

## A Modern Korean Intellectual in Colonial Korea in Cho Myōng-hŭi's Short Story "Ttangsokŭro" (Under the Ground, 1925)

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### Abstract

"Ttangsokŭro" (Under the Ground, 1925) illuminates the development of a narrator/protagonist's attitude from that of an idealistic intellectual to a person facing reality. He returns from studying abroad in Japan to his family, who are living in poverty. Now the responsibility of supporting his family becomes his reality. However, the narrator is geared toward the realization of the self and pursues his goal of being a successful poet. In this sense, his family is placed in opposition to his ideal. His marriage is itself arranged against his will. However, the narrator gradually begins to embrace his formerly unwanted family that he had desperately tried to escape from. This coincides with his discovery of the reality of Korean society under Japanese colonial rule and his personal experiences of poverty in Kyōngsōng, present day Seoul. Despite his weakness and incompetence, he strives to find the means to provide for his family by handing in his incomplete draft of poems to the publisher in the pursuit of monetary gain, and begging for a loan from a cold and unsympathetic friend. In the deadlock, a narrator/protagonist fantasy of robbery of rich people is only realized in his dream. The narrative in the text does not impart an in-depth interiority of the narrator that is fully developed, and the subject position is shaped through an immediate response to the tension and conflict occurring in the outer world. The short story also does not provide a way for the narrator to progress into a meaningful engagement with social change, but is confined to the individual level of awakening. However, the text provides the development of a protagonist's social consciousness grounded in social reality through his observation and experience of poverty in colonial Korea and striving to take care of his family in his daily life.

The short story "Ttangsokŭro" (Under the Ground, 1925) is an important text that characterizes the early form of socialist character in modern Korean literature by illuminating the transformation of the idealistic intellectual into a socialist. The socialist literary camp emerged during the rise of the socialist movement in the mid-1920s. After the March First Movement against the oppression of Japanese colonial rule in 1919, the Korean intellectuals, who were disappointed by the limit of liberal ideas tied with imperialism and capitalism, were attracted to the socialist ideology inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>2</sup> Cho Myōng-hŭi was a member of the Korean socialist literary organization KAPF (Korean artista proleta federation) and a representative writer in this group who provides the archetype of the Korean intellectuals' character and their engagement in the socialist movement.<sup>3</sup> "Ttangsokŭro" (Under the Ground, 1925) foregrounds the subject of the modern Korean intellectual who is in a deadlock under the constraints of Japanese colonial rule. A narrator, who is also a protagonist of the story, has had a modern education in Japan, but is merely placed in the position of a surplus in society. What is worth noticing is that a narrator/protagonist's subject position against colonial capitalism is shaped through his own experiences of poverty and alienation from society. In the story, the narrator is geared toward the realization of the modern self that is closely linked with pursuing his goal of being a successful poet, as his life motto "Inner Life and Art" indicates. His family is placed in opposition to his ideal of the modern. His family suffers from hunger and poverty but is too backward and unsophisticated to change their circumstances. His marriage is itself arranged against his will, and he strives to ignore the affection of his traditional wife and children. However, while observing Korean people suffering from miserable living

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<sup>2</sup> Michael E. Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: Short History*, University of Hawaii Press, 2007, pp. 69-71.

<sup>3</sup> No Sangrae, "Chomyōnghŭi Yōn'gu I" (Study of Cho Myōnghŭi I), *Ōmunhak*, Vol. 53, 1992, pp. 187-208.

conditions under Japanese colonial rule, and his own experience of hunger and poverty in Kyōngsōng, present day Seoul, the narrator opens his eyes to social reality and achieves a socialist consciousness. The development of a narrator's character into an embrace of socialism is expressed through his attempt to take care of his unwanted family. In this respect, the traditional family is equated with underdeveloped Korea and its exploitation by Japanese colonial rule in which the narrator examines the self and is transformed from the subject of modern individualism to a socialist subject engaging in social reality.

The narrative form of the short story is significant, as it helps to embody the characterization of a modern Korean intellectual protagonist and the development of his consciousness. This is the first person narrative in which a narrator reflects and examines the self in the past through writing this text. In this sense, a narrator, focalizer, and protagonist converge into one, so that all the narrative events are presented through a narrator's experience and perception of the narrative event that leads to his transformation. In this respect, the progression of his subject through his tense engagement with reality is the main concern of the story. In other words, the novel illustrates how a protagonist comes to be a socialist intellectual through experiencing social reality in Korea under Japanese colonial rule. The first person narrative in the short story plays a role in dramatizing vividly an individual character's experiences, perception, and his self-examination and discovery. However, at the same time, the scope of the narrative event and viewpoint is limited to the subjectivity of a narrator/protagonist. Moreover, this subjectivity of a protagonist who is the only focalizer in the text is restricted to the immediate and rash response to the social injustice that he perceives. For this reason, the narrative in the text does not impart an in-depth interiority of the narrator that is fully developed, and the subject position is shaped through an immediate response to the tension and conflict occurring in the external world. The short story also does not provide a way for the narrator to progress into a meaningful engagement with social change, but is confined to the individual level of awakening. Despite all these drawbacks, the short story embodies a new type of modern Korean intellectual who has the insight with which to critically look at the mechanism of Japanese colonialism and develop a socialist consciousness through his own experience on the margins of colonial modern Korea.

### **The Identity of "I" in Opposition to Family and Marriage**

The first pronoun "I", signifying a protagonist that a narrator embodies in himself before the transformation, is placed in opposition to traditional family and colonial Korea. Both traditional family and colonial Korea are a hurdle and an impediment to the adherence to a code of living up to his own identity as a modern intellectual. The narrator does not elaborate fully on the identity of his former self as a protagonist, but, rather, provides hints by his expressions of discontent and disgust toward an external world that can be summed up as the traditional family and colonial Korea. His environment is somehow posited as an antithesis that prevents him from living up to the identity that he has constructed. His presentation and evaluation of family and colonial Korea is expressed through the subject "I"'s perception and his mental response to it. The perception illuminated in the text is subjective and his mental response is impromptu. In this sense, his state of mind is the subject of change so easily under the influence of external circumstances.

The narrator is a colonial modern intellectual who has graduated from a university in Japan. At the beginning of the text, the narrator aligns himself with the image of the modern artist. He has distanced himself from practical life and its requirements, such as having a job, earning a living, and taking care of the family. Although what he seeks is vaguely mentioned as "inner life" and "the creation of art" (writing

poetry), in the text, it is suggested that the narrator has a vision of being a professional poet and it is relevant to inner life, but not external life. However, a protagonist does not have an economic base to pursue his vision. In addition, he has a family in poverty that he is forced to take care of. He also has difficulty finding his place in colonial Korea as an artist, because he is merely regarded as an incompetent intellectual for not being qualified as a bureaucrat or employee in the infrastructure facilitated by Japanese colonial rule. However, his way of perceiving these circumstances, in the beginning of the novel, is in the manner of discontent rather than frustration and despair. This is because he never attempts to make and develop himself into a subject of utility to both family and society. The narrator's attitude of coping with the disharmony is to distance and differentiate himself from his family and society, rather than involving himself with the social reality and changing it. His value-laden identity as an artist is merely arrayed in opposition to traditional family and colonial Korea.

The narrator's discontent toward his family even derives from the first impression upon encountering them after his return from Japan. The narrator's perception of the family as it is depicted in the text is subjective and he is determined to disparage his family as uncivilized and instinctive in their attempts to survive, and does not show sympathy for their desolate and helpless circumstances. But in order to portray reality vividly, the narrator uses the present tense to describe the family's miserable condition. The narrator captures the decline of the spirit and vitality as the following:

Look at those faces of my family members! They are as exhausted and drained as dried-up yellow flowers. I cannot find any vitality at all in them. At the same time, their eyes are filled with a persistent light, and only a little less than murderous look, which makes me dislike them (I can usually see this look on those who suffer from misfortunes and cannot suppress their suffering, especially on those who are fussy).<sup>4</sup>

His depiction is filled with subjective words rather than the objective circumstances of the family consistent with the narrator's impression. It degrades the family as a throng of people who are sickened by poverty and have lost their minds, with only their instincts and a determination to survive. It clearly shows that the narrator has detached himself from the family without any sympathy, and the narrator, after this quotation, has simply equated the scenery of his home with "chaos" and "living hell." He even guesses what the Korean people's life would be like through the example of his own family. The narrator's family in poverty plays a role as a representative means of illuminating Korea under Japanese colonial rule. At this point, the narrator is a mere spectator who distances himself from his family and their difficulties and even feels disgusted by them.

The family that is introduced through a narrator's subjective impression in the text is further exposed only through a narrator's perspective. The voices of family members are articulated through the dialogue but framed in the narrator's interpretation and evaluation, and their voices converge into the expectation that the narrator will save them from their poverty. This expectation underlies the gap, in an understanding of the supreme end of life, between the narrator and his family, and the family's expectation is demoted, from the narrator's perspective, to one that is merely ignorant and instinctive. The novel illustrates the scene of the family gathering in a room. The narrator senses that the unusual harmonious environment in the family is their expectation for him to earn the means of living, rather than welcoming him, and he perceives it as a burden. While he was studying in Japan, the whole large family including the narrator's mother, the older brother's family, his family (wife with two daughters) lived in

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<sup>4</sup> Cho Myŏnghŭi, "Ttangsookŭro" (Under the Ground), *Han'guksoŏlmunhaktŏegye*, Vol. 12, Tongach'ulp'ansa, 1995.

poverty in their hometown. According to his reflections, the family used to be a wealthy enough for him to have a modern education, but their fortunes declined. Even before he left for Japan 5 years before, the economic conditions of the family had been a lot better than at the time of his return. Now, they are all engaged in tenant farming, and are uneducated and ignorant about modern conventions. From a family's perspective, a narrator who has received a B.A. degree in Japan is supposed to have an ability to attain the economic means to live well. The expectation from the family is expressed through the narrator's sister-in-law's statement that "there will be no worries in our family now. If you attain the official rank, such as that of a lawyer, you will make a lot of money. At least you will easily become a county governor or provincial governor. Since you graduated from university, you can do anything."<sup>5</sup> The sister-in-law's perspective shows how naively they relate the university degree with economic success. From their perspectives, a university graduate is guaranteed to be a lawyer and a high-ranking government official, regardless of their professional education. It is quite interesting that the sister-in-law perceives the occupation of a lawyer as a government position. It also indicates the status of particular kinds of jobs which would promise a high income and a recognized social standing. The Japanese colonial government facilitates the legal institutions and organization of local areas to rule over Korea, and to acquire a higher position in this Japanese colonial legal and bureaucratic system would lead to higher social standing with increased economic status. The university degree in formal education is regarded as the requirement or at least a shortcut for stability under Japanese colonial rule. The narrator's response is to attempt to control his impulse to sneer at these assumptions, and he simply downgrades the expectations of all the family members as nonsense resulting from ignorance.

Regardless of whether the narrator is able to attain social status and provide the economic means that the family believes him to be qualified for with a university degree, his aim of life does not seem to lie in worldly success, but in the inner life that is intermittently mentioned in the text. Although his lofty ideal is very abstract and not elaborated sufficiently, it reminds us of the group of modern writers that emerged in 1920s Korea. Their slogan of "art for art's sake" functions as a way of differentiating themselves from other nationalists with their aim of enlightening the Korean people, and from the realistic and opportunistic intellectuals assimilated into and participating in the Japanese colonial domination of Korea. These groups of writers stressed the prioritization of the individual and self-realization, and brought these concerns into the forefront in Korean literature. They highlighted the pursuit of reality as it is located in the inner self. The narrator's pursuit of art and his attempt to be true to the inner self is identical to the ideal of these writers.<sup>6</sup> Considering his commitment to art and inner life, his dream and vision for individual realization as a literary writer cannot be understood and accepted by the family. Now he is pressured to take on a responsibility as the head of a family, at least to take care of his own wife and two daughters, if not a whole family. However, he continues to hold the position of a spectator as he says to himself "although all the family starved, it does not matter" and "I wish my predicament in my thought would just dissolve." After a two-day stay in his hometown, he leaves for Kyōngsōng, and seems to be running away from his family.

The conflict between the modern ideal of love and arranged marriage plays a pivotal role in intensifying his discontent toward his traditional family. In addition to the gap between his ideals and his family's expectation, there is a conflict between him and his wife. The arranged marriage with a traditional woman had been a stigma for him since passing the age to know about women. Most of the

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<sup>5</sup> Cho Myōnghŭi, "Ttangsokŭro" (Under the Ground), Han'guksosŏlmunhaktaegeye, Vol. 12, Tongach'ulp'ansa, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Cha Hyeyōng, *Han'guk kŭndae munhakchedo wa sosŏlyangsik ūi hyōngsōng* (The Institution of Modern Korean Literature and the Formation of the Mode of the Novel), Yōngnak, 2004.

modern Korean intellectuals who studied abroad away from their hometown had a traditional wife at home who took care of their in-law family. It is arranged by the family regardless of their intention and will. This unwanted marriage is often in conflict with their ideal of modern love and marriage based on their choice. It is common that Korean male intellectuals intermittently see their wives when they return temporarily for school break. During the school year, they are attracted to female students that they often date, and with whom they have extramarital relationships.<sup>7</sup> In the text, the narrator does not illustrate his ideal of love and marriage, or relate any anecdote of engaging in free love. However, he displays his discontent in his marriage. His marriage is arranged by his grandfather when the narrator is 12 years of age. His wife is four years older than the narrator. When he reaches puberty, the narrator hates the very existence of his wife, so that she even attempts to commit suicide by throwing herself into the well of the village. In this sense, the wife is a traditional woman that his fate depends on whether she is accepted into the in-law family including the husband. If the husband abandons her, she is destined to die because there is no place where she can be tolerated with her diminished status and social existence. After this incident, the narrator feels sympathy toward his wife and they have two daughters afterwards. Therefore, it is very difficult to find romantic love in a marriage that is determined and implemented by the patriarchal authority of a grandfather.

The narrator's conflict with his wife comes to the surface on the first night after his return, when he resists staying in the same room for the night with his wife and daughters. His refusal, and his attempt to push them precipitates a violent argument, and he even says to his wife that she should leave him and marry someone else or die. His marriage is not in harmony with his identity as a modern intellectual, and is a burden that he wants to escape from. However, despite his discontent with his wife, the argument has a deep impact on his predicament. Throughout the conflict, his state of mind swings from loathing to pangs of conscience. Reflecting on the scene of confrontation with his wife, his loathing is expressed when he refers to and describes his wife as a "so-called wife," an "enemy," "annoying thing," "living foulness," and "Skinny." When the narrator refers to his wife as his "so-called wife," he suggests that his marriage is a mere formality, and that he does not consider her to be his true wife. His disgust is conveyed in his description of his wife's high cheekbones and the effects of hard labor and malnutrition. It alludes to the fact that the narrator cannot feel any attraction for his wife. While the tension is accelerated through the wife's refusal to leave the room, a narrator perceives his wife as an "enemy" and an "annoying thing," and even evaluates the wife's attitude as "living foulness."

Despite his loathing toward his wife, the narrator is also tormented by a guilty conscience. In the flashback after the argument with his wife to the time when his wife attempted to commit suicide, he remembers the sympathy that he felt with regret and a sense of guilt. When his wife woke up from unconsciousness, he grasped his wife and shed tears over her. His relationship that led to the production of his first daughter resulted from a reconciliation. Although this compromise could not erase his discontent and loathing, it embodies a narrator's sense of hate-versus-sympathy in his relationship with his wife. Even in the middle of the argument, he senses the reproachful looks from his wife and he regrets his utterance of hurtful and acerbic words. It is worth noting that his sympathy and attachment to his wife is based on her value in a traditional gender role. First of all, she is a faithful wife to the husband and relies on him as her reason for living. While the narrator studies abroad in Japan, the wife waits for him while living with her in-law family, serving the mother-in-law and raising two children. She also works as a tenant farmer in order to survive. Her voice is articulated in the argument with the narrator. She does not

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<sup>7</sup> Chiyong Kim, "The Conceptual History of 'Yōnae' (Love) in the Korean Colonial Period," *Acta Koreana*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2013, pp. 113-140.

express any complaint or grudge and does not try to force him to make a living. What she desperately seeks is the husband's affection and care. Her only demand in the argument is that the family, including the two daughters, spend the night together in the same room and live together afterward, and that it should not matter that the narrator has just returned from Japan. Even when she comes up to Kyōngsōng to search for the narrator, she does not compel him to take on the role of the head of the family, and merely wants them all to live together. This attachment and persistence of the wife arouses his conscience. The motherly love that is displayed by the wife's care of their children is moving to the narrator. After returning from his outing after the argument, the narrator discovers that his wife and two daughters have fallen asleep. The narrator has the impression that they are sleeping due to the exhaustion caused by the argument between him and his wife. His wife had been hurt by his harsh words and cried with her children when he left the room. However, he notices that even in the worst circumstances, his wife has covered the first daughter with her traditional Korean jacket and is hugging the second daughter, covering her with her skirt. This is the point that the narrator values his wife's motherly love. The narrator even feels the sentiment of compassion for his wife and two daughters to the extent that he has a desire to grasp and hug his wife again. He endures his desire and instead he covers them with a blanket. While in the dead of night, with his family fallen into a deep sleep, the narrator eventually has time to meditate in order to cool down after the argument with his wife, and eventually falls asleep. When he wakes up, he discovers that his wife has brought his two daughters to him and covered them with the blanket. When he discovers that his wife is asleep in the corner of the room, he brings his wife to him and the whole family sleeps together. It is a quite desperate effort for his wife to attempt to relate her husband to the family, and reveals her hope that the husband will at least show affection to their daughters.

### **The Limit of Individual Anti-Japanese Sentiment**

Anti-Japanese sentiment is explicit throughout the text and is expressed through a narrator's subjective observation and his response to it that is confined to the individual state of mind, such as anger and resentment. In his hometown, when the narrator left the room after the argument with his wife, he spotted his old house where the family used to live before they fell into poverty. That house is now occupied by Japanese people who own a general store and, more importantly, are engaged in loan-sharking. The house where the family is living now is also mortgaged by a Japanese loan-shark for the family debt. This narrative setting plays a role in presenting anti-Japanese sentiment by alluding to the decline of a narrator's family as it is related to Japanese colonial rule and the penetration of Japanese capital even in a rural area. The anti-Japanese sentiment is even intensified through a narrator's observation of Kyōngsōng, present day Seoul, that is a metropolitan city in colonial Korea. By leaving his family behind, the narrator leaves hurriedly for Seoul. However, he does not have any plan or concerns in Kyōngsōng, other than escaping from his family. However, he is not qualified and competent enough to attain the economic means to survive. What he can do is to live in his friend's boarding house and wander around the city. At this point, he discovers the mechanism of Kyōngsōng as the metropolitan version of a Japanese colony. Kyōngsōng is packed with Koreans who strive to earn the means of living. However, on the street, the narrator discovers many people who have ended up begging for money and food. According to the news article that he reads, 200 thousand people are there, and 180 thousand are starving beggars. Except for the

southern part of a city populated by the Japanese, the rest of the area is underdeveloped.<sup>8</sup> As soon as he arrives in Kyōngsōng, he becomes one of those starving beggars. He also encounters a scene in which the Japanese look down on Koreans. On the street, a Japanese runs up against a Korean burden carrier and the Japanese scolds the Korean worker by even hitting his shoulder. The Korean only makes way for the Japanese with an obedient attitude. The narrator at this time depicts the Japanese as looking like loan sharks or businessmen as a way of implying that capitalism is paving the way for Japanese economic exploitation of Korean people. The narrator's response is rather hasty in that he feels anger and a strong desire to crush the Japanese out with his foot, and he almost chases after him. However, he is in a state of such rage that when he comes to his own consciousness, both parties have already left. When the narrator's collection of poems that he intends to publish is confiscated by Japanese police, he describes the image of the face of the Japanese police officer as having malicious eyes, an ugly nose, and a harsh way of talking. At this time, he also fantasizes that he punches the Japanese police officer in the face that resides so vividly in his mind.

However, his perception of colonial Korea and Japanese oppression of Korean people, and his anti-Japanese sentiment, do not bring the transformation right away. His perception is still limited to the individual lament and disillusionment as is expressed in the poem that the narrator includes in the text as the following:

There is nothing, nothing!  
In this desert, in this meadow, there is nothing.  
Except dry land and dry bone, there is nothing.  
What will occur to this land?  
What will occur to this group of people?  
Death! That is right; there is nothing but death.  
'Why doesn't the fire fall on this land!  
Why doesn't the fire fall on this meadow.'  
Where I stand is dry land,  
The only thing that I have is bone in this body,  
Can't I make gun powder by melting the sand?  
Can't I make a spear by sharpening the bone?  
Let's dance in the pit of death.<sup>9</sup>

The poem framed in the text plays a pivotal role in displaying a narrator's attitude and response to the external reality that a narrator observes. The subject of a narrator in the poem and the range of its consciousness are narrow, impulsive, and not fully developed. This rather abstract poetry demonstrates the scope of his perception on Korea. The poem reflects the gloomy aspect of Kyōngsōng, Korea in general that may develop from his observation of the poverty and underdevelopment, especially in Kyōngsōng. It is depicted through analogies such as "desert," "meadow," "dry land," and "dry bone." It is a place where nothing can grow, and is like a wasted and desolate land in a condition that is equated with death. The gloomy depiction of Kyōngsōng indicates that the narrator distances himself from Korea as he describes his family. There is no sympathy for or attachment to Kyōngsōng and the people living there, but only disillusionment and disgust. He has not discovered any hope or possibility of change. In the latter part of the poem, he proposes a rather vague resistance against reality. The metaphor that the narrator uses is suggestive of a weapon that he will sharpen from his bone that only he possesses, and make gunpowder

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<sup>8</sup> BaekYung Kim, "Ruptures and Conflicts in the Colonial Power Bloc: The Great Keijo Plan of the 1920s," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 48, No 3, 2008, pp. 10-40.

<sup>9</sup> Cho Myōnghūi, "Ttangsokūro" (Under the Ground), *Han'guksosōlmunhaktaegye*, Vol. 12, Tongach'ulp'ansa, 1995.

out of the sand that he can find in the desert. However, it is too metaphorical to provide the possibility of resistance in the ground of reality. The equation of the resistance with a “dance in the pit of death” does not employ the possibility of social change but mere reckless behavior out of despair. In *Kyōngsōng*, the narrator’s mental state is limited to superficial awareness of the no-win situation of the Korean people and his way of embodying resistance is not related to a firm ground in reality, and cannot develop into social consciousness. The subject can be compared with the person who is confined to a prison, and is just shouting out complaints that do not entail any resolution.

### **Individual Experience of Poverty and the Limit of Socialist Consciousness**

His experiences of living in Korea demoted him to one not much different from a beggar in the street. His dignity and pride as an artist have been demolished and he has even lost his self-respect. His life pattern is to follow his friends, and he depends on his friends for food to eat, and is staying at his friends’ boarding house. Eventually he becomes a renter in the boarding house and is expelled because he cannot pay for the rent and food. This pattern proves that he is incompetent in his search for a job and cannot earn the money to live on. At this point, the narrator is faced with a degree of hunger which is a threat to his very survival. He discovers that the maintenance of his so-called inner life is not possible when he is starving. He confesses that at first, even in poverty, he has some ideas for a poem, and meditates on it. In his poverty, he cherishes his inner life and attempts to continue writing a poem. However, his hunger overpowers his mind and consciousness since he could eat only one meal a day and sometimes he could not eat for three days. In that stage, the narrator could not adhere to his inner life in the sense that he reaches the state when he mixes up stone and planks in the street with rice cake and cloth when attempting to wrap food for himself. He realizes that the pride with which he has identified himself as a humanist and idealist is mere fantasy, and he reflects on his past when he pursued his individual progress contingent on self-realization and considered other Koreans to be no better than dogs and pigs motivated only by eating, sex, and empty vanity. He regrets his own standard that distinguished his inner life and art from the ignorant Korean people surrounding him. At this moment, he claims that he eventually would understand the proletariat’s suffering in the world. And he achieves the new commitment and takes sides with the suffering of the proletariat that is soon equated with the Korean people. His second poem, as it is drawn into the text, reflects this change of perspective in the following:

The thing that is wriggling in the dry land is only  
People of bone, no, bone of people.  
Let’s burn the bone and decompose the bone, let the seed of love sprout from them, Let the new  
Life hatch from them.  
The suffering of Korean people,  
The suffering of Korean people.  
Let’s draw the line in the soil and look.<sup>10</sup>

The previous poem is centered on the speaker who regards the surroundings as hopeless, and distances himself from them, so that the resistance is confined to the speaker motivated by disillusionment. It is quite worth noting that there are only the speaking subject and the scenery to validate the individual subject's confrontation with the surrounding gloom. However, the second poem highlights the third party other than the subject himself, and calls attention to the people in general. It is significant that the

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<sup>10</sup> Cho Myōnghŭi, “Ttangsokŭro” (Under the Ground), *Han'guk'sosŏlmunhaktŏgye*, Vol. 12, Tongach'ulp'ansa, 1995.

speaking subject's thought changes from "people of bone" to "bone of the people," and that people are more central than their material state depicted as bone. He envisions new hope and liberation from the difficult circumstances of people metaphorized as bone. The concept of the people is explicitly configured as the Korean people. The speaking subject here is positioned as an observer who foresees a better future for Korea, while the poem remains abstract, in that social reality is not embodied in the detailed material background. However, the narrator who has been confined to the inner self begins to be concerned with the social reality surrounding him, which is the experience of the Korean people suffering under Japanese colonial rule. It is a little difficult to say that the subject in the poem accomplishes the identification of a socialist consciousness. However, it would be accurate to say that an indication of socialist consciousness emerges which is mixed with nationalism.

The transformation of a narrator into a socialist intellectual and his discovery of the Korean people is expressed through the embrace of his family and facing reality by taking care of them. His wife comes to Kyōngsōng to live with the narrator. Since the narrator left the hometown, she has waited for the narrator to call her to Kyōngsōng. However, he barely escapes from the circumstance of begging for food from his friends, and still adheres to his inner life independent from real life. His wife's arrival in Kyōngsōng coincides with his new commitment to mingle with people and social reality. He simply disregards his previous discontent about his marriage without love by admitting that he is one of many Koreans who is not situated to seek love. He then agrees to live with his wife and two daughters. This decision is his effort to bring his life into correspondence with reality.

The narrowing of the distance between the narrator and the wife is mediated through their children. In the hometown, the narrator's discovery of motherly love in his wife functions as the catalyst of resolving the conflict with his wife. The discovery of the Korean people under Japanese colonial rule paved the way to uniting him with his family. In this sense, the Korean people are equated with the family, in that his attitude has shifted from discontent and disgust to the commitment to integrate the family into his part of life. In the text, his integration with family is expressed through his rediscovery of motherly love in his wife and paternal love in himself. In the newly rented room, he observes his wife's affection for the younger daughter when she holds her on her lap and strokes her hair. From this observation, the narrator begins to take notice of his wife's face, and he confesses that he has never before looked at his wife's face carefully. At first, he reads peace and virtue in his wife's appearance, which, in his opinion, does not fit his wife's physical appearance and the darkness of her face. It is the narrator's discovery of the positive images of his wife that represent not erotic female attractions but, rather, the traditional virtues of being a woman and a mother. Moreover, she is excited for the family to be living together, despite their humble living quarters. This displays his wife's character, with her naive and unconditional trust in the narrator. The narrator also begins to feel affection toward his two children, even though it is still not consistent. For the first time, he touches his daughter's cheek with his own and discovers paternal love in his heart. However, when she spills water by hitting her cup, he raises his voice and even physically strikes her. In this sense, he has not completely changed, but still struggles with the conflict between his inner life and the difficulties of living with his family.

However, the narrator still remains as an incompetent intellectual who unsuccessfully and desperately seeks the means of survival. It cannot be considered a meaningful engagement in social reality to change it but a starting point of reaching the reality. The narrator, in taking responsibility for the family, depends on his art, and the poems that he wrote. For him, it is the only available means to earn a living. In his former state, publishing the poem meant more than making money, and constituted the perfection that displayed his artistic accomplishment, and was the outcome of his inner life. To seek the

publication of the incomplete poems is the act of selling his honor and pride as an artist. However, the narrator compromises his commitment in order to provide the money for renting a room and buying a basic household establishment. He compares his attempt to sell his poems to commerce in the marketplace. He revises and even deletes the content that has caught the attention of Japanese surveillance and may prevent his draft from being published. However, in reality, the publishing company rejects his draft. In this sense, his poems are considered as not being valuable enough to sell in the publishing market. Through the mediation of his friend who introduces him to a new publishing company, he is able to sell his drafts and get some money in advance in order to begin to support his family. However, other than these initial funds, he does not have any other means to provide for his family. Soon, his family runs out of food and is unable to pay the monthly rent so that they are ill-treated by the owner of the house. It is traumatic for his second daughter, who observes from a distance and with great envy the owner's family eating breakfast. So the narrator visits the publishing company to attempt to get more money in advance of publication. Here he finds out that the publication of his draft was not permitted by Japanese police surveillance. Also, he learns that the police intend to investigate the narrator for writing a poem containing a criticism of Japanese colonial rule. Rather than getting more money to pay for the rent and buy food, he becomes indebted to the owner of the publishing company for the money that he has received in advance. At the end, he is visited by his old friend that he dislikes. The friend pursues success by collaborating with the Japanese and is rich. The narrator is disgusted with him, but he abases himself to borrow some money from him to buy rice. While facing reality, he proves that he is not competent for real life, since his art does not represent any practical value and only causes disharmony with the dominant political system. At the end, he begs for the money from a person whom he ignores and detests for pursuing earthly success even to the point of submitting to Japanese colonial rule.

A narrator's last-ditch effort to survive with the family does not solve the fundamental problem of the poverty that is facing them. He cannot deal with the inequity that he has received, such as the disrespect from the publisher and the classification of his poem as anti-colonial sentiment, mistreatment from the owner of the house where he has rented his room, and the shame of lowering his head to an indifferent friend that he dislikes. The narrator's former value and commitment to the inner life of an artist is disparaged as incompetence and uselessness which do not meet the practical requirements of society. Those people are the people who own the economic means and oppress the have-nots. His anger and frustration do not surface into any narrative event and action that can lead to any engagement in changing these miserable conditions. In this sense, he is still far from being the character with a socialist consciousness that perceives the inequity of society as a class conflict and involves himself in a confrontation with those who have, such as business owners and land owners who dominate the economic means by oppressing and exploiting have-nots. The only practical solution that he can imagine is to leave his two children in an orphanage and send his wife to be a servant maid to a rich family. Sickened and traumatized by his despair and shame, he fantasizes about committing a robbery, because he regards this crime as more honorable than begging and stealing, in the sense that due to the inequity of society between haves and have-nots, to rob those who have is not a shameful thing, but a kind of resistance against a corrupt society. However, his fantasy is not realized in reality, but is configured in his dream while he suffers from an illness. He climbs over a wall and threatens a rich person with a knife. However, he eventually is caught by a police officer. It is worth noting that he stabs the police officer, which signifies a violent act of resistance against Japanese power.

## **Conclusion**

A narrator in “Ttangsokūro” (Under the Ground, 1925) examines the self in the past and gives shape to the development of the self as a protagonist from an idealistic individual to a socialist with social consciousness. Colonial Korea, including his family in poverty, is embodied through a focalization of a narrator, and his own experience of poverty motivates the attainment of a new consciousness of social reality. It is effective to place a protagonist in the center of social reality in the text and highlight the development of his own consciousness in response to it. However, it restricts the possibilities of articulating various viewpoints with the example of different characters. In addition, although a narrator’s concern is oriented toward the external world, the narrative construction of social reality depends on the subjective perception of a narrator and his rather individual emotions, attitudes, and evaluation. It does not embody the interiority in which a narrator undertakes a deeper level of self-examination and the process of shaping subjectivity. It is confined to an immediate response, such as subjective evaluation, rash anger and frustration, and the text is not successful in showing a protagonist’s meaningful engagement in social reality like the later novels written by KAPF writers. However, it is worth noting that the text provides the type of the modern intellectual who turns to socialism through his own experience of inequity in colonial Korea. It is meaningful that the embodiment of a narrator/protagonist overcomes elitism in the sense that his social consciousness is shaped and developed through embracing his family and Koreans that he had formerly downgraded as uncivilized and short-sighted. The text ends in the deadlock of a narrator in which his fantasy of robbing rich people in his realization of class conflict in Korean society is only realized in his dream. However, it anticipates the socialist intellectual character that engages in the betterment of society, as his later work “Naktonggang” (Naktong River, 1927) illuminates.