

Liberated by Oppression: Literary Reflections of Colonial Korea between the United States and Japan

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INTRODUCTION

In 1875 the Japanese sent a war ship, the *Unyō maru*, into the waters off the Korean island of Kanghwa. As expected, the unauthorized ship was fired on by Korean batteries, providing the Japanese the pretext they had been seeking to force Korea open to commerce. The Japanese Navy blockaded the coast, demanded an official apology, and compelled the Chosŏn regime to sign the Treaty of Kanghwa on February 27, 1876.¹ Although the Japanese believed they had brought, albeit under duress, the Koreans into the modern world order, the Koreans viewed the treaty as a normalization of the status quo, and, as such, a way to keep Japan at a palatable distance while maintaining their own superior position in the traditional East Asian world order.² Ironically, however, this also provided Korea with unprecedented access to information about the West, and “convinced leaders of the Korean government not only of the inevitability but also the desirability of coming to terms with the United States.”³ It was not until 1882, when it signed a “Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation” with the United States, that the Chosŏn court truly and somewhat voluntarily acknowledged the need for and desirability of participation in an order that both lay outside traditional Chinese influence and checked rising Japanese ambition.⁴ Thus began a delicate triangular arrangement among the three countries that would witness significant shifts in balance prior to Japan’s defeat and Korea’s subsequent liberation on August 15, 1945.

This particular chapter of Korean history, the origins of and shifts in this configuration, was not lost on those who wrote literature. In fact, from the late 1890s, a crucial portion of Korea’s inchoate modern fiction was overtly editorial. Prior to the advent of the new novel in 1906, Korean writers experimented with the *sosajŏk nonsŏl* (narrative editorial) and the *nonsŏlchŏk sŏsa* (editorial narrative) from 1897 to 1905.⁵ Notably, from November 17, 1905, the very day of its conclusion, Japan’s newest offense, the Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty, was already under fire in Korean fiction. The anonymous *nonsŏlchŏk sŏsa* “*Sogyŏng kwa anjŭmbangi mundap* (Questions and Answers between a Blind Man and a Cripple)” appeared in the daily *Taehan maeil sinbo* on November 17 and ran until December 13, 1905. While the author’s decision to remain veiled is rather understandable given the precarious political climate at the time, the work’s content is unambiguous. It roundly criticizes not only the Japanese but also those Korean officials who behave obsequiously toward them and other foreigners while dealing despotically with their own people.⁶

Out of this tradition of editorial narratives was born the *sin sosŏl*, or new novel. Despite some contention, Yi Injik’s (1862-1916) *Hyŏl ūi nu* (*Tears of Blood*) is largely considered the first *sin sosŏl*. Yi began writing and serializing it in *Mansebo*, the daily organ he oversaw as editor-in-chief, from July 22, 1906, a mere seven months after the conclusion of the protectorate treaty. The narrative begins in 1895 P’yŏngyang amidst the cannon fire of the Sino-Japanese War. From there it follows its protagonist, the young Korean girl Ongnyŏn, from Korea to Japan to America. Largely mirroring Korea’s own fate, Ongnyŏn is taken in and aided by Japan early on, but is later betrayed and abandoned. It is in America that she truly succeeds, is reunited with her father, and plans to

¹ See Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 154-254. For more recent examinations by the same author in Korean, see Kim Kihyŏk, *Kŭndae Han Chung Il kwan’gyesa* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2007) and *Kanghwado choyak ūi yŏksajŏk paegyŏng kwa kukchejŏk hwan’gyŏng* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2007).

² See Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys: The Opening of Korea, 1875-1885* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 45-50, James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 252-271, and Kim Key-Hiuk, op. cit., 4-25.

³ Young Ick Lew, *Early Korea Encounters with the United States and Japan: Six Essays on Late Nineteenth-Century Korea* (Seoul: The Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 2008), 3-4.

⁴ One of the great ironies of this treaty is that was proactively brokered by China to reverse the effects of the Kanghwa Treaty. However, “the United States, which turned out to be the only Western treaty power to open its legation in Korea, refused to recognize China’s suzerainty over Korea and, instead, encouraged Korean independence from China.” (Key-Hiuk Kim, op. cit., 348-349)

⁵ See Kim Yŏngmin, *Han’guk kŭndae sosŏlsa* (Seoul: Sol, 1997), 23-80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-67.

return to and reconstruct Korea. Although the *sin sosŏl* did produce and represent important new developments in Korean fiction, like its editorial predecessors, it was explicitly didactic.⁷ As such, it did not shy away from historical realities but rather sought to instruct the Korean people on both how to interpret them in the past and overcome them in the future. And the foregrounding of America's pivotal role in creating a modern and independent Korea was unequivocal.

Just over a decade after Yi Injik had penned the final installment of *Hyŏl ũi nu*, Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950) began serializing *Mujŏng* (*The Heartless*), largely considered Korea's first *kŭndae sosŏl*, or modern novel. Perhaps to signal its novelty, *Mujŏng*'s first installment ran in the January 1 issue of the *Maeil sinbo*, somewhat ironically the daily newspaper published by the Japanese Government General in Korea. It captured readers' attention and disseminated its various messages over a total of 126 installments before coming to an end on June 14, 1917. Like Yi Injik before him, Yi Kwangsu clearly placed the novel's instrumental value in reforming the masses ahead of its role in bringing them pleasure.⁸ Despite the fact that Korea remained nominally independent, the shock and betrayal of 1905 were enough immediately to drive certain influential Koreans to respond in print and others even to suicide. Seven years after the much more overt and final annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, there simply was no room in *Mujŏng* for anything even resembling the cautiously optimistic early installments of *Hyŏl ũi nu* regarding Japan's potential role in Korea's development. Rather, America is immediately and completely foregrounded while Japan is relegated to the periphery. For the true protagonists, America is naively portrayed as Korea's best if not only hope, while Japan represents an increasingly distant and fruitless past flirtation with a derivative and tainted modernity.

Only one and a half years after Yi penned the naively hopeful final lines of *Mujŏng*, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson made his famous declaration regarding the right of all nations to self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. Two months after that, partially in response to what they viewed as a U.S. commitment, the Korean people rose up to reclaim their independence on March 1, 1919.⁹ Despite Wilson's rhetoric, the United States offered no official or even meaningful support. This was not the first time America had failed to aid Korea against Japan. Despite certain provisions in the 1882 treaty that were interpreted by Korea as guaranteeing mutual assistance,¹⁰ the U.S. observed Japan's 1905 aggression largely in silence. The same was true in 1910. Somehow these earlier instances were overlooked at the time, perhaps because America's ostensible neutrality still appeared positive vis-à-vis Japan's belligerence. The failure, however, to deliver on the much more concrete promise of 1919 marked a watershed in Korean understandings and future literary representations of the United States.

As seen above, modern Korean literature had never existed in a vacuum; rather, from its inception it had responded to and reflected historical forces and political events. Thus, even in the 1920s and 30s, after young Korean writers had vociferously rebelled against their predecessors' didactic approach to fiction, favoring instead what they called "art for art's sake,"¹¹ they did not shy away from depicting Korea's continued balancing act between Japan and the United States. During the 1920s it appears that Korean writers of fiction largely turned inward; they registered their disillusionment with both America and Japan by commenting on neither. This decade-long silence saw the emergence of a naturalism that examined Korean everyday life in all its gritty reality, and largely sequestered from observable external influence. From 1930, however, writers once again directed their gaze outward, first toward America, but this time with a diametrically opposite focus. Chu Yosŏp's (1902-1972) novelette *Yumi oegi* (*Notes from a Stay in America*), which was serialized in the daily *Tonga ilbo* from February 22 to April 11, 1930, appears to be the first instance of this revised view of America. Unlike his

⁷ Kwŏn Yŏngmin, "Sin sosŏl ũi munhaksajŏk sŏnggyŏk chaeron," *Inmunhak yŏn'gu*, Vol. 17, 6-7.

⁸ In his 1921 essay "Munsa wa suyang [The writer and cultivation]," Yi stressed the writer of literature's role as a social leader (*sahoe ũi chidoja*) and social reformer (*sahoe kaeryangga*).

See Kim Yŏngmin, *Han'guk kŭndae sosŏl ũi hyŏngsŏng kwajŏng* (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2005), 203.

⁹ See Frank Baldwin, "The March First Movement: Korean Challenge, Japanese Response" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1969), and Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119-135.

¹⁰ Article 1 reads in part: "If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement...." An earlier draft had promised to "render assistance and protection." "The 1882 US and Korea Treaty: Draft and Final Versions," accessed April 7, 2014,

<http://www.instrok.org/instrok/resources/Draft%20and%20Final%20Versions.pdf>.

¹¹ This actually began from February 1919 in Tokyo with the publication by Kim Tongin, Chu Yohan, and others of *Ch'angjo*." See Yi Kyŏnghun, "Ch'unwŏn kwa Ch'angjo," *Hyŏndae sosŏl yŏn'gu*, 14 (2001), 186.

predecessors, Chu had actually lived in the United States, spending 1927-1929 working on a master's degree in education at Stanford University. Although this certainly accounts for the greater realism and pessimism of his works set in America, it does not explain what soon happened in the works of mainstream Korean writers who had never even visited to say nothing of lived in the U.S.¹² From January 1, 1931, less than eight months after the final installment of *Yumi oegi*, Yöm Sangsöp began serializing his classic *Samdae (Three Generations)* in the *Chosön ilbo*. It ran until September 17, racking up an impressive 215 separate installments. Through the character Cho Sanghun, a debauched Protestant Christian who studied in the United States as a youth, America is portrayed as hypocritical and morally bankrupt. His son, Cho Tökgi, a young man with the intelligence and money to study wherever he pleases, is happily ensconced in Kyoto, and not at all happy about the prospect of having to return to Korea prematurely due in large part to his father's corruption. In many respects, this depiction represents an inversion of the technique used by Yi Kwangsu to displace Japan and elevate America. Now the U.S. is the past flirtation, the broken promise, while Japan represents the future. And here another inversion becomes possible: just as Japan's aggression made America appear more attractive from the end of the nineteenth century, the perceived repeated failures of America to fulfill its promises, both political and cultural, also had an effect on perceptions of Japan. And while it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that Japan is from the 1930s portrayed with anything close to the ingenuous optimism that once surrounded America, it is fair to say that Korea's liberation from its American fantasy did lead to a more neutral and balanced portrayal of Japan in the fiction of this period.

The individual historical events above are well-known and well-documented, however, their peculiar effects on literature remain little explored. This paper will examine these repercussions and reverberations as they appear in some of the most representative and anthologized full-length novels spanning much of the Japanese colonial period. Although this dark chapter in modern Korean history formally started with the annexation of 1910, the protectorate treaty of 1905 was presciently seen by many Koreans as its true beginning. Novels from 1906 and 1917 provide valuable glimpses into Korean perceptions of Japan and America from four years prior to and seven years following formal annexation. Following a long silence in the wake of the failed independence movement of March 1, 1919, works from the very beginning of the 1930s offer insights into Korea's changing views of its position between these two powers in a decade of relative cultural freedom. Perhaps somewhat ironically, it was Korea's disillusionment with America and mounting if reluctant acceptance of colonial reality that was in some sense liberating. It is from 1931 that we see a systematic dismantling of America's privileged position and a concomitant if reluctant acceptance of the reality of Japanese hegemony, as well as of Koreans' need to acknowledge and accommodate themselves to this new reality.

**JAPAN AS STOPOVER, AMERICA AS DESTINATION:
DECENTERING JAPAN IN
YI INJIK'S *TEARS OF BLOOD***

Andre Schmid conclusively documents the decentering of China and its subsequent replacement by Japan as the new leader in East Asia at the close of the nineteenth century.¹³ Although this was a process that occurred over a period of time and on several fronts, perhaps the most decisive single event in this process was the Japanese victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). What Schmid also demonstrates, however, is that Korean support of Japan was predicated on the latter's "solidifying Korean independence and protecting Korean territory."¹⁴ And this is the context in which Japan's next military victory, the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), was viewed by many Koreans at the time. With the forced protectorate treaty on November 17, 1905, less than two months following the end of the war on September 5, the landscape had changed dramatically. Yi Injik, who had studied in Japan and served as an interpreter in support of Japan's efforts against Russia, published the first installment of *Hyöl ũi nu* on July 22, 1906. Yi had a full eight months to mull over the events of the previous decade before presenting them to his audience. Not surprisingly, he opens his work amidst the chaos of the Sino-Japanese War, and briefly proceeds to chronicle the immediate effects of Japan's victory and seeming largesse toward Korea. As the novel progresses, however, it largely serves to decenter Japan and replace it with the United States.

¹² For an exploration of Korean novels set and based on living in the U.S., see U Miyöng, "Singminji sidae ijuja ũi chagi insik kwa miguk—Chu Yosöp kwa Kang Yönghül ũi sosöl ũl chungsim ũro," *Han 'guk kündae munhak yö'n'gu*, Vol. 17, April 2008, 325-359.

¹³ Andre Schmid, op. cit., 55-138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

Most immediately and drastically touched by the war is Kim Ongnyōn. Although she is a young girl who does not appear until the work's eighteenth installment, her progress throughout the novel largely serves as a metaphor for Korea and its relationship to Japan and the United States. The first seventeen installments of the novel are devoted to a general description of the horrors of war, an assessment of the Korea-China-Japan relationship, and of Ongnyōn's parents' respective situations. When she finally appears, Ongnyōn has been shot in the leg by a stray Japanese bullet. Although the narrator is quick to inform readers that she was quite lucky because Chinese bullets are laced with poison, the ominous juxtaposition of a gunshot wound and good fortune foreshadows the violence and pain inherent in Japan's assistance of Korea. Although the Chinese are clearly vilified, the Japanese are not portrayed as unconditionally positive. In the fifth installment the narrator informs readers that "the people within the city walls had grown sick" of the Chinese," but also of "all sorts of anxieties" regarding the Japanese troops, who "had swarmed in like black clouds during monsoon season to occupy every bit of space both inside and outside the city walls."¹⁵ Injured and separated from her family, Ongnyōn does consent to the offer of Major Inoue, the Japanese doctor who treats her, to go to Japan and live with his wife. Even in her compromised state, however, she accepts the invitation on the sole condition that if her parents are discovered to be alive that Major Inoue will immediately send her back to Korea.

"Well, if you go and stay at my house, I will send you to school and ... I vow to scour your country and if I find your parents alive I will immediately send you back."

"If you believe my father and mother are alive, and if you will be sending me back home, I will go wherever and do whatever you command."

"... My home is in Osaka, Japan, and if you go to my home my wife will be there. Since we have no son or daughter, ... she will love you very much, so consider her your own mother and go stay there."¹⁶

As is clearly demonstrated in the above exchange, Korean reliance on Japan in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War was neither blind nor absolute, rather it begins under duress and is framed as contractual and temporary. Furthermore, it is accepted based on promises of modern education and unconditional love and nurturing.

Equally important when considering this temporary alliance is the way in which Japan presented itself and, as a result, the way in which it was viewed by Koreans. Not content with simply modernizing, Japan sought metaphorically to "exit Asia" and become a part of the West, and Koreans were most often attracted not to anything inherently Japanese but to Japan as a geographically proximate and easily accessible source of modern Western "civilization and enlightenment." Ongnyōn first encounters Japan in the form of a modern, Western doctor working for the Red Cross. This is also evident upon her arrival in Japan at Mrs. Inoue's home. Although Ongnyōn immediately notes foreboding differences between Mrs. Inoue and her actual mother back in Korea—"her appearance was just the opposite of Ongnyōn's mother." ... "Mrs. Inoue's eyes were filled with menace," and her face had "a cold, blue tinge"¹⁷—the young Korean chooses to trust her, and to fulfill the contract. Furthermore, this seeking the West via Japan is made explicit by the very first command given to the servant.

"Yukiko, take our Ongnyōn to a general store and buy some Western women's clothes that fit her, then go wash her at a bath house, and take off those Korean clothes and put on the Western ones."¹⁸

Ongnyōn will in a sense be baptized, her Korean past washed away. But she will replace it not with Japan but with the West. It is completely fitting that she will be first taken not to anywhere associated with traditional Japan but to a "general store"¹⁹ and outfitted in Western clothes. From the outset, the narrator makes it perfectly clear that she is in Japan to access modern culture and learning, and with the promise of a return to Korea.

Once the decision to go to Japan has been made, however, Ongnyōn proves a model student. "Less than a half year after going to Japan, she was so good at Japanese that people who came to Major Inoue's house and saw

¹⁵ Yi Injik, *Hyōl ūi nu* (*Tears of Blood*), ed., Kwōn Yōngmin, (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2001), 180. All translations of *Hyōl ūi nu* are my own and taken from the original *Mansebo* version as reprinted in the above volume.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

¹⁷ Yi Injik, *op. cit.*, 211.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁹ General store is *chaphwajōm* (雜貨店), the predecessor of the modern department store. For a study of the department store and its various meanings, including its close association with Western "enlightenment," in late-Meiji Japan, see Jinno Yuki, *Shumi no tanjo: Hyakkaten ga tsukutta teisuto* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1994).

her thought she was a Japanese child, not a Korean.”²⁰ And within three years, “because she graduated at the top of her class, she was praised by everyone.” Readers are quickly informed, however, that “to Ongnyŏn’s ears, this did not sound the least bit pleasant.”²¹ She has labored in earnest, but remains fixated on her return. Korea has remained faithful to its half of the bargain, but if Japan’s concern for Korea begins as a mixed blessing, it quickly devolves into betrayal and abandonment. Almost immediately after having been informed that Major Inoue has been killed in battle, Mrs. Inoue begins to resent Ongnyŏn, who is now viewed as an obstacle to remarriage. Although she waits for three years until Ongnyŏn finishes school, she begrudges her adopted daughter tremendously. On the very day Ongnyŏn graduates, regarding the tragic event in which Ongnyŏn lost her family, Mrs. Inoue cruelly remarks, “If you’d grown up in Korea, you wouldn’t even have been able to watch other people study. It was for your good fortune that the Sino-Japanese War broke out.”²² Mrs. Inoue is soon joined by her servant Yukiko who pushes her even further toward abandoning the young, helpless girl: “Just get rid of the young mistress, and everything will be fine.”²³ The message is clear: the promise of love and support from Japan will be broken once it becomes inconvenient or unprofitable. Although the novel opens in 1895, it was written in 1906. Unlike the fictional Ongnyŏn, Yi Injik wrote *Hyŏl ūi nu* with full knowledge of the events of the decade following the war, including the forced protectorate treaty of 1905. As such, although the work begins with a mildly optimistic picture of Japan, both Korean expectations and the narrative are quickly guided toward America.

Deserted and forlorn, Ongnyŏn contemplates suicide, even venturing to water’s edge at Ōsaka Harbor. This, however, is not a story of Korea’s defeat in Japan but of its triumph and reconstruction in and by means of America. First by a policeman and later by two separate dreams of her mother back in Korea, she is prevented from leaping to her death. Returning home from her final visit to the harbor, she overhears Mrs. Inoue and Yukiko discussing her absence and decides never to return. She lacks the money to go as far as Tokyo, and so buys a third-class ticket for Ibaragi. On the train, that ultimate symbol of forward movement and modernity, she meets Ku Wansŏ, a young Korean man bound for study in the United States. Though their chance meeting and his offer to pay for her studies in America may strike contemporary readers as contrived, Ku’s significance is unequivocal. Unlike Ongnyŏn, who was essentially coerced to accept Japan after having been shot and potentially orphaned, Ku represents a Korean with the wherewithal to make his own choices. He immediately and resolutely decides to study in America, never once even considering Japan. Ku offers to pay for Ongnyŏn’s travel to and education in America much like Major Inoue did with Japan: “Then we two can go over to America, and, while we are studying, if you hear any news of your parents, I will send you back home first.”²⁴ Unlike the major, however, Ku possesses the dual benefits of being Korean and privy to the author’s 1906 hindsight.

“As people of our country, what use is there in living if we cannot study and escape barbarism? ... If we live on unaware of how the world works, in a few years another conflict like the Sino-Japanese War will break out in our country. So you must begin studying immediately....”²⁵

Not only does Ku use his resources to extricate the abused Ongnyŏn from Japanese duplicity and bring her to America with him, he also tacitly concludes that her years of study in Japan add up to nothing for the future of Korea. The very clear subtext here is that until now she has not really been studying, and that in Japan too much time has already been wasted.

Adding weight to the above interpretation is the extremely distinct path taken by Kim Kwani, Ongnyŏn’s father. Also believing his family has died in the war, Kim has an epiphany regarding the cause of the conflict as well as how to forestall future calamity.

“That’s right. There is nothing to be done about the dead. What’s most important is to ensure that the living don’t again suffer these things. Each of us must come to his senses to make our country as bright and strong as the countries of others, so that we, its people, can preserve our lives and preserve our property.”²⁶

²⁰ Ibid., 214.

²¹ Ibid., 220.

²² Ibid., 221.

²³ Ibid., 227.

²⁴ Ibid., 237.

²⁵ Ibid., 237-238.

²⁶ Ibid., 183-184.

This emphasis on strength for the preservation of life and property echoes the earlier, non-fictional insistence on “solidifying Korean independence and protecting Korean territory.” Kim’s method is straightforward: in order to “accomplish great things for his country,” he vows to “travel to every country in the world” in order to “get a proper education.”²⁷ He proclaims that he will learn in numerous countries, but immediately and directly goes to the United States to achieve his goals. Through his soliloquy and actions readers are presented with a categorical conflation of study in America and a Korean strength that will prevent foreign powers from abusing them in the future. Equally importantly, and paralleling Ku Wansō above, Kim is completely free of external constraints and never even considers study in Japan.

Only one of the three protagonists—a young, injured, helpless girl—studies in Japan, and only briefly. Despite her early successes, she is soon betrayed and abandoned. The novel’s setting shifts to the United States where she meets true and continued academic success, is reunited with her father, discovers her mother is alive and waiting for her back in Korea, and considers marrying Ku. In fact, her father and she are both studying in Washington, D.C., and he becomes aware of this through a newspaper article chronicling her graduation as high school valedictorian. As in Japan, she is “the most praised girl in the school,”²⁸ but in America this leads not to abandonment and betrayal but to reunion with her father and repatriation to Korea. The novel comes to a close with three of its four protagonists still in the United States, and the promise of a sequel detailing what happens “after the girl has returned to her homeland.”²⁹ Written just after the disappointment and disillusionment of 1905, *Hyōl ūi nu* presents no true hope for Korea in Japan. Rather, it depicts an abstract and naively optimistic American dream based on the conception that America is the true source of what Koreans had mistakenly sought from Japan in the past, and on the misconception that America would somehow protect Korea in the future.

JAPAN AS DISTANT PAST, AMERICA AS IMMEDIATE FUTURE: YI KWANGSU’S *MUJŎNG*

The political coercion of the 1905 protectorate treaty, egregious as it was, paled in comparison to the annexation of 1910. The latter carried a crushing finality, marking the end of Korea as an independent nation state. As such, its effects on literature were proportionally salient, albeit more subtly expressed. Although the draconian controls in place from 1910-1919 likely precluded any sort of direct criticism, Yi Kwangsu wrote *Mujōng* in 1917 with a full knowledge of and under the full weight of Japan’s despotic rule over the peninsula. In addition to these specific political abuses, Yi, who had studied in Japan and desired to do so in America, harbored more general and longstanding doubts about Japan’s value as a source of authentic Western civilization and enlightenment.³⁰ In terms of literature specifically, he wrote that “a literary work engages its readers most effectively when it depicts life as realistically as possible.”³¹ Unable or unwilling to denounce Japan directly, Yi simply relegated it to a position of relative insignificance within the novel. Japan’s actual political hegemony was countered by Yi’s depiction of the country via those Koreans most closely associated with it as intellectually and culturally impotent, as well as morally bankrupt. America, by contrast, is foregrounded from the work’s opening scene to its final installment as the first, best hope for Korea’s development and eventual independence.

On the first day of the first month of 1917, the first scene of this much-anticipated work of modern Korean fiction begins with the following lines.

Yi Hyōngsik, an English teacher at Kyōngsōng School, finished his two p.m. fourth-year English class and . . . made his way toward the house of Elder Kim. . . . Elder Kim had hired him . . . as a private tutor for his daughter, Sōnhyōng, who needed to learn English in order to study in America the following year.³²

Thus begins the modern Korean novel. Unlike *Hyōl ūi nu*, which opens with a scene from the past and Japanese troops on Korean soil, *Mujōng* opens in the present, devoid of Japanese people, and with Koreans’ venturing to the United States in the immediate future. The English language, the intellectual capital that enables study in America, also appears from the work’s very first line. And despite the fact that the narrator claims in the second

²⁷ Ibid., 184.

²⁸ Ibid., 242.

²⁹ Ibid., 269.

³⁰ Yi’s mentor, An Ch’angho, lived in California. Yi was on his way to join An in San Francisco in 1914, before having his trip stifled by the outbreak of World War One.

³¹ Yi Kwangsu, op. cit., p. 297.

³² Yi Kwangsu, *Mujōng* (*The Heartless*), ed., Kim Ch’ōl, (Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2003), p. 35. All translations are my own and taken from the original *Maeil sinbo* version as reprinted in the above volume.

installment that “Hyōngsik had no power whatsoever. In a golden age, he lacked even the power of gold,”³³ readers, in fact, soon discover that English, and its explicit connection to the United States, is sufficient social capital to allow the orphaned and otherwise unpropertied Hyōngsik to wed the wealthy Sōnhyōng, and thereby solve his financial woes.

From the work’s opening scene, Hyōngsik has already put Japan and the past behind him, and is focused instead on teaching English in Korea in the present. But Korea in the present is a Japanese colony, and populated by many he deems beneath himself. He already possesses “a pride and arrogance toward Korean society,” and believes that “among Korean educators, he alone has the ability to understand the new civilization and discern Korea’s future path.”³⁴ Once he is engaged to Sōnhyōng, however, his focus falls solely on the United States and its role in constructing a future Korea. Leaving Elder Kim’s house, he realizes not only that “Sōnhyōng had become his wife” but also that “he could go to the United States, enter college, get his B.A., and then get his Ph.D.” He informs Usōn that he will leave almost immediately, and that through his impending U.S. education it will be possible to make Koreans “into an entirely new people.”³⁵ His euphoria and nearly messianic confidence are made even clearer in installment 95.

Hyōngsik lived as happily as if in a dream. Each day he taught Sōnhyōng English, and, once finished teaching, talked about all sorts of things. . . .

Hyōngsik appeared to have simply removed himself from this world. . . . From the time he awoke until he went to sleep, he thought only of Sōnhyōng and America. . . . All of his hopes lay on Sōnhyōng and America. . . . And when he returned from America, everyone would look up to and respect him. One with no hopes for the future may view the present as most valuable, but to Hyōngsik, who had tremendous hopes for the future, the present held no value at all. . . . His past self now appeared utterly without value and repulsive.³⁶

Although no truly direct criticism was possible in 1917, the above makes it clear that his past self had been foolish to believe and study in Japan, while his present is worthless in a colony controlled by Japan and filled with those he considers unenlightened. It is through America and not Japan that in the future he will “throw out the old Korea. . . and create a new and newly-civilized Korea.”³⁷

Although Sōnhyōng is portrayed as much less mature and aware than Hyōngsik, she too pins all her hopes and dreams on the United States. While studying English, but before becoming engaged, her thoughts are rather shallow and selfish.

Sōnhyōng smiled to herself as she imagined the figure of her wearing a fine Western dress, donning a Western hat with a feather in it, going to America, and talking freely in English with young Western woman similar to herself. She was certain that once she became proficient in English, both her own status would be elevated and that others would love and respect her more than now. She was also fairly certain that when she returned home after going to America and graduating from an American university like American young women do, there would be a person to accompany her. And that person accompanying her would be a man a man tall and handsome a man who had graduated from an American university.³⁸

Soon after this, however, the narrator informs readers that she is not to be blamed and of her potential. She is likened in turns to a “freshly-bloomed flower” in the spring that “still knows nothing of wind or rain, or aging, or wilting and falling,” and to “a machine that has never once actually been used but merely tucked away in a storage shed.” What she requires, we are told, is the “baptism by fire known as life,” which is provided to young girls in “civilized” countries through “poetry, fiction, music, art, and discussion.” Although the narrator also opines that “whether or not this ‘person’ would awaken, no one but God knew,”³⁹ this metaphorical baptism is presumably what awaits her in America. Finally, although a young woman, she essentially mirrors the two male protagonists of *Hyōl ūi nu*. Like those earlier characters, she is sheltered and somewhat naïve about the world.

³³ Ibid., 41.

³⁴ Ibid., 422-424.

³⁵ Ibid., 497-503.

³⁶ Ibid., 554-555.

³⁷ Ibid., 503.

³⁸ Ibid., 181-182. Nothing has been omitted from this quotation; the nonstandard punctuation reflects the original text.

³⁹ Ibid., 182-184.

Also like them, albeit guided, even pushed, by her prescient father, she has the resources to study anywhere she wants, and knows enough to decide on the United States without even considering Japan an option.

It would be inaccurate, however, to claim that Japan is never presented as an option in *Mujŏng*, but, just as in *Hyŏl ūi nu*, it is never considered by those with choices. Pak Yŏngch'ae, a *kisaeng* and the daughter of Hyŏngsik's former benefactor, does end up studying music in Japan. But it represents her only choice and she, like Japan, is a symbol of the past. Having been rejected for Sŏnhŏng and America by Hyŏngsik, she is on a train to P'yŏngyang where she intends to commit suicide. On the train she meets the rather masculine and charismatic Pyŏnguk, who, significantly, is dressed in Japanese clothing and whom Yŏngch'ae mistakes for Japanese. Yŏngch'ae is still mired in premodern beliefs about women; having been unable to preserve her virginity she sees suicide as her duty. Pyŏnguk, who is studying in Tokyo, is on the train to visit her parents in Hwangju. Hearing Yŏngch'ae's story, she confidently responds, "First of all, Yŏngch'ae, you have been deceived your entire life." She continues, "Your past history is a dream. Your true life opens from now."⁴⁰ But Yŏngch'ae is so thoroughly mired in the past that she remains unconvinced.

"If you have promised yourself to someone in your heart, but before you can give him your body you defile yourself, is it not your duty to die?"

...

"Then I will ask you a few things. First, was it you who promised your heart to Mr. Lee? That is to say, was it your idea to promise him your heart, or was it a single word from your father that made the promise?"

"Oh, that, well of course it was my father who made the promise."

"Then you decided your entire life based on a single word from your father!"

"Well, yes. Isn't that the way of the Three Obediences?"

"Ha, those so-called Three Obediences have killed several tens of millions of women over several thousands of years, and what's more they've made several tens of millions of men miserable. Those few accursed words, ha."⁴¹

Yŏngch'ae finally acquiesces to Pyŏnguk's exhortations to "completely forget what happened in the past and begin all things anew."⁴² They get off the train together and stay at Pyŏnguk's house before departing for Tokyo. In this context, the education and opportunities available in Japan are represented as suitable only for the most remedial and desperate cases. Japan is a sort of consolation prize for Yŏngch'ae, who has lost Hyŏngsik and whose understanding of the world is just barely emerging from the nineteenth century. For Hyŏngsik, Yi Kwangsu's autobiographical protagonist, however, Japan remains a place of past disappointments and broken promises.

In addition to Hyŏngsik's own past frustrations with the country, in the narrative present Japan is clearly conflated with unscrupulous and even nefarious Korean characters. Dean Pae Myŏngsik, a graduate of the Tokyo School of Education, oversees the Kyŏngsŏng School where Hyŏngsik works. Because, however, he "drinks alcohol and frequents brothel, he lacks the qualifications to be either dean or teacher."⁴³ Further implicating Japan is the fact that he was appointed to the position of dean by the school's superintendent, "Baron Kim," a title itself with clear connotations of collaboration with Japanese colonial authorities.⁴⁴ Although blissfully ignorant when queried on the educational theories of Johann Pestalozzi and Ellen Key, "Dean Pae liked regulations. 'Regular' and 'strictly' were the words he used most often." In fact, when the teachers laboring under him are finally unable to bear his excesses, Hyŏngsik protests, "Those aren't school regulations, they're more like the laws of an entire country,"⁴⁵ thereby cementing the dean's association with Japanese tyranny over Korea.

Far more grievous than the social and administrative shortcomings of Dean Pae, however, are the heinous deeds he commits with Kim Hyŏnsu, the profligate son of Baron Kim. When Hyŏngsik discovers that Yŏngch'ae has gone to Ch'ŏngnyangni "alone with some man" he fears the worst and rushes to save her. His friend, Sin Usŏn, whom he meets along the way, possesses much greater knowledge of the actual situation. She has been abducted by Kim and Pae, and Usŏn, fearing they intend to rape her, has informed the police. When they arrive,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 528.

⁴¹ Ibid., 530.

⁴² Ibid., 533.

⁴³ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁴ Titles such as "baron" or "duke" were given to those influential Koreans who volunteered from the outset to collaborate with rather than resist colonial rule.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 144.

Usŏn informs Hyŏngsik in Japanese that they are already too late: “*Mō dame da.*” Yŏngch’ae’s “hands and feet were bound. And her skirt and bloomers were torn. Her hair had come undone to cover her back, and red blood flowed from her lower lip.”⁴⁶ Although the police do arrest Kim and Pae, the narrator informs readers that “they were not the least bit repentant.”

To their way of thinking, it was alright to rape a woman like a *kisaeng* if she did not do as ordered. . . . Thus, they did not consider what they had done tonight to be conduct at all contrary to their morals or conscience. They were merely afraid that, due to the existence of pesky laws, having physical relations with a woman against her will would be deemed the crime of rape.⁴⁷

Although they hang their heads as Hyŏngsik berates them—“You also studied in Tokyo for four or five years.”—they are “embarrassed but not repentant.” For Dean Pae, “it was of no concern if she was raped, and of no concern even if she died.” Kim Hyŏnsu, for his part, thinks only of “the pleasant taste when embracing Yŏngch’ae,” and of how his wealth and social position as a baron will see him released the next morning. He “found Hyŏngsik’s interference despicable,” and silently contemplated his revenge, planning to see Hyŏngsik “spend his short life rotting in jail.”⁴⁸

Although Hyŏngsik is able to avoid retribution from Kim Hyŏnsu, he does believe until very near the end of the novel that Yŏngch’ae has taken her own life due to the rape. This allows him to pursue his American dream uninhibited. “The thought even occurred to him that the timing of Yŏngch’ae’s death had been most fortunate.”⁴⁹ At many junctures in the narrative Hyŏngsik appears quite cruel and self-involved. The *mujŏng* or heartlessness of the title, however, refers also to the ineluctability of his dispassionate choice for Korea of the United States over Japan, and as such, of Sŏnhyŏng over Yŏngch’ae. *Mujŏng* is ultimately about building a new Korea. As such, when the novel ends Yŏngch’ae is the only character who remains in Japan, and even she intends to return to Korea shortly: “Yŏngch’ae also graduated last spring at the top of her class in piano and vocal music from Tokyo’s Ueno Conservatory, and although she is still in Tokyo she too will return to Seoul around September.” Even Pyŏngguk, who first took Yŏngch’ae to Japan, has opted to leave: “Pyŏngguk graduated from music school, and earned her own money to study abroad for two years in Berlin, Germany.” And the story that began with their preparations ends, as did *Hyŏl ũi nu*, with its true protagonists still in United States: “Hyŏngsik and Sŏnhyŏng are now seniors at the University of Chicago in America; they have both been well and will be graduating this September. . . .”⁵⁰

THE TURNING POINT: MARCH 1, 1919

If *Mujŏng* can be seen as the literary expression of a cautious hope for eventual independence that prevailed in certain circles in 1917, the international political events of 1918 and especially 1919 gave rise to much more immediate aspirations among Koreans both on the peninsula and in Japan. In fact, following his abortive trip to the United States, Yi Kwangsu returned to Tokyo, his consolation prize as well, where he studied at Waseda University from 1915-1918. He also was “one of the student drafters of the February 8th Student Declaration of Independence which sparked the March 1st Movement.”⁵¹ Yi was a gradualist but his hopes materialized much earlier than he imagined when writing *Mujŏng*. President Woodrow Wilson’s announcement of his Fourteen Points on January 8, 1918 followed by his self-determination speech a month later on February 11 had already captured Koreans’ attention. The end of World War One and Wilson’s opening address at the Paris Peace Conference on January 18, 1919 appear to have galvanized Korean resolve and intensified hopes all the more. In early February, Korean students in Tokyo drafted a declaration of independence, and on March 1, 1919 a final version was proclaimed in Seoul and P’yŏngyang. This trust in the support of the United States, however, had once again been misplaced.

The independence activists had been inspired to action by naïve misconceptions: that Woodrow Wilson and the United States would help Korea because the American president had expounded the principle of self-

⁴⁶ Ibid., 252.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 256-257.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 458.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 716-717.

⁵¹ Ellie Choi, “Selections from Yi Kwang-su’s Early Writings, 1909-1922,” *AZALEA: Journal of Korean Literature and Culture*, Volume Four (Cambridge: Korea Institute, Harvard University, 2011), 277.

determination, that the peace conference would endorse self-determination for one of the victors' colonies, and that independence could be gained by words on a declaration and by peaceful demonstrations.⁵²

Although it began as a non-violent movement—the original signatories turned themselves in to authorities the very same day—it spread in scope and intensity, eventually ending in violent suppression by Japanese authorities.⁵³ Regardless of, or perhaps due to, the above-mentioned naiveté, the intensity of Korean hopes was matched by the severity of the disappointment they felt when the United States failed to act.

The events of 1919 may in fact have led to a reappraisal of America's perceived failures to aid Korea in 1905 and 1910, thereby transferring the negativity once reserved for Japan onto America. The "Korean people, especially Korean intellectuals, were inevitably overwhelmed by the grief of disillusionment.... The image of America, therefore, began to change from that of a nation of 'righteousness and humanity' to that of another 'imperialistic' power struggling for international hegemony."⁵⁴ Although it would take just over a decade to appear in works of fiction, this change registered almost immediately in the press. Clearly reflecting these new assumptions, editorials in the vernacular dailies wasted little time in denouncing both the United States and Wilson. America was using self-determination as a ploy to undermine the great powers of Europe and establish its own "neo-imperialistic' hegemony over the world." The editorial from the following day continues the attack.

He speaks about righteousness and humanitarianism, but in reality.... He does not permit any intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations, and takes American racial prejudice for granted. In his arrogance he will not reform his policy. ... *He puts on a show of helping small countries but, in fact, he is not providing them with any real support.* This shows that Mr. Wilson's righteousness and humanitarianism are indeed just camouflage. They are just a front....⁵⁵

In historical context, the "show of helping small countries" without "any real support" appears unambiguous. Just one year after the March First Movement, America has been recast.

The editorial tone of the *Tonga ilbo* was not an isolated phenomenon but a barometer of Korea's new understanding of the United States. In 1919 the U.S.-educated Kim Kyusik had optimistically traveled to Paris in order to lobby for American assistance even after March First. In 1922 he disparaged America as a "bloodsucker nation" no better than Japan.⁵⁶ In certain ways the crushing nature of the defeat led to a resignation. Korea may have been too jaded to reinvest Japan with the sort of naïve hopes they had once projected onto the United States, but their disillusionment may also have led to a more realistic appraisal and acceptance of the colonial situation as permanent. When coupled with the seeming freedom Koreans enjoyed in the cultural rule following the March First Movement, this led to a significant recasting of the Korea-Japan-U.S. configuration. The tables had been turned: now America was the broken promise of days past, while Japan represented the foreseeable future. Koreans certainly did not adore Japan, but they did go about accommodating themselves to achieving the best place possible in the imperial order, which they realistically saw as permanent.

RETHINKING KOREA'S PLACE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN: YŎM SANGSŎP'S *SAMDAE*

Japan's offenses had registered rather immediately in works of fiction from the first two decades of the twentieth century. Despite the newly critical apprehension of the United States that appeared in newspaper editorials and personal correspondence from 1920, however, it was not until the beginning of the 1930s that a reconfigured America resurfaced in Korean fiction. Continuing its critical stance on the United States, the *Tonga ilbo* serialized the Chu Yosŏp novelette *Yumi oegi* from February 22 to April 11, 1930. Even earlier, from August 1928, they had been publishing his essays on life in America, where he studied at Stanford University from 1927-1929, and they would again serialize his full-length novel, *Kurŭm ūl chabŭryŏgo* in 1935. While Chu's negative

⁵² Frank Baldwin, "Participatory Anti-Imperialism: The 1919 Independence Movement," *Journal of Korean Studies*, Volume 1, 1979, 128.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 123-126.

⁵⁴ Ho-min Yang, *op. cit.*, 250.

⁵⁵ "Chŏnjaeng ūi chongsik ūn hasi e chaehaso (2)," *Tonga ilbo*, April 28, 1920, in Ho-min Yang, *op. cit.*, 251. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Young Ick Lew, "A Historical Overview of Korean Perceptions of the United States: Five Major Stereotypes," Young Ick Lew, et al., *Korean Perceptions of the United States: A History of Their Origins and Formation*, trans. Michael Finch (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 26-27.

perceptions of America are provocative and fit rather well with the current analysis, both his personal background and the focus of his writings could be considered unrepresentative in general as well as inconsistent with earlier examples. Unlike Yi Injik and Yi Kwangsu, Chu had quite particular personal experiences with and in America that undoubtedly colored his perceptions.⁵⁷

In 1931, however, less than eight months after the final installment of *Yumi oegi*, Yŏm Sangsŏp began serializing his full-length novel *Samdae* in the *Chosŏn ilbo*. Like *Mujŏng*, it symbolically began on January 1. Yŏm parallels both Yi Injik and Yi Kwangsu in that he is also a domestic writer who studied in Japan but had never been to the United States. In addition, unlike Chu's 26-installment novelette, *Samdae* ran a full 215 individual installments over nine and one half months, making it generically more compatible with the longer and more detailed *Hyŏl ūi nu* and *Mujŏng*. As such, both author and work better represent "typical" Korean understandings of America, of Japan, and of Korea's relationship to them.

Mujŏng opened on January 1, 1917 with its two protagonists, Yi Hyŏngsik and Kim Sŏnhyŏng, making preparations to study in America. On January 1, 1931, *Samdae* opened with two of its protagonists, Advisor Cho and his grandson, Cho Tŏkgi, wrangling over what household items could be taken along for study in Japan. Unlike Hyŏngsik, however, Tŏkgi is not going to Japan for the first time, but is returning after a short stay at home. The narrator informs readers that in one or two days, depending on how quickly he can wrap up his domestic affairs, he will return to prep school in Kyoto, where he has already spent three years. He intends to matriculate into Kyoto National University and study law.

"I think I'll major in law."

Tŏkgi, within the law major, planned to focus on criminal law and become a lawyer in the future. Even if he didn't become a lawyer specializing in criminal law, in any case, considering Korea's situation, it seemed it would fit well with his undertakings.⁵⁸

Where Yi Hyŏngsik was bent on ignoring the present and on studying biology in America because the benighted people of Korea most needed science,⁵⁹ Cho Tokgi has accommodated himself to "Korea's situation," and is concerned with his own personal "undertakings." Clearly, the generation that came of age after March 1, 1919 views Japan dispassionately as representing the status quo. When discussing either present or future, America is not even mentioned.

Rather, through the person of Cho Sanghun, Tŏkgi's father, America is always mentioned pejoratively and as part of Korea's past. And when it does obliquely make its way into the narrative present, it is always in the form of hypocritical, morally-bankrupt Korean Christians. Sanghun is the character most closely associated with both America and Christianity. Like Yi Hyŏngsik, he used his association with Christianity to obtain a U.S. education. Contrary to the naïve hopes of *Mujŏng*, however, Sanghun was not changed for the better. He is egocentric, debauched, and even criminal. Recounting how Sanghun seduced Hong Kyŏngae, a young girl who studied with his own son, and at a church school that he himself had helped found, the narrator informs readers that "(h)e had been in America a full two years ... sermonized with a haughty eloquence ... and was a handsome fellow." This, combined with his family's considerable fortune, allowed him to "monopolize popularity within the church" and to "gather in one person all the adoration from its young women."⁶⁰ Not only did he use the halo of America and wealth to commit adultery he also largely abandoned Kyŏngae and his new baby daughter. He did provide them with a modest sum for housing, but that, like all his money, came from his father. He failed, however, to add the child to his family registry, and thereby acknowledge her and give her legal rights. When confronted by his more honorable son, he callously responds, "If I didn't abandon them, what then? I have to consider my own situation as well..."⁶¹

The failings of Sanghun, however, do not stop here. In fact, throughout the entire novel, a hypocritical concern with his reputation and appearance rather than his actual character and behavior is one of the defining characteristics of Cho Sanghun. He immediately brings to mind the "show of helping," "camouflage," and "front" mentioned regarding American hypocrisy in the editorial quoted above. Rather than concerning himself with

⁵⁷ U Miyŏng, op. cit., 328.

⁵⁸ Yŏm Sangsŏp, *Samdae [Three Generations]*, Kwŏn Yŏngmin, et al., eds., *Yŏm Sangsŏp chŏnjip* 4, (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1987), 98. All translations of *Samdae* are my own and taken from the original *Chosŏn ilbo* version as reprinted in the above volume.

⁵⁹ Yi Kwangsu, op. cit., 703-704.

⁶⁰ Yŏm Sangsŏp, op. cit., 59.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

Kyōngae and their newborn daughter, he merely “trembled with fear that rumors would spread inside the church....” Unable to control himself, yet also unable to take responsibility for his actions and “lacking the courage to sacrifice his social standing,”⁶² Sanghun abandons the young woman and child. And this is not an isolated incident from his past for which he expresses contrition in the narrative present. Rather, as the story progresses, he is completely unrepentant, and again commits adultery with a young woman, Kim Ŭigyōng. She is also connected to the church, as a kindergarten teacher, but by night she is a *kisaeng* cum prostitute. Displaying a complete and continuing lack of restraint, he impregnates her as well, only this time brazenly moves her into his own house, right next to his legal wife, and spends quite a bit of the family fortune outfitting her new quarters. As the novel winds down, his perfidy, formerly confined to moral transgressions against his wife, devolves into criminal offenses against his own son. Having forged documents and hired men to impersonate police officers, he enters the Cho family compound to steal assets entrusted to Tōkgi. In the confusion, however, it is Tōkgi who gets arrested by the actual police. “As if orchestrated by heaven, Tokgi had been arrested at the perfect time.” Although he observes that his son may spend up to a year in jail before being released as innocent, Sanghun is far from guild-ridden; rather, he wastes no time in converting the “land deeds” into “cash.”⁶³

The direct conflation of Christianity and America is not limited to the person of Cho Sanghun, nor is it a mere narrative device appearing only in novels such as *Mujōng* or *Samdae*. Rather, as with Japan’s image and offenses explored above, it represents a historical fact reflected in those works of fiction. The pre-1919 image of America and Christianity, as well as their interrelationship with Japan, is nicely summarized below.

I am not sure whether it was surprising that the ordinary Korean people, who were under gendarmerie-police rule without even a single newspaper, should have come to view the words and deeds of the missionaries as though they were the Gospel and have an excessive expectation of the United States.⁶⁴

But this “excessive expectation” also led to an enormous sense of betrayal and disillusionment. In the wake of the March First Movement editorials like the one below became more common.

One of the main reasons for the unusual development of Christianity by American missionaries in Korea has been the [mental] insecurity of the Koreans as a nation. . . . Furthermore, the impatient, overbearingly arrogant attitude of the Japanese was another reason. . . . Those Americans could not understand the Korean people fully because of their continuing racial prejudice. . . . They just approached [the Koreans] with the power of “possessions,” racial prejudice, and a contemptuous attitude.⁶⁵

As might be expected given the above turn, the narrator’s direct descriptions of Sanghun’s thoughts and actions are not the only avenue through which the hypocrisy of Christianity, and by extension America, is assaulted.

When Tōkgi, who is more concerned about the new addition to the Cho family than Sanghun, first visits Kyōngae’s house to see his bastard half-sister, the following exchange ensues.

“How old is the child? Is it a girl. . . .”

“Now she’s four.”

. . . .

“That child—she’s a regular female Jesus,” she said with a mocking smile.

“Why?”

“Because she’s a child without a father.”⁶⁶

Sanghun’s second concubine, Kim Ŭigyōng, is also a duplicitous churchgoer. When she meets him she works at a church kindergarten by day and a brothel by night; Tōkgi’s friend Kim Pyōnghwa terms her “the bitch who takes care of others’ angelic children” before “slinking off to commit unsavory deeds in a house of ill repute.”⁶⁷ Sanghun not only impregnates her but also brings her in to the Cho house where she spends her days gluttonously

⁶² Ibid., 102-103.

⁶³ Ibid., 399-400.

⁶⁴ Kim Yongōk, “Han’gugin ũi Migukkwan,” *Chungang saron* I (1972), 27, in Ho-min Yang, op. cit., 227.

⁶⁵ “Chosōn kwa Kiddokk`yo—Tongdaemun puin pyōngwōn sagōn e kamhayō,” *Choson ilbo*, March 7, 1926, in ibid., 279.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 194.

indulging her every culinary and sartorial whim.⁶⁸ Kyōngae’s mother is also presented as an unscrupulous, opportunistic Christian. In fact, Kyōngae largely blames her present predicament on her mother, believing that, enticed by Sanghun’s wealth, she encouraged her own daughter to pursue the illicit liaison.⁶⁹ And, despite his various transgressions, it is her mother who later nudges her to reestablish relations with him, again selfishly thinking only of her own welfare: “She firmly believed that if the two could now just quietly, amicably live together, even if the family fortune did go to Tōkgi, ... she would be able to live the rest of her life comfortably.”⁷⁰ In fact, there is not one Christian positively portrayed in *Samdae*. Pyōnghwa’s father, a Christian minister, disowns his son for not undertaking the course of study he demands, while even Sanghun’s nameless, faceless fellow parishioners are never depicted in church or at school but rather only as his drinking and gambling cronies.

As seen above, although *Samdae* was written in 1931, the March First Movement had not been forgotten, just accepted. And this is just as true for Japan as it is for America. Yōm himself was living in Japan at the time of the movement, and was arrested for organizing an independence rally in Osaka. He was originally sentenced to ten months in prison, but later acquitted. The narrator does make reference to certain characters, Kyōngae’s and P’ilsun’s fathers in particular, who were patriots and suffered greatly for their involvement. But, perhaps because 1919 expectations of Japan were so abysmally low while those of the United States so unrealistically high, blame is somehow transferred to America. Yōm knows that Japan’s seizure of Korea drove many Koreans to Christianity and America. His narrator ominously refers to political defeat as bringing many young patriots to “kneel beneath the altar,” and as constituting “the first step” toward their “religious life of today.”⁷¹ But the failure of America to provide political assistance in 1919 and the failure of Sanghun and his generation to provide moral leadership in the ensuing years are an established fact in 1931. In other words, yet another reversal of America and Japan has taken place. Quite early in the novel, readers are informed that Tōkgi “thought of his father as standing in the middle of a single log bridge crossing from the feudal to the present age.”⁷² In *Hyōl ūi nu* and *Mujōng*, Japan was the single log bridge, the brief link, but now the United States has been demoted to that position. Closer to the story’s end, we are given yet another graphic illustration of this inversion. Nearly perfectly mirroring the crucial scene from *Mujōng* in which Hyōngsik sees an old man in P’yōngyang who has “fallen behind the times” and thinks that he and the old man are “people from different countries,”⁷³ we learn that Tōkgi’s affection for his father is rapidly fading, and that he “thought of his father as a person from a different world.”⁷⁴ Thus, the turn is completed—in the narrative present and for the generation that represents Korea’s future, America is “behind the times” while Japan is at the center.

Of course, negative depictions of America are not sufficient to demonstrate a more positive understanding of Japan. From the novel’s outset, however, Japan as well as Japanese language and culture are portrayed as neutral and normal. Certainly Koreans have been hardened by their earlier disappointments, so that Japan is not treated with the immature optimism that once surrounded the United States. That said, neither is it avoided or reviled; Korea is simply now and integral part of Japan, and Japan is an integral part of Korean everyday life. The novel opens with Tōkgi’s anxiously awaiting his return to school in Kyoto, and the bright future that assures him. In the opening scene, he and Pyōnghwa go out for drinks at Bacchus, a Japanese-owned bar in the predominately Japanese Chin’ogogae area. While there they converse with each other about their futures in flawless Japanese. When Kyōngae, who is working there as a hostess, returns from the bath house and enters the bar, she is dressed in a Japanese outfit. This is a very great leap indeed from Ongnyōn’s bath and change into Western clothes in *Hyōl ūi nu*. Immediately upon her arrival another inversion occurs as she calls out in Japanese, “*Tadaima*.” *Mujōng* opened with descriptions of the English language and America, while the first actual spoken words in the novel were English as well, “Mister Lee.”⁷⁵ From that point on, she becomes Aiko, and operates seamlessly with the owner and Japanese customers. She addresses Pyōnghwa as Kin-san, and converses with him in Japanese as well. Significantly, the only time she breaks into Korean is to revisit past failures: she whispers a foreboding message to Tōkgi, sending notice she is not yet done with the Cho family.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Ibid., 336.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 328.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 327.

⁷¹ Ibid., 35-36.

⁷² Ibid., 36.

⁷³ Yi Kwangsu, *Mujōng*, 387.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 342.

⁷⁵ Although written in Korean, Sin Usōn calls out to Hyōngsik using the “English” *Misūt’ō Ri* (미스터 리).

⁷⁶ Ibid., 22.

Samdae—Three Generations—places much emphasis on this third generation. Like *Hyŏl ūi nu* and *Mujŏng*, the youth are seen as representing the future of Korea. Only in this case, they possess a very different understanding of its meanings. Tŏkgi and Pyŏnghwa are 23 years old, while Kyŏngae is 25. None was even born in 1905, and all were infants in 1910. They have never actually known an independent Korea. In 1919 they were a bit older, but it only led to the imprisonment and death of Kyŏngae’s father and the dissipation of Tŏkgi’s. They are not pro-Japanese or anti-Korean, they are simply realists. And the reality in 1931 is that for their generation America is absent, and when dealing with Japan class has come to matter much more than nation.⁷⁷ This was, of course, the case for Koreans like Tŏkgi and Pyŏnghwa who “grew up with similar family backgrounds,” which led first to “young friendship” and later to an enduring “deep understanding and sympathy.”⁷⁸ The important thing to note is that social class equally affected Korean-Japanese relations and relationships. Tŏkgi spends his leisure time in Kyoto skiing, and is understandably reluctant to return to Korea. Pyŏnghwa had been studying in Tokyo, and doing quite well. He gained entrance to Waseda University and wanted to study politics and economics, but his father, a Christian minister, insisted that he study theology and would not send him tuition.⁷⁹ Thus, as with Kyŏngae, it is not Japan that hinders the prospects of bright young Koreans, but the American-educated, Christian Koreans of the previous generation.

Not to overstate the comfort of Korea’s new position relative to Japan, but throughout the novel it is made quite clear that Japanese do and must respect Koreans of a certain class. Even the ne’er-do-well Sanghun, thanks to his family background, is afforded respect in his interactions with the Japanese. When he ducks into a café with Kyŏngae, readers are told that the Japanese waitresses all rise to greet him, and that “as a fine gentleman entering behind a beautiful woman, he was given a generous reception.”⁸⁰ In the fancy Japanese-run hotel he frequents for liaisons, the Japanese clerk, knowing him to spend money freely, also treats him particularly well.⁸¹ And this sort of treatment was not limited to bars and hotels; not even the Japanese police were above the law of class over nation. When his grandfather was alive, Tŏkgi had served as his Japanese interpreter on visits to the Chongno Police Station. During that time he had seen how respectfully Kimura, then a detective, treated his grandfather, “as a man of wealth and influence.” Later, when Kimura becomes chief of police and Tŏkgi inherits the family fortune, the narrator informs readers that the Japanese had to be careful about how they treated “those with money.”⁸² Even when a certain younger Japanese detective dislikes Kimura’s approach, he still bows deeply because Tŏkgi is the Cho family heir. Tŏkgi, for his part, is not unaware of this dynamic and behaves not as a Korean but as a member of the upper class, at which “the detective too was compelled by Tŏkgi’s assured tone and attitude.”⁸³

CONCLUSION

As Yi Kwangsu famously proclaimed, “a literary work engages its readers most effectively when it depicts life as realistically as possible.”⁸⁴ And when Yi penned the novel *Hŭk (The Soil)* in 1932, we see that the turn away from America was not particular to Yŏm. In a complete reversal from *Mujŏng*, both the male protagonists of *Hŭk*, the autobiographical provincial Hŏ Sung and the wealthy Seoulite Kim Kakchin, head to Tokyo to further their studies abroad and advance their future positions back in Korea. There are many possible explanations for the shifts in Korean attitudes toward America and Japan; I have only explored a few. By the 1920s, long prior to the pronounced pan-Asianism and anti-Westernism of the Pacific War, Koreans were already beginning reluctantly to accept the permanence of Japan and the resulting shared destinies of the two nations. This could not help but influence the Korea-America-Japan relationship. The Japanese Exclusion Act brought the following response from a Korean newspaper.

⁷⁷ For the original treatment of “class over nation” see Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Kochang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 224-252.

⁷⁸ Yŏm Sangsŏp, op. cit., 13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43-44.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁸¹ Ibid., 130.

⁸² Ibid., 374-375.

⁸³ Ibid., 322.

⁸⁴ Yi Kwangsu, “Munhak iran hao,” 297.

As colored people and as East Asians, we are in the position of being excluded just like the Japanese. ... If Koreans today were to change places with the Japanese, we would certainly receive the same treatment as them, that is to say, we would also be treated as so-called “unwelcome people.”⁸⁵

The fact that Koreans were legally Japanese citizens notwithstanding, this editorial represents a growing awareness of a certain commonality. Written in a Korean daily, it also relates to the quotation above about being “without a single newspaper” in relation to “the impatient, overbearingly arrogant attitude of the Japanese.” These were clearly pre-1919 problems and criticisms; in the wake of the March First Movement Japan’s military rule was changed to a cultural rule. Although this was largely a strategy to relieve pressure and avoid another March First Movement, it did lead to a completely new and relatively broad cultural freedom that lasted at least until the end of the 1930s and under which Korean literature and culture flourished.

By 1938, in the classic satire *T’aep’yōng ch’ōnha* (*Peace Under Heaven*) by Ch’ae Mansik, America is simply absent. It has ceased to be a meaningful signifier. Rather, the narrator and characters discuss a generic “West” and the pros and cons of the “modern” culture and practices deriving from it. In 1940 and 1941, the final days before total mobilization led to a tightening of the controls on Korean literature, writers such as Yi Hyosōk had moved far beyond America to imagine and experience Europe. Ironically, the modernization and development that had occurred within the confines of colonial rule had also opened up direct contact with the Russian enclave in Harbin and the imagination of Europe it enabled. These works are quite Europhilic, yet they completely ignore America. This further demonstrates that the turn away from the U.S. was localized and tied to specific historical experiences, rather than representing the sort of simple xenophobic pan-Asianism that prevailed in the Japanese empire during total mobilization. It could be argued that Harbin was in fact part of the growing Japanese empire and that Koreans were now content with a generic Europhilia that could be obtained by weekend visits to Harbin by express train that opens Yi Hyosōk’s 1940 novel *Pyōkgong muhan* (*Endless Blue Sky*). The West was no longer a new and superior place to live and study but an amusement park replete with horse racing, dancing cabarets, and department stores. And the people who inhabited the West were no longer superior to Koreans. In fact, they are often described as impoverished and desperate, requiring Korean assistance.

The Japanese defeat and surrender in 1945 brought all of this to an abrupt and unexpected end, and America squarely back into the picture. Despite the waving of the Stars and Stripes on the streets of Seoul, however, Koreans were no longer the ingénues American missionaries had met in the late nineteenth century. The opening lines of *Hyōl ūi nu* described Koreans’ long memories and lingering suspicions of Japan in 1895: “the people of P’yōngyang, while talking about the fighting ... during the Imjin Wars (1592-1598), were all wondering about the Japanese troops, ... engaged in all sorts of speculation, and gave way to all sorts of anxieties...”⁸⁶ In 1945 those same faculties would be applied to a much more recent and equally dubious America. Ironically, however, Japanese oppression and American silence had for over two decades liberated Korea psychologically from the naïve fantasy of U.S. salvation, even as they politically drove Koreans further toward subjugation and assimilation. Certainly 1945 ushered in a new chapter in Korea-U.S.-Japan relations, but it was certainly not the first, and perhaps not even the most influential.

⁸⁵ “Pae-Il pōp’an hwakchōng,” *Sidae ilbo*, May 28, 1924, in Ho-min Yang, op. cit., 285.

⁸⁶ Yi Injik, op. cit., 180.