

# **A Study on the Attitudes of Korean Poets toward Japanese Language during the Colonial Era**

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## **I. Preface**

The cultural and political history of Korea of the twentieth century could be briefly described as an eventful flow including several phases as follows: occidental invasion; failure of self-motivated modernization; colonization by the Japanese forces; temporary deprivation of mother-tongue; liberation and recovery of mother-tongue; failure of establishment of united nation-state; civil war which resulted in divided nation, etc. Although circumstances in Korea had been comparatively harsher than any other country with similar conditions, colonization caused by western invasion and civil war in the process of overcoming it could be widely found in the Third World countries across the world. Yet the peculiar point of Korea did also exist: The colonization in Korea was driven not by one of the countries in Western Europe but by Japan, her neighboring country, which traditionally had belonged to the same East Asian cultural sphere as Korea; and this brought about a distinctive cultural conflict that could hardly be found in any other country in the world.

In terms of culture, this conflict took the shape of Japanese language enforcement to Korean people who had been maintaining intrinsic Korean

language and its writing system created by themselves; yet the coercion of Japanese didn't persist forever, though quite a while, so that it could cause not the extinction of Korean language but only the distortion of it. But it's also clear that the deprivation of mother-tongue has been occasionally found all over the world throughout history; however unfortunate it may be to the deprived. In Korea, however, the projection of foreign power, namely Japanese proved to be neither consistent nor overwhelming, so it regressed after about 35 years of domination. This was fortunate for Koreans because they had soon rehabilitated their own language before their mother-tongue went extinct by Japanese. Yet no matter how temporary the deprivation of mother-tongue has been, it caused a pervasive degradation to mother-tongue which imposed a harmful impact on Korean cultural history in two ways: One is widely-noted Japanese debris lingering in Korean language until now; and it would require quite a long time to solve this problem because Japanese remnants in Korean language show diversifications some of which partly provide linguistic convenience to contemporary Koreans.<sup>1</sup> The other is excessive impulse to linguistic purification; most of Koreans after the Liberation of 1945 had been being obsessed with the idea that they should protect mother-tongue once lost and recovered, resulting in an aversive and inobservant attitude toward the influence of Japanese language upon Korean.

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1 To say that Japanese remnants provide convenience may sound bizarre, yet it's true. For example, we can go into the question of the word "ipjang (입장: 立場)": Yi Odeok (1925~2003), one private Korean language researcher, had consistently insisted that this word should have been removed from Korean vocabulary because it flew from Japanese during the Colonial Era, and he suggested its word formation peculiar to Japanese as evidence. Yi Odeok (1992); yet another Korean journalism researcher Kang Junman, in spite of the consciousness of and the respect for Yi's opinion, declared that he would keep up using that word because it could give practical shadow of meaning which other words suggested as substitute didn't retain. Kang Junman (2005).

The influence of Japanese upon Korean language wasn't still overcome completely. As long as there has been a question arising whether the influence of foreign languages is a target for reform or not, it would be fair to say that the problem of Japanese influence is still waiting for a final solution. Far more urgent is not a dichotomy of either overcoming or acceptance, but to comprehend the actual influence of them; to measure the extent of its penetration into mother-tongue; and to rearrange the diverse spectrum of the influence in order to prepare adequate methods to control it. The thought of linguistic purification exceedingly enforced after 1945, understandably, helped narrate the lingual history of the colonial Era under the Japanese regime mainly focused on events regarding Korean language only; for example, the forming of unified orthography of Korean in 1933, the arrest of the members of Jeoseon Eohakhoe (the Association for Korean Language Studies) by the colonial authorities in 1942, etc., and prevent people from looking at the actual linguistic realities in which Korean and Japanese language continued to negotiate and compete each other until the last day of the colonial Era.

In this article I want to make clear the ways Korean writers during the colonial era had formed their poetic dictions and poetics studying literature in Japanese, and categorize them in a meaningful way. I also want this study to be a part of more broad research of estimating the role of Japanese language in detail in the formation process of modern Korean language in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Japanese language, adopted as official language of public school system during the colonial era in Korea, had caused the split of the so-called "National Language," and enforced artificial bilingual communities in Korea, and even went on to try to extinguish Korean language for a short time before 1945. We must, however, not easily conclude that Japanese had influenced Korean

language unilaterally in that period. Although it's true that Korean writers in the colonial era were seriously influenced by Japanese, their aspects of accepting Japanese language were not merely passive. While Koreans were forced to acquire Japanese in public, Japanese authorities suffered from a variety of resistances linguistically or psychologically. Even in the cases in which there weren't such resistances, the level of obtaining Japanese language differed individually largely because of limited opportunities of cultural contact.

Also the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Japanese language itself was not a perfect one, but just a local language which was adapting itself to catch up western culture through the renovation of vocabulary and the translation of western literature. The possibility of Japanese as a language of modern poetry had been doubted by many before *Kaichoon* (1905) and *Sangosyu* (1913) were published and Hagiwara Sakutarō's colloquial poetry took shape. On account of Japanese language's locality, limitations of pronunciation, restrictions of literary genre, and biased aesthetic consciousness, the Japanese as a modern literary language was not a completed one, but one forming itself. In addition, Korean poets who were born or living in the colonial era varied in their Japanese circumstance depending on conditions of growth, generations, and personal choices.

Japanese colonial period of Korea lasted nearly 35 years, which roughly amounts to the time needed for a baby to be grown up into an adult maintaining cultural identity. But in the beginning the compulsion of Japanese language was not effective because of the lack of general education system. It took a considerable time for Japan to prepare an educational system in which Koreans could in earnest be transformed into Japanese-adapted humanities which the Japanese authorities wanted. Approximately anyone who would be a writer born after 1900

were naturally included into a system in which one could not help studying Japanese to introduce oneself into literature from the west. Such being the case, studying western literature simultaneously meant reading Japanese books with only a few exceptions.<sup>2</sup> Although not widely noted in the previous researches, the period of the 1920s can be considered as a critical turning point of literary trend in Korean literature if we see Korean literary history in terms of generations, because the time range of literary growth of writers born in that period coincides with the short and remarkable span of the most extreme Japanese militarism. The defeat of Japan in 1945 is now understood as a matter of course; but if we take a viewpoint of contemporaries of that age for a moment, we can also think that the same incident could mean to them an existential confusion which could nullify their literary trainings based on Japanese language. It was almost impossible for a Korean writer to be active in literary creations with the same literary tone before and after 1945.

In this paper, first I would like to point to Jeong Jiyong (1902~?) and Kim Soun (1908~1981) as the representatives of the first generation who had grown up into poets through the colonial era. Second, I want to mention the name of Yun Dongju (1917~1945) and Kim Suyong (1921~1968) who in common had learned literature within the colonial era but didn't enjoyed writing create Japanese poems, and I'll regard them as belonging to the second generation. Finally I would delve into their learning experiences of and attitudes toward Japanese language and literature and try to categorize them.

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<sup>2</sup> Cheon (2003: 229-236).

## II. Jeong Jiyong : Japanese as a Role Model for Literary Modernization

Jeong Jiyong (1902~?) was a member of the first generation in Korea who had been exposed to Japanese in regular school education.<sup>3</sup> Most of members of his former generations hurried to literary creation after a short stay in Japan, and their levels of literary accomplishment were not high. In contrary, Jeong Jiyong spent quite a long time as a regular status of school student after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, until he graduated Doshisha University in 1929. After graduation he returned to Korea and employed himself as an English teacher in his alma mater, Hwimun high school. His job of teaching English provided him with a steady income which was indispensable to maintaining his life as a poet. For Jeong his self-conscious mission of creating modern Korean poetry was supported by this outer condition.

Jeong Jiyong once said that “a nation that could afford to sing and recite poetic masterpieces had good reason to be proud to foreigners.”<sup>4</sup> Jeong Jiyong, who had been born in colonized Korea, the marginal sector of capitalist civilization in the early twentieth century, realized that the stream of capitalist modernization was irreversible; that literary tradition of Korea couldn't help being degenerated by western forces; and that Korea's traditional poetic form didn't satiate the sentiments of himself living in a new era. He was devoid of previous literary or linguistic model of mother-tongue which could enable him to express

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3 Kim Eok (1896~?), six years older than Jeong Jiyong, a pioneering Korean poet and translator, has been known to attend Osan private school from 1913 to 1916. Osan was established by Yi Seunghun, a nationalist merchant, so curriculum and atmosphere of Osan were accordingly highly nationalistic. Kim (1986).

4 Jeong (1939).

sentiments of new modern era, and was destined to create such model on his own ability.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, a lack of modern literary model was a problem of not only traditional Korea but the entire pre-modern East Asia where capitalist modernization accompanying the breakdown of traditional societies was enforced from outside. And the modernization by western forces in this region required an adjustment of hierarchy among languages accepted in traditional East Asia, particularly causing rapid and sudden westernization of public education in Korea around 1900. Language always plays a significant role in deciding curriculum across the world, and the point of emphasis on education switched from classical Chinese to western languages or its equivalents in Korea during this era. As a result, the literary form of representing Koreans' sentiments must have been modulated likewise.

Japan had faced almost the same problems as Korea since she was also a member of the entire East Asia bloc, but her challenging tendency gave Japan some solutions to these same problems in advance. The fact that Jeong Jiyong once was one of the ardent disciples of Kitahara Hakusyu, a major Japanese modern poet, has been either an open secret or an object of intended neglect among many contemporary Koreans;<sup>6</sup> but Kitahara was one of the conspicuous figures in Japanese literary history to convert the traditional Japanese poetic language confronted by sudden westernization into a new one corresponding to modern sentiment. Including also Hagiwara Sakutarō, another major

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5 Of course, Jeong Jiyong also referred to traditional poetry forms while writing his poems throughout his life, and he had a profound knowledge of Chinese traditional poetry. But it may be also true that these facts had a influence more on later extension and deepening of his poetic world than on the search for modern form of poetry in his youth. Kim (1987: 53).

6 Sanada (2001).

figure of modern Japanese poetry, as a pioneer of this kind of works, we may conclude that Japanese could, thanks to their efforts, obtain a means to express their inner sentiments and delicate feelings, with diversification and iridescence, relatively free of the help of foreign languages.

It was in 1923, the year of Kanto earthquake, that Jeong left Korea for Japan to study English literature, and by then the accomplishments of Kitahara and Hagiwara or others to successfully establish modern poetic diction in Japanese language had become well-recognized in general. Jeong's choice of major as English literature supposedly gives us a hint that he was well-informed that modernity from the west was a decisive cause of East Asian upheaval of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century, and that he had been cultivating a sense needed to manage on his own in a westernized situation before going to Japan.

It must also be noted that his place of studying full-scale English literature was Japan. Considering geopolitical reality of then colonized Korea where Jeong was born, it is nearly inevitable for him to select Japan as his place of studying English literature abroad. But it's just a mere accident for someone to study English in Japan from a wider point of view. Fortunately this accident presented Jeong with a fertile ground of development as a literary man, because his ultimate goal was not studying English literature itself but creating a newly-born national language consistent to the emotion of new era which required new style of literature. For Jeong the Japanese language was one imitable case among many East Asian languages which successfully accomplished the transformation enabling it to both convey modern thoughts and express emotions generated in a new era.

Like many of his contemporaries who studied in Japan, Jeong also

came to have knowledge about not only his major but also a variety of western heritages of modern literature. It was in a requested review on poetry thanks to the recognition of Kitahara Hakusyu when he declared a literary ambition of his own with words full of poetic tinge. He confessed, being fully conscious of his Japanese teacher Kitahara, that “both poetry and teacher were his faraway horizons to long for.” He also said that he would “train himself by means of a Japanese pipe.”<sup>7</sup>

This metaphor of pipe is relatively clear. Pipe here represents the form of expressing and representing newly-arising modern sentiments, therefore Japanese pipe surely means the newly-transformed modern Japanese language elaborated by Kitahara Hakusyu and his followers. Jeong in his youth, eager to take his way to a successful modern poet, pursued language as a form of incarnation of sentiments appearing in modern times. According to a common idea, however, that quintessential prerequisite of the poetic language necessitates its own use of mother-tongue, old forms of mother-tongue employed in traditional poetry which didn't match the new age were to be drastically modified. In the eyes of Jeong Jiyong, Japan didn't failed to modernize mother tongue as an effective poetic language, which he called a “Japanese pipe.”

Japanese was for Jeong only a role model of linguistic modernization, and never was an object of his ultimate pursuit. It should be understood in this sense that Kitahara Hakusyu, despite the flaws of Jeong's Japanese writing, acknowledged and praised his poetic talents.<sup>8</sup> Still, the purpose of Jeong's study in Japan was to reconstitute Korean language by referring to the guidance of Japanese way to linguistic modernization. Jeong indeed, returning to Korea finishing his study of six years in

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7 Jeong (1927).

8 Sanada (2001).

Japan, successfully accomplished his task of modernizing Korean poetic language form by discovering new methods of wording; accepting foreign poetic forms and adjusting them according to Korean circumstances; and finding a way to have a nice command of adequate poetic images thanks to both his efforts in Japan and his inborn qualification of being a poet. To sum up, Jeong Jiyong first went into the world of modern poetry by reading modern literature in Japanese, notably by Kitahara Hakusyu. While majoring in English literature in Doshisha University, he absorbed western literature by reading Japanese or English books. When his study reached a certain stage, he contrived to write modern poems, first in Japanese then in Korean. But his Japanese poems are written only in the first stage of his literary creation because he pursued the establishment of modern Korean poetry.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly his Japanese works cannot be found in his later stage of creation; and we may categorize his attitude toward Japanese language as “passive acceptance.”

### **III. Kim Soun : Japanese as the Only Possible Measure to Preserve Korean Poetry**

Kim Soun (1908~1981), almost a contemporary of Jeong Jiyong, has been occupying somewhat more obscure position in Korean literary history than Jeong does. That's because Kim strived by a thorough study of Japanese to join the mainstream of Japanese literary groups, so he left relatively little to record on Korean literary history. His literary attitude like this led him not to refuse to write in Japanese even after

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<sup>9</sup> Most of his Japanese poems were written within two years from 1926 to 1927. His late Japanese poem “Hurusato” (1939) is merely a translation of his Korean poem “Gohyang” (Homeland, 1932).

the Liberation of 1945, and maybe this attitude has caused an apparently odd phenomenon that he has a much larger number of readers in Japan than in Korea even today.

In short Kim Soun had become a successful person by writing in not Korean but Japanese, the language of the enemy of his fatherland that time. He isn't, however, classified as a pro-Japanese poet or a collaborator, which is one of the harshest abuse in today's Korea, as demonstrated by the fact that he was excluded from the entry of *Biographical Dictionary of the Pro-Japanese in Korea* (2009). What accounts for this seemingly contradictory situation? One reason is the fact that most of Kim's Japanese writings are translated versions of Korean language poetry. Against a number of narrow-minded would-be patriots, Kim could confidently apologize that his Japanese writings were an introduction of Korean culture to Japan. Sure enough, Kim maintained from the start a hearty affection to his fatherland and its people in a way a few wicked pro-Japanese collaborators didn't take. It's no accident that Kim's first well-known Japanese writing, *Chosen Minyosyu* (1929), was in fact a by-product of his ambition to both collect Korean folk songs and present them to Japanese readers. Additional explanation for the phenomenon can be provided by the existing split within Kim's readers group between Korea and Japan; in other words, the inaccessibility of Kim's Japanese works to most Korean readers.

Also Kim's career of studying literature was very different from that of Jeong Jiyong or other Korean literary students in Japan in his age. Although Kim took in some ways the same process of forming literary sophistication as Jeong, Kim was much more seriously affected by Japanese literary movement than Jeong was, because Kim's life in Japan had begun much earlier: Kim left for Japan in his age of 12 in 1920. After his arrival at Japan, Kim started to absorb the nutrition of Western

and Japanese literature by himself, attending irregularly the self-appointed "library university",<sup>10</sup> preceding Jeong's study in Japan for several years. Furthermore, Kim's experience of reading literature was almost concentrated on western romantic poetry or its translated versions into Japanese.

According to sayings of Kim's alive son Kim Inbeom, Kim Soun had hardly any knowledge about foreign languages except Japanese,<sup>11</sup> but it could be estimated that by knowing about *Kaichoon* (1905) and *Sangosyu* (1913), two famous western poetry anthology translated into Japanese, he had assumed the task of translating poetry worth challenging. Especially *Sangosyu* (1913), widely famous of the elegance and personality of its diction commanded by Nagai Gafu, the translator of the text and also a well-known modern Japanese novelist, worked as a leading model of translation Kim would produce later.

But it shouldn't be forgotten that Kim never lost his identity as a Korean, despite the fact that he spent a large amount of time in Japan from his young age and acquired a nearly native Japanese language proficiency as well as profound experiences about Japanese lives. The well-known episode that Kim at the age of 19 visited Kitahara Hakusyu without notice and gained his praise immediately shows that Kim never felt even a bit of trembling which one who encounters his or her object of admiration could feel.

After receiving Kitahara's acknowledgment, he had been recognized more and more important figure within Japanese literary world; one major modern Japanese poet Shimazaki Toson was so interested in Kim enough to write introduction for Kim's Japanese translated collection of Korean poetry titled *Chichiirono Kumo* (A Cloud Colored Ivory) (1940); and

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10 Kim (1968: 69–70).

11 Kim Inbeom assured this fact to me by e-mail on November 8, 2010.

another famous Japanese poet Sato Haruo praised that collection with his compliment that “the poetic mind of Asia begins to be borne again with him.”<sup>12</sup>

Namely he had already transformed into a considerable figure in the Japanese literary circle. The causes of his works' relatively easy acceptance into Japan supposedly lay in his exquisite ability to express the sentiments of *Chosen* (a regional name of Korea in Japanese at that time), an exotic space, by fluent Japanese language so as to give a shocking impression even to Japanese poets. In reality Kim couldn't help confessing that "Even I, who don't think it proud to support cosmopolitanism in the domain of art, has actually become a person unable to deny it in everyday life." in the preface of his 1933 book, *Chosedoyosyu* (Collection of Korean Children's Songs).<sup>13</sup>

As a result, Kim was enforced to seek harmony between the undeniable fact that his root went deeply into Korean soil and the reality that his present main field of literary activity was in Japan. Confronted by this kind of situation Kim chose as his task to introduce some elements of traditional Korean popular culture—especially folk songs and children's song—to Japan, by arranging and translating them. The best Korean work produced by Kim is *A Collection of Korean Folk Songs* (1933), which was precisely not a creation of Kim but only a restoration of dispersed Korean traditional folk songs by gathering and rearranging them. Kim's later famous works like *Chosenminyosyu* (Collection of Korean Folk Songs) (1933), *Chosendoyosyu* (Collection of Korean Children's Songs) (1933), *Chosenshisyu* (Collection of Korean Poetry) (1943) were all essentially constructed under the influence of this Korean work of his own and can be regarded as a series of continuing

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<sup>12</sup> Kim (1943a: 10).

<sup>13</sup> Kim (1933).

works. We may as well think that most of Kim's Japanese works are not creations of his own but introductions of emotion and voices of Korean people in Colonial Era as a form of translation from Korean language.

However, many researchers have pointed out that these Kim's works had been absorbed into the stuff of Japanese language, which was the language of dominator, despite Kim's good will to make a cultural bridge between Korea and Japan. That's maybe related with the fact that Kim has been accepted as an unscathed poet up to this day in Japan thanks to his works published there which cannot be deemed in the strict sense as collections of created poems; but mere translations of them. This state of affairs is more complicated than it seems at a glance. The fact that Kim has been being regarded as a poet in today's Japan means that most of his works are accepted to many Japanese readers as not so much transmitters of Korean culture as masterpieces of refined Japanese language. Kim had once referred to his quarrel with one Japanese professor of Keio University caused by the professor's saying that "I have been thinking that Koreans all make poetry only in Japanese",<sup>14</sup> but ironically, we cannot deny that the presence and works of Kim Soun himself may have functioned a little to promote such Japanese understanding of the Korean language and literature as exemplified by the case of Keio university professor mentioned above.

We have difficulties in evaluating Kim's works of Korean poetry's translation into Japanese due to two following reasons: One is the fact that his works had exceeded the level of a pure cultural intercourse because of the time his works had been intensively published. It was between 1937 (the year when Kim translated a poem "*Cheongpodo*", meaning "Green Grape" in English, written by one famous Korean resistance poet Yi Yuksa and published in a Korean collaborator magazine

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14 Kim (2006: 60–61).

*Doyonoko*) and 1943 (the year when his last book of Japanese-translated Korean poetry was published) that his Japanese masterpieces were mainly produced. Unfortunately and accidentally Japanese militarism had peaked at this juncture, and consequentially the annihilation policy of Korean language by Japanese political forces nearly succeeded. Indeed, more than anyone else, Kim knew fully well the seriousness of that time. He wrote in the epilogue of his book *Chosenshisyu* (Collection of Korean Poetry) (1943) that his intention of publishing this book was to preserve at least some contents of Korean poetry, which would lose its original means of writing. The other is a somewhat biased but widespread opinion that, even if his translations may have succeeded as Japanese literature, it was unsuccessful as literature in translation because of phonological differences between Korean and Japanese spoken language which Kim failed to overcome. One of the representatives of this opinion is Saegusa Toshikatsu, a Japanese professor of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He severely criticized that Kim's translation in Japanese was made by cutting off original Korean words that didn't match up assumed Japanese poetic lines, arraying the remnants in the style of mosaic, and inserting here and there a few phrases having lyrical atmosphere.<sup>15</sup> And Professor Saegusa concluded that in Kim's translation only the translator remained, not the original poem. Kim himself was, however, well conscious of this problem more than anyone else, and did insist the impossibility of translation from Korean to Japanese in the very epilogue of *Chosenshisyu* in which he accepted the extinction of Korean language as a fait accompli.

While Nagai Gafu, followed by Kim thanks to his remarkable ability of translating poetry, emphasized that translator must digest original text sufficiently and then make translation like original one, Kim had found

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<sup>15</sup> Saegusa (2003).

the reality that "While Japanese language boasts of the beauty of brevity, Korean maintains persistence. When the sluggish rhythm of Korean language is gaining affections, people indicate the coarse texture of Japanese."<sup>16</sup> Through his lifelong study on the phonological features of Korean and Japanese and his laborous task of translation, he had reached the conclusion that the lingering tones contained in Korean language could by no means be translated into Japanese. In this case problem lies not in Korean but in Japanese itself, he cautiously insisted.

What caused Kim to submit an out-of-date argument of comparing the characteristics between Korean and Japanese in the final aspect finishing his entire works of translating that would have been no longer possible because of the absence of further created writing in Korean? Of course, the stream of later history broke down this kind of prediction as we already knew well. Perhaps he had intended to prepare a prescript to his conditions of translating works in advance to prevent later condemnation that might be targeted toward him, or to make the point clear on which he had placed an emphasis during his long time of solitary labor. Or he might have wished to explain to his later generations the features of Korean language that was prohibited permanently and doomed to be sent to an ancient museum.

Kim Soun was born in Korea just before the Annexation of 1910, and he took his literary training mostly by himself. And he went to Japan in the age of 12, not for a study abroad but only for existence.<sup>17</sup> His genius also made him continue to study literature alone even in Japan, by reading Japanese books. Certainly his independent literary education was far from being systematic, but he ranged over extensive literary works available, not to mention written in Japanese; especially he devoted

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<sup>16</sup> Kim (1943b).

<sup>17</sup> Kim (1968).

himself deeply into modern western and Japanese poetry. For this reason, the Japanese wordings in his works like *Chosenshisyu* (1943) were praised as indistinguishable in the aspect of literary Japanese style from those written by original Japanese poets. In other words, in the realm of poetry Kim had come closest to the essence of Japanese literature, and he bequeathed us only a few poems written in Korean language.

#### **IV. Yun Dongju : Japanese as a Negative Language to be Ignored**

Yun Dongju (1917~1945), one of the most beloved and widely sung poet in contemporary Korea, is showing very unique attitude toward Japan and Japanese language. Neither had he been born in independent Korea, nor did he have an opportunity to live just for a moment in Korea liberated from Japan. His whole lifetime is completely tangled in the colonial era; nevertheless he was least affected by Japanese influence among four poets in this paper. Until now, not a single poem written by him in Japanese is reported. He is now honored in Korea as a “resistance poet,” for he continued to write Korean poems even after Japanese authorities prohibited Korean people from using Korean language in every walk of life in Korea.<sup>18</sup> But it would be a fault if we said that Yun was ignorant of Japanese and Japanese books. None has exact evidences, but it’s certain that he had read thoroughly a great many Japanese books about literature.<sup>19</sup> He performed his training of modern

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18 Japanese authorities in Korea promulgated *Kokumingakkou Kitei* (Regulations on Elementary School) in 31th February in 1941, which abolished already optional Korean language course in elementary school completely. Jeong (1985: 463).

19 Omura (2001: 52–74).

literature by Japanese language possibly when he was in Yeonhui College in Korea (1938~1941) and Doshisha University in Japan (1942~1943). Nevertheless his poetic world was never assimilated by Japanese cultural elements, and this means that Yun's inner poetic world was as firm as a rock.

Where did this firmness come from? We can guess several points from his life as a whole. First, he was born and raised in Jiandao, today's Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China, which gave his life some freedom from direct Japanese regime. Second, he devoted himself to Christianity, one of the most worldwide but the least Japanese religion. Third, his family and his alma maters in China were strongly biased towards patriotic nationalism. For example, Eunjin middle school where Yun studied from 1932 to 1935 was a mission school founded by Canadians, so it was able to maintain extraterritoriality from the reign of Manchukuo, even Korean flag and national anthem were available there. Of course textbooks for lesson were almost written in Japanese, but Korean teachers, according to Mun Ikhwan's testimony, read aloud through those Japanese books by Korean language: a kind of immediate translation.<sup>20</sup>

In 1936 Yun transferred to Komyo Gakuin High School at Longjing established by Japanese as a fourth grader in 1936, in order to get opportunity to enter an advanced school. As Komyo Gakuin had been officially located in the realm of Manchukuo, four kinds of language course were opened: Japanese, Korean and Classical Chinese, Manchu, English. Although Yun's GPA was relatively high, only his grade in Japanese was remarkably low.<sup>21</sup> This may be explained by the fact that he had just transferred from Anti-Japanese schools to Komyo, and in all

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<sup>20</sup> Song (2004: 124).

<sup>21</sup> Song (2004: 211).

courses of Komyo only Japanese was exclusively used.

In 1938, the next year of the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Yun entered Yeonhui college in Keijo, today's Seoul. Despite the near prohibition of Korean language course in school by Chosen Government-general, Yeonhui College pushed ahead with Korean language course twice a week. Yun's outstanding Korean poems regarding his existential agonies were beginning to be created from this time. In 1942, after graduating Yeonhui, he left for Japan to study further, changing his name into Japanese, Hiranuma Tochu, and entered Rikkyo University in Tokyo. In that summer, he finally visited his hometown in Longjing, and said to his younger brothers that "Korean publications would disappear soon, so buy and collect whatever stuffs written in Korean language, even score." This, contrary to the cases of those like Kim Soun, meant that Yun actively resisted Japanese policy to deprive Koreans of Korean language. It is far well-known that after getting to Japan he transferred from Rikkyo to Doshisha in Kyoto, then he was arrested by Japanese police, and two years later he died in Japanese prison in Fukuoka.

Judging from his life, we can conclude that Yun's study of Japanese are mainly for reading literary books, and he was far from being interested in Japanese poetry itself. He was born and raised in a place of exile in China, near Korea, at the hands of his elders at home. Like many others he also had to leave his home to study further. Yun respected Jeong Jiyong and his poems, and like Jeong he also went to Japan to study English literature. As Yun was just an unknown young poet without responsibilities, he was conversely able to sacrifice himself completely to the altar of preserving Korean language and poetry. When Yun was arrested in 1943, he was forced to translate his Korean poems into Japanese language by policemen wanting to examine whether his poems were anti-Japanese or not. Perhaps those translated poems might

be the only Japanese poems written by his hands.

## **V. Kim Suyeong : Japanese as an Occasional Instrument for Penetrating Realities**

Kim Suyeong was born in 1921, four years later than Yun Dongju, but Kim was born in Keijo, the center of Chosen province of Imperial Japan, unlike Yun. Kim's contemporaries who lived inside Korea could get a systematized Japanese education in school. Members of this generation faced the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937) and the propaganda of the New Orders in East Asia (1938) devised by Japanese militarists, at the time of attending high school. This historical change caused the abolition policy of Korean language education in school system, and the exclusive use of Japanese language was violently enforced soon.<sup>22</sup> Yet this policy lasted only a few years until the defeat of Japan in 1945, then the position of Japanese suddenly collapsed from forced national language to a forbidden one. People and land stood still, but politics made lingual circumstance changed from hell to heaven, or vice versa, surrealistically.

Kim Suyeong belonged to the generation involving a fairly large number of Korean people who felt more comfort writing in Japanese than in Korean due to the enforced Japanese education during the last and the most extreme years of the Japanese Colonial Era.<sup>23</sup> Kim Suyeong, outstanding in his ability of foreign languages from the beginning, had been fluent in English and Japanese before his studying in Japan between 1941 and 1943, and he acquired the theory and practice of surrealistic

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<sup>22</sup> Kim (1981: 200).

<sup>23</sup> Choe (2001: 44).

flow of contemporary arts, attending Mizushima Drama Institute during the life in Japan. He was also influenced both by some English and American poets classified into western avant-garde group like T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Stephen Spender, etc. and Japanese post-war modernist poets such as Murano Shiro, Ayukawa Nobuo and Takano Kikuo.<sup>24</sup>

For Kim Suyeong Japanese language was so near and familiar around his personal life because of strict official education under the Japanese regime that he felt relatively less antagonism toward it, unlike those of former generations who had thought that Japanese language was a negative thing, which would gradually eat away at mother-tongue. Although today's many Koreans—grown up in a society full of anti-Japanese sentiment and through anti-Japanese education—would hardly be able to understand the attitude of Kim Suyeong and part of his contemporaries who had less antipathy to Japanese language, but it must be noted that one belonging to Kim Suyeong's generation had gone through his or her adolescence at the very moment when Japanese language had been being overwhelmingly enforced and the language policy of Japan in Korea was the most vicious of all the time during the Japanese regime, and that Kim Suyeong's poetic ambition was far higher and more universal than that of others caught in narrow nationalist values.

Those of Kim Suyeong's generation doomed to live in Korea were impossible to ignore or deny the realities of Japanese language consciously because they had been grown up after the establishment of Japanese bureaucracy and Japanized school system which enforced

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24 Kim (2002: 28); Choe (1993: 62). Especially Ayukawa Nobuo is showing a similar poetic tendency with Kim Suyeong thanks to both his extreme experience of serving in and returning from war and his strictness which he imposed on modern poetry. Kim (2001: 205–224). This requires further comparative study of Kim and Ayukawa henthforth.

assimilation policy in Korea. In reality it would be better off for an average Korean intellect to accept the superior position of Japanese language and obtain possible nourishment from it than to agonize over shock and humiliation that came from the deprivation of mother-tongue as Japanese language had become the only choice left to Korean people who wanted to read and write. I believe with certainty that Kim Suyeong was among this average intellectual group. I may sound too obsessive, but it should be confirmed that we cannot condemn his attitude for treacherous to fatherland, because it was also an undeniable fact that Japanese, partly and accidentally, played an effective role in introducing modern knowledge from the West to young Korean people at that time.<sup>25</sup> Japanese language was, according to Kim Suyeong's description, like a "phantom" that replaced mother-tongue by political enforcement in the first place,<sup>26</sup> but it also functioned as a path to advanced foreign culture and to greater knowledge that Korea of those days decisively lacked. In short, Japanese language, then, simultaneously presented "a possibility" as well as "a yoke" to most Koreans. For Kim Suyeong Japanese meant more the former than the latter, and this would form a peculiar viewpoint toward Japanese language, which might also be based largely on his surrealistic concept of art.

Of course, we shouldn't exaggerate the fact that Kim Suyeong thought Japanese an opportunity, because Japanese wasn't more than a privately accustomed instrument for literary study to him. He also had another effective tool for his study other than Japanese: English. After the Liberation of 1945, and before Korean's English literature academy should be formed in earnest, Kim played a remarkable role in introducing and translating English criticism into Korean and Korean language.<sup>27</sup> For him

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25 Kim, suyong (1981: 204).

26 Kim, Suyeong (1981: 302). Original text was made in 1966.

Japanese was equivalent to English since it was only a tool, so he didn't project any national prejudice into Japanese language and literature.

After the Liberation of 1945, receiving great influence from Japanese poets and many other English and American poets and critics, Kim Suyong tried to formulate his own poetics, criticizing the existing literary trends which former generations had created. He insisted that "poetry should have a dialectical unity of form and content,"<sup>28</sup> and criticized 1930s modernism for "being occupied by narrow themes like its solitude of the lyrical speaker and its sentimentalism." Kim Suyong "views established facts as his enemy," and "his ideal language is one that flees from facts" as Mallarmé pioneeringly did.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps language, among many of artificial regimes, seems to be the most extensive and driving factor in human life: especially the mother-tongue, or the most accustomed language for a person—and particularly, for a poet. Oddly, however, it was certainly not Korean but Japanese language that did take the position of an established fact for the generation of Kim Suyong; and this was, needless to say, all the fault of the distorted political realities. More oddly, however, the Japanese language lost this status and regressed in 1945, when Kim Suyong was 24 years old, thanks to the political restoration—and maybe with some confusion to him and his contemporaries. And this convulsion in language hierarchy suddenly transubstantiated the use of Japanese in Korea from a natural to an unfamiliar, even surrealistic one.

Kim Suyong's Japanese writing after the Liberation can be understood in this social context. In his diary of 10<sup>th</sup> 1961, he wrote in Japanese like this: "While being in this room of mine, I feel as if traveling to

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27 Jo (2005).

28 Peter Lee, ed (2003: 431).

29 Peter Lee, ed (2003: 429).

some places far away and I live within what is distinguished neither from nostalgia nor from death. Perhaps I live in Japanese.”<sup>30</sup> And in a 1966 note on his poetry originally written in Japanese, Kim Suyeong “enigmatically” wrote that he did not use Japanese but a “phantom,”<sup>31</sup> and he argued that making this reversed choice of language, namely “experiencing phenomena which one could not encounter as long as he stuck with one language,” made him “reflect on and recognize the transformation of his poetic reality.”<sup>32</sup>

What caused him to continue to write Japanese in private arena, even after the Liberation of 1945? In the problem like this, I think we need to take his own comment that “because of poor Korean ability” at face value.<sup>33</sup> Unlike common diaries of others, abstract thinking and writing were greatly needed in Kim’s diary where he was developing intense poetics by quoting a variety of literary theories and aphorisms from different sources.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, his abstract thoughts had been developed mostly by Japanese before 1945. Kim, after Liberation, may have been embarrassed by himself thinking and writing unconsciously with the help of Japanese. But he would decide to look straight at his consciousness tinged with Japanese, and threw away any hesitation using Japanese, now regarded as just one of many foreign languages. The term “phantom” which might be used as a metaphor of Japanese language might also be used to represent the image of himself incapable of throwing it away.

Hence we can argue that Kim’s such attitude toward Japanese should be regarded as not an acceptance but a result of psychological complication. At first it may be surprising to many contemporary Korean

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30 English translation by Seo (2005).

31 One researcher translated this term into “apparition”. Seo (2005).

32 Kim, Suyeong (1981: 302).

33 Kim, Suyeong (1981: 294).

34 Park (2005).

that a prominent poet like Kim Suyeong frequently had written Japanese in his diary, but it was only for the sake of convenience in his work. Kim Suyeong didn't have any actual relations with Japanese writers unlike Jung Jiyong or Kim Soun, who had followed Japanese poets like Kitahara Hakusyu.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the fact that Kim Suyeong started his literary career after Liberation made him relatively freer from Japanese influence than his predecessors.

It's at least certain that Kim Suyeong had overcome the excessive emphasis on language of his two great foregoers: Jeong Jiyong and Kim Soun. The fact that Kitahara Hakusyu, the poetic guru whom Kim Suyeong's two great foregoers had respected with all their hearts, cooperated with Japanese militarism so easily in his later years would imply that he reached his poetic achievement so much as he lost his sight of historical realities around Japan. We should be always careful before conclusion, but could say that when a poet is too absorbed in the work of developing lyricism and polishing language, he/she may not grip on, or ignore, real world. It's natural for Jeong jiyong and Kim Soun who pursued pure lyricism in poetry to follow Kitahara Hakusyu, and it's also understandable Kitahara Hakusyu, a master of lyrical Japanese, wrote emotional eulogy for any event of his age, including war of aggression.<sup>36</sup>

Kim Suyeong was also second to none in the degree of devoting himself to the problem of language. His inclination was so strong as to make him even confess that his consciousness was deeply permeated by foreign languages.<sup>37</sup> But Kim was different from those who became

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35 Kim Suyeong himself declared that he had any teacher of poetry neither in Korea nor outside. Kim (1981: 287).

36 There are many cases of brilliant lyrical poets who later cooperated with militarism in Japan: Saito Mokichi (1882~1953), a famous Japanese traditional poet and doctor of Taisho period, wrote a lot of pro-war propaganda works; Takamura Kotaro (1883~1956), also a prominent poet and sculptor, went a similar way. Kato, Shuichi (1983: 217); and Choe (2005).

unable to search for outside world by exhausting his/her vitality only for polishing up language. Kim Suyong, more than any previous poet who preceded him, “ceaselessly reflected upon and sifted through his life and poetry as an interconnected whole.”<sup>38</sup> We should bear in mind that Kim Suyong’s life itself was far more harsh and indented than others. The combination of his genuine linguistic ability and gruesome experiences during the Korean War—Kim Suyong had been drafted into the North Korean People’s Army by force and was taken prisoner; he was even consigned into the notorious Girjedo POW Camp—provided him with a means to overcome both “pure literature” slanted in favor of the beauty of form and sensitivity and “proletarian literature” which regarded poetry as a means to propagate political ideology. Of course his sudden death by traffic accident left his entire poetic world incomplete, and it may be undeniable fact that his poems are in any general sense less beautiful and more unfamiliar than other three poets in this paper. However, as demonstrated by the argument so far taken, it’s more impartial to consider his complicated life and dialectic poetics simultaneously when we would appraise the worth of Kim Suyong’s poetic works accurately.

## VI. Epilogue

In this paper I tried to extract the attitudes toward the Japanese language of four major Korean poets—Jeong Jiyong, Kim Soun, Yun Dongju and Kim Suyong—and analyzed the causes of forming such attitudes through examining their sayings and lives. These four poets, in common, had accumulated a considerable standard of literary cultivation;

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37 Kim, Suyong (1981: 301).

38 Paik, Nak-chung (1999: 145).

had learned how to write in Japanese, even in some cases before in Korean; and at last had formed peculiar poetic world respectively. Although Kim Soun, in particular, mainly endeavored not to create poetry but translate selected Korean poems into Japanese, it is clear that the production of his own can be considered the Japanese-related literary works which is the major concern of this paper. I am eagerly hoping that, by investigating their respective attitudes of accommodating Japanese language into their lives and the influence of it into their writing, I would introduce a new kind of extensive viewpoint on modern Korean cultural history that could be explained in the aspect of the rise and fall of the positions of Korean language compared with influential foreign languages.

Four poets, in common, were all in the front lines of the development of Korean language in their age. While Jeong tried to develop the formation of Korean poetry that could express sentiments of many Koreans in a new era, Kim Soun translated some Korean poems into Japanese in order to preserve even the contents of them through his well-polished Japanese linguistic attainment. We may as well say that their pioneering efforts were rewarded, because until today Jeong is being praised as the father of modern poetry in Korea, while Kim doesn't lose his reputation in Japan: the one and only skilled translator—from Korean to Japanese—equivalent to Japanese native speaker in terms of language proficiency. In addition, as Kim's poetic achievement was mainly targeted at either Korean readers who gained Japanese language ability enough to appreciate literature written in Japanese or Japanese readers interested in Korean poetry, it's in some sense natural that most of Koreans today forgot his Japanese works written before 1945.

Between 1937 and 1945, when Korean language actually were vanishing from the public stage, Yun Dongju and Kim Suyong were

showing different ways of facing Japanese influence respectively. Yun Dongju held fast to his principle of writing poems only in Korean, which meant in that time an active resistance to Japanese regime, which ended with his death by Japanese authorities, as a natural consequence. While simultaneously Kim Suyong was being brought up as a poet with the help of Japanese books mainly, and this ironic situation brought him to both an advantage before 1945 and a confusion after 1945. Japanese language meant to many Koreans during the Colonial Era—especially to cultural elites—both a path to advanced western culture and a yoke to mother-tongue. Yun regarded Japanese as the latter, while Kim the former.

The history of Korea had once provided Kim Suyong with Japanese language before 1945, but soon took it from his hands after the Liberation; as a result his Japanese writings, far different from those of his predecessors, began meaning to the breakdown and reconstruction of realities. It's no accident that Kim Suyong was deeply fascinated with surrealism, which was essentially eager to make reformation of distorted realities beyond the domain of lyricism. Of course, all this brought him the most extreme existential confusion, and made his poetry less understandable by normal standard. In spite of all, Kim Suyong is one of the most thorough investigator of foreign languages among all of Korean poets, and by this reason he hasn't lost the renown of being a master of the most avant-garde and radical poetics in the Korean literary history.

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## ABSTRACT

# **A Study on the Attitudes of Korean Poets toward Japanese Language during the Colonial Era**

**Bae, Suchan**

Four Korean poets who had grown up in the Japanese colonial era—Jeong Jiyong (1902~?), Kim Soun (1908~1981), Yun Dongju (1917~1945), and Kim Suyeon (1921~1968)—showed peculiar attitudes toward Japanese language respectively. These poets, in common, had learned to write in Japanese, even in some cases, before in Korean; and at last formed their own poetic worlds.

Jung Jiyong referred to modern Japanese literature and western literature written in Japanese to write modern poetry. Though he began to write poems in both Korean and Japanese in the late 1920s, soon he dropped Japanese and pursued only Korean. In the early 1940s, Kim Soun translated selected Korean poems into Japanese in order to preserve even the contents of them; His translation works are so fluent that even Japanese misunderstood them as original Japanese literature.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Yun Dongju and Kim Suyeon read many western texts translated in Japanese, so we can say that Japanese supplied them with effective tools for literary study. Yun wrote some beautiful but deeply agonizing poems in Korean, and wouldn't write in Japanese until his last day of life. On the other hand, Kim Suyeon left a few confusing Japanese essays concerning his surrealistic poetics. His Japanese writings means the breakdown and reconstruction of realities, corresponding to his real experience of being given and soon deprived of Japanese language due to the historical chaos in Korea before and after

1945.

**KEYWORDS** Korean Language, Japanese language, Jeong Jiyong, Kim Soun, Yun Dongju, Kim Suyong.