

Literature in Lee Kwang-Su and World Literature
: from a Cosmopolitan Vision

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<Abstract>

The collision between plural national languages may cause an exclusive nationalism. However, if we can hypothesize that the resistance of a national language is not directed to the (language of) outside but rather to all kinds of homogenized (language) space, we can consider that the national language inheres the power of resistance to that self-homogenized space which is based on self-nation-centeredness. This kind of resistance, which can also be named self-negation, is primarily related to the capacity to allow the Other in itself and to make itself the Other. This is the process in which the particularity formed through its resistance to a universality forms another universality: namely, the process of appropriating universalities.

The literary language can be generated and maintained in the process of such de-homogenization. Literature, by means of excluding and deconstructing the oppression of a universality, receives the Other as a momentum for reconstructing another universality, thus building up a field where the plural universalities are contested. In Yi Kwang-Su's bilingual way of writing, I will try to trace an example of the literature that built up such field beyond 'Korean' and 'modern'.

1. Introduction
2. Vernacularization
3. The Triumph of Vernaculars: Literature

1. Introduction

One may say that the fundamental elements of a nation's literature are inevitably the concepts of the nation-state, national language and nation (people); a national literature should be established on sovereign-nation, written and read with national language and by national people. However, this kind of definition based on modern value system might look somewhat narrow in light of Yi Kwang-Su's transnational imagination. He wrote in both Korean and Japanese languages, and his literature was received by Korean people as well as Japanese people. Here the border between Korean and Japanese literature disappears.

Where is Yi's literature located then? The answer can be given by reaffirming that it would be difficult to restrict Yi's literature to national borders. However, we can never neglect the fact that in the beginning his work emphasized a nationalism reminiscent of the Enlightenment, and, despite the broad criticism concerning a pro-Japanese writer who abandoned his nation, Yi himself insisted that his literature centered around Korea as a nation-state. After all, his literature shows a contradictory aspect that surpasses the border of a nation and at the same time maintains the identity of a nation.

This contradiction in Yi's literature, which anticipates its nature of cosmopolitanism, promotes ambivalent and transversal positionality in association with the nature of resistance in his literary language. Whether Korean or Japanese, his language can be judged as cosmopolitan insofar as it is formed on the resistance to the national homogeneity, a homogeneity formed in both Japanese imperial nationalism and Korean colonial nationalism. In this respect, Yi Kwang-Su's nationalism is local and universal at once. His cosmopolitan vernacular and literature make such ambivalence possible.

Now I need to clarify that what we call 'cosmopolitan vernacular' in Yi Kwang-Su indicates precisely the whole process of vernacularization or bilingual writing in his literature rather than a specifically pre-fixed language or vernacular. Yi's

imaginations were not always tied to pre-fixed linguistic places or territories or boundaries constituted with the process of modernization (or Westernization). Yi's imagination goes beyond nationalism and modern-nation-state system, yet bound to them in that he desires to return to home-place of modern-nation-state of Korea which can be hardly classified into modern or postmodern constellations. What matters in this tricky situation is to trace Yi's literature, its trajectory beyond the modernist (and nationalist) insistence on territorialized imaginations of identity. We may be able to do this work by foregrounding the aspect of de-territorialization of his vernacular which occurs within his literature, just as if we can witness it in our present phenomena such as migration, mediatization and capital flow.

Yi Kwang-Su's literature traces the exile between linguistic places and the pursuit of cosmopolitan community. Its nature cannot satisfactorily be explained with the concepts of cultural plurality and multiculturalism. This is because the cultural plurality of multiculturalism can be fundamentally confined to the frame of a nation. Yi's imagination was born and continued in a sort of anarchist status. His pursuit toward nationalism in his first period was filled with resistance itself rather than directed toward an ultimate point such as establishment of modern-nation-state; in other words, such cultural centers as China and Japan to which he referred in his literary enterprise were merely mediators and contact-detonations of his resistance rather than the ultimate targets. I will verify this resistance by highlighting the whole trajectory of his bilingual way of writing.

My aim in this paper is to argue that the language of resistance, which is the nature of vernacular, grounds Yi's bilingual writing and links his literature to cosmopolitanism.

2. Vernacularization

In the essay "Age of Transition between Korean and Chinese Languages" written in 1908, Yi Kwang-Su strove to establish the position of Korean language as national language by regarding Chinese language as a foreign language, and thereby

presenting a modern-nation-state consciousness. In short, what he noted in the process of establishing national literature was language, which was a vernacular; that is, he intended to found national literature on the so-called vernacularization. In the West, vernacularization accompanied and enabled the production of the nation-state; vernacularization helped initiate an early modern era, marked by its specific type of modernity. In the process of developing a Korean literature, Yi was also involved in a vernacularization of a great tradition as we see in his essay “The Concept of Chosun (Korean) Literature”(1929) in which he differentiates between Korean literature and Chinese literature by emphasizing that Korean literature must be written in Korean language. Here Korean language represents the national language. The stress of national language is directly linked to the stress of modern-nation-state as the place and system where the national language locates and operates. In this respect, one might say that Yi Kwang-Su formulated national literature like the formation of modern nationalism of the West.

However, it is very crucial to point out that the Korean language submitted by Yi Kwang-Su possesses the nature of resistant language surpassing the dimension of nation-state. In other words, the language of national literature (national language) that he stressed sustains undeniably Korean literature, but it also surpasses the dimension of national language insofar as it resists to its own homogenized “placeness.” If we can understand this process of surpassing national borders as vernacularization occurred in Yi Kwang-Su’s literature, we need to discuss it as a problem to highlight how a new vernacular could be created as language of de-homogenization rather than to investigate how a new vernacular was selected among the existing languages.

The vernacularization process, to borrow from Bahkin, promotes the centrifugal force of the unofficial language resistant to the imperial-official language based on the single centripetal force; in this sense, the vernacularization process is the source of language diversity and the moral structure in which a language is no more governed by another language. Now I would like to call into question for whether and how Yi Kwang-Su was conscious of this vernacularization process in his literary enterprise.

Yi strove to justify vernacularization by foregrounding the Korean language as peculiar to Korean people and thus representing the people's sensibility in Korea. However, he seems to have undergone difficulty in establishing a justification because in the center of his choice of language there was an obstacle of sensibility obtained from the outside rather than that peculiar to Korean people. Facing this problem, Yi intended to allow the space of plural languages and plural sensibilities, and through the contest between these plural languages he strove to extract the best language to refine the Korean people's sensibility.

In this respect, it can be shown that Yi used multilingualism to further vernacularization. For him, the sensibility obtained from the outside indicates the sensibility imported from Japan and the West, and more importantly, that which Yi formed in his inside facing the multilingual reality. The language that Yi submitted in his vernacularization and the sensibility that that language should represent were no longer existed on the basis of territorialized imagination. He sought to build up the new kind of language by virtue of confronting himself to his contemporary situation, and his own new sensibility through such language. The contemporary situation Yi faced consisted of two kinds of realities: a reality that had been hegemonized by Chinese cultural initiative and a substantial reality of Korea that Yi attempted to grasp beyond China. By the same token, Yi's reality in relation to Japan was also involved in the duplicated frame of that coined by Japan and that to be recovered. In confronting such dual realities itself Yi Kwnag-Su aimed to choose his own language, thus demonstrating the nature of resistance and self-negation that Yi's concept of language was destined to have.

Now the point that we should observe in Yi's vernacularization is how he recognized in Korean vernacular a sensibility derived from the outside. For him, Korean vernacular could not be the only national language although there must have been national language in order to establish national literature. This is because Korean vernacular could be a translated language from Chinese and Japanese languages. Precisely here, we can observe the nature of resistance in Yi's vernacular. In the essay "What Is Literature?" that he wrote in 1916, he was not satisfied with negating the

past of Korean literature and prospecting its future but rather moved toward the work of seeking the language with which he could represent the reality of Korea by understanding the Korean language as a translated language that includes the sensibility from the outside. In order to escape from the outside such as China and Japan or more precisely the internalized outside in Korea and thereby to make him link to the true outside which is the Other as momentum of other-ing so as to recover the inside, Korean or Japanese or Chinese were not to be discernible (or differentiated). The language of 'Korea' that Yi sought was not necessarily Korean or Japanese based on the trajectory of homogeneity but the language of resistance.

In this regard, Yi's vernacularization leads us to revise the equation that identifies the use of the vernacular with the birth of nation. The premise that there exists specific vernacular in the process of building up the modern-nation-state can no longer be taken for granted; it is rather a result of imagination. In this case, vernacular does not derive from a sort of origin but should be chosen and then, ultimately, constituted.

Then, how did Yi Kwang-Su's vernacular establish its own place among Korean, Chinese and Japanese languages? Between Korean and Chinese languages Yi Kwang-Su chose Korean through his will. In a similar vein, the relationship between Korean and Japanese is characterized by negotiation; in the context of negotiation Yi sought the possibility of co-existence of both languages. After all, Yi Kwang-Su's vernacular was not unified into a single level but took on the multiple structure; it was not confined to the modern nation-state system insofar as it was born out of the process of resistance to China and Japan, and went beyond them by including them.

3. The Triumph of Vernaculars: Literature

To borrow from sociologist Ulrich Beck, the principle of cosmopolitanism is found in the relationship of both/and rather than either/or. As stated before, Yi Kwang-Su chose Korean by excluding Chinese, and then negotiated between Korean and Japanese, and afterwards, by including both, moved toward the cosmopolitan stage. In

his literary production, Yi Kwnag-Su was always concerned with the problem of negotiating between Japanese as national language and Korean as vernacular, and Japanese as vernacular and Korean as national language. As a result, he strove to build up the cosmopolitan vernacular by adopting both. For him, vernacular did not indicate any specific-single-fixed language but the process itself in which he uses the plural vernaculars in his literature.

Yi Kwnag-Su's vernacular literary language's' did not 'emerge'; they were deliberately constructed. The bilingual way of writing which based his vernacular literary language was also made, willed, chosen and planned. His vernaculars, connected with literature, become cosmopolitan so as to surpass the locality of nations. His bilingual way of writing makes an easy connection between vernacular and literature through the notion of literary-language-diversity.

If Korean language was the vernacular that Yi desired, Japanese language was also the vernacular that he wanted. In this dual process, he practiced literature rather than national literature. His vernacular literary languages arise on the stage of cosmopolitan vernacular through the negotiation and inclusive co-existence of Korean and Japanese languages rather than the choice of one of them.

What is crucial in the stage of negotiation is to recognize the Other's vernacular as a vernacular. This means to recognize Japanese language as a particular vernacular rather than national language as a universal language. The thought that a nation-people use the same national language in the same nation-state is merely an ideology mobilized in the process of establishing the modern nation-state. Like a literary language in a state, a national language is sustained by the plural structure of diverse languages which is far from maintaining linguistic homogeneity.

Ironically, the proclamation made by Ueda Gastoshi(上田萬年) that national language is the mental blood of Japanese people can be understood as if the concept and institution of Japanese language was mobilized in the process of establishing the nation-state in Japan. Conversely, behind Yi's position to recognize Japanese as 'national language', there is the paradoxical participation to the situation that Japanese is mobilized as national language. In other words, the Japanese language that Yi

recognized as national language was the language of the empire, an expanded form of Japan as a modern nation-state. The national language for Yi Kwang-Su was Japanese and simultaneously Korean language. Such dual recognition allowed his vernacular to release from the boundary of national language. This is a resistance to imperial language and simultaneously to colonial language. By virtue of these dual resistances, Yi was able to consistently postpone the homogeneity of national language without being absorbed into the ideology of national language.

In all, Yi's vernacular literary languages were born in the process of surpassing the national languages that he faced. This means that Yi did not recognize the triumph of one of the national languages such as Korean and Japanese languages but exhibits consciousness of negating the homogenized structure itself in the two respectively. This consciousness arises along with the attempt of seeking the significance of maintaining the particular.

Maintaining the particular helped Yi Kwang-Su move toward cosmopolitanism through negation of the homogenized linguistic places. By using Korean and Japanese languages as his own vernaculars, he showed that vernacular is intrinsically particular; in this transversal process between homogenized places, he discovered the outside of his own vernaculars and thereby allowed his vernaculars to have cosmopolitan nature without excluding the outside. In this respect, I propose that the triumph of vernacular be considered in the plural, as the triumph of vernaculars which means to form the conversational relationship of vernaculars based on the recognition of their heterogeneity and the promotion of their consolidation and transversal communication. The practice of de-homogenization that Yi Kwang-Su pursued with his vernacular literary languages leads us to evaluate his literary language as a cosmopolitan vernacular and as approaching the realization of literature which surpasses language through language.
