

Border Writing: Yi Sang and Colonial Korea

L'image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus or moins éloignées. ... SURREALISME, n.m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale. (André Breton, "Manifestes du Surrealisme")

INTRODUCTION

The influence of André Breton's "The Surrealist Manifesto" in 1924 was global. In the same year, Takahashi Shinkichi, a Japanese Dadaist, visited colonial Korea, and generated heated discussions there in the cultural section of the *Tong-a* daily newspaper about the meaning of Dada under local conditions. In 1929, not long after Breton's second manifesto of surrealism was pronounced, a Japanese surrealist, Hirado wrote a modernist poem:

The sound of Akebono Bruu unbb the sound

· N the sound N ~~~~ the sound

uu the sound u·R· the bright sound ++the sound+ the light light the light

u· the sound NR the sound of Akebono

u· the sound of the object O B B B the sound sound sound

R· the sound V...the sound the airplane ("An Ensemble" [Gatsool], Hirado Renkichi 1931; qtd. in Oka 15; all translations from the Japanese are mine.)

Consequently, the adaptation of Bretonian poetry of images as poetic motif was transferred first to Japan and then to colonial Korea during the 1920s and 30s. The visualizing of language and automatic writing, which was thought to reveal one's sub-consciousness to the level of consciousness by ignoring punctuation

rules, spacing, grammar, and other conventional sentence structures, became a new form of expression in colonial Korea.

As the above brief exposition of cultural parameters and textual examples demonstrate, the cultural situation of the colonist, Japan, and the colonized, Korea, contains specificities which to know about will enable us to understand the topic of my paper: I intend to focus on the structural connection between the historically specific colonial situation of Korea and the problems and dilemmas which the Korean modernist, Yi Sang, confronted.

1. THE COLONIAL SITUATION, NEW KOREAN LITERATURE, AND NATIONALISTIC WRITING

When Breton's *Manifesto* was imported to Japan and Korea, certain regional political and cultural specificities appealed to writers in each national context. Japan's colonial domination in Korea was a historical period in which two different national vocabularies competed unequally. Recognition of the literary achievement of a national writer can be significant, but it is more meaningful to look at the broader — comparative — picture of how literary genres and ideas cross national borders. However, the literary transference and the development of modern Korean literature have not been reflected in English translations, in scholarship, or criticism. Indeed, many major works of Korean literature have not yet been translated into English. Furthermore, there has been little published research on the Japanese colonial period in general, or on Japanese cultural imperialism, or on the topic of Japanese colonial literature (see Robinson).

While French and British colonist ideology was often unapologetically racist, race was not an overt issue in Japan's occupation of Korea. Instead, Japan's focus was on the "uncivilized" character of Yi Korean society (1392-1910). By 1905, Koreans had already developed a sense of national identity, seeing themselves as a distinctive people with a strong cultural heritage set within definite geographic boundaries. Thus, in order to establish its dominance, Japan needed to undermine this sense of nationhood among the Korean people. The goal of Japanese colonial policy was assimilation, and justification for this policy was sought in the linguistic and cultural affinities between Japan and Korea.

In the late nineteenth century, Korean intellectuals resisted Japanese influence and attempted to preserve Korea's independence; they interpreted Japan's introduction of modern institutions as serving the purpose of colonization. Japan's distinction of cultural borders between Korea and Japan was constructed on the notion of cultural affinity, which Japanese colonialists claimed so as to reduce the differences between Japan and Korea. For Koreans, to be a true nationalist, one had to resist the Japanese approach of cultural assimilation. Under such cultural and social circumstances, modern Korean literature developed with the main focus on resistance. While this might be inevitable given the historical circumstances, in my opinion nationalistic writings blurred

Korean scholars' search for an objective profile of the history of Korea or Korean culture. In other words, only through reflection on Japan's presence and its relation to Korea would Korea be able to define itself.

Given the colonial situation in Korea, two different lines of thought merged and clashed: the new emerging intellectuals, who accepted the "new" ideas and ways of writing, and the traditionalists, who believed that the Confucian world view would lead to true nationalism. The object of my analysis, Yi Sang's texts stood at the intersection between the traditional and modern values, and between his world and the colonizer's voice within him, and thus his work is well suited for the "reflective" approach I postulated above. Yi Sang's literary works and his language address the subtleties of agonies and solutions. Among Korean modernists, for instance, Kim Ki-rim, Jung Ji-Yong and the group of *The Meeting of Nine Artists* (Kuihwa), Yi Sang's work is significant on several accounts. In brief, perhaps a parallel of Yi Sang can be drawn with Aimé Césaire, the Caribbean poet, who brought awareness of pride in his culture's heritage, and sought to challenge the European prejudice against the "barbarous" *négritude* (see, for instance, Kane). Césaire's concept and efforts to search for political and cultural identity confronting colonialism by literary means are in many ways similar to Yi Sang's work.

More recent Korean literature may be typified as resistance literature in the context of the preservation of Korea's culture, literature, and traditions. Literary texts as well as scholarly interpretations of the struggle against discrimination, the construction of a national history, national identity, and self-esteem were the central themes in the Korean literature of resistance. In this context, however, language itself has been privileged. Just as *négritude* developed its discourse from the language of black culture on its own terms in order to resist the Eurocentric definition of cultural evolution, this occurred in Korea similarly based on parameters of language. Of importance is that many Koreans during the colonial period wrote in Japanese, yet the recognition of such Korean authors in contemporary Japan has been overlooked while in Korea, writers during the colonial period who wrote in Japanese were criticized as collaborators. A politically charged word, translated in English as "pro-Japanese element," was commonly used to describe Korean authors writing in Japanese. The term in Korean came to describe such authors as "apostates." Interestingly, such criticism has grown more intense in contemporary Korean literary criticism. As an example of such general sentiment may serve a tomb including the list of names of writers, statesmen, and entrepreneurs (see Im).

In my opinion, all colonial literature cannot be reduced to resistance literature as a reflection of a master-slave relationship. Yi Sang, for instance, did not write overt propagandistic political novels or poems. He was neither connected with the Independent national protest nor directly concerned with resistance politics. Rather, the retreat of the old class system, the rise of commercial and

business activities, changes in marriage customs, etc., have become the new themes in modern Korean novels. However, it is important to study the background of these contemporary changes of Korean literature and to understand that the colonial period is crucial. In addition to the above mentioned cultural and literary transference between the Japanese and Korean cultures, also Western genres, psychological novels, literary trends, etc. influenced Korean authors during the colonial period.

In general terms, the artistic and aesthetic representation of reality in Korea in the 1890s was different from the aesthetic or historical modernity of the West at the same time. Also, the fact that national literature was importing its new representational modes from Western genres and styles but through Japanese intermediaries is an important factor. As in the case of other national literatures, in the early twentieth century, Korean literature too was very "historical." Thus, the intellectual base of Korean history centered on writers who in their texts theoretized and fictionalized the Confucian notion of the ideal nation. As Koreans were confronted by the processes of modernization, there was another group of intellectuals who agonized over the gap between the ideal and the real and they tried to overcome the non-practical aspects of Confucian rhetoric. This latter group contributed significantly to a Korean intellectual tradition. Thus, we can, in a rough generalization, divide Korean intellectuals and writers into the two main groups of traditionalists and modernists. During the colonial period, since Japan attempted to import and to impose both Japanese and Japanese-mediated Western institutions and ideas on Korea, the two foreign cultural bodies became linked in the minds of many nationalists. It is for this reason that Korean nationalists often ended up resisting Western ideas.

In order to understand how this split affected Korean literature, we also need to look at the state of literacy in the late nineteenth century. By this time, writing was no longer the prestigious domain of the learned classes. In the edict of 1895, the government declared that all official documents be written in a style consistent with the spoken language. The traditional Korean social class system dissolved following the impact of primary educational institutions and a meritocratic educational system. The reading of literature and readership was no longer the domain or the privilege of a particular class. During the colonial period, the major outlet for authors of literary texts was newspaper serials. As the newspaper circulation grew and readership expanded, novels and short stories especially gained popularity and by the 1920s and 30s historical novels also gained popularity. Ideologically and thematically, in the prevalent general intellectual climate of rejecting "the heterodox" or "the Western" — by the traditionalists — two different types of writers emerged with different reactions to the changes. One group made the epistemological shift of accepting the new ideas while the other rejected Western influence and sought for national identity in historical writing. In other words, the modernists favored the adopting and learning about new forms of literature from the Western genres via the Japanese

translations. The traditionalists resisted change or adaptation and tried to maintain the Confucian idea of literature, and continued anti-Japanese writings.

From words, art, and aesthetics to social and educational institutions, the transcultural process of a Japanese-Western-Korean paradigm occurred in every social and cultural aspect of Korean life. Influence from Western genres was particularly conspicuous during the 1920s. For instance, Yom Sang-sop's novel, *Samdae* (*Three Generations*) presented ill-fated characters in the context of Japanese economic exploitation. The interpersonal conflicts depicted in this novel resulted from irreconcilable types of family members and their respective psychologies and roles in the turbulent preparation for a changing society.

Writers who adopted new genres borrowed styles from Japanese-translated Western literary works, while continuing to publish their works in a serial form in daily newspapers. Along with this borrowing from Western genres, politically engaged literature grew very strongly in the 1930s as a form of resistance. But also social questions were prevalent and the Korean Association for Proletariat Federation (KAPF) emphasized resistance literature based on themes related to poor living conditions caused by colonial oppression.

During the colonial period, many Korean writers received their education in Japan or made several visits to Japan, and, as mentioned above, some of them wrote in Japanese. Such writers and their novels and poems were often criticized as not capable of conveying the Korean national spirit. Critics used the analogy of a Korean wearing *geta*, Japanese shoes, with the traditional Korean dress. National historical themes using folk and legendary materials, in the opinion of these critics, were more appropriate for confronting the realities of colonial life. But, ironically, in the process of developing and unfolding a Korean tradition, authors during the colonial period eventually borrowed the mature Japanese methods of utterance and used them for resistance purposes. Thus it came that the reduction of the meaning of literature to a single theme of national resistance in colonial Korea developed into an advocacy of themes of modernity. The subject of my study here, Yi Sang, differed somewhat from other colonial writers in that his main interest was not focused on resistance but on the inquiries into the "self" in the colonial situation; the self trying to achieve a reconciliation between Western intellectual disengagement through Japanese learning and continued attachment to native values and the concept of reality.

2. THE LANGUAGE OF THE MODERNIST YI SANG

2.1 A Brief Biography of Yi Sang

Yi Sang was the product of Japanese colonial society. Born in 1910, the same year that Korea became Japan's colony, Yi Sang graduated with a degree in architecture from one of the elite technical colleges. Upon his graduation, he acquired a post with the office of the Japanese Colonial Government-General as

an architect. The colonial school system was very competitive and getting a post at the colonial bureaucracy was highly selective. Often, such an opportunity was not granted even to members of the educated Korean elite. Yi Sang, a penname, evolved from the Japanese who called him with the honorific marker whenever he attended the construction site. Yi enjoyed his recognized status by Japanese officials and instead of using his real name, Kim Hae-kyong, he changed his name (see Kim).

As a child, Yi Sang was adopted by his paternal uncle, for his uncle did not have a male child. Although his uncle cared for him and supported his schooling, Yi often rebelled against him by spending the money he received for tuition on art materials: his uncle did not like Yi's idea of drawing or writing. Thus, Yi Sang's relationship with his uncle was an on-going confrontation. Later, as a young man, Yi Sang developed tuberculosis. During the same time, he lived with a lover for three years. The woman and Yi owned a café where modernist poets met for a short time. By 1933, his health worsened and he went for a retreat in the countryside and during this time wrote poems related to nature.

Most of Yi's poems were originally published in Japanese. In the colonial situation, his resistance against authority and reality was through writing even though he chose to write in Japanese. Yi Sang often expressed that "Pen is my last resort as a knife." Obviously, Yi Sang was self-conscious about his Japanese writings and suffered a self-imposed shame because of his Japanese publications. Nevertheless, the choice of language was merely his means to fight against two worlds of languages imbued with oppression, Korean in its aspects of traditionalism and Japanese in its colonialism. What was important for Yi Sang was to search for his true self.

Yi Sang's first publication was *December 12*, an autobiographical short novel which portrayed his psychological conflict and hatred against his uncle, and his strong psychological drive to commit suicide. His other known novels, *K'wontai* is one of his early writings, and *Nal-Gae* is his latest novel, after a period of strong output of poems.

2.2 Major Themes in Yi Sang's Work

For the purpose of my study of Yi's work, I selected the following texts, in chronological order:

1930 *December 12* (*12.12 Sibiwo'l sibiŭ*): An autobiographical novel which reflected his strong hatred of his paternal uncle. He describes his constant impulse to commit suicide, and his growing consciousness of death as his tuberculosis worsens.

1931 Poems: *A Bird's Eye View* (collection), "Nervously Corpulent Triangle," "The Face," "Boiteux Boiteuse," "Notes to the Lines 1," "Notes to the Lines 6," "Diagnosis" ("Poetry #4"), "Al Capone"

1933 Poem: "The Mirror"

1934 Poem: "Poetry #2"

1936 Novels: *Boredom* (*K'wontai*), *Wings* (*Nal-Gae*)

There are three major themes that Yi Sang dealt with. First of all, the notion of the self was one of the prominent themes in his works. Particularly the notion of self and his immediate family, such as his father and his uncle who adopted him to be the heir of the family line became the major focus. It was a common practice for Korean families to adopt sons from the same family line when the first son of the family did not have a male child. Thus, Yi grew up not with his natural father, but with a paternal uncle. From this familial situation, Yi agonized over his self being detached from his natural parents.

His second major theme was death. In 1933, owing to complications of his tuberculosis, he took a retreat to hot springs in rural Korea, and it was then that Yi lived with the owner of a café, from whom he found both love and consolation. In 1936, Yi met his former lover again after a period of separation. However, as a marriage of convenience, he married yet another woman. But one year later, Yi Sang left his wife and departed for Tokyo. During his physical illness, with weakness, frequent blood vomiting, and constant high fever, his poems dealt with the motifs of body parts, as "Germs of the Gabriel Angel," with "destruction of human heart" and "replacing with heart and stomach." In his poems, his experience of severe blood vomiting was transformed into an increasing "sexual appetite." At the same time, Yi struggled to overcome his physical condition and its accompanying fear of death.

His third major theme was modernism. As a person who was exposed to the geometric concepts studied in architecture and his brief work experience as an architect at the colonial government office, he approached modern objects and modern life with curiosity. His novel, *Nal-Gae*, was the first Korean modernist novel that used the stream of consciousness. Altogether, Yi Sang's poems and novels represent a bold attempt at psychological realism, searching for the voice of the self, expressing the conflict between two conflicting worlds, and relating his new aesthetic sensibility to the reality of colonialism.

2.3 Yi Sang's Poems

In the growing trend toward proletarian underground literary works, political themes superseded the question related to the self. The significance of Yi Sang's writings in 1930s in the history of modern Korean literature lies in his ability to describe the psychological state of the self through his experimentation with the

Korean language while engaging in writing in Japanese. Yi Sang was the first writer to experiment with the new style of writing by using different sizes of letters, by introducing numbers, mathematical equations, geometrical charts, word-play, and irony. Yi Sang's first cycle of poems, *Ogamdo* (1931) was published in Japanese. These poems, in search of the self, were at the expense of social responsibility. In his poems, there were new words related to the city and visual senses, as well as a good number of words borrowed from English and French. Here are some examples of Yi's poetry:

Two persons ...1...

The Christ began to give a sermon in shabby clothes.

Al Capone took the image of the olive mountain as itself.

It was after a certain day in 1930 -----.

A plump Capone with his wounded cheeks was selling a ticket in front of the church decorated by neon signs. 1931.8.11

Two persons2....

The coin of Al Capone is truly shiny and can be taken as a medallion, but Christ's coin is so ugly and poor, that it can not leave a footprint from the qualification of money.

Christ, until the last moment, refused a frock coat which Capone sent to Pressant.

This story is not only famous but at the same time, isn't it evident? 1931.8.11 (Yi 105)

Christ is compared with the Chicago gangster Al Capone (1899-1947), whose criminal activity was legendary at the time of the Great Depression. The relationship between Christ and Capone is based on the notion of mercenary transactions and Christianity is bluntly presented in preposterous metaphors. This approach to Christianity represents a connection of modernity, Western influences, and the poet's own precarious physical state. Yi Sang's fear of blood was related to death, but he had no intentions to seek help from an absolute being. Instead, frightened by his physical condition, Yi Sang projected the image of Christ as a ridiculed object.

Yi Sang's poetry contains movement, as seen in his "Diagnosis": the text seems to be untamed in its space and development. Sometimes nothing can be expected or predicted of them. For Yi Sang, language meant references to a world of objects, but he tried to relegate certain given meanings to an object. For him, language was expressed in different types of figures, such as "one straight line," "hexagonal sugar cubes," codes or numbers such as the juxtaposition of the

Roman number 4 reversed, upside-down and facing in different angles, and various print types:

▽ is my AMOUREUSE.

How many times have you won from wrestling

It seems there is only the upper part of the back buried in the overcoat.

Oh▽, I am a broken musical instrument with breathing.

At any rate, solitude may visit me. But I will not XX. Only by doing so. My life has basic colors, so it is rich.

I am a caravan.

I am a caravan. ("The Nervously Corpulent Triangle"; Yi 107)

What does ▽ refer to? Yi Sang did not want to present a concrete referent to his images. In his poems, untranslated French words, such as in the titles *Au Magasin de Nouveautés* and *L'Urine*, or *menstruation* in his text, for instance, were presented and developed as his own means of expression, sometimes by syntactic fusion with vernacular Korean expressions which could not be adapted to the Japanese language context. As in "The Crow's Nest," the sign of "two" reflects a word game of oppositions, mirrors, and echoes:

There is no sound in the mirror

No world could be as quiet as that

In the mirror, and I have ears

Two ears that cannot understand my word.

The I in the mirror is a left-handed one who can not receive my hand-shake ---- the left-hand that does not know which shaking hand

Although I may not be able to touch me in the mirror due to the mirror

If it were not for the mirror how could I have met me

I do not possess the mirror at this moment, but there is always me inside of the mirror

Though not so certain, the person seems occupied in activities.

Me inside the mirror and the opposite me are very alike

I am sorry for I worry me inside the mirror but cannot give a diagnosis. ("The Mirror"; Yi 51)

For Yi Sang, the language of the self was modernist, questioning, and developing dialogue with the same self. Consequently, Yi Sang's true search for himself conflicted with two separate selves existing within him. In "The Mirror," the

division of the two selves is revealed; each self opposed and echoed. As in "The Mirror," "The Face" uses a similar metaphor of worlds each having its border:

3. THE BORDER BETWEEN SELF AND REALITY

Yi Sang's poems indicate that his universe was caught between tradition and the modern, echoes between two contraries, mirroring between images and role-playing. Yi Sang's concept of border was characterized by clashes of contraries, crippled conjugal relationships, and contradictions. In his world, the self and the family existed in contradiction. Yi Sang, as the first son of the Yi family line, had to leave his natal family to preserve his paternal uncle's lineage whose family line took priority over carrying the Yi family line. In the Confucian tradition and conventional Korean law, the first son's first son takes the highest priority of the heirship, as in the continuation of regal lines. Since Yi Sang's elder paternal uncle did not have a son for the continuation of the ancestral line, Yi was adopted. Yi tried to reveal his unconscious desires to the conscious level; psychological trauma from being raised by his paternal uncle for the succession of the family line and being forced to leave his natal family behind, his hatred against his uncle, and his suicidal attempts from two consecutive hemoptysis that worsened his tuberculosis. These are all reflected in Yi Sang's autobiographical novel, *December 12* (12.12) as well as in his poetry:

I look at my hungry face.

Why is the face having a hungry face under a blooming cheek.

Where does this man come from.

Where does this man come from. ("The Face"; Yi 108)

My father becomes my father when he is nice and near by me, and I become the father of my father, nevertheless my father is my father, but why do I repeatedly feel my father of my father.... Now I become my father but why do I have to live by jumping back and forth to finally all at once to play the role of my father and the father of my father, and also the father of my father's father. ("Poetry # 2"; Yi 13)

Further, Yi Sang's writing reflects the tension between his internalized values conforming to traditional expectation and his modernist proclivity. In the 1930s, the language of modernity was prevalent but the people's values remained unchanged. Confucian patriarchal familial behavior was still the central feature in Korean morality. This persistent idea of moral life was rigidly applied in the form of unwritten cultural norms and rules. In this context, Yi felt the solitude in the absence of reference that he could make. He may have preferred the relationship between the self and the ancestors to be continuous, but the contradictions arising from his desire to be a unique individual and the cultural expectation to meet his obligation as the first son could not be reconciled. Whether Yi Sang's own self was fictional or realistic to him, a conflict

persisted between the two selves; one trying to seek continuity between the self and the ancestors, and the other trying to be only himself. This notion of conflict and discontinuity is broadly presented through the presentation of female images. For instance, in "Boiteux-Boiteuse," Yi's reality and the world are unbalanced and crippled. Here he switches codes and language, abrogates long verses, and appropriates his arbitrary feelings toward images of words:

Long
Short
In a Cross

But on the cross the oil was on
The fall
An inevitable parallel
Physically, it hurt.

Orange
A cannon
Grapes

If you got seriously injured and bled, that is distasteful. ("Boiteux-Boiteuse"; Yi 86)

There is no logical connection apparent in the poem. What is presented is the isolation in the rupture of each stanza, presented in/with abstraction. Yi Sang's presentation here is a certain image: *Boiteux* in French means the "limping one," which is symbolized as in a psychological relationship between conjugal partners and in its extended metaphor as in the world being divided into two; that of colonial reality and the presence of a world created by Japan.

Compared to the portrayal of the female image by other modern Korean poets, in Yi Sang's poems the female is no longer victimized or oppressed. The polarities between the powerful and the weak, the center and the periphery, is reversed and abrogated in the poems. For him, the experience of the periphery was fully validated. Thus, the image of the female in Yi Sang's poems is presented in figures, such as the upside down triangle. This female image suggests the poet's sensibility to newness and subverts the ancient way of representing the presence. Yi Sang's attempt to reverse the role-playing of the female and the male figure was revolutionary. Female images by other Korean modernists' poems were linked in forms of feminine rhymes and contents of feminine narration through images of flowers, moon, darkness, tears, as opposed to male images of fire, sun, brightness, and heaven. In the poems of Kim So-wol, Han Yong-un, and Kim Yong-rang (see Jung), women's desire for men was symbolized in chastity, sorrow, yearning, resignation, and acceptance of fatality. Yi Sang's allegories with female images were created to project the whole and

the part in a "fragmentary representation" of reality (the colonial reality) by reversing the typical feminine image via the character of a professional lover as wife and husband. Yi Sang attempted to relate his aesthetic sensibility to the colonial reality by confusing the victor and the victimized, by using the female figure of complicity in humiliation as the colonized. For him, female figures with arbitrary rules imposed on the male figure are no longer victimized or subordinated. Thus, it is now the male figure who can not even defend himself. The male sex is designated as an object of ambivalence yet always with a menacing aspect.

Yi's poetic representation of the female was then expanded into a novel focusing on the unbalanced conjugal relationship. In his novel *Nal-Gae*, a couple lives in a dark, closed, and shabby room. The wife earns their living as a prostitute, while her incompetent husband amuses himself all day long with the fragrance of his wife's perfume and cosmetics. One day, the wife brings a man to their room and her husband — assuming that he is conforming to his wife's wishes — is left to find a new place to live. Yi Sang's allusions to female images and female psychological responses are reflected in the novel within the context of the Confucian tradition, prevalent in Korean intellectual history. Obviously, he was not yet entirely free from the Confucian-oriented image of the female. In the story, it was assumed that the husband is still the symbol of the household. The wife's conduct of leaving aspirin pills for the husband to relieve his migraine was taken as a symbolic act of care. But, the husband was suspicious about the wife's care, and her care and financial support were not appreciated. The husband's life situation was blamed entirely on the wife for "misunderstanding" rather than on the incompetent husband. Although the husband apologizes for the alleged misunderstanding, the story projects an image of the wife as a villain:

We were spouses fatalistically crippled. I do not need to attach logic to my wife. No need for excuses as well. The fact remains as the fact, and the misunderstanding remains as misunderstanding. We will endlessly keep walking the world as crippled. Isn't it so?... I felt something ticklish under my arms ... the wings began to emerge.... Let's fly. Fly. Fly. Let's fly once more. Let's try to fly once more. (Jung 52)

Nal-Gae was written before Yi's departure for Tokyo. Yi went to Japan because respect for scholarship demanded that one must go to Japan, to study or pursue advanced education. In 1935, the year Yi Sang arrived in Tokyo, the city had modern urban features. The Gothic-style buildings, Renaissance domes on train stations, clocks for the public, theaters, coffee shops and the red light districts did not appeal to Yi Sang as "truly modern." What Yi Sang knew about Tokyo and Japan was from his readings and his education and upon seeing the "real" Tokyo, he sarcastically described his impression of the city as a colonial metropole: "Tokyo is such a dishonorable city. Compared to Tokyo, Seoul

(*Keijo*) is like a secluded farm village with good-hearted people.... There emanates disgustingly epidemically exposed Western foul smell. In other words, in Tokyo, only the remains of the molecule form is imported, and it pretends that there were real which makes me nauseated" (Kim 219).

Tokyo for Yi Sang was represented as a metropolitan center, the location not only of the power which comes from the control of language but also of order itself, with the periphery of the colonial world, in which only the illusion of power exists and the disorder always predominates. At the same time, Yi's perception and experience of the city was limited. As the Korean society generally caters to a male existence, Yi took the advantage of being a male which in turn formed his demanding type of personality. He expected Tokyo would project images he already knew.

But Yi Sang and his writing experienced peripherality in other domains, too. His poems were criticized as works of word plays and leisure writing and he was also characterized as a writer with psychological disorders whose works, therefore, should be analyzed in terms of psychoanalysis. In my opinion, it would be a serious mistake to read Yi Sang's work as that of an "insane" person. Rather, Yi Sang challenged the traditional structure of poetry and tried to create novelty in form and content. For instance, "Notes to the Lines 6" typifies his apparent creation of textual nonsense in a difficult style:

The Study of Direction

4. ▽ ▽ ▽ ▽

The dynamics of numbers

The temporality (Historicity according to vulgar speculation)

Speed and the co-ordinates and the speed

▽ + ▽

▽ + ▽

etc. ("Notes to lines 6"; Yi 17)

As in the above poem, his texts projected psychological realism, the voice of the self. Moreover, Yi expressed great consciousness about the Korean language but without nationalism. Between the two worlds of modernity and tradition, he challenged both but could not find a referent to which he himself could adhere. His novel, *The Wings*, was a further attempt at psychological realism. As Choi Jae-so writes in his critique, "Yi Sang used his satire, wit, metaphorical language, exaggerations, paradox, self-ridicule, with all other types of intellectual means to express blasphemy to the common sensical knowledge and indolence about family life, money, and sex" (448). Yi Sang wanted to create his own language, and do away with referents to objects and thus for him writing in Japanese or in Korean was not a primary issue. Instead, he struggled to master both languages.

It was like having capillary tissues between the exterior world of realities and the interior world of conflict and emotions, between the reality and the imagination, between his interior vision and exterior physical deterioration, day and night, unreal and real. The tension between these two domains resulted in Yi Sang's own language, which is neither Japanese nor his native Korean, but rather a reshaping of his own words by alignment of numbers, codes, different sizes of type prints and figures, metaphors, and by ignoring much of that radical newness in turn by challenging what was transposed from Western writing. Yi Sang attempted to overcome the border between two worlds, that within himself and that of the outside colonial world and its subjectification. In the latter situation, what Yi Sang perceived was unacceptable and thus he expressed his desire to create "wings" and to "fly away" from the arbitrariness of the world, the morbid room, the impasse around him.

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RUIQI MA

The Ideology of Cultural and Gender Misunderstanding in D.H. Hwang's *M. Butterfly*

"by dehumanizing the enemy, we dehumanize ourselves" (Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, "Afterword")

With the development of intercultural dialogue and communication, an increasing number of literary works have appeared reflecting cultural relationships between the East and the West. On the critical landscape, the established binary approach of such scholars as Edward Said, for instance, has been further problematized in many aspects. For instance, the problematics of gender issues, forms of marginality, and ideology is one such area found in many studies (see, for instance, Palumbe-Liu). In this article, I will explore the question of ideology in D.H. Hwang's *M. Butterfly* from a Mainland Chinese point of view.

North American ethnic minority authors have increasingly received attention since the 1960s, and Chinese-American and Chinese-Canadian literature, represented by such texts as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* (1994), or Yan Li's *Daughters of the Red Land* (1995), have achieved considerable success in both readership and scholarly attention. Of course there is, connected to the specific issue of marginalities and (post)colonialism also the problematics of politics in the classroom, the canon debate, the various aspects of gender and race, etc.¹

When D.H. Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, received the Tony Award for best play of 1988, the author became another eminent Chinese-American writer after Kingston and the play received accolades from all sides. For instance, the director of the play, John Dexter, called *M. Butterfly* the best play he had read in twenty years (Hwang, "Afterword," 96). When it first opened in Washington at the National Theater, where such popular classics as *West Side Story* and *Amadeus* had

¹ For current Chinese and East-West perspectives on intercultural "misunderstanding" and literary perspectives, see Yue and Le Pichon; Yue and Meng; and Lee and Meng; for an interesting theoretical framework, *inbetween peripherality*, and a current East-West perspective, see Tötösy.