

Salinger and the Koreans Han Song

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Salinger and the Koreans

On Christmas Eve, on a New York street, the Cosmic Observer met a lonely old man who called himself Salinger. He was dressed in rags, sickly, cold, hungry, and on the verge of death. Yes, he was indeed Jerome David Salinger, the author of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

The Cosmic Observer decided to make him a subject of his study and took him into a McDonald's, where the Observer bought him whatever he wanted to eat. As the embarrassed Salinger wolfed down his Chicken McNuggets and Filet-O-Fish sandwich, he told the Observer the story of his life.

After *The Catcher in the Rye* catapulted him to fame, Salinger retired to seclusion in rural New Hampshire. There, in the hills next to the Connecticut River, he bought about ninety acres of farmland. He built a cabin on top of a hill, planted trees and gardens over the property, and surrounded it with a six-and-a-half-foot chain-link fence connected to an alarm. He proceeded to live a hermit's life there.

The site for his cabin was a picturesque, sunny spot that seemed untouched by progress. To live as a pretend deaf-mute hermit in a cabin away from people was, of course, the dream of Holden Caulfield — and as it turned out, also the dream of Salinger himself. Once he had settled into his cabin, he rarely went out. Visitors had to first contact him by mail or by passing a note through the gate, and if they were strangers, Salinger simply kept the gate shut, refusing even to

answer them. He was seldom seen in public, and even when he drove his Jeep into town to shop for books and necessities, he kept conversations to an absolute minimum. When anyone tried to greet him in the streets, he turned around immediately and fled. His picture appeared only in the first three editions of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and thereafter, due to his insistence, the publisher had to remove the portrait. It was so difficult to find an image of him that a French newspaper once mistakenly published a photograph of Pierre Salinger, the White House Press Secretary, to accompany an article about the famous author. In addition, once he had become a household name, his writing slowed drastically, and he hardly ever published new works.

The great American people were content with Salinger's choice. In fact, if time's trajectory had not been bifurcated due to the Cosmic Observer's observation, Salinger would have gone on living as a recluse until death from natural causes at age ninety-one. All in all, not a bad life.

Unfortunately, trouble came to the timeline just as he had hoped to disappear anonymously from the world — the fault of the Cosmic Observer. No one knows what the Observer intended, but, as a result of his interference, the armed forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conquered the United States of America. The North Korean scientists did not rely on their primitive nuclear weapons; instead, they used the newly invented Quantum Reambiguator, which changed the topology of spacetime and allowed anything to happen.

As a result, the invincible Korean People's Army not only unified the Korean Peninsula but also conquered the rest of the world. To be honest, the KPA really was an impressive army: disciplined, orderly, never looting as much as a single needle or thread from the conquered civilian populations. If there were no barracks in the conquered cities, the soldiers slept in the streets and left the residents secure in their houses. They were solely interested in liberating the entire human race, freeing both their bodies and minds. The world had been without hope of salvation, just as Salinger described in his book: capitalism was rotten through and through. Oh, how the people suffered from spiritual crises, and economic catastrophe followed economic catastrophe! Each day was worse than the day before, and the next day worse yet. The living envied the dead. Maybe this was why the great author had retired to his cabin in the woods: he was the only one who understood how bad things were.

The Koreans saw Salinger as a precursor to the full liberation of humanity. It was because of his book that the Koreans had vowed to liberate the entire human race in the first place. These gentle, unsophisticated, earthy people from Asia loved Salinger from the depths of their hearts. Under the direction of the Supreme Commander in Chief, Salinger's book had been translated into Korean many years ago and been read by generation after generation of North Korean students. The translator had even written the following in the preface: *Our youths grow up in a Socialist motherland in which they're constantly bathed in the loving care of the Workers' Party of Korea, the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League, and the Young Pioneer Corps. As a result, they're endowed with the lofty ideals of Communism and blessed with colorful and vibrant spiritual lives. Therefore, by reading a book like The Catcher*

in the Rye, *they can contrast their own environment with the ugly conditions persisting under capitalism, thereby broadening their horizons and gaining more wisdom.*

It was no wonder then that Salinger was so well respected in North Korea; indeed, he was far more respected in North Korea than he was in the United States. He was the one who had stripped off the shiny shell of capitalism to reveal the filth underneath.

The conquest of America interrupted Salinger's life as a hermit. The media corps that accompanied the KPA made him a focus of its reporting. A group of excited Korean reporters traveled to New Hampshire and found his cabin, demanding an interview. As was his habit, Salinger refused. In his life he had agreed only to one interview, which had been conducted by a sixteen-year-old girl who featured him for her school newspaper; Salinger had made an exception for her.

Even though Salinger refused to be interviewed, the Korean reporters, imbued with heroic idealism and charged with a mission, could not simply turn around and leave. Gingerly, they cut through the chain-link fence with pliers and marched up to Salinger's cabin, where they set up cameras in front of his door for a live broadcast. But the stubborn Salinger continued to rebuff them, keeping his door shut in their faces for three days and three nights. Finally, the Korean reporters lost their patience. No one refused the official media of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea! Still, the reporters remembered their reputation as members of the kind, honest Korean people and did not vent their rage. They thought of another method.

Soon the phone in Salinger's cabin rang. He picked up the receiver, and a slow, deep, well-mannered male voice spoke through the earpiece: "I'm the Minister of the Korean People's Army Political Propaganda Department. Mr. Salinger, I hope you would be so gracious as to accept our reporters' interview request. In addition, I'd like to extend an invitation to you to join the Korean Writers Association as a vice president —." Reflexively, Salinger hung up. Then he sat down on the ground and wept.

In retrospect, Salinger's reaction was perhaps not the result of political obtuseness but a personality defect. Still, in the eyes of the Koreans, Salinger's behavior was not only pretentious and overly dramatic but nearly a deliberate provocation. Now, they were truly enraged. Out of a desire to salvage what was left of Salinger, the Koreans decided to ban his work and place him on a blacklist such that all his writings, whether fiction or essays, were prohibited from being published anywhere in the world. Rumor had it that during his seclusion in the cabin, he had written some new books that were never published. The American publishers had planned to wait until his death and obtain the publication rights for all such works — impossible plans now.

Next, Salinger was deemed to have been a propagandist for the corrupt lifestyle of capitalism and one who attempted to pervert and poison the spiritual life of the youth. But since the Korean people were forgiving, humane, and sincere, they did not imprison him or initiate public criticism sessions against him or demand that he write self-criticism. He was allowed to stay in his

cabin, but men dressed in ill-fitting civilian clothing patrolled his property, apparently keeping it under surveillance.

No one mentioned the name of Salinger anymore in public, and he was quickly forgotten. Even his fans had dismissed him from their minds. Salinger thought this wasn't such a bad outcome, as he could now live as a true hermit. Gratitude to the KPA! When he had nothing else to do, he observed the Koreans who kept him under surveillance. *They are so young and handsome*, he thought, *each like a member of a herd of reindeer from the distant East. And their thoughts are in fact unique, like building blocks through which they could understand the world objectively and thoroughly.* Despite being rulers of the world, they behaved in a way that reminded Salinger of his Holden. *That's right, just like Holden.* Salinger experienced a pleasurable dizziness, as though drunk with fine wine.

But the happiness didn't last. Mass economic reconstruction began with the goal to transform America into a gigantic paradise, an attempt to realize the complete revitalization of the country. Under the leadership of the KPA Real Estate Corps, everything proceeded according to a unified and comprehensive plan. Naturally, New Hampshire had its own role to play in this beautiful future.

One morning, Salinger was woken from sleep by deafening noises. Dazed, he gazed outside the window and saw a row of gleaming Baekdu bulldozers, which had been modified from Chonma-ho battle tanks, bearing down on his cabin. Angrily, Salinger rushed out the door — something he rarely did — and argued with the workers who had come to break down his house, arguing that it was his inalienable private property. Of course, such reasoning was useless and revealed a secret hidden in Salinger's subconscious, a secret that perhaps he had not even known himself: the human race's universal greed for wealth. It was truly tragic.

A few Korean soldiers, fearless with youth, tackled him to the ground and held him down. The bulldozers rumbled forth and soon reduced his house to rubble. Salinger thought of going to court, only then realizing that there were no more courthouses in America. Then he thought he would commit suicide by setting himself on fire, but he couldn't find a match or lighter; in any event, he was actually terrified of death — a fact that distinguished him from the Korean soldiers who were all ready to sacrifice their lives at a moment's notice. Since he was homeless, he began to wander around America. His previous life as a recluse meant that few photographs of him had been published, and no one recognized him in the streets or gave him generous gifts. So, please remember this: if you are ever famous or enjoy success, don't keep too low a profile.

The Cosmic Observer listened quietly as Salinger finished his tale. The Observer felt there was no reason to fault the Koreans. They had behaved only according to their wont. And indeed they had rescued humanity, saving the species from extinction due to catastrophes caused by collapsing societies. Salinger had been responsible for his own obscurity. To put it simply, Salinger's fate represented the end of certainty.

This was one of the simplest laws of the universe, but one often ignored. Everything was part of an endless cycle of constant change, which had to do with both quantum mechanics and the net increase in entropy. If one couldn't

even understand such fundamentals, what hope was there of understanding why the universe's designer would create North Korea? The Koreans had simply seized on this regularity. In such a world, with such a timeline, it was a bad idea to underestimate anyone: in a single night it was possible for the last to come first, to turn the world upside down.

In fact, the Cosmic Observer now began to envy the Koreans. Though he had caused all this transformation with his attention, he could not be a Korean because he was Chinese. Not just anyone could be Korean, and as a Chinese, the Cosmic Observer had a worldview and methodology that were already constrained by certain laws of physics. He could only observe, but he could not act. He was the catalyst of these changes, but he had to remain outside the world he had transformed. The Koreans were still young, but the Cosmic Observer was already old. *Perhaps this is the greatest loneliness of all. Perhaps the Koreans have experienced something like this before?*

And so, the Cosmic Observer examined the legendary author again. Seeing the old man blowing his nose into a paper napkin and secreting the few remaining French fries away into his pocket, the Cosmic Observer experienced a deep sorrow. But even more tragic was the fact that before the momentous changes, Salinger had written that odd bestseller. The Cosmic Observer began to worry: *Could the book be the only thing to interrupt the time line and collapse the bifurcation of time? After all, the Koreans have only just begun to construct this world Who knows? For a thinking machine, this is too difficult a problem.*

[Translated from the Chinese by Ken Liu]

塞林格與朝鮮人

韓松

這年聖誕節前夕，在紐約街頭，宇宙觀察者遇到了一個孤獨的老頭兒，自稱塞林格。他衣著襤褸，貧病交加，又凍又餓，快要死了。是的，他就是《麥田裡的守望者》的作者羅姆·大衛·塞林格。宇宙觀察者決定選擇他做為觀察對象，就把他帶進一家麥當勞，請他飽餐了一頓。塞林格一邊狼吞虎咽吃著麥樂雞和麥香魚，一邊紅著臉兒講述自己的身世。他在由《麥田裡的守望者》一書成名後，就退隱到了新罕布什爾州的鄉間，在河邊小山的附近，買下了九十多英畝的土地，卻只在山頂築了一座小屋，周圍種上許多樹木和花草，外面攔上六英尺半高的鐵絲網，網上裝有警報器。他在此隱居下來。這個地方，風景如畫，美不勝收，跟世外桃源一樣。想要做一個又聾又啞的人遁跡世外，原本是《麥田裡的守望者》中的主人公霍爾頓的理想，現在看來，這其實原本就是塞林格本人的理想。他在這兒住下後，深居簡出，如果有人登門造訪，都得先遞送信件或便條；如果來訪者是位生客，他就拒之門外，甚至連答覆都不給一個。大作家很少在公共場合露面，偶爾開著吉普車到鎮上去購買書刊雜物，也極少跟人說話，萬一有人大街上招呼他，他馬上拔腳便逃。他的照片只在《麥田裡的守望者》頭三版的封面上刊登過，後來由於他本人堅決反對，出版商也只好把照片撤去，此後要弄到他的一張近照就十分困難，由此還鬧出一個笑話：法國某家報紙在介紹塞林格時，竟錯把與他同名的白宮新聞秘書塞林格的照片登了上去。塞林格成名之後，寫作速度也變得越來越慢，很少發表作品……總之，就是這樣一個人。偉大的美國人民也寬容了他以這樣一種方式存在。也就是說，如果時間沒有因為宇宙觀察者的觀察而出現岔岔，塞林格就會這樣與世

隔絕地退隱下去，在九十一歲時自然死亡。這何嘗不是一件好事呢？但是，不巧的是，就在他想要匿聲遁去的這個世界上，時間線出了問題——這是宇宙觀察者所為。不明白他這樣做是出於一種什麼心理。美利堅合眾國被來自遠東的朝鮮民主主義人民共和國軍隊占領了。朝鮮的科學家並沒有使用他們原始的核武器。他們使用的是最新式的「什麼都可以發生武器」，改變了時空的拓撲結構。

結果就是，戰無不勝的朝鮮人民軍不但統一了朝鮮半島，還征服了世界。要說起來，這支軍隊可真是好樣兒的，軍容整齊，紀律嚴明，不拿百姓一針一線，沒有住處時，就露宿街頭，絕不入室擾民。他們要做的只是解放全人類，包括從身體和心靈兩個方面加以解放。這個世界本來已經墮落沒救了，如同塞林格描寫的那樣——資本主義糟糕透了。哦，精神陷入了災難，經濟危機不斷發生，今不如昔，明不如今，生不如死。這才是大作家退隱鄉間的真實原因吧，只有他早看透了……塞林格被朝鮮人認為是人類解放的先驅。他們正是看了他寫的書，才發誓要解放全人類的。這些樸實善良的黃種人打心眼兒裡喜歡塞林格，因為在最高司令官的指示下，塞林格的書早在許多年前就被譯介到了朝鮮，供一代又一代人參考閱讀。譯者還寫了這樣的前言：我國的青少年生長在社會主義祖國，受到黨、團和少先隊組織的親切關懷，既有崇高的共產主義理想，又有豐富多彩、朝氣蓬勃的精神生活，因此看了像《麥田裡的守望者》這樣的書，拿自己的生活環境與資本主義的醜惡環境作對比，確能開闊視野，增加知識……因此，塞林格在朝鮮是受到無尚尊敬的，比他在美國受到的尊敬還要厲害——正是他剝掉了資本主義外表光鮮而內裡醜陋的衣裳啊。

美國被占領後，塞林格的生活開始受到打攪，他被隨同人民軍的主流媒體列入了典型報道的名單。一組朝鮮記者興致勃勃來到新罕布什爾州，找到了他隱居的住宅，表示要採訪報道他。塞林格一如既往拒絕了。他平生只接受過一次採訪，那是一個十六歲的女學生，為寫校刊的稿子特地來找他，塞林格破例接待了她。所以塞林格沒有答應朝鮮記者的採訪請求。但這些朝鮮記者是帶著任務來的，而且他們充滿理想主義和英雄主義精神，怎麼可能善罷甘休呢，他們就溫和地用鉗子絞破了鐵絲網，列隊走到了塞林格的小屋前，在作家的門口支起攝像機，擺出現場直播的架式。但塞林格這老頭兒很固執，死活不開門，也不露面，就是不出來。這樣僵持了三天三夜，朝鮮記者終於火了，因為他們是朝鮮民主主義人民共和國的官方主流媒體，是得罪不起的。但記者想著他們是溫良敦厚的朝鮮人，就沒有把怒火直接發泄出來。他們想了別的辦法。很快，塞林格家裡的電話響了。他拿起來，耳機裡傳出一個緩慢深沉而富有教養的男低音：「我是朝鮮人民軍政治宣傳部部長。塞林格先生，希望您接受我們記者的採訪，同時，邀請您加入朝鮮作家協會，並擔任副會長職務……」塞林格條件反射一般，一下就把電話掛掉了。然後他坐在地上，抽泣起來。現在想來，這大概並不是立場態度問題，而僅僅是性格問題吧。塞林格在精神上並不是完人。但是，在朝鮮人看來，塞林格不僅僅是故作神秘、故弄玄虛，而且是近於挑釁了。他們於是真的憤怒了。出於挽救塞林格的考慮，朝鮮人決定封殺塞林格的著作，並把他列入黑名單，在世界範圍內禁止出版他的任何文字，包括小說和隨筆。據說，塞林格成名後，躲在小屋裡還寫了一些書，但都不拿出來發表，美國的出版商原先還在計劃等他死了，弄到他所有著作的版權呢，現在做不到了。

接下來，塞林格被認為宣傳了資本主義的腐朽生活方式，並且要在思想上腐蝕和毒害青少年。但朝鮮人畢竟是大度的、人性的、誠摯的，他們並沒有把塞林格抓起來，也沒有批鬥他或者讓他寫檢討。塞林格還被允許住在那間小房子裡。只是，周圍多了一些身穿不合體便衣的人，從早到晚，似乎在履行監視

的任務。在社會上，沒有人再提到塞林格。他很快被遺忘了。連他曾經的書迷們都忘掉了他。塞林格心想，這樣倒也好，隱居的目的真正達到了。感謝朝鮮人民軍啊。他沒事時就端詳監視他的朝鮮人，覺得他們長得好年輕也好漂亮，就像一頭頭來自遙遠東方的馴鹿，他們的思維方式則是獨特的，也就是類似於積木，這樣就能通透地認識客觀環境了。作為世界統治者，他們的一言一行竟然有些像塞林格筆下的霍爾頓。沒錯，就是這樣。塞林格像喝了美酒般，感到了一陣舒適的暈眩。

但好景不長，隨後，大規模的經濟建設開始了，美國將被改造成一座巨型樂園，從而實現它的全面復興。在朝鮮人民軍房地產部隊的主導下，一切有了統一而周全的規劃。新罕布什爾州自然也在這個美好的設想之內。一天清晨，塞林格被喧囂聲吵醒，他迷惑地看了看窗外，就見到大地上整齊地矗立著一大排閃閃發光的長白山型推土機，它們都是由天馬虎式坦克車改造而來的。塞林格感到很惱火，就少地衝出了門，面對拆遷者大聲申訴，說這是他的私人財產，是不可以侵犯的。但這個理由註定是無效的，因為它暴露出了隱藏在塞林格潛意識中的秘密，這個秘密連他自己可能都不知道，也就是人皆有之的對財富的貪戀。這太悲劇了。他立即被幾個初生牛犢般的朝鮮士兵按倒在地。推土機轟隆隆衝上前就把他的房子鏟倒碾平了。塞林格這時起了打官司的念頭，但他很快意識到全美已經沒有一家法院了。於是他又想到了自焚，但他卻沒有找到火種，而且他其實還是很怕死的，這一點上他跟時刻準備犧牲自己生命的朝鮮人不一樣。塞林格無家可歸，只好開始在美國各地流浪。他以前太低調了，連照片都沒有幾張傳世，走到大街上，沒有一個人認得他，給他慷慨的施捨。所以請記住，一個人在春風得意的時候，切不可太低調了。

宇宙觀察者靜靜聽完塞林格的講述，覺得沒有任何理由，指責朝鮮人做得不對。朝鮮人本來就是這樣子的，而且他們的確解放了全人類，使這種生物沒有在亂世中滅亡。是塞林格自己埋汰了自己。簡單或通俗來講，塞林格的命運代表了確定性的終結。這本是宇宙中最為樸素的一條規律，卻常常被人忽視。一切都在循環和變化之中，這跟量子運動和熵增都有關係。如果連這個都弄不明白，又怎麼能夠明白為什麼宇宙的設計者會創造出朝鮮人來呢？朝鮮人無疑把握住了規律性。在這樣一個世界上，在這樣一條時間線上，切不可隨便小看了誰誰誰，一夜之間人家就可以後來居上，給你來個天翻地覆。總之，宇宙觀察者現在羨慕起朝鮮人來了。他導致了這一切的發生，自己卻做不成朝鮮人，因為他是個中國人。說到朝鮮人，那可不是隨便一個人就能去做的，何況身為中國人，宇宙觀察者的世界觀和方法論已經受到了某種物理規則的約束。如今，他只能去看，而無法去做。他是變化的製造者，但他現在卻只能待在他形成的變化之外。朝鮮人還很年輕，但宇宙觀察者已經老了。這才是莫大的孤獨吧。或許以前朝鮮人也體會過這個？

於是，宇宙觀察者再度打量面前這位傳說中的作家，看到他正在用紙巾擦拭鼻涕，並且把吃剩的幾根薯條偷偷摸摸藏進衣袋，不禁悲從心來，但更可悲的是，在事物發生變化之前，塞林格竟寫下了那本莫名其妙的暢銷書。宇宙觀察者忽然擔心，這會不會成為唯一突破時間線的東西，並導致分岔的崩潰呢？畢竟朝鮮人才剛剛開始建設這個世界……但誰又真的知道呢？唉，對於一台有思考能力的機器來講，這太難了。