

Specter, Rhizome, and Bridge: *Kim Su-yeong's View of Tradition*

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Abstract

There are two major currents in the field of social sciences in regards to tradition and modernity. The first one, which is accepted as an irrefutable theory, is centered on the thesis that modernity destroys tradition. The second one, asserted by Hobsbawm, is based on the thesis that modernity invents tradition. Although they apparently oppose each other, they share the same presupposition, since both of them perceive tradition as a substance. This paper examines, in this regard, a third way of perceiving tradition, which is to look at it from the perspective of the theory of tradition asserted by Kim Su-yeong. For this, I will restructure his theory of tradition referring to concept of "specter" created by Derrida and also concept of "rhizome" created by Deleuze and Guattari. I will also examine the symbol of the symbolic space of bridge where tradition and modernity communicate each other. Through this process, I attempt to revive the possibility of thinking the tradition in a new perspective.

Keywords: specter, rhizome, specter-tradition, rhizome-tradition, Kim Su-yeong

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Introduction

We can observe two dominant viewpoints in social science discourse in regards to the relationship between tradition and modernity. The first asserts that “modernity destroys tradition” (Shils 1981, 21-22; Eisenstadt 1973, 1-11). According to this viewpoint, which is widely acknowledged by classical sociologists such as Weber, Durkheim, and Tönnies, with the arrival of the modern age, newly-introduced social relationships, forms of solidarity, and lifestyles definitively put an end to old patterns of social life. In other words, modernity completely replaces tradition. In contrast, Hobsbawm’s research on “invented traditions” concluded that many products, practices, rituals, etiquette, and cultures in Europe that were thought to possess long historical backgrounds were in fact invented at the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the formation of nation-states was under way in Europe. Modernity invents tradition instead of destroying it (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

These two seemingly opposing viewpoints, nevertheless, share the same premise, as both perceive tradition as a “substantial entity.” Whether tradition indicates comprehensive life patterns of the pre-modern age or something that was purposely invented by modern political subjects, tradition is perceived as “contents” which can be destroyed, lost, or even invented. The former claims that these tradition-contents were destroyed with the arrival of the modern age, while the latter claims that the modern age created these tradition-contents.¹

1. We can observe more dialectical positions as regards the relationship between tradition and modernity, in opposition to these substantialist viewpoints. For the most part, these positions, which look at tradition with the paradigm of memory, tend to define it as collective memory that has fallen into oblivion (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). Tradition as collective memory fundamentally differs from the idea of tradition-contents, given that it is an “unconscious” power modulating the present and subject to the incessant process of recollection which are identical to the reinterpretation or translation according to the changing realities (Buck-Morss

Although these two opinions derive from Western social sciences, they also represent the main currents of views of tradition adopted by Korean intellectuals, who underwent the transition to the modern age under colonial oppression, and subsequently emerged with a “double psychological bind.” While aspiring for the modernization of their colonized motherland, they had to not only bid farewell to their past by labeling it as tradition, but also make the past a glorious and mythical era in order to contend with the power of the colonists (Ryu B. 1998, 65). In other words, they needed modernity to “obliterate” tradition, while simultaneously inventing it, as well as making it their own language and symbols. In that sense, tradition became a contradictory object that had to be simultaneously eradicated and resurrected. That is the reason why there is no “theory,” but only “doctrines” of tradition in the intellectual field in Korea. Tradition has turned into an object to be destroyed or defended, instead of an object to be reflected on (Kim Hong-Jung 2005, 205-206).

This article strives to explore an alternative view of tradition, explicated by the poet Kim Su-yeong (1921-1968). As is well known, Kim Su-yeong is one of the most beloved and remarkable poets, representative of poetical circles of Korea in the 1960s. Although his poetry has been intensively studied, his poems are still open to new interpretations (Nam J. 2001, 19; Yu Jong-ho 1982, 258). The authentic power and influence of his literature cannot be reduced to the purely aesthetical dimension of his poetry, however. Not merely a poet, he was also an important intellectual. As Kim Yu-jung points out, Kim Su-yeong viewed poets as intellectuals, stressed the importance of the conversation between poetry and philosophy, and considered himself both a poet and a thinker (Kim Y. 2005, 458-460). In

1991, 301-302; Scholem 1966, 45; Escoubas 1989, 119; Peret 1996, 105). Kim Su-yeong’s theory of tradition is very similar to this type of dialectical understanding of the relationship between tradition and modernity, but I will examine more in detail the peculiarities of his theory of tradition in this article with the help of two major concepts, specter and rhizome.

fact, his poetry is very rich in philosophical, political, and sociological significations, and this quality is attributable to his sincere and painful reflections on various contradictions in Korean society at the time. He wrote poems as a serious thinker concerned with the destiny of the society to which he belonged. The relationship between modernity and tradition is one of the important problems he reflected on, and I will explore it by analyzing some of his more exemplary poems and making active use of Derrida's concept of specter and Deleuze's concept of rhizome. I will try to discover Kim Su-yeong as a thinker, hidden behind Kim Su-yeong as a poet. With these in mind, I will first examine the recurrent theme of "specter-tradition" dominating Kim's early poems, with a special focus on the poem "Abeoji-ui sajin" (The Picture of the Father) (1949). Secondly, I will examine the theme of "rhizome-tradition" in the poem "Geodaehan ppuri" (Gigantic Root) (1964). Finally, I will examine the poetic apparatus of bridges bringing together different generations and times as in the poem "Hyeondaesik gyoryang" (The Modern Bridge) (1964).

Specter-Tradition

According to literary critic Yeom Mu-ung, Kim Su-yeong's literary horizons never transcended modernism in a larger sense. Just like Yi Sang, Kim Su-yeong never wrote lyrical poems on nature, for which he is considered a radical antitraditionalist. However, Kim Su-yeong always maintained a certain distance from the modernist poetry movement (Yeom 1983, 143). Given that modernism is characterized by the pursuit of novelty, esthetical revolutions, and the destruction of tradition to replace old forms and techniques with new ones, the early poems of Kim Su-yeong are indicative of his unique view of tradition. In other words, these poems suggest that Kim's attitude toward tradition was not identical to that of other modernists.

In 1945, Kim Su-yeong published "Myojeong-ui norae" (The Song of the Court) in *Yesul burak* (Art Village) and in 1949 he published "Amerikan taimji" (American Time Magazine) and "Gongja-ui

saenghwallan” (Confucius’ Hardship of Life) in *Saeroun dosi-wa simindeul-ui hapchang* (The Chorus of New Cities and Citizens) along with Kim Gyeong-rin, Im Ho-gwon, Bark In-hwan, and Yang Byeong-sik. If we examine the poems written in this period, it seems the poet’s mindscape was dominated by a theme of tradition, symbolized by the figure of “father.” In his early works, such as “The Song of the Court,” “The Louse (I),” and in particular “The Picture of the Father,” the speaker is portrayed as someone thoroughly overwhelmed by the silent but suffocating pressure of the “father,” who is already deceased and thus presents himself only in the form of a photographic image (Nam K. 2005, 129).

I have never looked
straight at my father’s
beard, never (Anthology I: 18).

On the picture of my late father hang his glasses
just like reality whose gaze is hard to bear.
His gaze is deep.
Nevertheless,
his eyes are not
as blue as they were on the day he passed away
just like my famine, he looks at me from his standing position.
As for me, I stealthily look at his face
away from the eyes of my wife (Anthology I: 22).

What immediately grabs our attention in this poem is the odd inability of the poet to directly look at his father’s image or face, given that Kim Su-yeong’s main poetical credo is none other than “look straight at the objects of the world,” as is solemnly declared in “Confucius’ Hardship of Life,” published in 1945. In this piece, he announces with bona-fide confidence: “Buddy! I’m going to directly look at them.” Who are the “them” that he is going to look straight in the eyes? He responds that he will look straightly at “physiology, quantity, imbecility, and the brilliance of objects” (Anthology I: 15). He hopes to delve into the essence of the world through the rigorous application

of the penetrating poetic gaze without being enchanted or bewildered by the phenomenon of the world unfurling before his eyes. He is saying that his poetry is founded upon the search for the real, looking impartially at things just as they are. What will occur after he looks so directly at the world? The answer is found in the last stanza of the poem, “And, I will die.” Obviously, the final destination is death (Anthology I: 15). It is not so hard to understand that the attitude of “I am going to directly look at them” is the “spirit and motto of every one of Kim’s poems” (Choe H. 2001, 116), and also in the vein of Confucius’ philosophical saying, “If I could attain enlightenment in the morning, I would willingly give up my life in the evening” (Yu Jong-ho 1983, 245). Like Confucius, young Kim Su-yeong made up his mind to consecrate his life to the attainment of enlightenment, commencing with a disinterested contemplation of the world and finishing with a heroic death as an incarnation of wisdom.

In this context, the peculiar inability to confront his father’s face also reveals an inexplicable weakness that does not befit Kim’s above-mentioned poetic aspirations. Why does Kim have to look at his father’s picture in such a stealthy manner? The answer lies in that the poet’s consciousness is oppressed by nonexistent but overpowering tradition, to the point that he does not dare to stare at his dead father’s image, as it represents the vanished but still potent past. It is presented even more conspicuously in “Yeongeuk hadaga si-ro jeonhyang” (From Theater to Poetry—My First Work) in which he offers criticism of his debut work “The Song of the Court,” where he had expressed reverence for the past in a melancholic and exaggerated tone by presenting various antique objects of a destroyed court (Dongmyo). In this self-critical text, he describes the “awe and fear” he used to feel, without knowing why, whenever he visited the forlorn East Shrine, the very topos of tradition (Anthology II: 227). Just like the father in the picture who leads a nonphysical existence, the shrine in the poem shows no trace of life. Furthermore, the eerie wail of a stranger is heard in the shrine of Confucius as a background noise in the poem (Anthology II: 227). In fact, for Kim Su-yeong, an authentic place of tradition is an isolated and lonely place. In the

poem “Pari-wa deobureo” (With a Fly) (1960), he writes as follows.

The civilization,
which should have ceased its existence long time ago,
is tormenting me even today.

At the sound of the cold autumn wind,
a bird-like tradition
seems to have found a resting place
in the shadow of a tree (Anthology I: 135).

As Kim Myeong-in points out, Kim appears to have been oriented toward tradition during this period (2002, 85-86). However, he still failed to communicate with tradition in an open-minded manner. It is obvious that Kim is “oppressed” by tradition that no longer exist (Park S. 1999, 307). If I use Derrida’s famous ontology of specter (*hantologie*), it would be fair to say that for Kim at that time, tradition exists like specter, which I would like to call the “specter-tradition.” Specters are wandering souls nonexistent in reality. However, as it has not been symbolically released from this world, it not only continues to haunt the living, but also becomes a compulsive burden to them. It does not exist, nor is it a pure and simple illusion. As Derrida illustrates, specter is the “presence of the nonexistent” (1993, 25-26). Just like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, it gives an order and makes a request. A specter is a death that is not mourned, a debt not redeemed, and the collective hopes or promises of the past that were not yet realized. With this concept of specter, Derrida asserts that a certain intellectual tradition (Marxism in his case) cannot be erased arbitrarily and that any attempt to oppress it will cause them to return in the form of a specter. If I adopt Derrida’s viewpoint, we can more easily grasp Kim’s idea of tradition.

Specter-tradition has two following ontological characteristics: First, unlike the tradition, which is believed to have been obliterated by modernity, specter-tradition is not a hollow name devoid of power, nor has it been completely erased from reality. Specter-tradition functions as a “living” potency that paradoxically leads a stirring

existence between physical death and symbolic extinction. Specter-tradition constrains, forces, and recalls the living. It urges us to interpret its own otherness that has been forgotten, repressed, and silenced. Secondly, the specter-tradition has nothing to do with the artificiality of invented tradition, which has been forged to function as screen or fake memories. Specter-tradition refers to an unforgeable and uninventible “real” in the lacanian sense of the word, and the fundamental otherness of the past that returns after demolishing the imaginative and symbolic order of reality. It makes an appearance at the point where intention ends and begins to destroy purposely invented visions and memories. In this context, specter-tradition could be perceived as a certain material of tradition, which has been neither acknowledged nor accepted as tradition but merely waits to be appointed as such.

However, as this concept derived directly from the Derridian specter, it inevitably shares deconstructionist limitations. That is, it is impossible to communicate with a specter because of its radical otherness. Likewise, it is also impossible to envision a hermeneutical relationship with specter-tradition. The specter-tradition could be perceived as a total otherness of historical time that haunts and obsesses the horizon of the present. This can be explained as the “visor effect” (*effet de visière*) that was introduced in Derrida’s theory of spectral ontology. According to Derrida, we are unable to perceive specter, just as we are unable to perceive any objects when a visor blocks our view. Our eyes are unable to discern specter, since it is devoid of a physical form. To be more precise, we do not observe specter, but we are being observed by it (Derrida 1993, 26).

Herein lies the reason for which Kim could not directly look at his father’s picture: specter-tradition belongs to the world of compulsive calls from the past, which one cannot avoid encountering in one’s life. However, although Kim intuitively grasped the tradition that haunts his consciousness and imagination like a ghost, he failed to communicate with it. In order to communicate with specter, Kim needed to undergo a tumultuous event like the April 19 Revolution. As Walter Benjamin pointed out in the 14th thesis in his “On the

Concept of History” (1940), the revolutionary epoch charged with hyper dialectical tensions and subversive potentialities not only demolishes the homogeneous and empty continuum of history, but also revives the past. Thus, revolutionary situations restructure historical facts, which have been firmly established on the chronological time table, and which are fundamentally irreversible. In other words, historical past or tradition comes back like a ghost to serve as the original copy from which to mold the future (Benjamin 1940, 395).

Rhizome-Tradition

It is beyond argument that the April 19 Revolution was a turning point for Kim’s poetics (Kim Hyeon 1985, 105; Jeon 2008, 248; Choe D. 1998; Yu Jung-ha 2003, 251-252). He was fascinated by this movement for the democratization of Korean society, as demonstrated by the poems he wrote during this period. The biggest change in Kim’s poems as a result of his experiences of the April 19 Revolution was a considerable increase of the repetition method. This method, which can be described as a poetic mimesis for the urgent political reality during the April 19 Revolution, effectively shows the characteristics of the languages of the festival and the square in the Rabelaisian style (Jang S. 2001, 211, 216). Several poems of the revolution penned by Kim² blatantly include examples of straight talk, slangs, and slogan-like expressions. They also made use of montages and disparate words. All of these characteristics show a remarkable difference from Kim’s highly abstract and ambiguous poetic world in the 1950s.

As the language of the street and the language of effervescence

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2. “Useon geunom-ui sajin-eul tteoseo mitssitgae-ro haja” (First of All, Let Us Take His Picture Off the Wall to Use It as a Toilet Wiper), “Ha geurimja-ga eopda” (Hey, There Is No Shadow), “Gido” (Prayer), “Yukbeop jeonseo-wa hyeongmyeong” (The Compendium of Laws and the Revolution), “Pureun haneul-eun” (The Blue Sky Is), “Mansijitan-eun itjiman” (Although We Repent Missing Our Chance), “Naneun arijona kauboiya” (I’m a Cowboy from Arizona), “Geomi jabi” (Spider Hunting), and “Nagao nagadao” (I Am Going Out, Please Go Out).

infiltrated his poems, the gap between poem and reality was abruptly narrowed, and Kim's pen was transformed into an incarnation of the longing, anger, and pain of the people in poetic form. Just as a demagogue would, Kim swears, curses, rebukes, threatens, and moans. Through this direct poetic combustion, he came to encounter forces such as tradition, the nation, and the people, which were methodologically put into parenthesis by so-called modernism. This awareness acted as a driving force that would lead Kim to overcome the political and historical failures of the April 19 Revolution at the ideological and poetical levels. As the fervor of the April 19 Revolution abated, Kim's poems began to lose vivacity. Little by little, he sank into the ordinary routine lives of the petit bourgeoisie. In the wake of the May 16 military coup, he wrote a series of nine poems titled "Singwigeorae," in which he expressed strong anger towards society and history, wounded by the failure of the first civil revolution in the history of modern Korea. Ironically, however, this period of passivity and anger led Kim to reflect more deeply on the reality and power of the people.

Although it is uneasy,
 Although it is uneasy,
 stay still.
 Mr. Poet,
 the people is always one step ahead of you (Anthology I: 163).

Something begins to change in his poems. He opens his eyes bit by bit to the world which was until then veiled by the influence of the modernism. For example, in the "Guseulpeun yukche" (Painful Body), he expresses the will to search for his moral ideal, in spite of the numerous difficulties that he encounters (Anthology I: 191-192); in "Si" (Poem), he appreciates the hard work of the common people (Anthology I: 195); and in "Jangsi II" (Long Poem II), he thinks highly of the concept of "repose" in his work (Anthology I: 210); and he acknowledges the potential of the next generation in "Urideul-ui useum" (Our Laughter) (Anthology I: 223). As poet Jang Man-ho asserts, the respite and disenchantment he experienced during the

1960s helped him create a great vision of reconciliation and love (Jang M. 2004, 291). In this sense, “Gigantic Root” is the summit of this dialectical movement in Kim’s poetics.

I am dating Mrs. Isabelle Bird.
 She is a member of the Royal Geographical Society in Britain.
 She saw the dramatic scenes of Seoul in which
 all men vanish and the world of women arrives
 at the toll of the bell in Injeongjeon.

(. . .)

If it’s tradition, any filthy tradition is ok for me.
 On Gwanghwamun Intersection I can see the mud of Sigu Gate.
 Next to the house of In-hwan’s parents-in-law, I think of the times
 when women folk were hand-washing clothes, making a fire under
 the lye pot,
 sitting by the brook that is now reclaimed for land.
 This gloomy era, nevertheless, is like paradise for me.
 Since I got to know Mrs. Bird Bishop, the rotten Korea
 no longer bothers my mind. To the contrary, it arouses appreciation
 in me.
 No matter how filthy it may be, history is always ok.
 No matter how dirty it may be, mud is always ok.
 As long as I have memories that ring more loudly than a brass rice-
 bowl,
 human beings are eternal, and so is love.

While I’m dating Mrs. Bishop, I don’t give a shit about progressives
 or socialists. Even reunification and neutrality are nothing but god-
 damn crap.
 Secrecy, profoundness, learning, and convention should go to the
 police station.
 The Oriental Development Company, Japanese consulate, Korean
 government officials,
 and ice cream should all go and suck an American bastard’s dick.
 But chamber pots, woven horsehair headbands, smoking pipes,

seedling shops, furniture stores, Gurige Pharmacy, temples,
leather stores, pockmarked people, one-eyed people, women
who cannot give birth, ignorant people.

I like all those innumerable reactionaries.

In order to put my feet on this land,

Even the iron pillar of the third footbridge planted in the water is
like nothing compared to the gigantic root that I have planted
in my land.

The gigantic root that I have planted in my land. . . . (Anthology I:
225-226).

Citing the famous travel memoir written by Isabell Bird Bishop, *Korea and Her Neighbors*, Kim intentionally defamiliarizes his own past by borrowing the orientalist gaze of the occidental traveler (Bishop 1897). The sights of Seoul in the premodern era as seen in the eyes of an intelligent and curious foreigner unfolded in such an unfamiliar and odd way that even Koreans would find them exotic (No Yong-mu 2004, 396). By strategically borrowing this gaze from Bishop and by revealing without reserve all the bizarre aspects of the capital which metonymically represent Korean tradition, Kim ends up embracing his base past, hilariously described as “filthy tradition” (*deoreoun jeontong*), “filthy history” (*deoreoun yeoksa*), and a “dirty mud” (*deoreoun jinchang*). Such undaunted and straightforward, yet optimistic mindset is an astonishing quality that was completely absent in his early works, where he was unable to even raise his eyes to the specter-tradition in his father’s photo. Instead, Kim not only accepts tradition but makes it an object of love, no matter how shabby, filthy, or unpleasant the tradition may be. In the process, tradition becomes so potent that ideology, ideas, scholastic pursuits, and honors lose their meaning in the imposing presence of tradition. Even colonial apparatus of Japan like the Oriental Development Company and Japanese consulate, and Korean government officials and the historical situation of the Korean peninsula are considered to be unimportant in comparison with the unrivaled authority of tradition. Tradition functions as a root that connects the poet and his land at the deepest level, so deep that nothing can shatter the relationship.

Behind this radical change of attitude toward tradition are epistemological changes, which are in fact the disappearance of the visor effect of the specter. Specter-tradition no longer presents itself as the “late father’s face” oppressing the poet with a frightening silence. Instead, it comes into view as a scene, a landscape, and a constellation of various objects like chamber pots (*yogang*), woven horsehair headbands (*manggeon*), smoking pipes (*jangjuk*), seedling shops (*jongmyosang*), furniture stores (*jangjeon*), Gurigae Pharmacy (*gurigae yakbang*), temples (*sinjeon*), leather stores (*pihyeokjeom*), pockmarked people (*gombo*), one-eyed people (*aekku*), women who cannot give birth (*ae monnanneun yeoja*), and ignorant people (*musikjaengi*).

What is really interesting about the possibility of speaking with the specter-tradition is that these “remains” from the past are actually waste items that are damaged, broken, and petty. According to Kim himself, the objects representing tradition are neither completely obsolete words, nor widely-used contemporary words. They exist in a spectral realm, half dead and half living (Anthology II: 280-281).³ Kim addresses these spectral objects as the emblems of the loyal and faithful relationship he maintains with the past. His perception of tradition is very unique in the ideological and intellectual history of modern Korea, and what clearly demonstrates this singularity is the employment of the term “root” to underline the organically inseparable correlation with tradition. In fact, it has been often noted that Kim made use of the word “root” more in his 1960s poetry than in his earlier works (Nam J. 2001, 148-149; Kim Y. 2007, 355-356). For example, in “Long Poem II,” he speaks of “the sound of God’s footprints vibrating the root” (Anthology I: 210); in “Mal” (Words) he

3. In his essay “The Most Ten Beautiful Korean Words,” Kim Su-yeong writes, “The words I consider as beautiful are eventually the words that I learned when I was a child. I learned the vocabularies of the merchants of Seoul, since my father was himself a merchant. So those following words comprehend the history and myth of my childhood: first sale of the day (*masugeori*), haggling (*enuri*), dive bar (*saekjuga*), unlicensed prostitute (*eungeunija*), eating sweets between meals (*gungeotjil*), duster (*chongchae*), schoolroom (*geulbang*), Seosan bamboo (*seosandae*), ink stone (*byeorutdol*), and flint (*busitdol*).”

muses that “the root penetrated more deeply into the winter” (Anthology I: 233); and in “Pul” (Grasses) there is the phrase “It is cloudy and the root of grass fell down” (Anthology I: 297). Nonetheless, the metaphorical signification of the root employed in the poem “Gigantic Root” is very different from the meaning of the above-mentioned roots.

The “root” in this poem does not refer to a physical root, nor does it translate into the origin of a nation or person that is often symbolized by the word “root.” The “root” that Kim mentions in the poem is not the physical underground substratum connected to a tree’s trunk and leaves. It also does not refer metaphorically to the origin of the nation, often symbolized by a root. Had Kim tried to connote a more solid tradition, based upon the image of a substantial entity, the word “root” could have referred to the great spiritual foundations of Asia (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) or great artistic masterpieces, museums, and historical sites. However, the “gigantic root” is far from being such a prestigious legacy. To the contrary, it is a heap of ordinary waste. Instead of a substance, it exists as a random arrangement. Instead of being a single unit, it is an aggregate. Instead of being homogenous, it is diverse. The “gigantic” root is not colossal, unitary, and deep, but tiny, multiple, and epidermal. In that sense, the root in Kim’s poem is almost identical to rhizome mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizomes are thick horizontal underground stems which produce roots and leafy shoots. It does not have a designated point or location like a tree or a root. Instead, it is a space for competition among diverse lines. In that sense, the roots in Kim’s poem are almost identical to rhizomes mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari. Literally speaking, rhizomes are thick horizontal underground stems, including bulbs and tubercles. In the metaphorical sense by Deleuze and Guattari, they also refer to a specific complex system that consists of heterogeneous elements and symptoms. Naturally, the rhizomatic system completely differs from an arboreal structure. For example, the rhizomatic system has no specific center, point or location, given that it solely consists of multiple lines that extend. The rhizomatic system is created by the process of

variation, expansion, conquest, capture, and abscission, whereas an arboreal structure is created by the simple process of linear growth (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 9-37). So what is this tradition that has been embodied as rhizomes (rhizome-tradition) and what are some of its features?

First, rhizome-tradition destroys the myth of the origin and offers a new morphology of tradition. According to this view, tradition is not in the shape of a tree, but a rhizomatic network, and instead of existing in the depths of the past, it manifests itself as multiple symptoms dispersed on the horizon of the present. Just as the rhizome is characterized by singularity and polymorphism instead of being characterized by universality, uniformity, and permanence, the rhizome-tradition is a process of transmission through generations. The past is not reified or mummified, but incorporated into the dialectical process of endless transfiguration, conjunction, flux, and transformation. Passing through this rhizome-space, the tradition is de-territorialized from the past and re-territorialized into the realm of the present.⁴

Second, the traditional objects that we encounter during the process of such transmission manifest themselves as waste that has been demolished and scrapped by the forces of time, instead of well-preserved relics of the past. From a semiological point of view, rhizome-tradition does not consist of symbols characterized by their totality and integrality, but those whose appearance destroys this totality and integrality of symbols, since the symptom is a partial, broken, flawed, and cracked sign.⁵ In this sense, the symptom may

4. "However, the past which Kim Su-yeong wishes to make peace with or look straight at is not the fixed past as it occurred long ago, but the past containing eternity in accordance with the present. So, what he reflects upon is not the tradition itself but traditionality, namely the temporality of the past that we can observe in the present" (Kwak 2001, 111).

5. The production of symptoms is modeled upon the principles of the opportunity (*tuché*) determining the moment of encounter with the real, since the genesis of the symptoms surpass the expectations, intentions, and aspirations of the subject (Lacan 1973, 53-62). The Greek etymology *symptōma* connotes this fragmentarity of symptoms as traces of the real manifested by chance, since *symptōma* signifies

be an antidote to the perception that views tradition as a transcendently-given complete totality. Generally speaking, the tradition as symbols exerts a myth-like influence, given that it embellishes the past and makes it a native land to return to. Kim refuses such a view of tradition, which was notably adopted by Seo Jeong-ju in his famous “Jilmajae sinhwa” (The Myth of Jilmajae). However, to quote Kim, the past “must be negated before being retrieved” and this view sharply contrasts with the mythical vision in the tradition of Seo Jeong-ju which re-appropriates the past without any fundamental struggle (Anthology II: 59).

Therefore, tradition seen from the perspective of rhizome transcends the two dominant theories of modernity and tradition: “modernity obliterates tradition” and “modernity invents tradition.” Rhizome-tradition is neither invented fake tradition, nor dead tradition. It is an aggregate of various traces of specter-tradition. Tradition is more akin to the unconsciousness of modernity rather than its predecessor, premodernity. Just as consciousness and unconsciousness coexist in separate spheres, modernity and tradition coexist in different forms in the same space and time.

Seen from the perspective of rhizome, the authentic subjects of tradition are not the dominant class, intellectuals, or elite groups, but rather various kinds of common people. Kim Su-yeong discovered the political and historical potential of the people in the April 19 Revolution. The power of the people is not the power of the great, but that of the small, tiny, fragmentary, scattered, dirty, and forgotten. As is well known, it is symbolized by grass, which fights against the wind that represents the dominant power (Anthology I: 297). Rhizome-tradition is neither a dead past nor a fake invention. It is living and real, but it is not a totality reified and systematized. It moves temporarily and spatially in its typical dynamic of connection. The problematics of rhizome-tradition opens the way to thinking of the transmission of tradition.

literally “fall with” and that the symptoms designate in this context “the signs fallen to the ground and shattered by chock” (Didi-Huberman 1990, 62).

The Bridge

Kim Su-yeong's understanding of tradition thus evolved from the spectral model to the rhizomatic model. The important point in this process of evolution is that the otherness of specter-tradition was hermeneutically moderated by the vision of rhizome-tradition. Unlike specter-tradition, which is almost impossible to communicate with, rhizome-tradition presents itself in the form of multiple fragments of the past, which posterity can re-territorialize symbolically in the context of their own historicity. There exists a new vision of communication between the past and the present as well as between tradition and modernity, and this vision is realized in a brilliant poetic manner in "The Modern Bridge" written in 1964.

Every time I cross the modern bridge, I suddenly find myself in a
reflective mood.

Oblivious to the fact that the bridge has been tainted by sins.
The insects of the colony keep crossing the bridge 24/7
as if the bridge were their own.

Young people have no idea why this bridge is so ill-fitting
Whenever I cross this bridge, I put a pause on my heart just like a
machine.

(I've repeated this practice innumerable times.)

However, the problem does not lie in this rebellion.
It lies in the love of these young people have for me.
Maybe it's their faith in me.

Whenever they say,
"Sir! You are talking about the events that happened twenty years
ago."

I slowly reflect on their age and then a sense of inner peace spreads
through my mind.
Maybe it's a new history.

This kind of wonder makes me younger and older at the same time.
Or maybe it doesn't do either of them, because it always ends up
erasing the line between young and old.
The bridge has witnessed such a pause of time.

The moment when youth and old age cross by each other, through
that phenomenon and the calmness of it, the bridge learns
about love.

It's really strange.

I've witnessed an enemy becoming brother with my own eyes!

(Anthology I: 235-236).

This poem describes the process of deep solidarity being established between the poet, who is in his early 40s, and young people in their early 20s, with whom the poet shares almost no common generational experiences. For the poet, the bridge not only symbolizes the colonization whose remnants are still present, but also represents backward culture and customs. Consequently, the poet finds the bridge ill-fitting. When the poet encounters younger people who do not have any awareness of the bridge's historical background, he feels a wide generation gap. Instead of the real bridge over the Hangang river, the "bridge" in the poem may well be the one which connects the older generation, who weathered colonization, with the younger generation, who says, "Sir! You are talking about the events that happened twenty years ago." The bridge may also be the one that connects oblivion and recollection, as well as tradition and modernity. It serves as a literary device for physically manifesting the passage of time, and also as a scene of time that can be understood as an instrument for reasoning.

This "bridge" communicates experiences that cannot be communicated and makes unlovable object loved. In that sense, it takes on the meaning of a medium through which the synthesis of past/present, tradition/modernity happens (Ko 2002, 15-6; Jeon 2008, 266-270). It is a brilliant poetic apparatus of the "tension and overcoming of the two opposites" (O 1999, 334).⁶ In this sense, Professor Kim

6. This bridge is also a symbolic expression of love, according to Kim Myeong-in who made the following argument: "Love plays the role of connecting the young and the old, as well as the fast and the slow. Thanks to this love between historical subjects, history can be passed down from one generation to another. Although this is a relatively abstract idea, it constitutes a very new and important discovery for Kim Su-yeong. Love plays an important role in communications between differ-

Sang-hwan writes as follows:

According to the bridge technique, when reality is subject to division and contradiction, and thus loses a certain cultural identity, you have to continue to recall the fundamental tasks of poetry. You have to also devise a method to approach and build reality. Kim Su-yeong did it on the bridge. Why did he do that on the bridge? It was because of his awareness of the fragmentation and rupture of historical reality. The rupture that exists in history, ideologies, generations, classes, and places, as well as discord among different traditions may be the fetters of reality. In this country of contradictions, where exist numerous gaps that should be bridged, the “bridge technique” may be the one that should be urgently mastered. By fulfilling that need, Kim has become the “bridge” himself, and that is where the status he assumes in the history of Korean literature is found. Wouldn’t Kim be the “bridge” that connects the older generation and the younger generation, the city and the village, the premodern era and the modern era, intellectualism and sentimentalism, tradition and modernity, and even modernity and postmodernity? (Kim Sang-hwan 2000, 21).

As the quote points out, “The Modern Bridge” not only shows many ruptures that exist in the depths of Korean mentality in the modern age, but also offers situations or images that give a clue as to how to mend the ruptures. The bridge symbolizes the possibility of transmitting traditions, recalling the past, fostering understanding between different generations, and finally, loving each other. The bridge in Kim’s poem interlaces tradition and the present like the double helix of DNA. First, tradition is revived as a meaningful past, so long as it maintains a vivid relationship with modernity. Second, modernity can fully manifest itself, so long as it continues to communicate with tradition.⁷

ent generations” (Kim M. 2002, 243).

7. In terms of Ryu Chan-yeol, by thus transcending the limits of traditionalism and modernism, Kim Su-yeong went beyond the “designed tradition” and “translated modernity” (Ryu C. 2005, 42-57).

Through this understanding of tradition, Kim firstly managed to transcend so-called traditionalism.⁸ In general, traditionalism can be defined as ideological, aesthetical, and literary attitudes to resolve the problems of modernity by resuscitating the inherent potential of the tradition of the past. Therefore, traditionalism has a tendency to bring back traditions that glitter like a permanent symbol. In that sense, the traditions which traditionalism pursues have mythical characteristics. The best example of this would be the poetic features of Seo Jeong-ju, who made waves in poetical circles in the 1960s. Kim criticized them as “escape to Silla” (Anthology II: 360) because the past becomes an object of mythical nostalgia in Seo’s extraordinarily beautiful poems, creating a certain fantasy for the past. The first thesis negates such a mythical past.

Secondly, Kim also transcended the limits of modernism, which seeks to renounce tradition. As mentioned above, Kim also has the characteristics of an “anti-traditionalist,” given that he had not written even a single lyric poem in the vein of Kim Sowol, Kim Yeong-nang, or Seo Jeong-ju. What he sought, first and foremost, was the poetic and cultural embodiment of Korean modernity. He always lamented the culturally backward environment of South Korea and longed for progress on the situation. However, he did not believe that the modernization of Korea could be achieved by adopting a Western model. For him, modernization could only be realized by restructuring his own traditional values, inheritance, and potency (Yu S. 2005, 38). Kim criticized dominant poets of modernity of his time, such as Song Uk, Bak I-do, and Bak In-hwan, as their poems promoted an “escape from reality” (Anthology II: 360). The series of experimental and thought-provoking poems they wrote was criticized by Kim as a modernism of “pose” and “costumes” while devoid of seriousness (Anthology II: 363, 380-381).

8. Concerning traditionalism, see Nam K. (2001, 11), Hwang (1991), and Park H. (2004, 3-4).

Conclusion

I have examined Kim Su-yeong's view of tradition through the metaphor-concepts of specter, rhizome, and bridge. In his early poems, Kim perceived tradition as a living and powerful specter with which it was very difficult to communicate. I named this type of tradition conceived by Kim as specter-tradition. The concept of rhizome-tradition represents Kim's view of the mid-1960s. According to this view, tradition is not a pure "origin" comparable to a "root," but a rhizomatic structure of various symptoms of the past. These two concepts are similar to each other in that both of them deconstruct the substantialist concept of tradition and stress the temporal and dialectical coexistence of past and present and of modernity and tradition. However, it should also be noted that the differences between them; while specter-tradition is beyond communicability, rhizome-tradition opens the way to the problematics of transmission. As I analyze it, in the "Gigantic Root" I observe a transition of views on tradition from a spectral model to rhizomatic model. The poet proclaims his unconditional love for the shabby symptoms of the past. Tradition, which used to be an oppressing specter with an uncanny manner, evolved into an interlocutor at this point. Thanks to this evolution in his view of tradition, Kim Su-yeong could envision the possibility of transmitting the past to the present and the present to the future. An exemplary poetic apparatus of this transmissibility is the bridge in "The Modern Bridge." As the symbol of the dialogical space of tradition and the present, the image of bridge transcends the otherness of specter-rhizome and the fragmentation of rhizome-tradition. This is where the evolution of Kim's views on tradition culminate.

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