

## *The Sense of Nonsense in Cold War Korean Fiction*

Evelyn Shih

“Nönsensü” first became a cultural value in Korea during the colonial period as part and parcel of Japanese “ero-guro-nonsense,” which formed the interface between mass culture and capitalistic modernity. It became a part of the new consumerist entertainment culture in the 1950s, appearing as a descriptor for comics and comedy film, among other cultural products. However, by the mid-1960s, it had become a new value in literary fiction due to the increasingly censored space of literary production. The tendency of nonsense culture to invert values, to assert meaning through what seemed to be meaningless, and to subvert language itself became crucial for such authors as Yi Hoch’öl, Sö Kiwön, Nam Chönghyön, and Ch’oe Inhun. Though it was often called “satire” or “humor”, I argue that these fictions in fact pick up the tradition of nonsense with deep roots in Korean mass culture from previous eras and use it in order to critique the anti-Communist, developmental ideologies of the Park Chung-hee regime. Such critical positions emerged in tandem with new (or re-established) journals such as *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yöng* (est. 1966), *Shin Donga* (revived 1964), and *Munhak kwa chisöng* (est. 1970), and indicated a shift in literary engagement with social issues. This presentation will focus on the fiction of Yi Hoch’öl, who was highly skilled at presenting these critiques using the tactics of nonsense, and successfully eluded the censors for most of the 1960s.

**Evelyn Shih** is a scholar of Chinese and Korean literatures, media, and cultures. She is currently a PhD Candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UC Berkeley, and has held fellowships from the Fulbright program, Academia Sinica, and the American Council of Learned Societies. Her current project focuses on the evocation of public affect through comic culture during the Cold War in Taiwan and South Korea, two post-colonial states aligned with the United States. Particular objects of study include drawn cartoons, genre films and taiyupian (Taiwanese Hokkien cinema), new literary journals of the 1960s, and recordings of stage entertainment. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* and *Room One Thousand*, and will appear in an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Korean Studies*.

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