have approached his categorization from different perspectives. Given the significance of satire in identifying Ch’ae’s legacy, this article aims to provide a classification of his works in which satire plays a crucial role. In addition, through literary analysis, it proposes a theory concerning the archetypal character often found in his satirical novels. The article focuses on works that depict the “chameleon”—an opportunist archetype willing to do anything and disregard ethical considerations in order to attain material wealth and social acceptance. Furthermore, it explores the contrasting ways in which this archetype differs from the satirical portrayals of intellectuals found in some of his works from the 1930s. In so doing, this study seeks to elucidate how a focus on the chameleon archetype can contribute to a better understanding of literary legacy of Ch’ae Mansik.

**Keywords:** Ch’ae Mansik, satirical literature, modern Korean literature, opportunists, colonized intellectuals

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## Introduction

Ch'ae Mansik made his literary debut with a short story, "Se kil ro" 세 길로 (Three paths), published in *Chosŏn mundan* 朝鮮文壇 in 1924.<sup>1</sup> He went on to produce a total of 15 full-length and medium-length novels, 70 short stories, 30 plays, 40 essays on literary criticism, and approximately 140 essays, newspaper articles, and other miscellaneous texts.<sup>2</sup> His literary career spanned the Japanese occupation of Korea, but he also produced a significant number of works following the liberation of Korea in 1945 before passing a few months prior to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Like other authors of his time, his writings received little academic interest until recently following the republishing of several of his works. Among these are "Sonyŏn ūn charanda" 소년은 자란다 (A boy grows)<sup>3</sup> and "Kwadogi" 과도기 (Time of transition),<sup>4</sup> originally written in 1923.<sup>5</sup> Decades later in 2006, a version of the original manuscript bearing traces of Japanese censorship was republished by Pang Minhŏ.<sup>6</sup> In 2004, a work entitled *Hŭngbu chŏn* 흥부전, originally published in 1947, was discovered by the research team of the magazine *Munhak sasang* 문학사상. As noted by Pang Minhŏ, this work belongs to a series of works by Ch'ae that parodied classic Korean stories.<sup>7</sup>

The rediscovery of a series of pro-Japanese works published towards the end of the colonial period has also prompted debate on the persona of Ch'ae Mansik. In the context of increasing political pressure, he produced 14 works that have been categorized as pro-Japanese, the first being the brief essay "Na ūi kkot kwa pyŏngjŏng" 나의 꽃과 병정 (My flower and soldier, 1940).<sup>8</sup> In this essay, he praised the new social order the Japanese were establishing in East Asia. Other pro-Japanese works of this period include "Yŏja ūi ilsaeŅg" 여자의 일생 (A woman's life)<sup>9</sup> and "Arŭmdaun saebyŏk" 아름다운 새벽 (A beautiful dawn).<sup>10</sup> The latter was confirmed as a pro-Japanese work in 2006 when it was compared with a version published in 1947 which erased the controversial elements of the original manuscript.<sup>11</sup> Another example

<sup>1</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Se kil ro," *Chosŏn mundan*, vol. 3 (Sŏul: Chosŏn Mundansa, December 1924), 10–16.

<sup>2</sup> Kong Chonggu, *Ilche kangjŏmgi minjok munhak chakka waii taehwa: Yŏm Sangsŏp, Ch'ae Mansik, Kim Saryang* (Sŏul: Yŏngnak, 2022), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Sonyŏn ūn charanda," *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 6 (Sŏul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1989), 273–402.

<sup>4</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Kwadogi," *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 5 (Sŏul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yŏngsa, 1989), 169–290.

<sup>5</sup> Yun Sumi, *Ch'ae Mansik sosŏl e nat'anan silp'aeja p'yosang yŏn'gu* (PhD diss., Hanyang Taehakkyo, 2021), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Pang Minhŏ, ed. *Kwadogi, Ch'ae Mansik ch'ŏnyŏjak (ch'inp'il wŏn'go)* (Sŏul: Yeok, 2006). Also, see Kim Su Yun, "Claiming Colonial Masculinity: Sex and Romance with Japanese Women in Ch'ae Mansik's Colonial Fiction," *Acta Koreana* 21, no. 1 (June 2018): 262.

<sup>7</sup> Ch'oe Kiu, "Ch'ae Mansik sosŏl *Hŭngbu chŏn* palgyŏn," *Chŏnbuk ilbo*, March 2, 2004, <https://www.jjan.kr/article/20040301113839>.

<sup>8</sup> Ryu Hyojŏng, "Ch'inil chakka' Ch'ae Mansik, kŭrŭl miwŏ hal su ōmnŭn kkadak," *Ob My News*, September 12, 2014, [https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS\\_Web/View/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0002029333](https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002029333).

<sup>9</sup> This was serialized in the seven issues. See Ch'ae Mansik, "Yŏja ūi ilsaeŅg," *Chogwang* (March–June 1943, August–October 1943).

<sup>10</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Arŭmdaun saebyŏk," *Maeil sinbo*, serialized from 10<sup>th</sup> February 1942 to the 10<sup>th</sup> of July.

<sup>11</sup> Wŏ Chihye, "Ch'ae Mansik 'Arŭmdaun saebyŏk' ch'inil sosŏl," *Taejabo*, March 7, 2006. <http://www.jabo.co.kr/14628>. On the other hand, Ch'oe Yuch'an contended that the allegorical elements of "A beautiful dawn"

is *Yŏin chŏn'gi* 女人戰紀 (A woman's account of war), in which Ch'ae based his heroine on the military character Nogi Maresuke (乃木 希典, 1849–1912), a key figure in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, who committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*) after the death of the Meiji emperor.<sup>12</sup> However, following the liberation of Korea in August 1945, Ch'ae wrote “Minjok ūi choein” 민족의 罪人 (Criminal of the nation), in which he apologized for his involvement in these activities through a fictional narrative.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his pro-Japanese writings, the literary legacy of Ch'ae Mansik has undoubtedly earned him a place alongside other prominent writers of his time. The continued interest in his work is evident in the numerous academic studies carried by Korean scholars. On an international level, while translations of his best-known works are available, there are few academic studies in other languages. This article seeks to redress this imbalance and will focus on a number of works in which he developed a satirical mode of writing. Through this analysis, it will shed light on the significance of his satirical characters.

This study argues that there are two archetypal characters in the satirical works of Ch'ae Mansik: intellectuals and opportunists. These two categories can be differentiated in terms of their adaptability to the rapid changes Korean society was undergoing at that time. While intellectuals often felt like powerless victims of a culture that forced them to acquire an education but did not provide them with associated employment opportunities, opportunists were willing to adapt to become materially successful in Korean society.

The approach taken in this paper differs from previous studies in seeking to establish a guiding thread that encompasses the characters Ch'ae Mansik satirized during different periods in his career. Most previous scholarly research has either worked within a colonial/postcolonial division<sup>14</sup> or analyzed both periods separately.<sup>15</sup> Among these works, Chŏng Hongsŏp's work is perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies on Ch'ae's satirical literature. Relying on textual analysis, it dedicates a chapter to “Kwadogi” (1923) and argues

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were meant to criticize the Japanese Empire. See Ch'oe Yuch'an, “Arūmdaun saebyŏk ūi allegori yŏn'gu,” *Han'gukhak yŏn'gu* 39, (2011): 49–80.

<sup>12</sup> Yi Sanggyŏng, “Ilche malgi ūi yŏsŏng tongwŏn kwa 'kun'guk ūi ōmŏni,” *P'eminijum yon'gu* 2 (2002): 228.

<sup>13</sup> This was serialized in *Paengmin* 白民 (October 1948–January 1949). See Ch'ae Mansik. “Minjok ūi choein,” *Paengmin* 白民 (Sŏul: Paengmin Munhwasa), vol. 4, no. 5, 33–46 and vol. 5 no. 1, 49–65.

<sup>14</sup> Ch'oe T'aekkyun, “Haebang konggan Ch'ae Mansik ūi p'ungja sosŏl yŏn'gu: Chuch'e ūi punyŏl e ttarŭn p'ungjasŏng ūi yakhwa rŭl chungsim ŭro,” *Ōmunhak kyoyuk* 21 (1999): 511–42; Cho Chihyang, “Ch'ae Mansik ūi haebang chikhu sosŏl e nat'an'an p'ungjasŏng yŏn'gu” (MA thesis, Kyemyŏng Taehakkyo, 2005); Pak Subin, “Haebanggi Ch'ae Mansik munhak ūi chagi p'ungja wa sidae kamgak yŏn'gu,” *Hyŏndae sosŏl yon'gu* 75 (2019): 157–89.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Nam Chunhyŏn's MA dissertation follows a classic chronological order and divides Ch'ae's major satirical works into colonial and post-colonial. He concluded that since satire continues before and after the liberation, it is useful to analyze both periods. Nam also argues that while satirical literature focused on the contradictions of frustrated intellectuals, post-liberation works turned to the pressing issues of Korean society. See Nam Chunhyŏn, “Haebang chŏnhu Ch'ae Mansik p'ungja munhak yŏn'gu” (MA diss., Kŏn'guk Taehakkyo, 2003), 74–76. However, this approach is problematic when analyzing “Ch'isuk” (My idiot uncle, 1938) and *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* (Peace under heaven, 1938), in Ch'ae Mansik, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip* [Peace under heaven: Selected works of Ch'ae Mansik], vol. 1 (Sŏul: Aep'ul P'uksŭ, 2014). This article shows that it is required to offer a different categorization that goes beyond the socio-historical context in order to understand the nature of the satirized characters in Ch'ae's fiction.

that the protagonist's issues with his traditional wife constitute a self-satire that draws on Ch'ae's personal experience.<sup>16</sup> However, although it is possible to argue that Ch'ae laid the foundations for his later works dealing with young intellectuals in "Kwadogi," quantifying the weight of satirical and ironic elements in the narrative is challenging. This article, on the other hand, does not consider this book to be the first of his satirical novels, as other elements such as the love triangle are more central to its narrative. Something similar occurs in *T'angnyu* 濁流 (1938),<sup>17</sup> one of Ch'ae's major works. Even though this work includes a certain amount of satire (especially in the first half), readers would see that the narrative is centered on the downfall of its protagonist comparing to Ch'ae's other works that use satire to emphasize the contradictions within characters.

Yun Sumi recently focused her doctoral dissertation on the concept of the "loser" in the works of Ch'ae Mansik. However, unlike the present study, it did not focus specifically on his satirical works. However, it did establish a continuity among his works from different periods. Yun proposed that his not writing during specific periods in his career had a psychological impact on him. She also concluded that the protagonists in his novels always fail in their struggle against the world,<sup>18</sup> which deprives readers of the catharsis of victory. This article develops these ideas and shows how Ch'ae's portrayal of intellectuals is different from opportunistic "chameleons," who are presented as morally deplorable but socially successful, and how the characters' fate awakens a sense of catharsis in the reader.

### Ch'ae Mansik as a Writer of Satire

It is challenging to provide a concise definition of Ch'ae Mansik's literary style. However, Cho Tongil sees him as a pioneer in the techniques of irony and satire.<sup>19</sup> He also credits his realist novels with renewing the novel form and praises them as brilliant critiques of Korean society under Japanese rule during the 1930s. Similarly, Kwön Yöngmin presents Ch'ae as "an unusual writer who explored the potential of satirical literature."<sup>20</sup> Kwön focuses on how Ch'ae criticized colonial reality in some of his most renowned works, but he does not address his works after liberation. Similarly, Peter H. Lee depicts Ch'ae as "the great writer of satire during the colonial period."<sup>21</sup> There has, in fact, been a tendency to highlight only the satirical nature of Ch'ae's work, which neglects the fact that although "often pigeonholed as a satirist, Ch'ae was much more."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Chöng Hongsöp, "Ch'ae Mansik munhak üi p'ungja yangsik yön'gu" (PhD diss., Söul Taehakkyo, 2003), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *T'angnyu: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip* [Murky Waters: Selected works of Ch'ae Mansik], vol. 3 (Söul: Aep'ül P'uksü, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Yun, "Ch'ae Mansik sosöl e nat'an'an silp'aeja p'yosang yön'gu," 117.

<sup>19</sup> Cho Tongil, *Han'guk munhak t'ongsa*, vol. 5 (Söul: Chisik Sanöpsa, 1988), 425.

<sup>20</sup> Kwön Yöngmin, *Han'guk hyöndae munbaksä*, vol. 1 (Söul: Minümsa, 2002), 497.

<sup>21</sup> Peter H. Lee, ed., *A History of Korean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 413.

<sup>22</sup> Joshua S. Mostow, *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asia Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 622.

The satirical nature of the work of Ch'ae Mansik has drawn considerable attention, particularly in contrast to the generally more serious tone of his contemporaries.<sup>23</sup> As such, contemporary writers associated his work with satire, irony, and realism. However, the complexity of his work challenges these categorizations. Satire cannot be considered a genre but rather a mode of writing, which further complicates matters, as it is a prominent characteristic in some of his works yet marginal or non-existent in others. In addition, the relationship between irony and satire is not always clear. While the first denotes an intention, the second is a characteristic. Both concepts intersect and share common ground, but not all irony aims for a humorous reaction from the reader.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the reader's interpretation of the message determines whether such a reaction is produced or not. Consequently, not every instance of irony is satiric, and not every instance of satire is ironic.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines satire as "a mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn."<sup>25</sup> It can often be an incidental element in literary works that may not be wholly satirical, especially in comedy. Its tone can range from tolerant amusement, as seen in the verse satires of the Roman poet Horace, to bitter indignation, as seen in the verse of Juvenal and the prose of Jonathan Swift. On the other hand, irony, along with other devices such as paradox, cunning, sarcasm, and hyperbole, is employed to enhance the effect of satire. It can be perceived as a recurring rhetorical resource of satire. As pointed out by Hutcheon, the nature of irony does not just imply the decoding of a single inverted message. It often constitutes a semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings in which social context plays an important role.<sup>26</sup> Booth describes a four-step process that takes place as the reader attempts to understand irony:

1. The reader must move away from the literal meaning and recognize the incongruities;
2. The reader must consider possible interpretations and alternative explanations that may even contradict the original statement;
3. The reader should make a decision regarding their knowledge and understanding of the author's intention;
4. The reader should arrive at a new and valid meaning for the message.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, unveiling the true meaning contained within ironic messages is a complex undertaking, and this highlights the necessity of analyzing and accurately understanding this type of literature. It also makes translation into other languages particularly challenging and may potentially give rise to controversy, something that has occurred with a number of

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Fulton and Ju-Chan Fulton, trans. *Sunset: A Ch'ae Mansik Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 101.

<sup>24</sup> Zoja Pavlovskis-Petit, "Irony and Satire," in *A Companion to Satire*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 510.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 228.

<sup>26</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 10–11.

Ch'ae's translated works.<sup>28</sup> In an attempt to avoid such issues, this article presents the original Korean text for reference in the footnotes as an accompaniment to the translations presented throughout the various sections.

## A Taxonomy of Satire in Ch'ae's Literary Works

The satirical works of Ch'ae Mansik comprise only a small portion of his literary production. This section will clarify which of his works feature this mode of writing.

Ch'ae's satire is known for its sober criticism of history and reality, embodying a desire for improvement.<sup>29</sup> This article divides his satirical works into two broad categories: those that delve into intellectual themes and those that satirize different subjects. Apart from his full-length novel *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* 太平天下 (Peace under heaven, 1938), his most significant satirical fiction appeared in 1948 in the anthology *Challan saramdŭl* 잘난 사람들 (Distinguished people).<sup>30</sup> The first edition of this volume included the short stories “Nakcho” 落照 (Sunset), “Toyaji” 도야지 (Pig), “Non iyagi” 논 이야기 (About a rice field), “Maeng sunsa” 孟巡查 (Constable Maeng), “Misŭt'ŏ Pang” 미스터 방 (Mister Pang), “Ch'isuk” 痴叔 (My idiot uncle), and “Irŏn nammae” 이런 男妹 (This kind of sibling) (see Table 1). The title itself exudes irony and can be translated as “distinguished” or “great” people. The caricatured characters depicted on the cover of the book further hint at the spirit of the works included in the anthology.

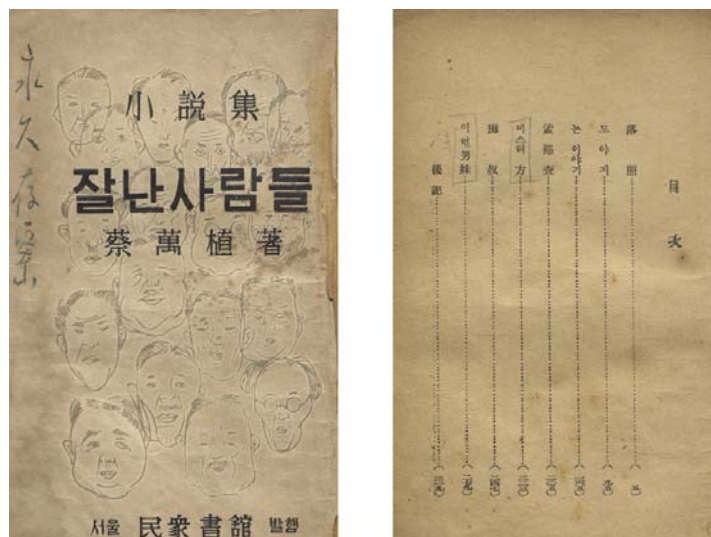


Figure 1. The cover of the first edition of *Challan saramdŭl* and its table of contents

<sup>28</sup> Han Miae, “Ch'ae Mansik ūi p'ungja sosŏl e nat'an an airŏni pŏnyŏk yangsang: 'Ch'isuk' kwa *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* ūi yŏngyŏk pon ūl chungsim ūro,” *Pŏnyŏkbak yŏn'gu* 16, no. 5 (2015): 183–211.

<sup>29</sup> Song Hach'un, *Ch'ae Mansik yŏksajŏk sŏngch'al kwa hyŏnsil p'ungja* (Sŏul: Kŏn'guk Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1994), 97.

<sup>30</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Challan saramdŭl* (Sŏul: Minjung Sŏgwŏn, 1948).

However, the text of the reflection in the editor's epilogue is of more interest for the present study:

It is said that history does not repeat itself. However, the world is powerless, reminiscent of the past days of "Ch'isuk." Approving a foreign invasion by a power whose military is strong, culture advanced, and rich; worshipping, praising, and voluntarily surrendering to it; assimilating into it and proudly believing in pursuing our own interests like the protagonist of "Ch'isuk"... Our land is again full of characters like him in 1948 from the leaders at the top to the errand boys of the foreign troops at the bottom.

저 무력이 강하고, 문화가 앞서고, 물화가 풍성 화려하고 한 침략 외세를 승인하고, 그를 숭배하고 찬미하고, 그에 자진 굴복, 아부하고, 그에 동화되고 함으로써 일신의 영달을 꾀하고 하는 것이 당당히 신념 화하였고 한 "치숙"의 주인공 나... 이 "나"류의 인물이 위로는 일부지도자라는 사람네부터 아래로는 주둔 외군의 심부름꾼에 이르기까지 1948년의 오늘에 또다시 이 땅에 충만하여 있음을 무엇으로 설명하여 할 것인지.<sup>31</sup>

Researchers have generally established a distinction between the pre- and post-liberation periods in Ch'ae's work. This is in some ways justifiable, considering that the liberation period marked the onset of a new era in which the resolution of the legacy of colonialism and the political conflict over the nature of the new Korea had a considerable influence on literature. However, I argue that there is continuity between the two periods, evident in the satirical characters Ch'ae depicts and in the title *Challan saramdül*. This is evident in the passage above, which establishes a connection between "Ch'isuk" and the protagonists of the post-liberation era.

A new edition of *Challan saramdül* came out in 1996 with the subtitle /p'ungja sosöl/ 풍자소설 (satirical novels).<sup>32</sup> It included six works that were not in the original compilation: "Angt'al" 양탈 (Whine), "Ch'angbaekhan ölgultül"蒼白한 얼굴들 (Pale faces), "Redi meidü insaeng" 레디 메이드 人生 (A ready-made life), "Myöngil" 明日 (Days to come), "Somang" 少妄 (Juvesenility), and "Sanggyöng panjölgi" 上京半折記 (Half season of moving to the capital). While the original anthology included only post-liberation satirical works, the new edition also included satirical short stories from the colonial period, making it the most complete compilation of his satirical short stories. However, "Sanggyöng panjölgi" is a surprising inclusion in this anthology, not just because of its criticism of Korean ethnicity that led to it being marked as pro-Japanese, but also because of its apparent lack of satirical elements.

One of the main characteristics of Ch'ae's satirical works is his concern with the lives of Korean intellectuals. This was a common topic among writers of that time as they were part of the so-called intellectual class themselves. However, unlike writers such as Hyön Chin'gön (1900–43), who dealt with this theme in "Sul kwönhanün sahoe" 술 勸하는 社會 (A society

<sup>31</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Challan saramdül* (Söul: Minjung Sögwan, 1948), 319. Author's translation.

<sup>32</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Ch'ae Mansiküi p'ungjasosöl, Challan saramdül* (Söul: Tosö Ch'ulp'an Pogosa, 1996).

that drives you to drink) from a depressing perspective,<sup>33</sup> Ch'ae wrote in a more realist style and included elements of parody. These works present a self-satire of helpless intellectuals and simultaneously a critique of the reality that produced such intellectuals.<sup>34</sup> Works such as “Angt'al,” “Ch'angbaekhan ölgultül,” “Sanjök” 散炙 (Skewers), “Kü twiro” 그 뒤로 (After that), “Kü üi kajöng p'unggyöng” 그의 家庭風景 (His domestic landscape), and “Redi meidü insaeng” fall into this category. All these works have an unemployed intellectual as their main protagonist.

Published in 1930 in *Sin sosöl* 신소설, “Angt'al” was Ch'ae's first satirical short story.<sup>35</sup> S, the main protagonist, is unable to pay his rent and suffers from hunger. From the opening scene, his shabby appearance is parodied, a characteristic that can also be found in other works such as “Redi meidü insaeng” and *T'aep'yöng ch'onba*. The dilapidated appearance of S and other intellectuals depicted by Ch'ae is a result of their poverty, just as the grotesque features of the hedonist Master are related to his wealth. In this case, S is uncomfortable with his stained clothes and worries that others will notice the holes in his socks, but he has no choice but to wear the clothes he has.

The focal point of the narrative is the battle between intellectual ego and hunger, and Ch'ae emphasizes the vulnerability of those who are unable to provide for themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Labor? That painful and lowly endeavor? Me? What about an unknown lover that may be waiting for me somewhere out there? What about my rich and luxurious life? Do these beautiful hands and face rot while doing physical work? No way.

노동? 괴롭고도 천한 그 짓을? 내가? 연애 - 누군지 모르나 어대선지 지금 나를 기다리는 듯 곱게 있을 미지의 애인은 어떻게 하고? 그러고 돈 많은 호화로운 생활은 어떻게 하고? 이 고운 손이 고운 얼굴이 노동판에 가서 찍어? 안될 말이다.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, however, S decides to engage in manual labor in a gold mine. As Song points out, this represents the journey of an unfortunate intellectual towards socialism and the abandonment of his initial dreams of a bourgeois lifestyle.<sup>38</sup> However, this work also sparked controversy. The literary critic Ham Ilton 함일돈 (or Floyd E. Hamilton) categorized it as bourgeois and nationalist literature, much to Ch'ae's discontent.<sup>39</sup> Although Ch'ae was not

<sup>33</sup> Hyön Chin'gön, “Sul kwönhanün sahoe,” *Kaeb'yök* (Söul: Kaeb'yöksa, November 1921), 136–148.

<sup>34</sup> Chöng Hongsoöp, *Ch'ae Mansik munhak kwa p'ungja üi chöngsin* (Söul: Yöngnak, 2004), 82.

<sup>35</sup> Yi Pyöngnyöl, “Ch'ae Mansik üi sosöltül,” in *Challan saramdül: Ch'ae Mansik üi p'ungja sosöl* (Söul: Pogosa, 1996), 346.

<sup>36</sup> Yi Pyöngnyöl, “Ch'ae Mansik üi sosöltül,” 347.

<sup>37</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 6 (Söul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yöngsa, 1989), 505.

<sup>38</sup> Song Hach'un, “Chakka üi yuksöng kwa sosöl üi silche: K'ap'ü wa Ch'ae Mansik üi munhakchök köri,” *Hyöndae sosöl yön'gu* 24 (2004): 12.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the author's response to the evaluation, see *Tonga Ilbo*, February 14, 15, 17, 20 and 21 of 1931. Also see Ch'ae Mansik, “P'yöngnon'ga e taehan chakka rosöüi pullbok” in *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 10 (Söul: Ch'angjak kwa Pip'yöngsa, 1989), 20–27.



affiliated with the KAPF (Korea Artista Proleta Federacio 조선 프롤레타리아 예술가 동맹), he was considered a fellow traveler or sympathizer,<sup>40</sup> since some of his works shared similar themes to those in the works of authors who were members of the organization. However, unlike KAPF authors, he did not prioritize ideology over aesthetics in his literature.

“Ch’angbaekhan ölgultül” is a short story published in the tenth issue of the magazine *Hyesöng* 혜성 in 1931.<sup>41</sup> The story incorporates elements of colonial modernity such as trams, café culture, beer, and motorboats. Its protagonist, K, wakes up late on a Sunday and is visited by his friend, S. Both are poor, young intellectuals. They discuss attending a trial involving a KAPF member, and upon realizing that they lack money for the tram fare, K decides to pawn his watch. On their way to the trial, they visit a bookstore with the money, where they read the table of contents of books on economic theory and communism but end up buying magazines. The fact that S buys the popular Japanese magazine *King* suggests that he has internalized the same modernism implanted by Japan that he criticizes. Furthermore, while intellectuals are portrayed as victims due to their powerlessness to participate in society, Ch’ae also highlights their irresponsible behavior made manifest in their hedonistic tendencies.

In another scene, the two young intellectuals decide to go to the Han River, depicted as “a great blessing for the people in Söul during summer—those who have the financial means, time, and emotional freedom to afford a round trip fare, as well as those who belong to a higher level beyond that.”<sup>42</sup> They sip beers while observing other people having fun on the river, criticizing this “bastard world” from which they feel alienated. They encounter a woman who works at a tobacco factory, whom they refer to as the “bitch,” symbolizing a sort of wicked woman or femme fatale who participates in Han River leisure. The pale faces in the title represent those of K and S, projecting the essence of colonial modernity. They represent intellectuals of the time who sought a means of resistance and transformation against a foreign-imposed modernity.<sup>43</sup>

Given the repetition of plot elements such as idle intellectuals wandering the streets and pawning their scarce belongings to finance their leisure activities, these two short stories may have provided the foundation for the expanded narrative of “Redi meidü insaeng,” one of Ch’ae’s most famous works published three years later. It is arguably the work that most accurately conveys the life of intellectuals at that time.<sup>44</sup> In the story, Ch’ae develops his views on Korean history, particularly in the third chapter, where he claims that the Taewön’gun 興宣大院君 (1820–98) was the Don Quixote of the fading years of the Chosön dynasty.<sup>45</sup> Ch’ae, in fact, produced a partial translation of *Don Quixote* in 1933,<sup>46</sup> a work that may have appealed

<sup>40</sup> Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea. Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Ch’ae Mansik, *Ch’ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7 (Söul: Ch’angjak kwa Pip’yöngsa, 1989), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Ch’ae, *Ch’ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 13.

<sup>43</sup> No Sangnae, “Kündae rül uhoehanün ‘Ch’angbaekhan ölgultül’: Ch’ae Mansik üi ‘Ch’angbaekhan ölgultül’ üi chungsim üro,” *Inmun yön’gu* 80 (2017): 169.

<sup>44</sup> Ch’ae, *Ch’ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ch’ae, *Ch’ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 51.

<sup>46</sup> For further information, see Chul Park, “The Reception of *Don Quixote* in Korea,” *Review of Japanese Culture and*

to him given its satirical characteristics. However, the Taewŏn'gun is generally perceived as someone lacking the open-mindedness to adapt Korea to changing times, which arguably could contribute to a more rapid loss of Korea's sovereignty. In the same chapter, Ch'ae emphasizes how the traditional order of the *yangban* is now obsolete, and in the emerging society, one can accomplish anything with money.

The main character in "Redi meidŭ insaeng," P, is an unemployed intellectual who roams the streets with his friends spending the little money they have, while his son is cared for by his brother. His shabby appearance is satirized, and Ch'ae mixes ironic situations with realistic depictions that portray intellectuals as victims of the system. This is best conveyed in the following quote:

If they hadn't been intellectuals, they could have become laborers. But since they were intellectuals, 99 percent of those who tried to join the ranks of blue-collar workers couldn't fit in and had to drop out. These rejects were dispirited and jobless, a powerless, cultured reserve force, and they had given up. They were like dogs who had lost their masters and become unwanted. In short, they were ready-made human commodities turned shop-worn.

인텔리가 아니 되었으면 차라리 (7/8자 삭제/편자) 노동자가 되었을 것인데, 인텔리인지라 그 속에는 들어갔다가도 도로 달아나오는 것이 99다. 그 나머지는 모두 어깨가 축 처진 무직 인텔리요, 무기력한 문화 예비군 속에서 푸른 한숨만 쉬는 초상집의 주인 없는 개들이다. 레디 메이드 인생이다.<sup>47</sup>

Ultimately, this prompts P to reject university education and send his young son to a job at a printing company. However, as Chŏng points out, it is difficult to see his actions as a reaction against a bleak reality. Instead, his decision reflects a cynicism that extends from the plight of intellectuals to the entire reality he sees around him.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, "Myŏngil,"<sup>49</sup> inspired by "Redi meidŭ insaeng," continues Ch'ae's exploration of the intellectuals. Pŏmsu, the main character, is an unemployed intellectual who lives with his wife and children. While his wife manages to earn some money from sewing, Pŏmsu struggles to find a job. One day, he travels to Chongno and accidentally bumps into his old friend, P. His friend seems to be doing well in business and insists on them having lunch together, despite Pŏmsu's attempts to hide his precarious financial situation. One of the most remarkable scenes occurs when they are in the restaurant and P goes to the toilet. Pŏmsu is tempted by the money poking out of his friend's jacket:

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*Society* 18 (2006): 47.

<sup>47</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "A Ready-Made Life," in *A Ready-Made Life: Early Masters of Modern Korean Fiction*, ed. and trans. Kim Chong-un and Bruce Fulton (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press 1998), 62. Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 7, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Chŏng, *Ch'ae Mansik munhak kwa p'ungja ūi chŏngsin*, 123.

<sup>49</sup> Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 7, 9.

They entered the restaurant and sat down for a while. P took off his suit jacket, placed it on the table and went to the restroom. Coincidentally, the pocket with money in it was facing upwards. Pömsu swallowed hard and stared at that pocket filled with money. His heart raced and his face flushed like when he had been at the jewelry store earlier. He calmed his racing heart and looked around left and right. There were hardly any customers, and no one was sitting near Pömsu's table. No one was looking at Pömsu. The opportunity was truly precious.

식당으로 들어가 잠깐 앉더니 P는 양복저고리를 벗어 걸상 위에 놓아두고 변소에 간다고 도로 나갔다. 마침 바른편 돈 들어 있는 포켓이 위로 가서 있다. 범수는 침을 꿀꺽 대키며 그 속에 돈이 시글시글할 그 포켓을 바라다 보았다. 아까 금은상점에서처럼 가슴이 두근거리고 얼굴이 확확 달아오른다. 그는 진득이 가슴을 가라앉혀 가지고 좌우 옆을 둘러보았다. 전체로 손님이 드물고 범수네가 자리를 잡은 식탁 근처에는 아무도 앉지 아니했다. 고개를 들고 보아도 누구 하나 범수를 보는 사람은 없다. 기회는 절대로 좋다.<sup>50</sup>

Pömsu had previously considered stealing a golden pin from a jewelry store but had abandoned the plan, lamenting that “even after sixteen years of university, he lacked the skill to hide a small golden hairpin” (대학까지 십육년이나 공부를 한 것이 조그마한 금비녀 한 개 감쪽같이 숨기는 기술을 배우니만도 못하다).<sup>51</sup> On this occasion as well, he is unable to steal money from his friend, much to his own disappointment.

One of the central elements of the narrative is the discussion between Pömsu and his wife about the education of their children. While Pömsu believes that education is useless, his wife thinks the children should attend school. When Pömsu arrives home, he finds his wife scolding the children because their eldest, Chongsök, has stolen tofu from a merchant. Chongsök felt “his heart race and a lump in his throat, but the dish tasted more delicious than when he bought it from that guy with money (가슴이 울렁거리고 목이 매기는 했지만 그놈이 여느때 돈을 주고 사서 먹는 놈보다 더 맛이 있고 좋았었다).”<sup>52</sup> Pömsu cannot avoid comparing himself to his son, who has succeeded in stealing food.

In the end, the dispute between the couple remains unresolved as Pömsu sends Chongsök to work in a factory while his wife enrolls his younger brother in a private school. Pömsu's decision seems reminiscent of P sending his son to work at a publishing company in “Redi meidū insaeng.” The fact that two intellectuals decide to send their sons to work in factories not only conveys the idea that knowledge is useless in colonial society, but also serves to enhance the ironic tone of the works. As Muecke states, contrast is related to the semantic inversion of irony, highlighting the disparity between expectations and reality.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the greater the contrast, the greater the irony.

In the works analyzed so far, Ch'ae presented a realist critique of the situation of

<sup>50</sup> Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 163.

<sup>51</sup> Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 158.

<sup>52</sup> Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 182.

<sup>53</sup> D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1982), 53.

intellectuals in Korea. While young people of his generation were encouraged to study, often abroad, upon their return to Korea, they discovered that there was no demand for their skills in the labor market of a still predominantly agrarian society. Ch'ae's critique of the system that produced such "useless" intellectuals who are unable to achieve economic stability evokes a sense of pity in the readers. He depicts intellectuals with a pathetic appearance who, even in their lowest moments, do not contemplate the idea of manual labor, as seen in characters like S in "Angt'al" and P in "Redi meidũ insaeng," the latter of whom is offended by the suggestion of finding a job in the countryside. In this sense, even though these intellectuals elicit pity from the reader, Ch'ae does not absolve them of responsibility for their situation. This can be seen, for example, in P in "Redi meidũ insaeng" choosing to spend his limited resources on drinking with his friends, despite knowing that his economically struggling brother is taking care of his son.

"Minjok ũi choein" (Criminal of the nation, 1948) is a complement to Ch'ae's other works on colonial intellectuals.<sup>54</sup> While this work is well-known for his self-reflection on his collaboration with the Japanese, from a thematic perspective, it still addresses the problems faced by intellectuals. Despite its gloomier tone, which has led some scholars to consider it "an atypical work,"<sup>55</sup> there are several narrative parallels between it and "Redi meidũ insaeng." These parallels support the notion that "Minjok ũi choein" is the culmination of Ch'ae's thematic exploration of the intellectuals.

### **The "Chameleon" Archetype: The Object of Ch'ae's Satirical Literature**

Ch'ae's satire often targeted a specific character. His concern for intellectuals stemmed from his own position as one of them. Throughout his life, he also experienced financial difficulties and fragile health.<sup>56</sup> While his portrayals of intellectuals offer insights into his view of this social group, a significant portion of his satirical literature focuses on different topics. This section will analyze a selection of novels that depict "chameleons."

Chameleons are small lizards capable of changing their color to blend in with their surroundings. Similarly, Ch'ae's novels feature a series of characters who are chameleons or opportunists, in contrast to the portrayal of loser intellectuals in other works. This section will focus on the following characters:

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<sup>54</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Minjok ũi choein," *Paengmin* (October 1948–January 1949).

<sup>55</sup> Cindi Textor, "Radical Language, Radical Identity: Korean Writers in Japanese Spaces and the Burden to 'Represent'" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2016), 107.

<sup>56</sup> O Hyŏn, *Paengnŭng Ch'ae Mansik saengae wa munhak* (Chŏnju: Sina Ch'ulp'ansa, 2000), 49.

Work	T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha	"Ch'isuk"	"Maeng sunsa"	"Misŭt'ŏ Pang"	"Nakcho"
Character Names	Master Yun	Nephew	Maeng	Mr. Pang (Pang Sambok)	Hwangju Auntie
Occupation	Moneylender and landlord	Mr. Kurada's employee	Policeman	Interpreter	Boarding house manager / landlord
Financial status	Very good	Good with promising future	Good but jobless	Very good	Very good / very poor (after 1945)

Table 1. "Chameleons" in the satirical works of Ch'ae Mansik

Probably the most renowned satirical works of Ch'ae Mansik are his full novel *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* and the short stories "Redi meidŭ insaeng" and "Ch'isuk." All three were written during the colonial period and are among his major works. *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* was serialized in the magazine *Chogwang* 朝光 from January to September 1938. The title, 太平天下, is a Chinese proverb meaning "peace under the sky" or "peace and prosperity." In one of the most significant scenes in the novel, the protagonist, Master Yun, utters this proverb while referring to the peace imposed by the Japanese, which presents an ironic critique of colonial rule. The basis for this interpretation stems from the coercive rule of the Japanese authority, which allowed a usurer like Yun to exploit his countrymen without fear. In the novel, Yun willingly ignores the oppression and injustice inflicted by the colonizers as long as he can continue to enrich himself.

The narrative follows a brief period in the life of Master Yun, who had once had the nickname "horse face," a landlord during the colonial period. In addition to its realist portrayal of family relationships and colonial society, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* exhibits a central satirical tone. This is evident from the opening scenes, which serve as an exercise in grotesque realism, evoking the concept of the *carnavalesque* as developed by Bakhtin. Grotesque realism focuses on the "literary expression of a central attitude in popular culture," manifesting in excesses, banquets, carnival celebrations, foolish games, and symbolic subversions.<sup>57</sup>

Old Master Yun, renowned in Kyedong for his wealth, was just returning from an excursion. The rickshaw had halted in front of his house and he was about to get down. [...] Pulling the rickshaw along the flat had been bad, but pulling it up several hundred feet of sharp incline after turning into the narrow alley had been enough, exaggeration aside, to make his tongue fall out. The old man weighed two hundred and forty pounds and then some! [...] Once on the ground, Master Yun recovered his full

<sup>57</sup> Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 65.

dimensions, revealing himself to be a man of great bulk indeed. In fact, an embrace, were it attempted, would more likely than not require a good armful and a half. To give you a better picture, it can be noted that the rickshaw looked like a toy beside him, and the gate began to tremble and quake long before he passed beneath it.

저 계동의 이름 난 장자 (부자) 윤 직원 영감이 마침 어디 출입을 했다가 방금 인력거를 처억 잡숫고 돌아와, 마약 덕의 대문 앞에서 내리는 참입니다. [...] 여느 평탄한 길로 끌고 오기도 무던히 힘이 들었는데 골목쟁이로 들어서서는 빗밧이 경사가 진 이십여 칸을 끌어올리기야, 엄살이 아니라 정말 허가 나올 뻔했습니다. 이십팔 관, 하고도 육백 몸메 [...] 내려선 것을 보니, 진실로 거판진 체집입니다. 허리를 안아 본다면, 아마 모르면 몰라도 한 아름답고도 받은 실히 될까 봅니다. 그런데다가 키도 알맞게 다섯 자 아홉 치는 넉넉합니다. 얼핏 알아듣기 쉽게 빧대면, 지금 그가 타고 온 인력거가 장난감 같고, 그 큰 대문간이 들어서기도 전에 사뭇 그들먹합니다.<sup>58</sup>

The caricatured physical appearance of Master Yun in the opening passage sets the tone for the novel and foreshadows its further development. It is not just Yun's grotesque appearance that stands out, but also his relationship with Ch'unsim, a teenage *kisaeng*. The significant age difference between them adds to the grotesque nature of their dynamic. However, Ch'unsim is not portrayed merely as Yun's plaything; she is a cunning girl who manipulates him into fulfilling her desires. In addition, the fact that Yun is not a true master and was formerly known as "horse face" emphasizes the ethically dubious origin of his newfound wealth. This wealth enables him to buy the title of "master," despite his profound ignorance. Ch'ae employs irony to highlight this ignorance in a scene where Yun ponders whether Confucius or Mencius was stronger: "In fact, one summer old Master Yun went up to the Confucian school. There, several scholars and gentlemen were sitting and humming while composing poetry. Out of nowhere he asked them, "Who do you think would win if the honorable Confucius and the honorable Mencius arm-wrestled?" The scholars and gentlemen were left open-mouthed, unsure whether to laugh or cry. Nobody was able to satisfy Master Yun's curiosity."<sup>59</sup>

A central element in the characterization of Yun is his obsession with climbing the social ladder. Once his social status changes, he becomes preoccupied with his position in society. This is evident in his purchase of the title of master and his attempts to pressure his grandsons (having already given up on his sons) to become prominent members of society. However, his family members seem determined to indulge their hedonistic tendencies and spend his fortune. This portrayal of a wealthy family sharply contrasts with the intellectual characters analyzed in the previous section and is clearly a critique of the social reality of the time.

While powerless intellectuals evoke an emphatic sense of pity, a selfish character like

<sup>58</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Peace under Heaven*, trans. Chun Kyung-ja (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 3–4; *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnba: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip* [Peace under heaven: Selected works of Ch'ae Mansik], vol. 1 (Sŏul: Aep'ul P'uksŭ, 2014), 17–18.

<sup>59</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnba: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip*, vol. 1 (Sŏul: Aep'ul P'uksŭ, 2014), 67–68.

Yun, whose wealth is derived from the suffering of others, evokes disdain. Yun's egoism is encapsulated in his famous sentence: "Let everyone else go to hell!"<sup>60</sup> This passage is perhaps the most renowned in the novel, showcasing masterful social criticism through subversion. The fact that a corrupt, grotesque character like Yun praises Japanese rule serves to expose its underlying miseries:

The bandits are all gone now, aren't they? And the chieftains too! The age of doom, when thieves took your property, and your life was worth no more than a fly's, those days are behind us! Look around you! There's a policeman on every street corner, and every village is governed fair and square! What more can you want than this? Don't ever forget to thank your lucky stars we live in this wonderful world, where the Japanese have mobilized a huge army, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, to protect us Koreans! It's a world of peace where we can keep what is ours and live in comfort! Peace under heaven, that's what it is!

화적패가 있느냐? 부랑당 같은 수령(守令)들이 있느냐 ...? 재산이 있대야 도적놈의 것이요, 목숨은 파리 목숨 같던 말세던 다 지내가고오 ... 자 부아라, 거리거리 순사요, 골골마다 공명헌정사(政事), 오죽이나 좋은 세상이어 ... 남은 수십만 명 동병(動兵)을 히여서, 우리 조선놈 보호하여 주니, 오죽이나 고마운 세상이어? 으응...? 제 것 지니고 앉아서 편안하게 살 태평세상, 이걸 태평천하라고 허는 것이여, 태평천하...!<sup>61</sup>

Yun, who saves his own life with no thought for his other family members when an angry mob attacks their house, is the perfect chameleon. He is willing to sacrifice moral considerations for the sake of climbing the social ladder. However, the novel contains a moral. When his grandson is detained and labeled a socialist by the Japanese police, the world he has built begins to crumble. As Hutcheon points out, a component of satire is the desire to reform and correct society's vices.<sup>62</sup> This is relevant because Ch'ae has often been associated with nihilism. In his satires of intellectuals such as in "Myöngil," the protagonists appear trapped in reality without a future. However, other satirical characters receive a justice of sorts in their stories. Intellectuals are depicted as a generation of losers, in contrast to chameleons, pragmatic characters who ascend the social ladder through cunning and corruption. However, in an ironic twist, these characters face a reckoning, particularly in the case of characters like Yun. In the end, opportunists like him must face a moral reckoning. This is also present in other satirical works such as "Maeng sunsa," "Misüt'ö Pang," and "Nakcho."

"Ch'isuk" is slightly different in this sense, as it ends without offering much information about the fate of the main character. It was initially published in *Tonga ilbo* 東亞日報 between March 3 and 14, 1938, and later included in the 1945 anthology *Challan saramdül*.<sup>63</sup> The main

<sup>60</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Peace under Heaven*, trans. Chun Kyung-ja (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 43.

<sup>61</sup> Ch'ae Man-sik, *Peace under Heaven*, 240; Ch'ae, *T'aep'yöng ch'önba: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip*. vol. 1, 272.

<sup>62</sup> Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, 50.

<sup>63</sup> Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chönjip*, vol. 7, 258.

character is an opportunist, a nameless youngster full of ambition who eagerly adopts a Japanese lifestyle in order to improve his own position within a society dominated by the Japanese. The title, composed of the characters 痴 (idiot, stupid, absurd) and 叔 (uncle), translates as “My idiot uncle.”

Perhaps the most notable element in this short story is its subversion of the satirical subject. Initially, the reader tends to empathize with the protagonist, who is also the narrator. The mistreatment of his aunt by his uncle creates a poor image of the uncle. However, as the narrative unfolds through a conversation between him and his uncle, his ignorance becomes clear, shifting the focus from the uncle to the main character. This ignorance is exemplified in a scene where he compares Korean and Japanese magazines and realizes that he cannot understand the former.

For the life of me, I wish I knew why every magazine that Chosŏn people put out is like that one. No pictures, no comics, and they’ve all got those complicated Chinese characters stuck in there. Who are they supposed to be for anyway? Plus, for guys like us, even when you wade through the Korean, it’s god-awful difficult to understand. So, you’ve got difficult Korean and complicated Chinese you can’t understand and so you don’t read it.

대체 죄선(조선) 사람들은 잡지 하나를 해도 어찌 모두 그 꼬락서니로 해놓는지. 사진도 없지요, 망가(만화)도 없지요. 그리고는 맨판 까탈스런 한문 글자로다가 처박아 놓으니 그걸 누구더러 보란 말인고? 더구나 우리 같은 놈은 언문도 그런대로 뜯어보기는 보아도 읽기에 여간만 폐롭지가 않아요. 그러니 어려운 언문하고 까다로운 한문하고를 섞어서 쓴 글은 뜻을 몰라 못 보지요.<sup>64</sup>

After examining works like “Redi meidŭ insaeng” and “Myŏngil,” where intellectuals reject education and send their sons to factories, it is interesting to find a protagonist that hints at the tragedy that could unfold if Koreans give up on education. In this case, the ignorant main young man lacks the tools to resist Japanese propaganda and decides to pursue a life focused on money as his highest value. His desire is to become as Japanese as possible by marrying a Japanese woman, changing his name to a Japanese one, and sending their future children to Japanese schools. In his view, the combination of these elements, along with hard work, will guarantee him a promising future in Korea. On the other hand, he cannot understand why his uncle spent so many years at the university only to be imprisoned for his socialist ideas.

While this short story serves as a warning against the danger of Japanese rule for future generations and indirectly criticizes Japanese rule, it is also a critique of Korean intellectuals. If one accepts that intellectuals bear a social responsibility to educate and disseminate knowledge in society, then they fail in this duty when they are unable to reach individuals like the narrator, who turns to easier Japanese publications when he cannot understand the

<sup>64</sup> Ch’ae Mansik, *My Innocent Uncle*, trans. Bruce Fulton, Ju-Chan Fulton, Kim Chong-un, and Robert Armstrong (Sŏul: Chimundang, 2003), 22; Ch’ae, *T’aep’yŏng ch’ŏnha: Ch’ae Mansik taep’yo chakp’umjip*, vol. 1, 72–73.



Korean ones. In essence, this is a critique of Korean intellectuals who write for a minority of educated people and fail to spread their ideas to a wider audience.

*T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha* and “Ch'isuk” are well known for their indirect critique of the Japanese through the satirical portrayal of their protagonists. However, Ch'ae also exposes these opportunists in his post-liberation satirical works. Good examples of this are “Maeng sunsa” (Constable Maeng) and “Misŭt'ŏ Pang” (Mister Pang), published in the third volume of the journal, *Paengmin* 白民, and “Nakcho” (Sunset), published in the second issue of the seventh volume of journal, *Taejo* 대조, respectively.<sup>65</sup>

Ch'ae was surprisingly aware of the direction that society would take in the years following liberation. He portrays the main character in “Maeng sunsa” as a petty and ignorant officer. This work, along with other works of the period such as “Misŭt'ŏ Pang” and “Non iyagi,” share a certain skepticism about the new post-liberation society.<sup>66</sup> The opening scene once again uses techniques of exaggeration and contrast to set up the mood of the novel. It establishes a relationship between Maeng and great scholars like Mencius, with the next scene highlighting the absurdity of such a possibility, reintroducing an element of reality.<sup>67</sup>

Was constable Maeng a direct descendant of the great sage Mencius known to us as Maengja? No one seems to know. Nor was it known for sure how many generations separated the noted prime minister Maeng Kobul, from Korea, and the Chinese minister Maeng Chŏngsung.

맹순사가 동양의 대현이라는 맹자님과 어떤 혈통의 관계가 있는지 없는지, 또 우리 나라 명재상 맹고불이 맹정승과는 제 몇대손이나 되는지, 혹은 아무것도 안되는지, 그런 것은 상고하여 보지 못하였다.<sup>68</sup>

Maeng, who Ch'ae portrays as an ignorant and unambitious man, was a police officer in the colonial regime. Ironically, it takes him only a simple test to obtain a new bracelet that turns him into a policeman in liberated Korea, highlighting the lack of interest of the US occupation forces in addressing the legacy of the colonial period. In this sense, Maeng appears to be yet another opportunist who changes his allegiance to the new powers without suffering any moral contradictions. Furthermore, when reflecting on his own activities, he considers himself morally upright, claiming that he has never taken more than 100 won from a person. According to his worldview, small-scale corruption and bribes are acceptable.

This is interesting because in “Minjok ũi chŏein,” Ch'ae reflects on the idea of collaboration and argues that there are different levels. This begs the question of whether

<sup>65</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 8, 257.

<sup>66</sup> Pak Subin, “Haebanggi Ch'ae Mansik munhak ũi chagi p'ungja wa sidae kamgak yŏn'gu,” 171.

<sup>67</sup> Joel Stevenson, “Short Fiction of the Liberation Period: Ch'ae Mansik and Constable Maeng,” *Acta Koreana* 2, no. 1 (1999): 131.

<sup>68</sup> Translation from Stevenson, “Short Fiction of the Liberation Period,” 132; Ch'ae, *Ch'ae Mansik chŏnjip*, vol. 8, 259.

Maeng should he be on the same level as others who became rich by exploiting their fellow Koreans. There is no way to defend Maeng's innocence as his role as a colonial policeman symbolized the violent oppression of Koreans by the Japanese. Later, when he joins the police force of liberated Korea, he seems to face his punishment when a murderer he had previously guarded in jail becomes his colleague. This prompts a change in his consciousness, embodied in the last sentence of the story, in which he establishes a connection between police officers and murderers, claiming that all they did in the past was extort and kill innocent people.

In "Misŭt'ŏ Pang," the chameleon reappears, this time in the form of an ambitious protagonist. Misŭt'ŏ Pang is a cunning man of humble origins who leverages his broken English into material success in liberated Korea. Unlike the characters analyzed so far, his activities during the colonial period are relatively unknown, but he did travel to other countries where he learned about the world and enjoyed himself before returning empty-handed to the family he left in Korea. In contrast to Pang, Paek Chusa represents the legacy of the colonial period. While Pang becomes wealthy working as an interpreter for an American officer, Paek, a man from noble origins, loses his wealth with the change of regime.

Paek misses the golden days of the colonial era when his family members lived in wealth and asks Pang to use his influence with the Americans to recover his lost wealth. Pang does not hesitate to boast about his newly acquired influence and exaggerates his power.

"Don't you worry." Mister Pang seemed delighted to be of service.

"Do you really mean it?"

"Why, right this minute, one word from my lips and a hundred, a thousand MPs with machine guns will swarm down and make mincemeat out of them, mincemeat!"

"염려 마슈." 미스터 방은 선뜻 쾌한 대답이었다. "진정인가?" "머, 지금 당장이라도, 내 입 한 번만 떨어진다 치면, 기관총 들면 었피가 백 명이구 천 명이구 들끓어 내려가서, 들이 쑥밭을 만들어 놓니다, 쑥밭을."<sup>69</sup>

Another satirical work from the time that is not mentioned in Fig. 2 is "Toyaji" (Pig) published in *Munjang* in 1948.<sup>70</sup> The novel depicts the political reality of Korea after liberation. It follows the story of Mun T'aesŏk and his father Mun Yŏnghwan, a corrupt businessman who is running for election to parliament. Ch'ae depicts these characters as total opposites. Labelled as a "*ppalgaengi*" (commie) or leftist, Mun T'aesŏk is a young progressive who feels alienated from the corruption of his family members represented by his father and his supporters. T'aesŏk and his friends are a counterpart to the wealthy, materialistic, and corrupt older generation. This, together with the fact that Mun Yŏnghwan finally fails in his

<sup>69</sup> Fulton and Fulton, *Sunset. A Ch'ae Mansik Reader*, 270; Ch'ae Mansik, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip*, vol. 1, 334.

<sup>70</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, "Toyaji," *Munjang, Sokkanbo* (Sŏul: Munjangsa, 1948), 4–44.

political aspirations represents Ch'ae's hopes for a better future.<sup>71</sup> However, despite its tone, this work leans more towards political satire than character-focused satire.<sup>72</sup> The same is true of "Nakcho." While both works offer a more complete portrayal of the contradictions and corruption of the liberation period than Ch'ae's earlier post-liberation works, they do not focus on the satire of one main character.

Despite this, one character from "Nakcho," Hwangju Auntie, does fit into the chameleon category. Although she is referred to as "Auntie," she is, in fact, just a friend of the family. The father describes her as "an abundant woman in various aspects who has gained weight, is more snobbish and also more annoying."<sup>73</sup> Even though the main character is the narrator, Hwangju Auntie is the main driver of the story. After raising her children as a single mother and achieving success, the communists in the North seized their belongings and forced them to move south. As a result, she is a fierce supporter of President Syngman Rhee, who she believes will correct the wrongs of the past and help her to get revenge on the North.

Hwangju Auntie has lost more than just money. Her elder son, a police officer who became wealthy through his collaboration with the Japanese and the extortion of Koreans, was murdered after the liberation, and now due to their precarious economic situation, her daughter Sunja is expecting a child after an affair with an American soldier. Despite all this, Auntie fails to recognize that her son acquired his wealth through illegitimate means, and she becomes an anti-communist. Here, Ch'ae addresses whether the polarization of ideologies of that time stemmed from people aligning their own interests with an appropriate ideology.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, Auntie's younger son shows a clear consciousness on this issue. He laments the brutal death of his brother but argues that it was deserved to a certain extent and that even the thought of recovering the family's wealth based on the blood of others seems sinful to him. Even though Hwangju Auntie and her family's destiny evokes some pity, she is a greedy character who fails to recognize the wrongdoings of her son and struggles to adapt to the new context. She adapts to living in the South by becoming an extreme anticommunist, driven not by ideology but by a personal quest to regain her material wealth and exact revenge for her misfortunes.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that satirical works constitute only a portion of the literary output of Ch'ae Mansik. By analyzing his satirical works published between 1930 and 1948, it has identified two main categories: satirical novels dealing with the life of intellectuals in colonial Korea and those that satirize the archetype of the chameleon, a sort of opportunist. The first category largely stems from Ch'ae's personal experiences. As an intellectual, he was

<sup>71</sup> Cho Chihyang, "Ch'ae Mansik ū haebang chikhu sosŏl e nat'an an p'ungiasŏng yŏn'gu," 45.

<sup>72</sup> Yun, "Ch'ae Mansik sosŏl e nat'an an shilp'aeja p'yosang yŏn'gu," 99–100.

<sup>73</sup> Ch'ae, *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha: Ch'ae Mansik taep'yo chakp'umjip*, vol. 1, 382.

<sup>74</sup> Cho Chihyang, "Ch'ae Mansik ū haebang chikhu sosŏl e nat'an an p'ungiasŏng yŏn'gu," 47.

concerned at the limited opportunities available to his generation in colonial Korea.

This division is not merely thematic. Both archetypes possess common points. For example, in both cases, Ch'ae uses satire and irony to criticize the contradictions within the characters and the society in which they live. However, while he portrays intellectuals as helpless victims of an imposed system who bear their share of guilt for their situations, chameleons are people without conscience, concerned only with material progress with no thought for ethical considerations. They represent the losers and the winners of social advancement.

An essential difference between the characters, however, is that the opportunistic winners eventually face a moral reckoning, representing a hope for reform or a positive feature within Ch'ae's realism. Initially, he warns the reader about a particular type of chameleon in Korea, one who is willing to collaborate with the colonial power and build his wealth at the expense of others suffering. However, these characters eventually encounter a sort of social justice, as seen in works like *T'aep'yŏng ch'ŏnha*, "Maeng sunsa," "Misŭt'ŏ Pang," and "Nakcho." This represents Ch'ae's hopes for a better future and, to some extent, an allegory of Korea, a nation that has often struggled for survival amidst larger military powers.

The opportunist archetype gained prominence in Korean literature, particularly after liberation when writers had somewhat greater freedom. Settling issues inherited from the colonial past became one of the main concerns for writers during this period. In line with this, various critical perspectives on opportunists emerged, echoing the traits of the chameleons in the works of Ch'ae Mansik. However, unlike other authors, Ch'ae is renowned for his satirical portrayals. His development of the chameleon character and his satirical depictions offer a notable insight into a specific historical period in Korea. However, his satirical literature transcends its era, revealing truths about the human condition that resonate with readers even today.

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