



Visual Metaphors in North Korean Graphic Novels for Children

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Abstract: North Korea produces dozens of comic books each year for its children of various ages. Comic books for younger readers are often populated with anthropomorphized animal characters – not humans. Some of them tell stories that seem to be allegories of the Korean War. In these graphic novels, the animals represent through visual metaphor the various groups found in Korean War stories – good and pure North Koreans, traitorous and cowardly South Koreans, and their evil American overlords. This paper examines these visual metaphors to see how good and bad characters are graphically presented to young North Korean readers.

Keywords: *North Korean, Comics, Visual Metaphors, Children's Literature, Propaganda.*

“No sooner is a form seen than it must resemble something:
humanity seems doomed to analogy.”¹

Introduction²

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (henceforth “North Korea”), many books are published each year at a number of state-owned publishing houses. Among the dry texts praising the Kim family, history books that teach a very unique view of world events, and textbooks for building a socialist utopia on the Korean peninsula, there are also works of literature. The existence of literary works presumes that people also read for entertainment, as they do in other countries. Still, in North Korea even literature must carry an educational message, in order to fulfill its role in revolution and construction. The genre of graphic novels has been effectively used by the state to provide such messages in an entertaining multi-modal form. This paper examines visual metaphors in North Korean graphic novels written for younger readers, and in particular the visual metaphors used in depicting the characters of those novels. Ultimately, the study aims to provide insights into the narrative and worldview imparted by North Korean graphic novels.

What Are Graphic Novels?

“Graphic novel” is the literary term for what are commonly called comic books. Influential

1 Roland Barthes, cited in David Silverman & Brian Torode, *The Material Word: Some Theories of Language and its Limits* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 187.

2 This paper uses the McCune-Reischauer system to Romanize Korean names and words.

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American comic book artist Will Eisner popularized the term to talk about a full-length stand-alone story written using comic book techniques. Eisner defined comic books as “sequential art.”³ Scott McCloud, in his seminal work *Understanding Comics*, further developed Eisner’s definition into “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.”⁴

Comic books or graphic novels have certain common characteristics: multiple frames or panels per page, each frame containing a scene, speech balloons containing dialogue, captions or narrations in boxes at the top or bottom of a panel, and gutters between panels. The story is driven forward by a combination of images and text. Not all graphic novels have each of these characteristics on every page, but most do.

In *The Visual Language of Comics*, Neil Cohn argues that comics are not a visual language in and of themselves; rather, they are written *in* a visual language, often combined with a textual language. He defines a visual language as “structurally sequential images” that “are produced in a modality,” that “express meaning,” and that “use a system of rules and constraints for sequential expressions of meaning” (a grammar).⁵ On graphic (or visual) language, Paul Laseau wrote:

The symbols for verbal languages are largely restricted to words, whereas graphic languages include images, signs, numbers, and words. Much more significant, verbal language is sequential – it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Graphic language is simultaneous – all symbols and their relationships are considered at the same time.⁶

By employing both a visual and a textual language, graphic novels are therefore “multi-modal.”⁷

One characteristic of images, as Barthes explains, is that they are polysemous, that is they do not signify only one thing. Every image implies a “floating chain” of signifieds underlying their signifiers, and each reader can choose how to interpret them.⁸ The text that accompanies an image acts to constrict how it should be interpreted

with respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a *repressive* value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above

3 See for example Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1985) and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1996).

4 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), 9.

5 Neil Cohn, *The Visual Language of Comics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3-4.

6 Paul Laseau, *Graphic Thinking for Architects and Designers* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989), 55.

7 Cohn, *The Visual Language of Comics*, 2.

8 Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image – Music – Text*, ed. & trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Will and Wang, 1977), 156.

all invested.⁹

This function is what Barthes calls anchoring, because the text anchors the “signifier” (the picture) to a certain “signified” (an object or idea).

Another function of linguistic messages (text) that accompanies graphic messages (pictures) is called “relay.” In a graphic novel, as in a film, text and image work together across time and space (the space of the book) to create a narrative, a story. Therefore, each individual picture and piece of text is part of a larger syntagm. In fact, Barthes specifically cited cartoons and comic strips as an example of where relay is often used.¹⁰

Graphic Novels in North Korea

In East Asia, comic books, newspaper cartoons and comic strips are known by the traditional Chinese characters 漫畫 pronounced *manhwa* in Korean, *manga* in Japanese, and *mànhuà* in Mandarin Chinese. However, in North Korea, the word “*manhwa*” has come to take on a very specific meaning: satirical pictures that poke fun at social problems in class society.¹¹ The term then refers only to one particular style of drawing and one type of narrative content. Books that are labelled “*manhwa*” deal either with South Korean society or with Korea under Japanese colonial rule.¹² Instead of using the designation *manhwa*, North Korea has been labelling comics, since at least 1956,¹³ as *kūrimiyagi* (“picture story”), or, more commonly, *kūrimch’aek*, which literally means “picture book.”

In his 1992 treatise *On Fine Arts*, Kim Jong Il laid out his vision for art production in North Korea. He mentions comic books only once, at the end of a sentence, in the penultimate paragraph of a section on “graphic arts” (in North Korean *ch’ulp’an misul*, literally “published or printed art”): “The forms of illustration need to be diverse. We must also make colourful [sic] the binding that can be likened to the face of the book and develop the comic strip genre.”¹⁴ The unusual English phrasing is from the official English translation; the Korean word in the original for “comic strip” is *ryōnsok kūrim hyōngsik*, literally “sequential picture format.”

The *Korea Encyclopedia* gives this definition of *kūrimch’aek*:

A publication that shows the contents it wishes to convey chiefly through pictures. A

9 Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” 156-157.

10 Ibid., 157.

11 I have found only eight books labeled “*manhwa*,” published in 1980, 1983, 1985 (two), 1990, 1991, 1994 and 1998 out of the 521 volumes that I have catalogued.

12 For a more thorough discussion of the use of the word “*manhwa*” in North Korea, see Han Sang-jōng, “Differences between North & South Korean Usage of “*manhwa*” – Focusing on the Hybridity of the North Korean ‘*kūrimch’aek*’ Sōsan Taesa [Nambukhan ‘*manhwa*’ yongbōp-ūi ch’ai – pukhan ‘*kūrimch’aek*’ [Sōsan taesa]ūi honjongsōng-eul chungshimūro],” *Hyōndae Pukhan Yōn’gu* 14.2 (2011): 7-34.

13 The earliest example I can find is *Hong’gyōng’rae* by Namgung Man, (Pyongyang: Minjuch’ōngsa, 1956), (although the publication date inside reads 1957).

14 Kim Jong Il, *On Fine Arts* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992), 115.

kūrimch'aek is characteristically based on pictures so that the contents it wishes to tell can be grasped intuitively, and the text explains the picture briefly. Therefore, a *kūrimch'aek* is put together in an easy to understand, plain-speaking way, more so than publications that are based on text. *Kūrimch'aek* represent in pictures subject matter that is both novel and has educational value, with as its content all phenomena of nature and society and human creative activity. In doing so, *kūrimch'aek* has a persuasive power that allows readers to see directly with their eyes and to feel [the message]. *Kūrimch'aek* targets a broad readership from young children to senior citizens, and is edited and published with a wide variety of content and formats. *Kūrimch'aek* do not only educate workers, youths and children, they also contribute to broadening their knowledge of nature and society. In order to make a good *kūrimch'aek*, one must choose content that can be represented in pictures and draw pictures so well that the message to be conveyed can be shown intuitively, and one must compress explanatory text to write it briefly.¹⁵

Immediately it becomes clear that *kūrimch'aek* have an educational function. Secondly, while graphic novels are often assumed to be exclusively children's literature, this is not necessarily the case. Just as in the wider world there are graphic novels written for different age groups, so there are North Korean graphic novels for younger readers as well as for adults.¹⁶ Thirdly, what is particularly noteworthy is that none of the standard features that one comes to expect in graphic novels are mentioned: panels, sequential pictures, speech balloons, and so on.

Art in North Korea is controlled by the state through the General Federation of the Unions of Literature and the Arts of Korea (*Chosŏn Munhak Yesul Ch'ongdongmaeng*).¹⁷ All literary works go through a committee of evaluation before publication to ensure that appropriate themes have been chosen and handled correctly.¹⁸ All fine arts (including painting, illustration, music and literature) must serve a purpose. Therefore, the opportunities for free artistic expression are limited.¹⁹

In *On Juche literature*, Kim Jong Il instructs the correct way to produce literary content. It is worth quoting at length what Kim says about the function of literature:

15 Chosŏn Taebaekkwajŏn, *Korea Encyclopedia [Chosŏn Taebaekkwajŏn]* (Pyongyang: Paekkwajŏn Ch'ulp'ansa, 2001) CD-ROM version.

16 Dafna Zur has written an excellent analysis of illustrated children's literature. See her "The Korean War in Children's Picturebooks of the DPRK," in *Exploring North Korean Arts*, ed. Rüdiger Frank, 276-298. Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2011.

17 Alzo David-West, "North Korean Aesthetic Theory: Aesthetics, Beauty, and 'Man'," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 2013), 104.

18 Kim Sŏng-hun & Pak So-hyŏn, *Understanding North Korean Comics [Pukhan manhwa-ŭi ihae]* (Seoul: Sallim Publishing, 2005), 33.

19 In *Cultural policy in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), cultural officials Chai Sin Sik and Hyon Jong Hun write, "We are wary of the principle of art for art's sake, the naturalistic tendency to recognize only the artistic value of a work to the detriment of its ideological significance. [...] [W]e have achieved the just proportion of ideological and artistic values in our literary and artistic works." (Op. cit. p. 24.)

Literature is a good way to provide cultural and emotional education to the people, as well as a powerful weapon for their political and ideological education and for giving them knowledge about life. The purpose of creating literary works is not only to provide people with a correct understanding of the world and sound ideas, but also to cultivate their emotions. Our cultural and emotional education is part of cultivating revolutionary sentiment and national emotion suited to the aesthetic feelings of the era of independence. Literature must contribute to instilling beautiful and noble emotions in the people, and improving their cultural level and human nature. Successful cultural and emotional education is of great significance in cultivating the feelings and emotions with which to acknowledge what is beautiful and noble in life and reject what is mean and lowbrow.²⁰

Therefore, even graphic novels are written not for pure entertainment value. They must also function as “a powerful weapon for their political and ideological education and for giving them knowledge about life.”

Of course, this is not a new idea. Pictures have long been used for propaganda purposes, to instill emotions and opinions in the minds of viewers. For example, Lester C. Olson wrote, “Benjamin Franklin was typical of 18th-century polemicists in his recognition of visual rhetoric as a powerful means to influence beliefs and actions.”²¹ In North Korea, where propaganda techniques have been finely honed since 1948, it can be said that visual rhetoric has been raised almost to a science.

Each year, the several state-owned publishing houses of North Korea produce a number of books with the label “*kūrimch’aek*” on the front cover.²² Looking inside, however, it is clear that this label is used not only for true graphic novels, but also for illustrated storybooks. Of the 521 books that I have catalogued in my database, 234 conform to the conventional “comic book” style, while 194 are illustrated stories, and 25 are compilation books that contain both kinds of narrative.

In more recent writing on the topic of *kūrimch’aek*, an attempt has been made to separate the two forms. For example, Ri Ch’ang-hyök, writing in North Korea’s monthly art journal *Chosön Yesul*, describes *ryönsok kūrim(ch’aek) hyöngsik*, [literally “sequential picture (book) format”], which has multiple “cuts” (panels or frames), versus *kūrimch’aek hyöngsik* [literally “picture book format”], which has only one scene per page.²³

Later that year, Ri wrote again about the characteristics of sequential *kūrimch’aek* format

20 Kim Jong Il, *On Juche Literature* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991), 17 [page numbers refer to the English edition of this work].

21 Lester C Olson, “Visual Rhetoric as Indices of Political Change,” in *Visual Communication: Perception, Rhetoric, and Technology*, ed. Diane S. Hope (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2006), 178.

22 For example, in 2013 at least 36 *kūrimch’aek* were published, in both the graphic novel and illustrated storybook formats explained above. In 2012, that figure was at least 24, in 2011 it was 25, and in 2010 it was 24. Just four publishing houses make up 82% of total *kūrimch’aek* output over the decades.

23 Ri Ch’ang-hyök, “Illustrations of the Sequential Picture Format and Their Types [Ryönsok-kūrim-hyöngshik-üi saphwa-wa kü ryuhyöng],” *Chosön Yesul*, Issue 7, 2010, accessed July 7, 2015. www.dprkmedia.com.

illustrations, and he introduced, perhaps for the first time in North Korean theoretical writing, the idea of a speech balloon [*mal-chumŏni*, literally “word pocket”], and stressed the importance of dialogue in driving the story forward in sequential *kūrimch’aek*.²⁴ In the following year, Chŏng Hyŏn-ho, also in *Chosŏn Yesul*, distinguishes the concepts of sequential *kūrimch’aek* from children’s *kūrimch’aek* and novels with pictures, and specifies speech balloons as the basic structural element of a sequential *kūrimch’aek*.²⁵

Despite the theoretical advances in understanding graphic novels in North Korea, however, the publishing houses continue to publish books of various formats with no distinction in labelling, calling them all *kūrimch’aek*. For the purposes of the case study in this paper, we will limit ourselves to the sequential *kūrimch’aek* format, which corresponds most closely to what we call “graphic novels” in English.

There are only a limited number of specific themes and time/space settings portrayed in North Korean graphic novels. Though there are some exceptions, most stories fall into one of the following categories:

1. the Korean War (1950-1953),
2. the anti-Japanese struggle (1905-1945),
3. struggle between landlords and peasants (pre-1905),
4. biographies of historical Koreans (e.g. Wang’gŏn),
5. a “timeless present” – present day, but no reference to specific events or dates,
6. stories that place in other, often unnamed, countries in Europe or Africa,
7. anthropomorphized animals.

The last category, graphic novels that feature anthropomorphized animals, are written for younger readers (up to elementary school age). They often contain morality tales, as well as stories of conflict and violence between good animals and bad animals. Because all North Korean literature is state controlled, it can be presumed that there are strong functions of anchoring and relay at work in the graphic novels produced there.

Visual Metaphors

In verbal or textual language, a metaphor describes a figure of speech when one thing is made to represent something else in order to make a point. For example, the expression, “it’s raining cats and dogs” is a metaphor in which “cats and dogs” are used to represent how heavily the rain is falling. Lakoff and Johnson write that “the essence of metaphor is

24 Ri Ch’ang-hyŏk, “The characteristics of sequential picture format illustrations [Ryŏnsok-kūrim-hyŏngshik-saphwa-ŭi t’ŭkching],” *Chosŏn Yesul*, Issue 11, 2010, accessed July 7, 2015. www.dprkmedia.com.

25 Chŏng Hyŏn-ho, “<Platform> Plastic Combination of Pictures and Text in Artistic Illustration Compositional Organization [<Yŏndan> Yesul-saphwa-kudo-chojik-esŏ kūrim-kwa kŭl-ŭi chohyŏngjŏk-kyŏlhap],” *Chosŏn Yesul*, Issue 4, 2011, accessed July 7, 2015. www.dprkmedia.com.

understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”²⁶

John M. Kennedy, a psychologist who researches metaphor in language and pictures, argues that metaphor can be used in depiction, or visual language, just as in textual language

depictions that follow some standard canons might be called literal, and ones that are metaphoric would be those that deliberately violate the standard canons while being intended to make a valid point that can be determined by examining the depiction and its referents.²⁷

Patterned on Fowler’s 1926 list of the most common metaphors used in speech, Kennedy posits 18 metaphors used in visual language.²⁸ We will return to some of these in the case study in this paper.

Charles Forceville uses the terms “target” to mean the topic which is being turned into a metaphor (Kennedy uses “tenor”) and “source” to mean the thing which is being used to illustrate the source (Kennedy uses “vehicle”). In the example above, “raining” is the target/tenor, and “cats and dogs” is the source/vehicle. Forceville lists four actions that must take place in the mind of a viewer of a visual metaphor, the third of which is “[the viewer must] decide which facts and connotations adhering to the source domain (the sum total of which Max Black, referring to Aristotle, calls “endoxa” [...]), can be mapped onto the target domain.”²⁹

Here he means that it is up to the viewer to decide which aspects of the target he or she recognizes in the source image, and therefore if the metaphor is a valid one. This calculation is based on the viewer’s endoxa, all that he or she knows, thinks, feels and has experienced about the source.

Aspects of the source are “mapped” onto the target. If there are many things that can be successfully mapped, then the metaphor can be said to have a high degree of “resonance.”³⁰

Forceville was writing about television advertising commercials. As a form of persuasive communication, these are comparable to North Korean graphic novels in as much as both carry out a persuasive and didactic function on their audiences. He writes that in order to be persuasive, “the intended mappings from a metaphor’s source domain need to be commensurate with the envisaged audience’s ‘endoxa.’”³¹ In North Korea, where all media and education are controlled by the state, it is easy to ensure that the endoxa of graphic novel readers is very similar, if not identical. Therefore, any visual metaphors

26 Cited in Charles Forceville, “Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor in Commercials,” in *Metaphor and Figurative Language: Theoretical Issues*, ed. Rachel Giora and Patrick Hanks, London: Routledge, 256.

27 John M. Kennedy, “Metaphor in Pictures,” *Perception* 11 (1982): 589-605, 198.

28 Kennedy, “Metaphor in Pictures,” 203-215.

29 Forceville, “Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor in Commercials,” 257.

30 Ibid.

31 Forceville, “Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor in Commercials,” 258.

would be expected to have a similar impact on North Korean viewers.

Case Study: Brave Hedgehog

For this case study, we will examine the 1991 North Korean graphic novel written for elementary school children, titled *Brave Hedgehog [Yong'gamhan kosūmdochi]*. The 80-page book tells a story about the village of Kkottongsan (meaning “Flower Hill”), which is under attack from the “Black Devil” and his evil henchmen, who live in Du'ōmsan (meaning “Manure Mountain”).³² No reason is given for why the latter is making war on the former.

In the good village of Kkottongsan, there live animals that are kind, friendly, and peaceful. We see hedgehogs, raccoons, squirrels, a rabbit, a cat, a dog, a deer, an Asiatic black bear, and a pig. They are almost invariably smiling, their pupils are dilated, and they look cheerful and innocent. Even on the front cover of the book, the hedgehog is smiling happily as he fires his revolver at an unseen enemy.

In the bad village of Du'ōmsan, which is actually a military base, there live only animals that are soldiers in an evil army. There are weasels, fieldmice, eagles, and a fox. All of these are ruled over and ordered around by a jackal. At all times, the faces of these animals are angry, sly, sneaky, fierce, or scared. Even when the jackal receives some good news, he laughs, showing his sharp fangs, and his body is contorted into an unusual posture, in which he shows the sole of one of his feet. He is also drawn in extreme close-up, whereas the protagonists of the story are usually drawn at a comfortable, non-invasive distance.³³ Clearly the emotional response that these characters are expected to elicit in the book's young readers is a negative one; readers should feel no sympathy for them at all.

The jackal known as the “Black Devil” has sent a spy into Kkottongsan in order to steal military secrets from the good village, to make it vulnerable to an attack from Du'ōmsan. The story tells how Detective Hedgehog is sent to the village to find the evil infiltrator. Within three days, and with almost no effort, he is able to do so. It turns out that the secret agent is in fact an evil weasel disguised as a good raccoon. When his mask is removed,³⁴ suddenly we see the malignant face of the weasel beneath. He begs for mercy, but is clapped in leg irons, beaten, and tied up. We do not find out his ultimate fate, but readers are not expected to care whether he lives or dies.³⁵

At the end of the book, we see the jackal, once more in close-up, discouraged by the arrest of his spy, choosing to run away from the village he had wanted to attack.³⁶

In story terms, this book bears many similarities to North Korean graphic novels that deal

32 Kim Sang-bok & Sin Ch'ōl-kyun, *Brave Hedgehog [Yong'gamhan kosūmdoch'i]* (Pyongyang: Kūmsōng Youth Publishing, 1991), 1 (see Appendix II).

33 Kim & Sin, *Brave Hedgehog*, 17.

34 *Ibid.*, 62.

35 *Ibid.*, 67-69.

36 Kim & Sin, *Brave Hedgehog*, 78-79.

with the subject of the Korean War. In these books, aimed at older readers, evil American soldiers and their treacherous South Korean lackeys (sometimes also accompanied by Japanese spymasters) are outsmarted by much cleverer North Korean soldiers and spies, who often work in disguise behind enemy lines. A true Korean is never depicted as evil. Any Korean person who does bad things is somehow already compromised in his “Korean-ness” – for example, he (or she) was adopted and raised by Americans, he is an officer in the United States Army, or he is working as an agent of the Americans because he wants to reclaim the land and factory that were confiscated from him. Good and bad characters are clearly divided along ethnic lines. There are a very few notable exceptions, in which a foreign character loves Korea and respects Juche Ideology, and is therefore a good person, but these are truly exceptional.³⁷

Brian Myers has argued convincingly that Juche, North Korea’s ruling ideology is in fact a smokescreen, a fake ideology designed to show the world that, like Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung was a great thinker and philosopher.³⁸ The mishmash of universal-humanist bromides that is given the name “Juche” is only the pro-forma ideology of North Korea. The real belief system is an ethno-nationalist one that Myers sums up in one sentence: “The Korean people are too pure blooded, and therefore too virtuous, to survive in this evil world without a great parental leader.”³⁹

Juche literature has but one purpose: to reinforce that message that the Korean people are innocent and virtuous, and they need a parental leader (a member of the Kim family) to guide them and protect them in the world.

It is therefore very possible to see *Brave Hedgehog* as a literary precursor of Korean War stories, in which instead of bad animals we see bad foreign characters (specifically invading Americans, Japanese helpers or un-Korean South Koreans).

Here, Forceville’s concept of “contextual metaphor” is useful:

The target of the metaphor is placed in a visual context that forces or invites the viewer to evoke the identity of the source, which is itself not pictured.⁴⁰

In this, as in other North Korean graphic novels featuring anthropomorphized animals, real humans do not appear. But these books do lay the seeds for a racialized view of the world that North Korean children learn at a later age. Although the image of the American invader is not shown directly, the actions, facial expressions and body movements of the

37 See, for example, Cho Hak-rae et al. *On Distant Shores [Mõnbada-õi kisũlk-esõ]* (Pyongyang: Kũmsõng Youth Publishing, 1990) or Chõn Yõng-hwa et al, *The Boy Who Raised Doves [Pidulgi-rũl kirũnũn sonyõn]* (Pyongyang: Kũmsõng Youth Publishing: 2012) for two prominent examples.

38 Brian Myers, “Ideology as Smokescreen: North Korea’s Juche Thought,” *Acta Koreana* 11, no. 3 (2008): 161-182, and *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – And Why it Matters* (New York: Melville House, 2010).

39 Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 15.

40 Forceville, “Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor in Commercials,” 256.

jackal and his evil henchmen so resemble those of human antagonists in graphic novels targeting older readers that the likeness cannot go unnoticed.

The spy in the midst of Kkottongsan, stealing the secrets of the good animals, is a weasel disguised as a raccoon. This type of plot device is only possible in a fantasy involving anthropomorphized animals (because in real life an American – almost always depicted as a white man – could not successfully disguise himself as a Korean), but it is interesting that the spy could not be a good animal who had chosen to “turn bad”; it had to be an animal bad from birth who was physically disguised as a good animal, complete with good facial expressions. This suggests that, for North Korea, goodness and badness is often something that is in the blood, inherited from good or bad parents.

The use of the jackal as the chief antagonist is very instructive. The jackal (*sŭngnyangi* in Korean) has been used as a synonym for Americans since Han Sŏrya’s Korean War short story *The Jackals*, which tells the story of an American missionary family who kill an innocent Korean boy. Brian Myers noted that the North Korean *Dictionary of Korean Cultured Language* “listed ‘imperialist invader’ as a second definition of the word *sŭngnyangi* (jackal).”⁴¹ We also see the word “jackals” affixed to the word “American imperialist [*mi’je*]” as a suffix or prefix in North Korean propaganda posters.⁴²

Furthermore, note the following summary of a typical anti-American work of North Korean fiction by Tatiana Gabroussenko:

In a standard North Korean narration ‘American beasts’ emerge as an evil monolithic entity stripped of any complexity and associated exclusively with an aggressive US international policy and war crimes committed on Korean soil. The essential anti-American fictional work presupposes a plot in which American sub-humans initiate a threat against North Koreans but, being intimidated by the moral and physical might of the DPRK and its leader, instead crawl on all fours and plead for mercy.⁴³

This could almost be a summary of *Brave Hedgehog*. Turning to Kennedy’s 18 kinds of visual metaphor, we see in *Brave Hedgehog* at least four of them:

- Allegory: this story, although it appears to be about animals in a fictional universe, actually points to the North Korean understanding of the Korean War and America’s involvement in Korea.
- Cliché: antagonists (whether anthropomorphized animals or actual Americans) are always drawn with scowling, leering, angry faces, sharp teeth, small pupils, and

41 Brian Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature* (New York: Cornell University, 1994), 153.

42 See, for instance, David Heather and Koen De Ceuster, *North Korean Posters* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 127.

43 Tatiana Gabroussenko, “The North Korean Philosophy of Foreigners,” in *Korea 2012*, ed. Rüdiger Frank et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 247.

otherwise visually unappealing.

- Hyperbole: Negative aspects of antagonists (e.g. scowling) and positive aspects of protagonists (e.g. smiling) are often exaggerated, and caricature is often used.
- Personification: animals as people, carrying on conversations in human languages, walking on two legs, carrying guns, living in houses, etc.⁴⁴

It should by now be clear that all the young North Korean readers of *Brave Hedgehog* would be expected to see in it a world in which there are very clear good and bad characters, and that someone who does something bad must be bad from birth. Later, when they read graphic novels about the Korean War, this world view will become consolidated and expanded. By using animals rather than humans to portray the characters, children will be encouraged to feel little human empathy for human enemies. Therefore, the book can have a dehumanizing effect.

Brave Hedgehog is by no means a unique example. Appendix 1 is a table showing the results of a survey of the good and bad characters (protagonists and antagonists) of several North Korean graphic novels that feature anthropomorphized animals. In all cases, the antagonists are depicted in a way that they look angry, ugly, and unpleasant, while the protagonists are depicted as naïve, innocent, kind and polite (except when dealing with antagonists). Good and bad are clear from the beginning, and nobody ever switches sides.

As a postscript, in the multi-part animated cartoon series *The Squirrel and the Hedgehog* [*Darami-wa Kosūmdoch 'i*], produced from 1977 until at least 2005, the same anthropomorphized animals are used to portray the good and bad characters. In fact, the comic book appears to be an adaptation of the same basic storyline as the animated series.⁴⁵

Conclusion

In *On Fine Art*, Kim Jong Il wrote regarding the depiction of characters that

what is important in the proper depiction of forms is *to enable the viewers to see the personalities of the characters* through this. The depiction of people's outward appearance should be done in close relationship with that of their personalities.⁴⁶ [Emphasis added]

In a later theoretical work on graphic arts, this is expanded upon to explicitly instruct that positive heroes should have beautiful and noble features in children's illustrations. Moreover, "[t]he level to which a positive character is depicted clearly shows the subject

44 Kennedy, "Metaphor in Pictures," 203-210.

45 Some clips of the series are viewable at <http://koreansquirrelarmy.tumblr.com/tagged/stuff> (accessed February 23, 2016).

46 Kim Jong Il, *On Fine Arts*, 49.

matter ideological content of the work.”⁴⁷ The opposite must therefore also be true, that negative characters are depicted in a visually unappealing way.

In the case study above, we can see that the “source/vehicle” of perpetually good animals versus perpetually bad ones would likely have a strong “resonance” in the minds of the young readers of graphic novels, laying the groundwork for a view of the world in which divisions are clear and protagonists can be easily distinguished from antagonists. Later, when children grow up and read graphic novels in which humans play the main characters, they will immediately recognize that hedgehogs and squirrels versus jackals and weasels were “contextual metaphors” that adumbrate the real world “target/tenor” – namely pure Koreans versus evil Americans. Therefore, these graphic novels, which might appear to outsiders to have little to do with real life, work to reinforce the Juche worldview of a pure Korean race always under attack by bestial foreigners. The text and the context work as strong anchoring and relay functions across the totality of North Korean graphic novel output. Thus, the worldview of North Korea as a pure and harmonious *Kkottongsan* perpetually under threat from evildoers is cemented in the minds of North Korean young graphic novel readers. **GPR**

47 Kim Yŏng-il & Ri Chae-il, *A New Turn in Graphic Arts [Ch'ulp'an misul-esŏŭi saero'un chŏnwhan]* (Pyongyang: Literature and Arts Publishing, 2003), 126.

Appendix I – survey of graphic novels featuring anthropomorphized animals

Book title	Antagonists	Protagonists
<i>Brave Hedgehog (1991)</i>	jackal	hedgehog
	weasels	raccoons
	fieldmice	rabbit
	eagles	cat
	fox	dog
	weasel disguised as raccoon	deer
		Asiatic black bear
		pig
		squirrels
<i>Great General Mighty Wing (1994)</i>	wasps	honeybees
	spiders	cicadas
<i>The Red Ants of Golden Field (2011)</i>	pine caterpillars	red ant
	rice grasshoppers	mantis
	longhorn beetle	dragonfly
	stinkbug	black ant
	spider	
	vermin	
<i>Surefoot and his Army (2011)</i>	rats	squirrels
<i>The Pollen Bongbongi Brought (2012)</i>	wasps	honeybees
	blow flies	
<i>“The Trap of the Plot” in The Trap of the Plot (2013)</i>	jackal	bear
		goat
		raccoon
		panda
		badger
<i>“The Bullhead Who Repaid the Enemy” in The Trap of the Plot (2013)</i>	catfish	Korean bullhead
		flying fish
		carp
		loach
		sand smelt/whiting



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7

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