

# THE DREAM COMES TRUE



*To Become a Film Actor: Only a Dream in an Alien Land for Pak Ki Ju  
In the Embrace of His Motherland Becoming a People's Artiste  
and One of the Three Celebrated Actors*

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## Preface

An excellent film or one which is regarded as a masterpiece is inconceivable separated from the characterization by its actors.

A competent actor enriches the world of portrayal of his work with his experience of life and creative imagination and skills.

People cannot immediately become familiar with the name of a character on the screen, but if they are told that the character is played by a certain actor, then they easily identify the character and they recall the man with a deep impression.

There are many famous actors in the circles of the cinematic art in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who are quite familiar to audiences.

Among them is People's Artiste Pak Ki Ju, who is well known for portraying various characters with individualistic acting.

When they think about him, people picture in their minds his face first.

A man of medium build, not so handsome face and few words—it is hard to regard him as an actor.

But while portraying supporting as well as major roles in scores of films, he created lifelike portrayals, and in the last days of his career he was honoured as one of the three celebrated actors in the country.

His unusual life experience in Japan where he was born and grew up enduring all kinds of hardship was of a good help to his acting after he became a film actor as he had wished after returning to his socialist motherland, and later it became a valuable asset for becoming a superstar.

The editorial board publishes this book to describe as it was how Pak Ki Ju, once an unfortunate young man of Korea, became a People’s Artiste beloved by the country and the people in the embrace of his motherland and the great comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

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## **1. In the Embrace of the Motherland**

### **Becoming an Actor**

Born as the son of the unfortunate Korean diaspora in Japan, Pak Ki Ju lived in misery in his childhood, suffering every manner of humiliation and insult.

He was born in a small mining village in Shiga Prefecture in Japan on January 3, 1939. His father had been drafted to Japan for forced labour.

Like all the Korean people who had been drafted to Japan, his family suffered from poverty. The sole heir for three generations of his family, he had to plunge himself into earning a living from his childhood, helping his father and mother who were working at a mine.

Before dawn his mother would wake her young son, help him wear clothes and send him to a railway station with a bucket. Looking at the son walking into the darkness still not quite awake, she shed tears. Pak groped in the darkness in search of coal ash discharged by steam locomotives. The sun would rise

while he was waiting for the burning coal to cool. After the coal got cool, there were chestnut-sized balls of coke.

What Pak had to do everyday before going to primary school was to collect such balls of coke, for his family could not afford coal or firewood. If he stopped this even a day, his family could not boil food nor heat the room. A bucketful of coke was enough for a day. If he was fortunate, he could get two bucketfuls a day; he would then sell a bucketful and add the money for his monthly school fee.

On the days when the family had to pay for his school fee, his mother would breathe a heavy sigh because of lack of money. At those times Pak would take out the money he had earned by selling coke, and a smile would appear on his mother's face. He would feel really happy to see the smile on the face of his mother who was always in worry about hard life of the family. So Pak made every effort to get more coke even though he was tired, felt sleepy or burned his fingers.

He could bear sleepiness and hardness, but what he could not stand was meeting his Japanese classmates on the way back home from the railway station. When they saw him, the Japanese children would tease him, calling him a "coal beggar," and others who were stronger than him and nasty would kick his

bucket, spreading the coal to everywhere. What he felt when collecting the spread balls of coke was resentment against his parents who had come to Japan, leaving their dear motherland behind.

When he became a teenager and began to understand the world, he realized he could do nothing with his own plight. Sometimes he would complain to his parents, asking why they had come to an alien land, but it never helped him.

Not only his parents but a large number of Koreans were drafted into Japan for military service or forced labour or by labour recruitment or went there while drifting here and there in search of living. They had to maintain their existence while being discriminated as aliens, and their offspring had to carry on the miserable life. That this was just a product of the history of Korea filled with ups and downs, Pak understood after he entered the Korean school.

After graduating from a Japanese primary school, he entered Korean Middle and Higher School in Aichi Prefecture under the Educational Society of the General Association of the Korean Residents in Japan, in order to learn that he was Korean and to learn the geography, history, mother tongue and customs of his motherland which he had never been to.

The school implanted in real earnest the knowledge about his motherland in the minds of Pak and other students. This fanned his yearning for his motherland.

The school was a cradle in which he developed his ambition to be an actor. After joining the art group of the school, he knew that he had a talent of becoming an actor, and wanted to be a drama actor.

But it was only a dream. Unemployment was waiting for him when he graduated from the school. He could never think about entering a professional art school for lack of money, so he tried to lay the foundations of an actor by running errands at a theatrical troupe or film studio, but they all rejected him because he was a Korean. Korea University was yet to be established in Japan by that time.

Not to say anything about realizing his hope and ambition, he had to earn a living. It was next to impossible for the Korean young man without any asset and supporter to get a job in Japan. He drifted among the unemployed for almost a year, and then returned to the mining village. There he could get the job, the assistant driver of truck that carried sand and gravel to construction sites. Though he had to work hard in the dusty construction sites, he never gave up the dream of

becoming an actor.

After he watched films from the motherland, he decided to become a film actor, not a drama actor. The first film he watched was *The People Who Defend Their Native Village*.

At that time the Japanese authorities confiscated the rolls of the film after a show of the film in Japan.

Koreans in Japan, including artists, who had been waiting to see the film from their motherland, waged a struggle to win back the rolls of the film; almost all the people in the Honshu area including the place where Pak was living turned out. They at last won the rolls of the film back.

After that, films like *Scouts* and *Aircraft Hunters' Team* from their motherland were shown among the Koreans in Japan. *Night of Korean Films* was a prime time for them.

These films became part of life of Koreans in Japan. When they talked, they tried to talk the way the characters of the films did; and when they behaved, they did as the positive characters did. When they watched mountain villages in the documentaries and listened to folk songs from them, they deepened their compatriotic feelings among them, and nurtured their affection for their motherland.

The road which they opened through the struggle of winning

back the rolls of the film *The People Who Defend Their Native Village* was widened with the opening of the sea route of their repatriation to their motherland. Not only films but several genres of artistic works which were created in their motherland were introduced to Japan.

The artistic and literary works including films and songs filled with national sentiments fanned Pak's decision to become an artiste. Moreover, in those days when he received letters from his friends who had returned to their motherland that they had entered universities or got jobs as they had wished and were giving full play to their talents, he could not suppress his attraction to the motherland.

He tried to persuade his parents to go to the motherland, but their reply was that they would go back to their hometown after the country was reunified. (His parents hailed from Kyongsang Province in south Korea.) If it was the only reason, he could persuade them, but his parents who knew well about the destiny of the artists in capitalist countries told him to give up his decision, saying that they could not understand why he tried to be an actor, a mean job, as a man. His friends, too, advised him to pursue mathematics as he was brilliant in this field, saying he was not fit for an actor. Worse still, the Japanese young people

laughed at him openly, saying the ugly “coal beggar” wanted to become an actor.

But he was not discouraged. He decided to go to the motherland alone, but it was easier said than done. He thought about who would take care of him as his parents did if he went to the motherland alone, and wondered whether he could become an actor in the motherland as he wished.

His mind got heavier from the thought that leaving his parents who regarded him as the pillar of the family would be going against filial piety.

He spent several days, suffering from agony, and finally decided to go to the motherland thinking that it was the only way to free his parents from poverty and hard work. He thought that if he achieved his hope in the motherland, his parents would understand him and come there, and he put his feet on the 23rd ship to the motherland in April 1960.

On the ship he talked in his heart to the compatriots sending him off on the alien land, and reviewed his days on that land.

The ship entered the territorial waters of the motherland, and thus he was embraced by motherland which would make his wish and ideal come true.

Like this, Pak came to the embrace of his dear motherland.

### First Step

For those who followed different roads of life pinning their hope on art and literature, their first steps are unforgettable.

In the first category are those who recollect the happy, outstanding first step, and in the other are those who took one difficult step after another from the outset but succeeded in the twilight of their lives. Pak belonged to the second category.

When Pak arrived at his motherland, what he could see first was the reality in the Chollima era.

In those days, world-startling miracles and feats were being created under the wise leadership of Kim Il Sung, and all the people were living in harmony, helping and leading one another forward.

The motherland Pak saw was a paradise on earth for the people that no one could find anywhere else.

As there is a saying *Pigeons always think about beans*, Pak always thought about Korean films and film stars.

In autumn that year, he had an entrance examination to Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts with the help of the relevant officials, but failed. The reason was that he

had not studied Korean well. In fact, Pak was born and grew up in Japan, so he was not good at his mother tongue.

He never gave up his hope, and made preparations sincerely while working as a lathe operator at the Tanchon Magnesite Clinker Factory for one and a half years. This not so long period of labour life was a very precious period for him.

He learned more about the traits of the working class who shed their sincere sweats for their country and fellow people and the true appearance of the socialist society in which all the people were helping and leading one another forward. It was really a precious life experience for him who was to be an actor.

In autumn next year, he entered the acting department of Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts.

The school of dramatic and cinematic arts had developed as Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts just a year ago, so the people showed much interest and concern to the university. When its students with the school badges on their caps and on the breasts of the uniform were on street, passers-by would cast respectful glances at them. Pak could not suppress his emotion, and wrote a letter to his parents in Japan.

Reading the letter, his parents, who had been worrying over

his entrance examination to the university, shed tears. His father wrote in the reply:

“What a good place it is! Is it a dream or reality that you are studying at the one and only university of dramatic and cinematic arts in the country? Please study hard and cherish deep in your mind the benevolence of the country, which is higher than the sky and deeper than the ocean, and become a man loyal to the country. They say the reality of the motherland is so good. We will soon get aboard the repatriation ship, too.”

As they promised to their son, his parents returned to their motherland next year.

Throughout his university days, Pak studied hard history, culture, nature, geography, morality and customs of his motherland, especially art and literature. *I will read all the artistic and literary books written in Korean*—this was one of the aims he decided to attain during his university days.

He had already been called a “book thief” as he would read other’s books without their permission. Now in the motherland he read books all the time. He would read several times even the books that others would read once.

The most difficult thing for Pak in those days was his pronunciation of Korean. He couldn’t pronounce it well because

it was not a few years after he had come to his motherland from Japan.

For him, correct pronunciation was directly linked to his portrayal of characters. He knew that without solving this problem, he could not fulfill his wish. He did his best to solve this problem in two to three years.

After a day’s lessons were over, he would go to the practising hall, not to the dormitory. Sometimes he would meet the announcers to get help from them. One day he went to the house of Ri Sang Byok, a People’s Announcer, and practised speaking, skipping supper.

In his class there were several promising students: former airplane pilot Jon Jae Yon who was quite sociable, witty and a big eater; kind-hearted Sim Sung Bo from Seoul, who had been well known as a “little actor” after appearing in films from his childhood under the education of Sim Yong, a Merited Actor; handsome Kim Kwang Ok from Nampho, who was reticent and gentle, Jong Ui Gyom from Hwangju with blue and sharp eyes and always with an impressive smile on his face. Later, they became famous actors in the cinematic sector, and in the university days they all had creative ambitions. But they all took special care of Pak who was from Japan.

## 1. In the Embrace of the Motherland

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One day, Pak, who was practising pronunciation with the help of his classmates in the dormitory, suddenly fell from anemia. Seeing his face growing pale, his classmates were at a loss what to do.

In fact, Pak sometimes fell ill apparently because he had suffered much in his childhood. His weak body could not stand any longer as he had practised too much without a day's rest.

After some minutes, Pak woke up and said to his friends holding their hands, "Don't worry about me. If my creative endeavour would contribute to my motherland, I will not regret even if I may fall one hundred times." He sat in front of the tape-recorder again. His heart was burning with the desire to lay down the foundations for portraying characters during his university days.

He attained the target which had seemed to be as high as the sky, and could pronounce Korean fluently just after two years; he excellently portrayed the character in a work created for the graduation from the university.

On graduating from the university with excellent marks, Pak's heart was filled with unusual excitement.

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## 2. Creative Personality Seen through Masterpieces

### Much Effort Even to Supporting Roles

Some actors begin their career by playing the major characters, while some others do so by playing supporting roles.

Pak had a poorer physical constitution than others and, worse still, he was not handsome enough to be a film actor owing to small eyes, high cheekbones, thick lips, harsh voice and unbalanced figure.

However, he finally succeeded, and even got famous as one of the three film stars of Korea.

He proved by himself that not only the handsome but the unattractive can be a film actor.

He often played the supporting roles. But he left a good impression on the audiences through an individualistic portrayal.

After graduating from Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts, his first role was Yun Sik, son-in-law of the hero of *The Family of Choe Hak Sin*, which became popular





A scene from *The Family of Choe Hak Sin*

in the 1960s. Pak wonderfully portrayed a mathematician who advocates “calm judgment,” saying that math formulas such as  $\log$  could never be changed even in the severe environment of war. Pak skilfully portrayed the character—seeing his beautiful wife with an awkward look, wearing thick glasses with his hair parted in the middle. He looked like an intellectual who had suffered under colonial rule.

O Pyong Cho, the director of the film, said:

“Among the actors of that film, I was more concerned than others with Choe Chang Su and Pak Ki Ju, who played Yong Su, a KPA squad leader, and Yun Sik, a mathematician, respectively. It was not only because their roles might be important or not but because both of them were greenhorns.

“Pak’s role was not to join a heated debate nor get depressed or distressed all the time, either. In a word, the line of his actions was not clear. Actors who should play such a role often fail to perform their roles properly, producing awkward actions.”

Though he was a novice, Pak did a good job based on an in-depth study of the characteristic features of the character he had to portray, and created a true-to-life portrayal; the people still do not forget the image of the mathematician.

After playing a fragile man who does not know about his motherland living outside the world of politics, a clumsy and humble man who draws sympathy from the people, and a reserved, gentle and reasoning man, Pak was well known as a “log man” or “mathematician.”

Playing such extras as an engineer, researcher, blue or white collar worker, he further cultivated his skills. He loved his parts in films as much as his own flesh and lover, and directed great efforts to portraying them.

## 2. Creative Personality Seen through Masterpieces

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Though he did not like writing, he wrote about the experiences about the supporting roles he had portrayed in a book, titled, *My Opinions on Playing Supporting Role*.

It reads in part:

...

Twenty or so years have elapsed since I returned to the motherland and began my career as an actor.

It is not a short period. To look back upon these years, I performed supporting roles in many films. But, even though I may finish my career as a supporting actor, I'll never regret it.

Supporting actors have their own pride and dignity.

There are some who say that supporting roles are not important as they act in the limited number of scenes, but they are wrong. They don't know the real taste of the supporting roles.

The film depicts life not through static scenes. It depicts man and his life through lifelike scenes, reflecting what are secondary as well as primary.

In the films, in particular, in which the dramatic events occur and develop by relationships among various characters, not only the main characters but also the supporting actors must create characteristic portrayals.

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## Much Effort Even to Supporting Roles

The harmony of portrayal in a film is decided, I think, by how the actors portraying the main characters and supporting characters achieve harmony among them.

If they fail to achieve harmony, the relationship among characters may confuse the audiences, leading them to forget the main characters even for a moment and be attracted to the supporting characters.

The supporting actors should exert as much effort as the main characters do. In some aspects, portrayal by the former can be said to be more difficult than that by the latter.

In this context, I've found two lessons throughout my career while playing the supporting actors.

One is standing in front of the camera in the state of apathy without prior study, thinking the portrayal is insignificant. I call it "stake acting."

If the supporting actors remain indifferent like stakes, the film cannot leave a lingering effect on the audiences even though its main characters have acted brilliantly.

What I've felt while playing many supporting roles so far is that the supporting actors should keep the accumulation of their emotions abreast with the overall flow of the film.

Unlike the main actors, the supporting actors make

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appearances in a few scenes, portraying their characters piecemeal. They may appear in a film in only one or two of its scenes.

But even when the supporting characters are not seen on the screen, they share the life of the main characters. The point is that they are not captured by the camera.

What I'm going to say is that in order for the supporting actors not to perform a "stake acting," they must study by themselves the life not seen on the screen.

Only then, can they accumulate their emotions and keep up with the hero and other main characters of the film, cooperating with them in unifying the portrayal of the characters.

The other lesson is that the supporting actors should not exaggerate the portrayal of their characters.

If they do so, the audiences may pay their attention to them, not to the main characters, eventually doing harm to the main story and the delineation of emotions.

Not long ago, I acted in *Korea Runs*, which depicts a young logger practising running industriously and winning an international marathon competition, adding glory to his motherland.

In this film, I played Mun Gyu, headmaster of a branch

## Much Effort Even to Supporting Roles



A scene from *Korea Runs*

school in a mountainous area, who trains Yong Ho, the hero, to practise running every day.

Portraying him, I put too much emphasis on my speech and action in the scenes where he trains Yong Ho and cheers him up when the young man has fallen down during a contest. But seeing the rush of the film, I felt something wrong.

My exaggerated actions affected the portrayal by the hero.

The reason was that I failed to pay due attention to the task of portrayal by the hero true to the ideological theme of the

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work, thinking I had to sustain the characteristic personality of my role.

To make the long story short, my subjective intentions and passion produced the undesirable scenes.

The supporting actors, as casts of a film, portray the characters' personalities, but they must not forget that their portrayal must be subordinated to sustaining the hero's personality.

Not to neglect their roles, thinking their acting is insignificant, and not to exaggerate their roles on the plea of sustaining the characters—these are what the supporting actors must always guard against.

...

This book reveals Pak's candid mind, his opinion on the supporting roles and his sincere attitude towards art.

Although he played supporting roles in many films, he made painstaking efforts to enhance his art of speech.

Here is a vivid example.

His house in Sosong District was 4 kilometres away from the Korean Film Studio. Once for many days, he walked to his house instead of taking the commuter bus, muttering something to himself. One evening, two men, who had seen him for a few

## Much Effort Even to Supporting Roles

days on his way home, followed him with the thought that he had gone crazy.

The man before them suddenly beat on his chest with his fist and stopped walking. The followers ran ahead and looked at him carefully. The man raised his head and laughed aloud many times, but the tone of laugh was different each time. He looked as if he were out of sense, indeed.

They worried that the man might take the wrong way, so they continued to follow him. Finally, the man arrived at a house, opened the door and went in.

When the followers were dithering about whether to go in or not, an angry voice was heard through the door.

"Darling, until when do you have to do this? Why don't you take the commuter bus like others?" asked a woman.

"I will not take the commuter bus until I solve the problem of my voice," answered the man.

"Other actors do not do as you do, but they are cast in many films."

"You are right. But I must perfect my art of speech. One who acts in the film in another's voice is not a genuine actor, I think."

"Actor?"

## 2. Creative Personality Seen through Masterpieces

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Now the followers could understand that the actor walked alone at night to practise his art of speech.

“It’s quite difficult to become an actor, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Till now, I’ve thought that they just have to stand in front of the camera.”

The two men left the flat.

Because Pak was not well known among the people until then, the two men did not recognize him.

In the sector of feature film, an actor who appears on the screen but is recorded in another’s voice is called a crippled actor or dumb actor.

Soon after he entered the world of filmmaking, he played a minor role in a film. But he was poor at speech, so he had to let another speak for him. During his university days, he had made great efforts to correct his poor pronunciation and achieved remarkable progress.

However, his speech was not so good when compared to his job as an actor, and his shortcomings were mainly revealed in intonation. Though he did his best to speak in correct intonation, the listeners shook their heads.

Aware of this, the director had planned to record his speech by another actor. This was fatal for him. Alien basic tone,

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## Much Effort Even to Supporting Roles

stereotyped speech far from reality and unfamiliar mike were ruining his career. In a mixture of emotions, he made a resolute decision.

He decided to walk to and from work for extra training to correct his alien basic tone and practise lifelike speech.

Thanks to the effort made for several days, he brilliantly performed his minor role in the film, surprising not only the creative team but the audiences.

He refused to portray the inner world of the character until he found out a verbal portrayal suitable only to the situation and occasion. It was because the speech of the character implies not only the goal of acting but also psychology of the character.

### Portraying Negative Characters

It was not before he portrayed negative characters that he began to gain reputation among the people.

The negative characters he portrayed could be divided mainly into two categories—one was reconcilable and the other was irreconcilable.

Pak was conspicuous in portraying the irreconcilable negative characters.

While portraying them, he paid much attention to their facial expression, to their eyes in particular.

Eyes reflect the psychology of a human in the most concentrated way. Sometimes they express the complicated sentiments and subtle psychology, which the words cannot express fully.

In many films, he created unforgettable facial expressions.

In *An Jung Gun Shoots Ito Hirobumi*, he played a Japanese tax officer.

He skilfully played the officer with facial expression organically blended with action, who, true to the sinister Japan's aim of annexing Korea in the future, plundered even an

old countrywoman of a roll of cotton cloth, saying that Korea should pay off the loan from Japan.

The tax officer gives a hard kick to the old woman with his ferocious eyes and snatches a roll of cloth. This scene made an active contribution to revealing the aggressive and depreatory nature of Japan and developing the central theme of the work.

That year, Pak was involved in the production of *Unknown Heroes*, and played Nakamura impressively.

Through this film that consisted of 20 parts, Pak who played a negative role got as famous as the main characters. Pak brilliantly performed his role as a Japanese journalist on his government's payroll by means of symbolic facial expressions.



A scene from *Unknown Heroes*

In particular, he rendered flawlessly behaving and walking full of ecstasy like a clown.

His facial expression, speech and hand-moving were so true to life that the audiences, not to mention the film experts, were surprised.

After the film was released, he earned another nickname *Nakamura*.

In many other films, he portrayed the villains brilliantly.

One of the secrets was his facial expression, his eyes in particular. He was told that as his eyes were small and narrow he could not expect much with his eyes in acting and that he should pay more attention to using his lips, facial muscles and body. But he found out his own method of acting suited to his physical conditions, and succeeded.

So, fascinated by Pak's portrayal of the negative characters, almost all the directors used to choose "Nakamura" when a negative character was needed in their films.

### Portraying Comic Characters

Throughout his career, Pak Ki Ju portrayed negative characters in 40 per cent of the films he was cast in, comic characters in 30 per cent and positive characters in 30 per cent.

In the early years he portrayed negative characters in the main, then comic characters, and then positive characters in the legitimate films in the last years of his career.

It was in the late 1960s when he portrayed a comic character for the first time in a satirical drama.

In those years, the Korean Film Studio arranged practising on the stage for the film artistes to raise the level of their skills. Several satirical dramas like *Conscripts* were created.

The drama portrays a company commander of the south Korean army, who participated in a "punitive" operation against the guerrillas but lost all his soldiers and narrowly saved his life from the jaws of death. It shows that the south Korean army is a puppet army of the US. In the drama, Pak played a conscript, creating a realistic portrayal of the character.

His appearance was a replica of a dullard who has gone hungry for three days and of a scarecrow standing on the crop



## 2. Creative Personality Seen through Masterpieces

field. When he got into a trouble, he ran wild like a psycho struck by electricity.

In those days, a girl had fallen in love with him. But after seeing the drama, she was much disappointed with him. One day, a friend of Pak's met her and tried to persuade her to understand him. She said: Of course I can understand the actor's job; but he seems to have an inborn temperament of being clumsy, short of something and villainous. She then retorted that if not, how he could play an idiot so brilliantly.

Later, she was told by other film actors that her sweetheart had performed his role splendidly, and the relationship between them was solved amid laughter.

Portraying comic characters in several other satirical dramas, Pak gradually mastered the physiology of this type of drama and the skills of acting. His comic talent was recognized, and he became a must in satirical works.

Pak owed his success to his deep knowledge and artistic skills about the comic life and rich skills for discovering and rendering comic details.

The climax of the short feature film *Deserved Humiliation* is an example.

## Portraying Comic Characters

The hero's wife goes out of the house with the water tap open, and locks the door. While he is having a siesta in his room, the hero meets an accident by the water flowing over the water tank and into the room and is struck by electricity. Pak correctly grasped the character's emotions changing at every moment, and portrayed them perfectly.

The unconscious behaviour in sleep, sudden surprise, flurries of indecision, depressed tearful face, swooning, self-abandonment, and desperation—every acting showed that his skills had reached a high level.

Among the many short feature films, this film was appraised as one with the highest representational level.



Scenes from *Deserved Humiliation*

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### 3. Contemporary Masterpieces and Acting by Their Heroes

#### Secret of Success–Shades of Acting

This happened in 1988 when the Korean feature film *The Country I Saw* was being created.

The film is about Takagi Takeo, who was a lead article writer of the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* and a famous writer of Japan. The story describes that he visits the DPRK and learns a lot about the country while seeing, hearing and feeling with the sense of a reporter.

There is an old saying: A long cherished hope is fulfilled late in life. Pak Ki Ju, now 49 years old, was very delighted and excited as he was to portray the hero of a feature film for the first time in his life. It was the trust of the film circles as well as a fortune for him.

Moreover, he was excited as it was the first time for him to play a hero in a film after he was awarded the title of Merited Artiste.

To make this film an important opportunity for him to gain fame, he exerted his efforts to analyzing and grasping the features of the character's personality and the process of the change of his taste and hobby. In this way, he developed the description by delving into the details of the hero's action revealed in his exotic life. On the other hand, in order to avoid the repetition of acting of Japanese reporter Nakamura in the feature film *Unknown Heroes*, he made efforts examining in detail the common and different points between the two characters.

At that time, he was rather indifferent to the nuances of acting, an important requirement of acting.

At first, the shade of his acting when the hero was leaving the airport after winding up his coverage of the DPRK was dark, so it was not appropriate for the logic of his personality.

Whatever the actor intended to depict in the scene, a dark shade was not appropriate.

The hero, Takahashi, was an honest man who tries to maintain a clear conscience even though he has worked as a reporter until then.

But while meeting people from various social strata in the DPRK, he has felt something quite different from what he

### 3. Contemporary Masterpieces and Acting by Their Heroes

thought about the country for a long time. With a great wonder, excitement and surprise, he studies in depth the great strength which established the most advantageous socialist system in the world on this land. In the course of this, he experiences the justness and truthfulness of the Juche idea and realizes that the core of this idea is the warm human love of Kim Il Sung whom the Korean people respect as their father.

In this film there is no condition that could cause sadness and sympathy in the character's personality and life as it was different from a tragedy where the desire and ideals of the hero are frustrated or where his struggle fails. Therefore, in view of the ideological and emotional experience and the logic of the development of the hero's personality, the character's face in the scene should be bright and filled with hope.

Then, why did Pak Ki Ju, the hero, choose a face with dark shade?

He thought: Takagi showered national insults on and expressed contempt for a Korean young man called Ryu Chon Song who brought to light the falsity of an article of his writing, so he must have felt regretful and guilty of conscience; moreover, he would feel reluctant to leave the DPRK, a paradise where a greater happiness and brighter future are promised;



A scene from *The Country I Saw*

therefore the shade of his acting at the airport scene is dark and serious.

In this way, he considered the character's acting depended on some aspects of life and led the whole work according to his own subjective intentions. In other words, he should have dissolved his intentions into the whole work, but he dissolved the latter in the former.

He corrected his fault expressed in the portrayal of the character, the shading of acting in particular, and created a vivid

image. The film was highly appreciated for its ideological and artistic qualities.

On May 23, 1991, Kim Jong Il said: Some days ago Takagi's son and daughter visited our country and saw the film *The Country I Saw*; they said the film was very good and the hero played just like their father.

Having learned new things while acting in the film, Pak Ki Ju wrote in his note:

"Smiles, tears and optimism in the character's acting according to the formative features of the work should not flow from any of his actions, but from the life itself reflected in the work. For this purpose, the character must vividly portray the emotional nuances of the ideological and emotional world appropriate to life, which cannot be described otherwise at the given moment of the situation. Actors must not undervalue the nuances of acting. Attaching importance to these nuances is one of the secrets to be a versatile and famous actor."

## Actor and His Opinion

There is an old saying that nothing is perfect in the world.

Pak Ki Ju, now popular among the people, had a fault that he had not forgotten in his whole life; nay, it would be more appropriate to say that it was a mental writhing from self-calumniation.

This happened when the film *A Stout Tree* was being created.

In this film, Pak Ki Ju was cast as the hero, and he acted well. He not only clearly identified the proper features of the character's personality but employed satisfactory methods of portraying them.

In the scene of a recreation party of young people, he sang a song, but his voice was replaced by another's. Some actors said that the song was not sung by Pak Ki Ju. In fact, he did not sing the song with his own voice.

The song he should sing was throbbing with the pulse of the stirring era and its mood was emotional yet vigorous. But Pak Ki Ju's voice was deep and gruff. So, the director replaced his voice with one of a professional singer for improving the film's

cultural refinement. So, though he sang the song, his voice disappeared in the scene.

Later he regretted: I could sing with my deep and gruff voice, and it could have been more truthful to the work; but I hesitated and failed to maintain my own opinion.

His lesson proves that the actor should maintain his independent view not only in his study of the scenario but also in his work with the director, and if he loses his independent view and relies entirely on the director, acting passively according to the latter's direction, he will never create a vivid portrayal of a character.

## Acting True to Life

The feature film *Guarantee*, a masterpiece in the 1980s and a winner of the People's Prize, is one where Pak Ki Ju fully displayed his talent and skills as an actor. It was because he completely switched to a legitimate acting and became popular among the people after this film was produced.

It is quite surprising that he represented the personality of the character, Ho Jin Song, truthfully in that film.

The film philosophically elucidates why the Korean people call the Workers' Party of Korea, their motherly party.

In the film, Ho Jin Song sincerely confesses to the Party organization his guilt that had not been known to anybody else and he had kept deep in his heart for over 20 years. He also gives up joining the WPK which he had so eagerly wanted. Thanks to the realistic acting by Pak Ki Ju, people saw Ho Jin Song who is standing at the crossroads of mental suffering and pleasure, and highly praised the actor.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, he played his parts wonderfully in over one hundred films including scores of short films. In particular, his acting in film *Guarantee*

### 3. Contemporary Masterpieces and Acting by Their Heroes

demonstrated his talent as a versatile actor.

In fact, the moment he received the director's script of the film, he was very surprised.

Ho Jin Song depicted in the scenario and the director's script was a man who had kept his guilt deep in his mind, deceiving his own conscience for decades. It was quite unfamiliar to him to portray such a character. There is a scene in the film, in which Ho Jin Song cries after receiving the Rules of the WPK from the hero, the chief secretary of the factory committee of the WPK. This was one of the most important scenes in Pak's acting. Ho Jin Song has never imagined that he could be a member of the WPK for his guilty past. So when the chief secretary advises him to prepare himself for joining the WPK, he burst into tears, unable to suppress his emotion. Therefore in this scene the actor had to bring the built-up emotions to a head.

The audiences always think about themselves in relation to the characters in a film. They feel the actors' emotions as their own.

How long can a man live? I have hidden my guilt for over 20 years. Can't I live this way for the rest of my life? This is Ho Jin Song's inward thought. But when he was suddenly faced with the fact that he could be a member of the WPK, what would

his feeling must have been? And with what feelings would the audiences sympathize with him?

Written on the director's script was just that Ho Jin Song sheds tears after receiving the Rules of the WPK.

Pak mediated days and days on this simple sentence. What was important in the scene was how he should act in this long scene and how he should shed tears.

So he depicted the character by taking a few steps towards the door after receiving the Rules of the WPK with a guilty



A scene from *Guarantee*

### 3. Contemporary Masterpieces and Acting by Their Heroes

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conscience, stopping in front of the door and then taking a few more steps before falling down on a chair and bursting into tears.

The main point in the scene was to show the outburst of happiness and built-up emotions of a man who could neither laugh or cry with an easy mind like others for over 20 years.

At that time, film critics commented: Pak Ki Ju portrayed Ho Jin Song's innermost world from various angles, a man who has worked faithfully with a hidden mental wound; in particular, the acting of wrapping his mouth with his hand unable to suppress the outburst of his feelings when he receives the Rules of the WPK is really true to life.

In a word, he cried in his acting remembering that he should do that as Ho Jin Song, not as an actor.

While playing the role of Ho Jin Song, he keenly realized that, when portraying a character, he could not deceive the audiences and the latter would not be deceived.

He also kept in mind the fact that, if an actor has to become a versatile one, he should accumulate life experiences and continuously pursue his skills training with definite purposes and orientation.

For his rendition in film *Guarantee*, he was awarded with the title of Merited Artiste.

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## 4. Possessing Multi-faceted Qualifications

### By Applying Technical Skills

With the passage of time, Pak Ki Ju reached mid-fifties.

So persons of his age said that the word *learning* did not suit his age, but he tried to learn more things in spare moments, reading, biking, driving and angling according to conditions and circumstances for acquiring the qualifications as befitting a film actor. And he possessed higher sports techniques and skills than amateurs in several events such as judo and Taekwon-Do.

He used to watch sports games such as football and boxing and even see every school sports meet of his children. He also was good at carpentry; he made bed and sofa for his house as well as table-tennis bat, sled, top and kite for his children all by himself.

As he had been a lathe operator in the Tanchon Magnesite Factory for a year and six months after being repatriated to the



motherland, he was well versed in machine tools such as lathe, drill press and shaper, and was perfect in driving. He was good at handwriting and painting; he would volunteer to write and draw the bulletin boards of the actors' team. He was a master of chess and playing cards, enthusiastic mountaineer and heavy smoker.

All these skills and hobbies were the fruition of his intentional efforts for acquiring various types of qualifications of a film actor.

His skills and abilities were demonstrated in a concentrated way in the multi-part feature film *The Nation and Destiny*.

*The Nation and Destiny* was created on the personal initiative and under the guidance of Kim Jong Il with the song *Pyongyang Is Best* as its theme. The seed, the germ of the idea, of this film is that the destiny of a nation is precisely the destiny of its individual members.

In this film he portrayed the character vividly and truthfully by effectively applying his skills of judo and Taekwon-Do.

His demonstration in the Taekwon-Do gym and knocking down Chun Doo Hwan (a regimental commander of the south Korean army and later south Korean president) were all his own acting.

What is impressive is the characterization in the scene of part 8 of going to see Kim Hyong Uk while driving a car with his wife Tal Lae seated next to him.

As he personally drove the car skilfully, he could add to the truthfulness of the work by revealing the character's innermost psychological world delicately in keeping with the situation of the scene.

The following happened when he played the hero in the feature film *A Stout Tree*. The creative team could not find an answer to a question: The story of the film is about accident-free, 100 000 km trial driving of a large truck of a new type, the first of its kind in the country, and Pak Ki Ju who was to play the hero was not learning how to drive.

So some creative workers thought that a professional driver should drive the truck and Pak should simply pretend to drive it when the truck was moving near the camera.

But when shooting began, they found that their thought was wrong.

At first they shot the scene of the truck running in a deep valley along a mountain ridge, which required a high level of driving skills. But the man who drove it was Pak, a professional driver.

What made them more surprised was that he was shedding tears when they went to him to congratulate him.

They thought that he was shedding tears with the pride of having driven the truck without any accident.

“When did you learn how to drive, Pak?”

“You know what I did in Japan?”

Then he told them that one day he had gone to a film studio with a ray of hope of becoming a movie star after experiencing many hardships but that he had been rejected simply because he was a Korean and he had to learn how to drive to eke out a living.

“A man who has never been out of his homeland cannot know how benevolent its embrace is. My motherland enabled me to graduate from a university and become a film actor loved by the people.”

His tearful words were an appeal of his pure conscience and a silent practice for the sake of his motherland.

### With Brain, Not with Face

People look different from one another. A man's shape and face as well as his height, countenance, figure and gait are the major criteria of an actor.

The appearance of Pak Ki Ju did not match any of these criteria. He was a man of regular body size and few words. Rather he looked like a carpenter or a construction worker.

However, his peculiar glittering eyes, zipped mouth and delicate and rich sentiment and emotion that could be seen when he was studying his role in a cast would make others think that he was a serious thinker and passionate man.

The plans he prepared for his role were amazing. They stated the directions and ways of acting in detail like a design of building, ranging from personality, hobby, taste, habit, action, performance, communication with his counterpart and objects of nature and oral rendering of the character as well as the seeds of the works and their ideological and thematic tasks.

Those who worked with him in film making for many years say that they were impressed by his honesty, sincerity, passionate thinking and studying.

He always regarded acting with brain as the motto of his portrayal.

The following is a story about how deeply he thought and studied to act with brain, not with face.

Part 6 and 7 of the multi-part feature film *The Nation and Destiny* show several times Pak Ki Ju crushing a cigarette butt on the back of his hand.

In order to represent these scenes truthfully, he kept on thinking and actually practised the act until the mark of the burn became callous.

His thinking and exploration for acting was based on his profound knowledge and rich experience of life.

He knew the diverse life more than scenario writers or directors did. While experiencing diverse life, he delved into the sister arts.

He always carried novels, books or newspapers in his hand. Extraordinarily sensitive, he liked music and fine art very much. He was lost in a muse listening to music from a cassette player even in the last days of his life.

He was not handsome, but he succeeded to become a star because he always created independent and original acting with deep thinking.

He made considerable efforts to help the greenhorns with their acting during shooting films.

The following is a vivid example.

A serious study of the script is the royal way to lifelike performance. Pak Ki Ju would start acting only after writing the table of scenes.

This happened when he was acting the headmaster of a local branch school in the film *Korea Runs*.

One day on location a greenhorn failed to properly play his role in front of the camera even after a half day's practice. Seeing this, Pak Ki Ju beat his chest.

The entire shooting crew got dispirited. Pak Ki Ju approached the greenhorn who was sitting alone away from the other members of the crew.

“Look, do you know any football star?”

The greenhorn, who was expecting rebuke from him, was surprised to hear the word *football star*.

“Have you ever seen a football match on TV or in a stadium?”

“Yes, but why?”

The actor felt a bit relieved to hear the word *football match*.

“You must have seen a cool scene of scoring by a star.”

“All see football match to see the scoring scenes, aren’t they?”

He got excited.

“Exactly. How does the star shoot?”

“You are telling me. A forward skilfully dodges in front of the opponent’s goalpost and shoots the ball at the right moment. Otherwise, he is not a star.”

“Then can the star alone win the match without the help of the other ten players?”

“Excuse me, you mean no goalkeeper and full back? Then who passes the ball to him?”

Pak Ki Ju did not miss the chance.

“There you go. I saw you acting in front of the camera and you were trying to swallow the acting goal all at once. Haste makes waste.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean you wanted to be a goalkeeper, a full back and a striker all at the same time in one scene.”

At last, the greenhorn realized what Pak Ki Ju meant by a star.

“You mean I looked like a star?”

“Of course, you did. Out of the anxiety to succeed in acting at once, you thought only of the reasonable analysis of the character without experiencing his innermost world. In other words, you looked awkward even in the clothes of the character.”

The young man was impressed by the advice of Pak Ki Ju.

“Then, what should I do?”

“You should be a good ‘cook.’”

“What ?!”

The greenhorn was surprised again and looked at Pak with his eyes wide open.

Pak Ki Ju read his face, and continued slowly,

“If an actor, independent creator, wants to have a strong opinion of his own, he should convince the audience that he is the character by dint of his acting in front of the camera.”

Then he instructed to abandon the ambition to become a goal keeper, a back and a striker all at the same time and cook the acting in accordance with the scene after a deep study of the scenario.

He meant to say that an actor should make a detailed plan of acting by portraying the character in accordance with the logic of the development of the personality of the character by

becoming a goal keeper in one scene and a back in other scene and a striker in another scene. Then he took out his pocket book to show the greenhorn his table of scenes for the plan of acting.

There were marks of different colours in the table. Pak always set up a table of scenes for any role he should play in a film. The table of scenes was his design of acting.

He could kick a goal like a star at the decisive scene as he had set up the frame of personality of the character by retreating, taking roundabout route or even advancing in front of the camera.

The young man was moved by his advice, and got a clue for his acting.

The table of scenes was the secret to be a star in acting.

### For Perfect Acting

Only the actor with high artistic skills can play the role admired by the audiences.

Pak Ki Ju made tireless efforts to attain rich artistic abilities to find out the original and characteristic personality from the complicated and diverse life, to portray vividly and truthfully the personality of the character and his relations with others, to act and speak according to the personality of the character and different situations, to skilfully communicate with other actors, and to adroitly use various methods and means of portrayal.

Once he revealed the tendency to display his forte with miscellaneous behaviour in order to show his individuality in acting. And he sometimes got interested in abnormal phenomena or distorted personalities instead of identifying the essence of life.

He realized that those were not true artistic skills while acting the role of the hero in the film *The Country I Saw*.

In the scene where the hero, Takahashi, says to himself after seeing the new year performance by schoolchildren, he nodded his head and stamped his feet more than necessary, shouting with emotion, thinking that it was a scene with orchestral music and applause. He even showed miscellaneous behaviour in order to embody the rhythms of *kabuki* (Japanese style of song



A scene from *Symphonic Poem to Thee*

and dance performance) in detail and put his hand on the head like the Japanese. Kim Jong Il saw through the shortcomings of his acting, and told him that the way he acted did not match the personality of the hero because the hero had a deep innermost world.

Pak keenly realized that an actor should not exaggerate his action on the plea of making the personality of the character individualistic, and that original acting and individualistic details could be achieved only when they matched the personality of the character and followed the logic of life, instead of pursuing some abnormal parts of life.

Since then he restrained from the habit of pursuing

miscellaneous behaviour, and tried hard to show the original and individualistic personalities of the characters. As a result, he could strike the heartstrings of the audiences with his acting as Cha Hong Gi in the series of the multi-part film *The Nation and Destiny*.

In order to attain rich artistic skills, he practised persistently and participated actively in the artistic skills presentations. Some people said he was an inborn actor, but he was more than that. Of course, his sensitiveness was superior to his reasoning power, but he was rather a diligent and hardworking man. He thought he was practising his role as an actor even when he strolled with his children or did kitchen work when his wife was absent.

When he was to portray a prison warden in the film *Symphonic Poem to Thee*, he would go into the small restroom of his house in the evenings to practise his role.

One day his eldest son asked him whether he really had to practise in the small restroom. He answered with a smile that he wanted to experience the bad smell of a prison.

The son told him that he could practise speaking in the living room. Pak Ki Ju told him that the behaviour and speech should be organically combined to portray the emotions of the character, and continued practising.

From the beginning of his career as an actor, he participated in the artistic skills presentations so actively that he was well known in the studio as an activist.

Others would say that a presentation without him was not interesting because he showed extraordinary passion in the presentations. In the course of this, he learned a lot and improved his skills step by step.

His artistic skills got richer also in the course of creative thinking.

It was his habit in his creative activities to keep thinking. His creative thinking always produced significant portrayal of the personalities of the characters amid the vigorous progress of the times and in the complicated and diverse life, and was directed to exploring the tricks with which to bloom the personalities in his acting. And he concentrated his creative thinking on how to strike the heartstrings of the audiences. He was persistent or rather tenacious in his creative thinking.

He read two or three times the book, which others would read only once, until he resolved the doubts he had while reading it.

Once he burned the midnight oil reading *Collection of Humours of the World* which his second son, a middle school student, borrowed. The book was not interesting to him; nay, he could not laugh while reading it.

Even the passages where his son would burst into laughter were not interesting; they only gave him an impression that they were just witty.

Some passages were mediocre, others ridiculous and annoying and still others even clumsy.

So he closed the book, and thought for a while.

*Other people burst into laughter when they read this book, but I don't. What is wrong with me? Is it because my intellectual quality is low or my nerve of laughter is paralyzed? Didn't the modern medical scientists prove that laughter is quite necessary for the people and has an effect nearly the same as sports have? They say laughter is necessary for the people as an integrated whole of music and sports combined together. But I can't laugh by force.*

He could not convince himself of this, so he carried the book in his bag for several more days and read it when others were not seeing him or in his spare time.

Then questions and answers about the doubts continued.

Some malicious people say that those who enjoy humour look down upon others.

Humour is necessary to make people pleasant, and how can they look down upon others? Isn't it rather a sort of concern for others?

Pak was a melancholy person who did not enjoy humour, but he was kind-hearted and sincere. Nevertheless, he didn't blindly accept the humour.

This shows how persistent and strong his thinking and temperament were.

The whole process of his career as an actor could be said to be the days of continuous creative thinking.



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## 5. The Series of Cha Hong Gi of Multi-Part Feature Film *The Nation and Destiny*

### Understanding the Character

Pak Ki Ju's acting is also engraved in *The Nation and Destiny* which is a box-office record breaker in the DPRK.

He acted as Cha Hong Gi (former corps commander of the south Korean army and president of the International Taekwon-Do Federation) in parts 6 and 7.

The audiences saw real Choi Hong Hi through the acting by Pak Ki Ju.

As a matter of fact, Pak worried a lot when he was assigned the role of Cha Hong Gi, and even lost confidence.

It was because the actors who played the roles of main characters in the previous parts demonstrated their seasoned creative abilities.

For example, the actor who acted as Choe Hyon Dok (former corps commander of the south Korean army, south Korean ambassador to West Germany and chairman of the

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### Understanding the Character

Paedal National Council in the US) in parts 1-4 was highly appreciated by Kim Jong Il for his spectacular acting.

The audiences were attracted to him who was good at acting—crying, laughing and showing emotions and behaviour of a young man in his twenties and an old man in his 70s in a perfect way.

Moreover, he had good physical conditions like powerful build, big eyes and thick face lines.

But Pak was different from him; very little tears and laughter, comparatively conspicuous acting, and no better physical appearance than the latter.

Of course, he had a perfect understanding of the character while acting as Cha Hong Gi in parts 1-4. His acting was impressive even though he appeared shortly in several scenes. However, they were supporting roles.

Under such circumstances, if he could not portray his role in the following parts 7-8, then he might make a mess of the already attained successes. In other words, his fate as an actor would be decided in these parts.

So he struggled hard and the entire studio and the crew paid attention to him.

Kim Jong Il was reported by officials that Pak Ki Ju was worrying about his acting as Cha Hong Gi. He said: I am

sure Pak Ki Ju could do a good job of it; we should let him do his acting with relaxation and with a deep understanding of the personality of the character and pay attention to detailed portrayal.

When he was told about this, Pak burned his heart with enthusiasm with the thought that Kim Jong Il was watching him.

He directed big efforts to analyzing and understanding the innermost world of Cha Hong Gi, which was essentially an aspiration after patriotism.

Cha Hong Gi was different from Choe Hyon Dok, even though he shared the ideals of patriotism and anti-communism with the latter.

Choe Hyon Dok thinks that anti-communism is the only way for the nation.

But patriotism cherished by Cha Hong Gi is related mostly with Taekwon-Do; he values Taekwon-Do more than any political ideals.

So all his activities are geared to adding glory to Taekwon-Do, a pride of the nation, and to achieving the great national unity and realizing the aspiration of the divided nation for their reunification by means of the martial art.

Cha Hong Gi and Choe Hyon Dok had different

backgrounds of the ideal of anti-communism as well as patriotism.

Choe Hyon Dok's ideal of anti-communism had been extreme from the outset; he had had no opportunity to have a proper understanding of socialism, he had been indoctrinated only with the anti-communist ideal, and it got hardened while living in the capitalist societies.

But Cha Hong Gi did not have the ideal of anti-communism from the outset. He had been sympathetic with communism, and worked as an official of the Young Communist League in the northern half of Korea. His ideal of anti-communism was not formed as an extreme one in the course of his life; he had been very gung ho for communism once but turned into an anti-communist because of a narrow-minded "communist" who had insulted him. That is why he does not slander and oppose the north blindly but agrees with the north to some extent.

That is why when he is reviewing his life in front of the Taekwon-Do instructors, he is in mental agony as he realizes that his fate is in contradiction to that of the nation even though he has tried to love his country and nation. Underlying in his innermost world was the ideological emotions of loving his country and nation, as well as the guilty conscience of having betrayed them against his will.

Pak deeply analyzed and understood the characteristics of such complicated innermost world of the character, and left a deep impression upon the audiences with his unique and individualistic acting including in the scene of walking along a muddy road while cursing Park Jung Hee.

He also tried hard to have a deep understanding of the individual personality and temperament of Cha Hong Gi.

The personality and temperament of Cha Hong Gi in the scenario could be characterized, in short, to be taciturn and manly. Apparently they matched the personality and temperament of Pak Ki Ju.

When acting, he talked less and showed behaviours more, and tried to avoid talking as much as possible in disregard of the scenario.

A detailed example is the scene in which he curses Park Jung Hee (south Korean president from December 1963 assassinated on October 26, 1979 by Kim Jae Gyu, the then chief of the south Korean Central Intelligence Agency) and broke away from him. After learning Park Jung Hee's dirty trick through Chun Doo Hwan, Cha Hong Gi staggers along a muddy road in the rain; the eyes bloodshot from agony, the hair wet and tangled, the mouth distorted, the twisting body with a hand on a big tree, the shaky hands striking the heart

and washing rainwater from the face, the sudden movement of taking off from his shoulder the epaulettes of a general, the agony-filled expression when looking at the sky covered with dark clouds ...

Those were the artistic reflection of the feelings of futility, disgrace, lamentation, agony, self-examination and self-reproach for having thought Park Jung Hee, human scum, to be a patriot, and south Korea full of evils to be his motherland, and of hatred, cursing, rebounding and severance towards Park Jung Hee, the mastermind of the continuing national division, as well as contempt and anger of having been deceived by Park Jung Hee.

Pak deeply studied and analyzed the outward features of Cha Hong Gi so as to have a correct understanding of the character's personality.

This was particularly important as the character was a well-known veteran of Taekwon-Do and a typical man of sports.

Learned Taekwon-Do from his uncle to protect himself because he was small in stature with thin eyes and weak from his childhood. Conscribed to the Japanese army before the country's liberation and stayed in Jinhae, Pyongyang and other places for more than one year.

Lived in a mountain for almost one year as a fugitive after

killing a second lieutenant of the Japanese army.

Worked as secretary of the Young Communist League Committee in a sub-county in Hwadae County, North Hamgyong Province, where he was born, after the country's liberation and fled to south Korea after quarrelling with the secretary of county committee of the Communist Party.

Graduated from a military academy in south Korea with Choe Tok Sin and studied as a research fellow at a US military academy.

Came back to south Korea during the Korean war

Served as a division commander of the south Korean army in the Yongpyong area (Choe Tok Sin in the Taejon area).

Served as a corps commander of the south Korean army after the war and appointed as the ambassador to Malaysia.

Formed Taekwon-Do Federation of south Korea and became its president when he was a corps commander of the south Korean army.

Later suffered persecution by Park Jung Hee, fled to Canada, formed International Taekwon-Do Federation and became its president.

The one and only green belt owner in Taekwon-Do.

Good relations with his wife, and admired as a nice couple by the others.

Visited the DPRK several times and met President Kim Il Sung.

His relatives live in his native village.

These were the basic information of the career of Choi Hong Hi Pak had learned while reading *Taekwon-Do*, a 15-volume book written by him.

Pak studied them again and again.

First, he had to change his outside appearance as much as possible to match that of the character in order to portray him.

Only his eyes looked very similar to those of the character.

There were not many similarities except his thin eyes and conspicuous cheekbones.

Besides, he was 13cm taller, his lips were thicker and his face was broader than the prototype's.

However, he was confident because as directors said, he looked most similar to the character among the Korean actors.

He tried to look like the character with the help of the make-up artists, and at last got appreciation from the crew that he looked "somewhat similar" or "very similar" to the character.

Now the most important thing for him was to learn the Taekwon-Do skills and the soldierly gait and posture.

He was lucky to have a career of six months of training at his own expenses at a judo club while living in Japan; he did not

want to be defeated by the Japanese kids.

But he was not satisfied with that since there was a big difference between Taekwon-Do and judo.

So he practised hard under the guidance of a Taekwon-Do instructor, and reached the level of performing basic movements in 15 days.

And he studied the video footage of Choi Hong Hi's visits to the DPRK in order to study the expression of the latter's eyes as well as his moderate manner and gait.

Thus he was able to create impressive acting of the hero by skilfully applying the outward features of the character in conformity with his personality and different situations.

For example, in part 6 he gives Hong Yong Ja instructions on Taekwon-Do in the headquarters of his corps. He approaches her, saying, "Let me see your skills, Instructor Hong." The spectacular movements he showed while defending himself from her continuous attack resemble those of a skilful and refined Taekwon-Do player.

And the movement angry Cha Hong Gi shows when he jumps to kick and throw Chun Doo Hwan (regimental commander of the south Korean army and later south Korean president) over his shoulder looks quite real.

He could create vivid scenes because he carried out most

of the Taekwon-Do movements by himself except two or three combined and edited scenes.

In part 7, his motionless carriage and firm stare in the scene of his soldiers practising Taekwon-Do in the training ground of his headquarters vividly show the outward features of the character.

And his outrageous look resembling a crazy tiger when he was told that one company of his corps had been totally annihilated by the "raid by the communist army" truthfully show the character's soldierly temperament, who is radical and knows nothing but fighting.

Pak's acting was so vivid that Choi Hong Hi saw the film three times with his wife during his visit to the DPRK. Choi was really amazed and said, "How come he mimicked me so real, and he really looks like me."

Choi Jung Hwa, Choi Hong Hi's son and a member of the Secretariat of the International Taekwon-Do Federation, who was living in Canada, saw the film with his friends and said, "The actor really resembled my father. He looks and behaves like my father."

Later he sent a letter of thanks to Pak Ki Ju.

## True to the Character's Personality and Situation

Unique acting true to the character's personality and situation is the characteristic action which the character cannot but perform in that particular situation. In other words, it is the action that matches his ideology, emotions and aspirations.

In this regard, Pak Ki Ju's performances in parts 6 and 7 of the film *The Nation and Destiny* are practical examples.

One of them can be found in the scene of Park Jung Hee's visit to the Taekwon-Do training ground of Cha Hong Gi's corps in part 7.

Park Jung Hee receives Hong Yong Ja's secret report: Cha Hong Gi is determined to reunify the country without fail by forging the spirit and strength of the Korean nation through Taekwon-Do; he denounced Pak as a dictator and a stooge of the US; his Taekwon-Do forces are growing up to be a serious danger in the frontline army units. Unable to conceal his fear, he decides to make an inspection of Cha's corps.

His true aim is to verify firsthand the corps commander's tendency and his alleged anti-government trends.

The following is the description of the scene.

... Park Jung Hee gets out of his car and is greeted by Cha Hong Gi. Then he proceeds to the review stand.

The scenario did not specify Cha's action in detail, and he was mostly supposed to stand still.

However, the instant he saw Pak on the stand, he expressed his state of mind by casting an unpleasant glance at him.

Although it is only a momentary action, it vividly shows the world of his complicated and subtle emotion: Why has that sly fox come to my corps? Is it really a front-line inspection or an act of some misgivings? At the same time it is a good expression of Cha's character such as his pride and dignity as a senior to the "president" and his manly yet sensitive features.

Then he keeps looking to the front.

His reasonable yet cold and sharp eyes are for soothing and calming down his complicated and subtle state of mind and reveal his delicate wait-and-see attitude towards the situation that may come later.

Other actors would have performed without attaching special significance to the role as it seemed not to have a special share in the overall portrayal of the scene.

But Pak discovered a body language unique to the character

in that situation and created a true portrayal of the character's complicated and subtle state of mind in 5-6 seconds.

His distinctive skills of portrayal can be found especially in part 7, in the scene in which he has an emotional reunion with his wife, Sin Tal Lae.

Betrayed by Park Jung Hee, a political imposter, Cha Hong Gi shudders with a surging indignation. In the stormy rain and wind, he tears the epaulettes of a corps commander off his uniform and writhes in agony. Then he spontaneously proceeds to his house where his beloved wife and daughter are waiting for him. However, being reluctant to enter, he sits down in the yard and falls into a deep thought in the rain.

When her little daughter told her that he has come, his wife rushes out into the yard, gives him a tight hug, not caring whether the little daughter is seeing her or not, and says that she has longed for the day to come.

Then why does his sitting silently touch the heartstrings of the audiences?

It is because a highly dramatic appeal is contained in his silent action. He has long kept his wife in agony due to his anti-communist ideology.

Nothing could check her cherished ideal of the motherland

because she regards this ideal as a true love for the country and nation.

Even though he forced her to marry him against her will, he could not succeed in changing her faith. That is why he feels great remorse before her when his anti-communist ideology has crumbled so unexpectedly. However, he has forced her to experience mental agony for such a long time that he thinks it is too late for him to ask her for forgiveness.

The burden of guilt came from his die-hard anti-communist career against his nation he followed despite her sympathetic and earnest appeal and denunciation. So he is sitting silently in the rain taking no account of the light from his dear house.

He wonders how his wife of great self-respect will greet him and if she will denounce him as a despicable being. But, surprisingly, she rushes out into the yard and gives him a warm hug.

He feels somewhat confused at first, but the next moment he is deeply moved by the understanding that she has not despised the man, Cha Hong Gi. So Pak portrayed the character by letting himself in her generous arms.

This acting also goes well with the development of the logic of Cha Hong Gi's personality.

He is a man of unusual self-respect and holds dear patriotism, to display the national spirit through Taekwon-Do. So when he fails to be elected a delegate to a conference of Young Communist League activists, he knocks down a “secretary of the Communist Party” out of disgrace and anger and goes to extremes of fleeing to south Korea forsaking even his girlfriend.

With faith in himself, he has not yielded even to Park Jung Hee, who was abusing his authority to commit all sorts of trickery and evil deeds. It was his sympathy with his wife’s ideal that made him yield to his wife. His self-respect that never tolerated subordination to others over the long years of his checkered career formed a persevering and taciturn personality in him.

So a spontaneous action before his wife may lead to inconsistency with the character’s personality.

That is why Pak is sitting silently in the rain before he meets his wife in the yard.

In this film he produced refined and unique portrayals in many other scenes, like those of talking with Hong Yong Ja over the telephone on Taekwon-Do, execution of “deserters,” conversing with Park Jung Hee on a liner over the June 16 military coup, his wife’s surprising and unpleasant attitude

when he was promoted as the commander of an army corps and talking about his home village to Hong Yong Ja in his office.

### Distinctive Portrayal of Details

Pak Ki Ju’s success and rise to stardom in the series of Cha Hong Gi of the film *The Nation and Destiny* are mostly related to his emphasis on the details and his distinctive and creative portrayal of them.

One example is the intensive depiction of Cha Hong Gi’s personality by using the cigarette, one of the men’s favourite items.

For Cha Hong Gi, Taekwon-Do is the soul of his nation and his spiritual faith and conscience. But every step of his life is taken against the destiny of the nation, which is followed by doubt, fear and anguish. However, he maintains his spiritual mainstay as befits a man of martial art.

Meanwhile, Park Jung Hee hatches a cunning and sinister plot to remove him out of fear of his Taekwon-Do forces rapidly increasing among the soldiers.

Cha Hong Gi, unaware of it, gave high praise to Park Jung Hee, saying that his “presidency” will bring about the “country’s



prosperity.” This explains why he is beside himself with fury and wrath for having been deceived by Park Jung Hee when he came to know the story behind the raid on a frontline post of his army corps.

Pak Ki Ju gave an excellent portrayal of the character’s world of complicated mind through his detailed action.

In the scene he showed his mental agony by putting out the cigarette by rubbing it against the back of his hand with a curse on the manipulators of the raid. His hand is suggestive of his ideal of Taekwon-Do.

The lit cigarette looks as if it were burning into ashes the heart of Cha Hong Gi, his foolish spiritual intention to save the destiny of the nation by means of Taekwon-Do. At the same time, it shows in a distinctive and unique way the taciturn and manly personality of the martial artist who had no choice but to burn his ideal of Taekwon-Do to which he has devoted his all in vain.

This unique and meaningful portrayal was not achieved easily.

At first, he attached a thin aluminum plate to the back of his hand or applied a thick layer of adhesive for the portrayal. But he could not produce a true-to-life portrayal. He also thought

of rubbing a dead cigarette and pretending that the light was still on.

He thought he could draw on the cigarette and rub the dead cigarette. If these actions were shot in separate cuts, it might seem alright. But when he tried this way, the falling black ashes revealed it was a trick.

He was reminded of the instruction of Kim Jong Il that movies hates and do not tolerate tricks.

He regretted having resorted to tricks in fear of trivial burn on his hand and made a resolute decision to rub a live cigarette on the back of his hand, which produced a true-to-life portrayal.

The next example is the detailed action of tearing off his epaulettes with a curse on Park Jung Hee.

The following is the description of the scene.

...

In a Taekwon-Do training hall, Cha Hong Gi grabs Chun Doo Hwan by the neck.

“Hey, there must be another guy behind Hyong Uk (director of the south Korean Central Intelligence Agency-Tr).”

Chun Doo Hwan confesses.

“Park... Jung... Hee”

Cha Hong Gi becomes surprised.

“You said Park Jung Hee?” he asks in doubt.

Hong Yong Ja turns away her eyes.

Cha Hong Gi: “Park Jung Hee. It was you.”

Then he walks to the door.

Hong Yong Ja: “Mr. Corps Commander.”

Cha Hong Gi: “Never ever find me, Cha Hong Gi, in this cursed land of south Korea.”



A scene from *The Nation and Destiny*

Cha walks along a path in the rain. The flash of lightning reveals his face.

He screams in despair. “I haven’t known you were such a plotter. Alas!”

Another lightning flashes.

Cha Hong Gi screams by the tree.

“You dare plot against me? What on earth are you going to make of me, one of the founders of the ROK army, you son of a bitch.”

He writhes, “What a national tragedy! Alas!”

...

He tears off the epaulettes and trudges in cold rain.

...

An inner monologue of torment leads to shivering and finally develops into tearing off the epaulettes.

The action is not simple. The slow motion of one hand reaching his left shoulder reflects his heavy heart and that of tearing it off is rather quick as if he snatches away rubbish. And throwing it away is a weighty action.

The other hand also moves slowly towards the right shoulder, tears the other epaulette off in a rather slow action and drops it on the muddy road.

This is the climax of his curse, indignation, violent rage and animosity towards Park Jung Hee, a plotter and a heinous fascist tyrant, and clearly shows the psychology of the man who has been deceived all his life. At the same time, it is a true-to-life portrayal that sustains in a distinctive way the character of Cha Hong Gi, a taciturn and manly figure.

There are many other distinctive and characteristic portrayals of the detailed actions and psychology that leave lasting impressions on the audiences.

Pak Ki Ju portrayed every character in distinctive ways, thus enjoying great popularity among the audiences. He was awarded the title of People's Artiste on December 25, 1992, for his attractive portrayal in the series of Cha Hong Gi of the film *The Nation and Destiny*, a great masterpiece and acme of the art and literature of Korea.

## Priceless Honour

April 28, 1992 is a day that Pak Ki Ju never forgot all his life. At dawn, he was woken up by a call from the Korean Film Studio.

He went to the studio. To his surprise, a senior official of the studio was waiting for him with the car engine left running.

After a while, inside the car Pak Ki Ju, to his surprise, was told that Kim Jong Il had called him.

He was excited. It had been a long time since he began his career in the Korean Film Studio after graduation from Pyongyang University of Dramatic and Cinematic Arts, but it was the first time for him to be called by Kim Jong Il.

He arrived at the office building of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea with several other filmmakers and artists. An official guided them into the office of Kim Jong Il. He could see that the leader had been going over a pile of documents until daybreak when the people across the country would wake up from deep sleep.

He felt remorseful as he thought that he had felt annoyed by the call that woke him up from slumber.

Kim Jong Il welcomed them with a broad smile on his face. When he noticed Pak Ki Ju, he shook his hand warmly and patted him on the shoulder, saying: How come the commander of a south Korean army corps is here? but the commander has been embraced by President Kim Il Sung, and I must welcome him. Then he said that he had enjoyed very much parts 6 and 7 of *The Nation and Destiny*, and praised Pak Ki Ju's portrayal of the main character, Cha Hong Gi, adding that he had portrayed the corps commander so well.

He continued: The portrayals are realistic in the scene in which the corps commander walks along the muddy road with his eyes towards the sky, saying, "Park Jung Hee, you son of a bitch," after tearing off the epaulettes; the action of tearing off the epaulettes is quite true to life; the more I saw the scene of his breaking with Park Jung Hee, saying, "I won't serve you any longer. I am leaving. Never ever find me on this land of south Korea," the more superb I found it is.

He also spoke highly of his delicate portrayal of Cha Hong Gi's emotion when he cast a glance at Park Jung Hee in the scene of the latter's visit to the Taekwon-Do training ground.

Kim Jong Il's praises were so generous that Pak Ki Ju was

overwhelmed and lowered his head.

Seeing Pak Ki Ju with kind eyes, Kim Jong Il recollected the past years, saying: When *Conscripts* was staged by the actors' team of the Korean Film Studio, you portrayed the character of a conscript, a supporting role in the satirical drama; you have acted as a supporting actor in many films but a few as major characters so far, but your portrayal of Cha Hong Gi is brilliant.

Pak Ki Ju received Kim Jong Il's guidance since he had acted in *Conscripts*.

In early 1969, the Korean Film Studio was seething with enthusiasm preparing for a stage performance initiated and guided by Kim Jong Il.

He saw to it that the film actors created and staged a satirical drama *Conscripts*, with the primary purpose of remarkably improving their artistic skills through stage performances.

In late January 1969, when the preparations were on their height, Kim Jong Il visited the studio. While he was guiding the preparations, he asked the actors who had been repatriated from Japan. Pak was the only one from Japan there, so he took a step forward and bowed to him. Kim Jong Il recognized him, who had played a mathematician in *The Family of Choe Hak*

*Sin* and, with a smile on his face, encouraged him to improve his skills through the stage performance.

Kim Jong Il went to a location where the feature film *The Sea of Blood* was being shot. The setting was a village, the whole of which was set on fire and in the sea of blood by the Japanese imperialists' atrocities. He recognized Pak Ki Ju among the actors, and asked him what his role was.

When he answered that he was cast as a member of the crowd, Kim Jong Il said the crowd should also play their roles realistically to make the film perfect in its ideological and artistic qualities.

In October 1971, when seeing the one-act play *This Is Also a Front Line* staged at a skills presentation by film artists, Kim Jong Il said that Pak Ki Ju played an old man in a down-to-earth manner and recollected again the days of making *Conscripts*.

Looking at the scar of the burn on the back of his hand that still had the scab, he asked if it had been burned by the cigarette he had rubbed against his hand to express Cha Hong Gi's anger towards Park Jung Hee.

Stroking the scab, he said that in order to produce a lifelike portrayal, an actor should be so passionate.

In fact, Pak Ki Ju was not famous before he appeared in *The Nation and Destiny*.

As he had played supporting roles in most of the films and because of his thin build and not so handsome face, nobody had been confident that he would be suitable for such a weighty role of Cha Hong Gi.

There had been a lot of debate on his cast in the production team, but they had failed to come to a conclusion.

In early April 1992, while seeing part 4 of *The Nation and Destiny*, a part of the series about Choe Hyon Dok, Kim Jong Il said that it would be a good idea to insert some scenes of portraying Choe Hyon Dok as well in the series about Cha Hong Gi. He asked an official



A scene from  
*The Nation and Destiny*

who would be cast as Cha Hong Gi.

The official answered honestly that Pak Ki Ju had been designated but some were unsure about whether he could play the weighty role.

Kim Jong Il said: A man of thin build cannot be the reason for any doubt whether he could play a south Korean army general; a film actor should not be made to portray the same personality all the time; they should be encouraged to portray various personalities.

In retrospect, Pak Ki Ju had been subjected to national discrimination and contempt in Japan. It had really been a tremendous change in his life to enjoy the priceless honour to become a movie actor.

Pak Ki Ju's career was clear evidence of the idea and theme of *The Nation and Destiny*, that the destiny of the nation is precisely the destiny of its members and that the destiny of the nation and its members can be blossomed only in the embraces of the great Comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

His parents could not but hand over to him the destiny of a member of a ruined nation and had made him carry a coal bucket in his childhood. However, Kim Jong Il's motherly

affection brought his dream come true and made him to rise to stardom.

In August that year, Kim Jong Il said to an official: Pak Ki Ju is now enjoying great popularity among the people; the series about Cha Hong Gi should be made before other series by taking the advantage of his popularity; when new stars are born, it will be a good idea to make sequels that feature them and then go over to other series.

So the series about Cha Hong Gi that had originally been planned to have two parts were made to have five.

Thanks to Kim Jong Il's trust and solicitude, Pak Ki Ju could enjoy the pinnacle of glory.

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## Conclusion

More than 70 years have been recorded in the annals of the Korean cinematic arts since *My Home Village* was produced in the days of building a new Korea.

And nearly 30 years have elapsed since the series of Cha Hong Gi (1992) was produced as part of the film *The Nation and Destiny*, the acme of the Korean art and literature.

When people see in this masterpiece Cha Hong Gi, a son of a nation beset with trials and ordeals, they always remember Pak Ki Ju.

The film, based on the seed that the destiny of the nation is precisely the destiny of its individual members, shows impressively the career of Cha Hong Gi, president of the International Taekwon-Do Federation, who had betrayed the nation and trodden the path of treason but in his later life embarked on the way of true life for his fellow countrymen. Pak Ki Ju's acting rendered a significant contribution to the success of this masterpiece.

It is also a review of Pak Ki Ju's life itself, which was closely

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linked with the Party and the country.

He enjoyed great honour and happiness in his later life.

Kim Jong Il once said: I was fascinated by Pak Ki Ju's acting; his acting was superb enough to cast a spell even on a man; among our male film actors, the three stars are those who played Choe Hyon Dok, Yun Sang Min and Cha Hong Gi.

Pak Ki Ju had suffered all manner of national discrimination and contempt in an alien land in his childhood, longing for affection and the career of an actor, before being repatriated to his motherland. In the embrace of Kim Jong Il, his great mentor, he became a People's Artiste loved by his country and fellow people, and participated in the Conference of Korean Intellectuals held in 1992.

Pak Ki Ju died on July 18, 1994, at the age of 55. Until the last moment of his life, he devoted everything to his creative endeavour for the benevolent Party and his motherland.

Throughout his career, he was never satisfied with his abilities. Always regarding himself as a novice, he redoubled his efforts and thus finally reached the apex of success and happiness.

## **The Dream Comes True**

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Written by Prof & Dr So Hui Jo

Edited by Kim Yong Son, Jang Hyang Ok

Translated by Tong Kyong Chol, Choe Kyong Nam

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E-mail: [flph@star-co.net.kp](mailto:flph@star-co.net.kp)

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