

The Understanding of Yun Dong-ju in Three East Asian Countries*

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Abstract

This study analyzes how three countries of East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea) understands Yun Dong-ju (1917-1945) and recognizes his historical significance, as well as suggests the future directions in interpreting his works. In Japan, Yun is understood as a poet singing innocent sentiment, ethical existence, and universal love for all mankind. The emphasis on future values and the refusal to read his poetry located in a particular time and space, however, denies the historicity of the three nations. For ethnic Koreans in China, Yun is an originator of historical text within which their ethnicity vitally exists. This perspective also leads to overlooking historical and geopolitical characteristics of Yun's poetry. In South Korea, Yun is placed at the center of nationalism with a postcolonial view; however, there has been a recent movement to comprehend Yun without associating political ideologies. Each nation's reading of Yun seems to eliminate or simplify multilayered traits of East Asian history and culture embedded in his poetry. This lack of historical awareness impedes the future generation's introspection of the past when recalling and regenerating Yun. Therefore, the text of Yun Dong-ju that lives in the past, present, and future of East Asian history, requires us to read it responsibly.

Keywords: Yun Dong-ju, East Asia, Korean poet, ethnic Koreans in China, imperialism, Japanese colonial era

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Three East Asian Countries and Yun Dong-ju in Text

Many recent studies have pursued researching culturally common identities of three countries in East Asia (China, Japan, and South Korea), emphasizing transnational openness and postnational understanding of local characteristics located within the global system. Furthermore, they suggest peace as a pursuable value for the East Asian community in this twenty-first century and insist on moving beyond nationalistic systems towards common humanity (Sakamoto 2010). The principles of peace and anti-war in East Asia that ensued in the post-Cold War era have spread into each nation; people's solidarity and campaigns surrounding these principles have become increasingly more active and participatory.

While it is certain that the pursuit of peace is a critically shared virtue for the future of East Asia, each nation should first introspectively assess their respective histories, even if they are not desirable memories. This is not an easy task because East Asian countries face a complicated, painful history. Furthermore, each country has highly different interpretations of the past, and this leads to varying evaluations on matters such as imperialism and the colonial era. In order to pursue a shared East Asian identity, therefore, it is necessary to examine each nation's historical experiences, which have in turn significantly affected their respective historical sentiment.

For this end, attention should be paid to the intersection of diverse dimensions and elements that exist in thinking of East Asia as a concept. Systematic researches on power dynamics within and outside of the region, remembered histories, and designs for the future are necessary. This is because East Asia is a geopolitical and geocultural conceptual place with entangled past and present geology, history, and culture (Yoon 2010). In light of this view, the poet Yun Dong-ju can be thought of as a text that represents crossings and stratified attributions of East Asia. Born during the height of East Asian geopolitical power struggle in the early twentieth century, Yun is considered a text that embodies the past, present, and future of East Asia.

Yun's poems were not published during his lifetime, but ever

since his poetry was posthumously published in Korea in 1948, he has been widely regarded as a national poet and a resister of imperialism. After Yun's grave was identified in 1985 by Japanese scholar Omura Masuo, Yun has been considered an ethnic hero in his hometown of Yanji city (in present-day Yanbian prefecture, China). At the same time, following Ibuki Ko's translation of Yun's poetry collections into Japanese in 1984, Yun has been introduced as a guardian of peace for all mankind, not just as a Korean ethnic poet. Since these developments, his life and works have been subjects of academic discussion in each of the three nations, while also garnering mass cultural following. It is a rare case that a single poet has influenced people's lives in three East Asian nations.

Yun was born in 1917 in Mingdong (Myeongdong in Korean; hereafter, Myeongdong) village, northern Jiandao (Gando in Korean) of Manchuria (currently, Longjing, Jilin province). Jiandao was a place of consistent territorial dispute between Korea's Joseon dynasty and China's Qing dynasty until Qing gained all territorial rights with the Jiandao Convention (1909) after the Sino-Japanese War. Until Manchukuo was created in this region as a puppet state of the Japanese Empire in 1932, the region had retained relative independence from both Japan and China, with which it had had a long history of a contentious relationship. Myeongdong, where Yun spent his childhood and early school years, was a village established by independence activists based on the tradition of Confucianism; and it was a place of high ethnic and cultural awareness as well as educational enthusiasm. He later left Jiandao to attend Sungsil High School in Pyongyang and Yeonhui College in Seoul (which later became Yonsei University), Korea. He then moved to Japan and entered Rikkyo University in Tokyo around 1940, before moving to Doshisha University in Kyoto. In 1943, he was arrested with his cousin Song Mong-gyu on the charge of having participated in the independence movement. He died at the Fukuoka Prison in Kyushu in February of 1945.

As aforementioned, Yun's lifetime movements mirrored the locus of historical tensions, political conflicts, territorial disputes, and foundations of empire and colonialism in East Asia that began at the end

of the nineteenth century. That is, Yun was a man who lived in the midst of dynamics and tensions among the three East Asian countries. After Yun left his hometown in Northern Jiandao in China, he lived in different geological places for each phase of his life, and left his mark in all three East Asian nations of China, Korea, and Japan.

In this sense, Yun is not just a poet, but also can be considered a unit of analysis, a readable text in the context of world or East Asian discourse. The purity illustrated in his life and work juxtaposed by the political contradiction evoked by his death in prison leads to a complicated understanding of his life. Moreover, the fact that his death is disturbingly connected with Korea's independence movement and Japan's medical experiments on a living body further forces us to read him as a multilayered text positioned amidst Korea and Japan, imperial power and colonialism, and warfare and violence. In the contemporary cultural topography of China, Japan, and Korea, however, this historical figure of Yun Dong-ju is conceived as straddling "art and life" as well as a future value for which East Asia should pursue.

This article contemplates how three nations of East Asia comprehend Yun, a symbol of the dynamic and intersected history of the region, focusing on major features of each nation's interpretations. This examination reveals discrepancies in historical awareness and present perspectives among the three East Asian nations, as well as suggest future directions in understanding Yun and his works.

South Korea: Yun Dong-ju as the Canon of Nationalism

In South Korea, Yun Dong-ju is one of the most popular poets both in and outside of academia, and his language of pure self-consciousness and introspection is beloved by a wide readership. *Haneul-gwa baram-gwa byeol-gwa si* (Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poems), his representative poetry collection, was a bestseller from the colonial liberation period until the 1970s and, since then, it has been a steady seller. His poems also have been taught extensively in middle and high schools. Moreover, much research on modern Korean literature revolves

around Yun.¹ Although there are some studies that question locating colonial resistance in Yun's poetry (Oh 1995), the major focus in most of the researches has been on his resistance poetry based on ethnic consciousness. The facts that his poetry conveys his inner anguish as a poet living in the colonial era, his prose expresses concerns for Joseon's culture and its people, and he died in Japanese prison have placed him center stage among ethnic poets. Gestures of his resistance are also evident in his poetry written in Korean—even though the language was banned during the last phase of the Japanese colonial rule—in his children's verse that sought to restore Korean culture, in his will for sacrificing himself for his people, and in his Christian martyr spirit. Based on such academic interpretations along with the ethnic-centered education curriculum, Yun has become a representative poet of colonial resistance in Korean literature, and his works have also been considered greatly valuable resistance poetry.

Following is his representative poem, "Seulpeun joksok" (The Sorrowful Race):

White towels are wrapped around black heads,
White rubber shoes are hung on rough feet.
White blouses and skirts cloak sorrowful frames,
And white belts tightly tie gaunt waists.²

The above poem compares those living in the colonial period with the sorrowful people wearing white clothes. White clothes culturally represent the pure and humble Korean people, historically referred to as *baegui minjok* 白衣民族 (literally, "white-clad folk"). In this poem, however, the weary reality due to exhaustion and poverty is depicted through the coarse feet and thin waist of the Joseon people. Empha-

1. Based on the December 2010 search results from the Korean National Assembly Library database, the number of studies on Yun totaled 900, which is 300 more studies than there are on Kim So-wol, one of the most important poets in Korean history and a poet who published his only poetry collection during the colonial era like Yun.

2. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

sizing the color white four times with a simple and calm voice, Yun shows people's bleak, dark lives. To comfort the people who face such reality, he repeats the biblical passage, "blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," from Matthew 5:3-12 (Beatitudes) in his poem. Awareness of this reality led him to cogitate what he had to do as a poet to help the people overcome the sadness.

Following are further examples of Yun's prose, entitled "Byeoltong tteoreojin de" (Where the Falling Star Drops) and "Jongsi" (The Final Destination):

Because I was born in the darkness and grew up in this darkness I must still be living in this darkness. . . . Despite the breaking dawn this village remains in the dark and I also remain in this darkness. . . . Will I have to ask a wise tree my direction. Where should I go. Where is East, where is West, where is South, where is North. Oh wait! That star flows with a flash. The place that I should go to must be where the falling star drops.

("Where the Falling Star Drops," January 1939)

Now I must soon change my final destination. But, I wish I could hang such signs as "Xinjing-bound," "Beijing-bound," or "Nanjing-bound" on my car. I wish I could hang the "Around the World" sign. No, if my true hometown exists, I would hang a "Hometown-bound" sign. If there is a destination for the coming future, I would rather stop there.

("The Final Destination," 1941)

Compared with poems voicing inner worries, the above prose directly reveals his concerns for his directions and his duty in the darkness that represents the colonial era. In the second passage of "Jongsi," he is seeking his life's direction because to study has no meaning if it is disconnected from human life. His will to seek in reality the future destination of history and his era led to the conviction that "we will find a bright world in the near future" ("Jongsi" [The Final Destination]). However, the path for Yun was full of hardship, frustration,

and darkness. Despite this reality, he was determined to preserve his own strong conviction and internal robustness. His poem, “Dorawa boneun bam” (The Night I Returned), evinces such determined, fierce conviction that he would take the path chosen for him and guided by God. He also demonstrated his final determination in his last poem, “Swipge ssuieojin si” (A Poem That Came Easily):

A Poem That Came Easily

The night rain whispers outside the window
of my six-mat room, in an alien country.

The poet has a sad vocation, I know;
should I write another line of poetry?

Having received my tuition from home in an envelope
soaked with the smell of sweat and love,

I tuck my college notebook under my arm
and go off to listen to the lecture of an old professor.

Looking back, I see that I have lost my childhood friends:
one and two at a time—all of them.

What was it that I was hoping for,
and why am I simply sinking to the bottom alone?

Life is meant to be difficult;
it is too bad
that a poem comes so easily to me.

My six-mat room in an alien country;
the night rain whispers outside the window.

I light the lamp to drive out the darkness a little,
and I, in my last moments, wait for the morning,
which will come like a new era.

Extending a small hand to myself,
I offer myself the very first handshake,
tears, and condolences.

(McCann 2004, 94-95)

Yun had entered the literature department of Rikkyo University in Tokyo in 1942, and then in October of that same year, he moved to the literature department of Doshisha University in Kyoto. His poem, "A Poem That Came Easily," was written at the end of his first semester in Rikkyo University. This poem describes in sequential order his thoughts on his studying in Japan, writing poetry, and how he will live in the future. The line "of my six-mat room, in an alien country" indicates his clear consciousness as a Korean, that he is in Japan as a colonial subject and Japan is not his country. While he is determined to live his life to the fullest when he thinks of his parents who send his tuition, he also feels shame and powerlessness when he finds himself settling to the bottom whilst listening to a lecture of an old professor. A reflective awareness of his shame enlightens him, however, and Yun looks forward to the advent of a new era, which would force out the darkness of the time. Such realization and determination stem from his awareness of reality and from a resolution that poets must write poems to shed light during such dark times. By the end of the poem, Yun expresses his resolution to greet a new epoch in history and end his inner turmoil and restlessness with the very first handshake with himself. The lamp and the morning (the lines 18-19) symbolize liberation and the coming of a new era. Despite the weakness of his hands, Yun dedicates his life to the future of his people by shaking his own hands—the hand of his once directionless life with that of his new historical life. After he wrote this last poem, he was arrested under the charge of engaging in the independence movement by the Japanese police in July of 1943. His incarceration may have been "the final I" that he imagined for himself while he contemplated what he could do for his people under colonization.

From 1948 when Yun's poetry collection was first published until

1980, Korean society commemorated Yun mainly in academia, literary circles, and mass media such as magazines and newspapers. Since 1990, however, he has been nationally commemorated through a variety of events. In December of 1992, the Ministry of Culture and Public Information chose Yun as a cultural figure of the month, and in 2007 the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs selected him as the independence activist of the month. Moreover, an old house of Professor Jeong Byeong Wook, where Yun Dong-ju's posthumous collections were stored, was designated as a cultural property. In addition, overseas translation projects of Yun's poetry are also in progress. Especially since 2000, Yun Dong-ju and his works have been read as major, mass cultural texts. For example, in 2007, the opera-musical *Yun Dong-ju* was performed, showing dramatic features of his life and death. In 2008, the first Korean astronaut Lee So-yeon gave a performance of reciting Yun's poem "One Night I Count the Stars" at the International Space Station. In 2009, SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System) aired an episode titled "Yun Dong-ju, the Mystery of His Death," as part of its investigative program *Geugeot-i algo sipda* (We Want to Know). On November 4, 2011, MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation), a major television station in Korea, aired a show entitled "Gaeul, Yun Dong-ju saenggak" (Autumn and Thinking about Yun Dong-ju). These are all evidence of the various ways in which Yun has affected the popular historical memory. Especially in the latest program "Gaeul, Yun Dong-ju saenggak," the description of Yun focused on his inner purity and his messages of love for peace and reconciliation, which are the characteristics of Yun's work that the Japanese audience emphasizes. The following section focuses on Japanese readers and the ways in which they understand and interpret Yun.

Japan: Yun Dong-ju as a Symbol of Peace and Reconciliation

Yun was introduced mainly as a poet of inner purity and advocate of peace rather than as an independence activist agonizing over his country. These characteristics reflect memories of Yun in present East

Asian cultural terrain, in which his image shifted from an ethnic nationalist poet to an advocate of peace and universal brotherhood. There are certain reasons that influenced this understanding. Foremost, Yun Dong-ju became famous in Japan after Ibuki Ko, who pioneered the introduction of Yun and his poetry to Japan, published the first translation of Yun's poetry collection, *Haneul-gwa baram-gwa byeol-gwa si* (Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poems), under the title of *Sora to kaze to hoshi to shi* 空と風と星と詩 in 1984 (Yun 1984). Ibuki laid the necessary groundwork for Yun and his poetry to be accepted in Japanese academia and mass culture. He worked with Kurosaki Junichi to introduce Yun to Japanese society by publishing Yun's poems in *Kiroku* 記録 (Records), a monthly journal, from March of 1982 to April of 1983. Then he met with Yun's younger brother and after agreeing to the terms of publishing Yun's poetry in Japanese translation, the collection was finally published in 1984. In his afterword, Ibuki evaluated Yun as an ethnic resistance and prophetic poet.

Omura Masuo intensively studied Yun after Ibuki Ko introduced Yun to the Japanese world (Omura 2001). Highlighting Yun's literature and his works as world class, Omura extensively researched him and subsequently influenced Korean literature by restoring Yun's works. He studied Yun's literature with a thorough positivist approach. He spent several years in Yanbian University, where he located Yun's grave, and also analyzed Yun's handwriting to identify the authenticity of some of the poetry pieces. Omura stressed the historicity of Yun's poetry, revealing that Yun, with the pure heart of a poet creating children's song, sang the pain and agony of his ethnic nation. Due to these projects by Omura, Korean literary studies in Japanese academia have been able to make progress.

It was Ibaraki Noriko who introduced the life of Yun Dong-ju to Japan, along with his poetry collection. Her reading on Yun is grounded in democratic ideology and her disdain of Japanese militarism. By evoking Yun's death, Ibaraki urged Japanese reflection on its violent coercive colonial rule through such policies as banning of the Korean language and forcing Koreans to change their names into Japanese (Yang 2009). Through her own poem "Tonari kokugo no mori 隣國語の

森” (In the Woods of the Language of Neighboring Country), she sought forgiveness from Hangeul (Korean language) in stating, “Hangeul, the language of a neighboring country that the Japanese language once sought to expel. Forgive us. It is time for this side to sweat to learn yours.” In the same poem, she emphasized the guilt of the Japanese colonial period by evoking Yun Dong-ju as in the line “Your youth is splendid and fragile.” Afterwards, she published her essay collection, *Hanguru e no tabi* ハンゲルへの旅 (A Travel to Hangeul) (1986), in which the essay “Yun Dong-ju” (Ibaraki 1986) was included. This essay was also included in Japanese high school literature textbooks in 1990. It was the first time that the life and poems of a Korean poet were taught with such detail in Japanese schools.

Although Yun Dong-ju and his works were discussed with a reflective viewpoint against Japan’s imperialist history, as evidenced by the above discussion of Ibaraki Noriko, since the 1970s this perspective has been replaced by a religious one that sings universal love for humanity.³ In recent years, the dominant trend in the study of Yun has been to de-emphasize his Korean ethnic nationalism and instead foreground Yun and his universalistic appeal as symbol of peace resisting against the evil of the age while struggling with his own existential conflict (Ueno 1997).

The translation of one of Yun’s poems reveals how Yun is understood in Japan. Ibuki’s translation of the poetry collection, *Sora to kaze to hoshi to shi* (Sky, Wind, Stars, and Poems), is the most well-known edition and still considered the definitive translation in both Japanese academia and popular culture. Japanese scholars, however, have critically commented on problems in the translation, and Ibuki has responded to the criticism with an explanation. It should be particularly pointed out that the poem criticized for its mistranslation, “Seosi” (Foreword), is one of the most beloved of Yun’s poems in both Korea and Japan, and that this poem, which follows, is consid-

3. Yun Dong-ju was a devout Christian, and the fact that he died in a hostile country has made him a martyr among Japanese Christians, which in turn played an active role in introducing Yun to Japan.

ered to demonstrate Yun's views on life and literature.

Foreword

Wishing not to have
 so much as a speck of shame
 toward heaven until the day I die,
 I suffered, even when the wind stirred the leaves.
 With my heart singing to the stars,
 I shall love all things that are dying.
 And I must walk the road
 That has been given to me.

Tonight, again, the stars are
 brushed by the wind.

(McCann 2004, 90)

Yun wrote "Foreword" in November 1941 before moving to Japan. This work, based on his shame-based introspection and the resolution to follow his destined life, is critical in understanding Yun's life and his views on literature. In the poem, Yun captures the suffering with wind stirred leaves, and relays his determination, with his "star/hope" cherishing heart, to love all dying creatures victimized by violence through the path destined for him.

How *haneul* 하늘 (meaning "heaven" or "sky") was translated was the most problematic. Ibuki translated it not as heaven (*ten* 天), but as sky (*sora* 空), and kept this same translation for the title of the collection, *Sora to kaze to hoshi to shi*. It would not pose a problem if this poem simply describes the natural existence of the sky, wind, and stars. The heaven that Yun refers to in the poem, however, is not a physical space like sky but rather an ideological space that grants the criterion of life. So it should be heaven (天), which in Asian philosophy means more than just the sky. According to Zhu Xi 朱子, heaven includes conceptions of firmament, leader, and logic. Mencius also emphasizes that a virtuous, noble man is not supposed to be shameful

when facing both heaven upward and people downward.

Korean culture also advocates respecting heaven and loving all mankind (*gyeongcheon aein* 敬天愛人). Moreover, because Yun was a devout Christian, “heaven” represented for him the space of absolute truth. Considering these meanings, *haneul* that Yun meant in “Foreword” must be the philosophical conception of “heaven” or “spiritual standards” for life grounded on Asian ethics, and thus, it is more appropriate to translate it as heaven and not as sky.

Because Ibuki missed this context when understanding the poem, he translated *ineun* 이는 (“blow” or “stir”) in the line “*ipsae-e ineun baram* 잎새에 이는 바람” (“the wind stirred the leaves”) into “rustle” (gently blow), thereby erasing the existential weight of Yun’s life that faced the historical winds. Moreover, the passage “*modeun jugeoga-neun geoseul saranghaeyaji* 모든 죽어가는 것을 사랑해야지” (“I shall love all things that are dying”; “すべての死んでいくものを愛さねば” in Japanese) was translated to mean “I shall love all living things” (“生きとし生けるもの生きとし生けるもの” in Japanese). Since Yun’s will to love all *dying* things clearly demonstrates his determination, as a poet, to stand against the brutality of the Japanese Empire at the time, Ibuki’s translation of “I shall love all living things” leads to misinterpretations.

Morita Susumu has emphasized that Ibuki Ko’s translation of the line into “I shall love all living things” is erroneous when Yun’s awareness of history is properly understood. Since “Foreword” is based on patriotic, scholastic traditions of Korean literature, Yun’s resistant spirit against Japanese imperialism cannot be ignored (Morita 1998). Omura also has criticized Ibuki’s translation because it changed Yun’s agony as a poet facing the historical winds of fascism to that of an innocent sentiment of a virgin girl. Because Yun wrote “Foreword” on November 20, 1941, during the period right before the outbreak of the Pacific War in which many Koreans were being killed and its ethnic cultures being obliterated by Japanese militarism, Ibuki’s translation of the line “love all things that are *dying*” into “loving all *living* things” misconstrues Yun’s resistant spirit against Japanese imperialism (Omura 2001). Ibuki has refuted Omura’s point by claiming that to “love all things that are dying” and to “love all living things” mean

the same. He also insists that when interpreting the poem for its existential matter, it is of little importance whether or not Yun had hatred toward Japanese militarism.⁴ In other words, Ibuki expunges Yun's historical consciousness by understanding Yun as an existential, romantic poet. In Korean history, however, the phrase "I shall love all things that are dying" is read as an expression of love for Koreans who were facing brutal realities. In China, this phrase is also often understood to signify the suffering of the people under the adversity of the Japanese colony (Sheng 2007).

Moreover, Kinoshita Nagahiro discovered an error in Ibuki's translation by comparing it with Japanese traditional literature. Ibuki's translation of "love all living things" derives from a famous verse, "all living things with their own life, all recite songs" ("生きとし生けるもの、いづれか、歌を詠まざりける" in Japanese),⁵ which is deeply rooted in Japanese consciousness. Japanese often recite this verse when positively responding to living things and quote it like a popular proverb that recalls traditional Japanese ethnic poetry (Kinoshita et al. 1998). Considering that Yun wrote the poem in Korean during the time when this language was prohibited, to apply a Japanese traditional poetry verse in translating his poem indicates the translator's failure to properly understand Yun's literature and historical consciousness. The verse "love all living things" replaced Yun's ethnic consciousness and sense of responsibility with an ordinary individual's contemplation of his existence. To love the things that are dying, victimized by violence and war, implies deference to a genuine sense of living. Through comprehending this, we can see how Yun is discerned in Japan, especially in relation to its consciousness and perception of the early twentieth-century East Asian history.

Many of the problems associated with Ibuki's edition were resolved

4. Suh Kyungsik, "Moeo-raneun gamok" (The Prison Called a Mother Tongue), *Hankyoreh*, July 14, 2006.

5. A traditional, anonymous lyrical verse written in *kanajo* 假名子, included in Kojima NoriYuki 小島憲之 and Arai Eizo 新井榮藏, trans. and eds., *Kokin wakashu* 古今和歌集 (Anthology of Waka Poems of the Past and Present) (Tokyo: Iwanamii Shoten).

with a new translation by Kim Si-Jong (Yun 2004).⁶ Kim, however, kept the same title for the collection as *Sora to kaze to hoshi to shi* 空と風と星と詩, instead of supporting the philosophy of heaven. Kim had responded to the public sentiment, as had Ibuki, and the ways in which the Japanese people understood their history and interpreted Yun's spirit and philosophy. Because people in Japan seem not to want to remember the truth about the Japanese colonial rule over Korea, they tend to read Yun's poem as expressions of existential love and not as accusations against the Japanese colonial rule (E. Kim 2009). Suh Kyungsik explains that there must be a desire to avoid the guilt associated with Japanese colonial conducts in Ibuki's translation. He stresses that such translation can actually intensify misunderstandings that lead to further conflicts rather than induce mutual understanding between Korea and Japan.⁷

Since the 1990s, the number of memorial projects on Yun has been increasing in Japan. In 1994, an association for reading Yun's poetry was founded in Fukuoka and, one of the major Japanese television stations, NHK, aired a special program on Yun Dong-ju to memorialize the 50th anniversary of his death. In 1995, his poem was engraved in a monument erected in his alma mater, Doshisha University in Kyoto, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the war's end. The dean of Doshisha University emphasized that the monument stood as a symbol for stronger bonds between Korea and Japan. As suggested by the monument's first carved phrase, "Yun Dong-ju is a Korean ethnic poet and Christian poet," the ideas of peace and reconciliation are highlighted by calling Yun a Korean and Christian poet while Yun Dong-ju as a historical legacy of the 1930s-40s Jiandao and Joseon is erased.

In contemporary Japan, Yun Dong-ju is understood as "a poet of peace and art" and "a pioneer of reconciliation between Korea and

6. Kim changed the problematic translation of "sky" to "heaven" and "all living things" to "all the things that are dying."

7. Suh Kyungsik, "Moeo-raneun gamok" (The Prison Called a Mother Tongue), *Hankyoreh*, July 14, 2006.

Japan.” In 2005, a variety of memorial events were held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Yun’s death. In 2008, the department of literature in Rikkyo University, in celebrating its 100th anniversary, held a large memorial event with the theme of “Living with the poet Yun Dong-ju.” Recently, citizens promoting intercultural exchanges between Korea and Japan are leading a campaign to establish a “Monument of Memory and Reconciliation” in the Yodogawa (Ujigang in Korean) area of Japan, where Yun once visited with his classmates. In addition, they plan to create a monument commemorating Yun also in Washington, D.C.

These commemorative events have contributed to transforming Yun from a Korean national poet to an international poet. We cannot, however, overlook that these memorials of Yun are imbued with the desires and goals of the promoters and do not always reflect Yun’s history. These commemorative events seem to emphasize visions of present and future peace while disassociating the implications of Japan’s aggression and colonial rule from Yun. In this context, Yun has become well known globally among people seeking world peace. It is, therefore, particularly necessary to critically examine this portraying of Yun as a symbol of non-violence and world peace in worldwide campaigns.

Yanji in China: Yun Dong-ju as a Historical Icon of the Ethnic Minority Group

Although Yun Dong-ju was born in Yanji, it was not until 1985, about 40 years after his death, that he became well known to the people in his hometown. After Omura sent Yun’s poetry collections written both in Japanese and in Korean as gifts to a literature society of ethnic Koreans in China and to Yun’s alma mater, his poetry became known in his hometown. Prior to this, nobody had heard of Yun Dong-ju, let alone his poetry, because of the Chinese state’s closed-door political and cultural policies that rigidly restricted studying of foreign literature.

After the Cultural Revolution and beginning in the mid-1980s, the

literary world in China opened its doors to outside cultures by pursuing foreign theories, works, and authors. This transition, however, did not affect the cultures of ethnic Koreans. More accustomed to Korean than Chinese, they embraced new cultures more slowly than the mainstream Chinese people and demonstrated little awareness of twentieth-century Western cultures. Moreover, although literature of ethnic Koreans developed in accordance with Chinese literature, ethnic Korean literature relied much more on North Korean literary studies and creative activities due to the linguistic affinity (Yu 2010). Yet, since North Korea was under cultural and political influences of China, its political closeness to China likely conditioned the lack of awareness of Yun in North Korea. Due to these conditions, changes in ethnic Korean literature by indirect introduction of Korean literature did not occur until after the 1980s. Although numerous studies on Yun began to be conducted after 1985, it was not until the diplomatic normalization between Korea and China in 1992 that scholastic interchanges began to be actively carried out. North Korea also began to study Yun in the 1990s and, in spite of criticizing his works for being full of sense of solitude and pathos, has evaluated him as a martyred resistance poet.

Most researches on Yun conducted by ethnic Koreans in China have placed his work at the center of ethnic nationalism and emancipation literature against Japan, which had developed after the Manchurian Incident. After the establishment of diplomatic ties between Korea and China, ethnic Korean literary scholars accepted without questioning the 1970s-1980s South Korean evaluations of Yun as a resistance poet. The literary history of ethnic Koreans, which comprises a part of the history of Chinese minority literature, has established Yun as a resistant and ethnic nationalist poet (Cho, Kwon, et al. 1997), and recently, as a humanist beyond that of an ethnic nationalist poet (Kwon 2006).

Main research trend of ethnic Koreans is to centralize Yun's resistance and emphasize him as a source of regional and ethnic pride. Lim Yeon (1993) evaluates Yun in terms of having enhanced the literary world of ethnic Koreans, calling him "Yun Dong-ju, the Poet

formed by his hometown.” In fact, Koreans in Korea share these sentiments of ethnic Koreans in China; the embracement of Yun as one of the most beloved Korean poets by Koreans originates from the fact that he is the poet of Yanji and the son of ethnic Koreans in China (Kim Ho-Woong 2005). The concept of Yun “as an ethnic poet created by Yanji” (Kim Hyeok 2010) is based on their locality and ethnicity, and this is fundamental to the current ethnic Korean remembrance of Yun.

Meanwhile, the tendency to emphasize locality by reminding that Yun is a Yanji poet is connected to reading for diasporic identifications in Yun’s poems (Liang 2009). Namely, this emphasis on Yun’s origins in Myeongdong, Longjing, China, connects Yun’s identity with other second-generation migrants, sharing with them the longing for their nostalgic native country (Zhang 2010). From this point of view, Longjing is, for Yun, the source of longing for his ethnicity, his nostalgic hometown, and eventually extended to include Korea as his nation (Meng 2011).

Currently, Yun’s poems are included in elementary and middle-school literature textbooks, *Joseon eomun* (Korean Language and Literature), and the education field treats his works as valuable literary legacies. His hometown, Longjing, has also hosted many memorial events and established numerous monuments, such as a monument engraved with Yun’s poem in Longjing Middle School in 1992, the restoration of Yun’s birthplace in 1994, a memorial festival among ethnic Koreans in 1995, and a poetry monument established in the public park in the Yanji urban area in 2010. In addition, organizations have created literary prizes named after Yun Dong-ju that are awarded through magazines such as *Yeonbyeon munhak* (Yanji Literature) or *Junghaksaeng* (Middle Schoolers). The basis of these commemorative events is to stress Yun as a historic figure of ethnic Koreans. For instance, the Yun Dong-ju Literary Prize is a call to develop the next ethnic generation by remembering the poet Yun and his soul (Kim Ho-Woong 2005). Furthermore, Yun’s alma mater helped to restore Myeondong village in an effort to revive ethnic awareness by emphasizing that Longjing is the cradle of ethnic Korean culture and Myeon-

dong is a living historical place; therefore, if Longjing is recovered, they believe that their ethnic souls can be preserved. In the history of ethnic Koreans in China, Yun Dong-ju is considered an icon of their culture, and thus, to restore him as an ethnic hero is a way to reinforce their political voice as a minority by enhancing their ethnicity and resistance. The manner in which Yun Dong-ju is read demonstrates how ethnic Koreans in China remember him and recognize their own history.

Reading Yun Dong-ju and the Future of East Asia

As aforementioned, Yun Dong-ju is a text to be read and interpreted in various ways not only in Korea, but also across Japan and China. In Japan, meanings of violence and political scars that evoked the imperial and colonized relations of the early twentieth century are eliminated; instead, the emphases are on his lyrical purity and ethical existence as well as on Yun as a symbol of universal love for all mankind in the twenty-first-century East Asian cultural landscape. These circumstances are not irrelevant to the reason why mistranslations of his works have not been modified.

For ethnic Koreans in China, Yun Dong-ju is read as a symbol of minority pride, interlinked with their subordinated status in China and the history of resistance against Japanese colonial rule. A reconsideration of these understandings is necessary in the current East Asian cultural communication that attempts to go beyond the ideology of a single nation or race. In other words, reading Yun Dong-ju as a text containing historical origins of a particular ethnicity limits and simplifies the characteristics of Yun Dong-ju's text created in the intersected spaces and dynamic times of the early twentieth century. These exclusions of historical time and place from understanding Yun, as practiced in both Japan and China, put limitations of the reading of Yun Dong-ju from being three dimensional.

In studies of Korean literature, there is a tendency to place nationalism at the center from a postcolonialist point of view when reading

Yun Dong-ju; however, it must not be forgotten that nationalism can be used to politically manipulate the sensibility of the masses. Such awareness is necessary because the movement to understand Yun Dong-ju in a way that emphasizes peace and reconciliation derives from the ideological criticism of nationalism.⁸

Meanwhile, those who read Yun Dong-ju are expanding to citizens of many countries, and have resulted in the formation of various voluntary associations and the penetration into everyday cultures. Monuments in memory of Yun Dong-ju are erected, poetry readings are organized, literary awards are established, and regular events are in progress. In general, however, when there appears a memorial in the form of a peace park to commemorate historical events, it often diverts from its original purpose, gaining its own independent destiny (Sun 2010). People who commemorate Yun Dong-ju seek values of peace and reconciliation in the past and present, rather than recalling past history. Therefore, through many commemorative projects, the historical and cultural meaning that Yun Dong-ju's texts evoked is fossilized, and the ethic of a transnational community that people's solidarities pursue erases the historical scars inscribed in Yun Dong-ju.

The historicity in Yun Dong-ju's texts cannot be read merely through universal ethics. This is because Yun's works were created against the backdrop of East Asia in the 1930-1940s, the time of power struggles between the imperial and colonized countries. He writes in his last poem, "Life is meant to be difficult; / it is too bad / that a poem comes so easily to me. / My six-mat room in an alien country; / the night rain whispers outside the window. / I light the lamp to drive out the darkness a little, / and I, in my last moments, wait for the morning, / which will come like a new era" (from "A Poem That

8. The argument for excluding past historical consideration when reading Yun Dong-ju's poems is not from a nationalist perspective, but is rather an attempt to read the texts from a perspective of universal ethics based on love for mankind. This tendency of research is similar to the recent changes in Korean popular culture that attempts to associate Yun Dong-ju with purity and peace and establish him as a bridgehead for reconciliation between Korea and Japan; also, this is similar to the recent trend of accepting Yun in Japan's cultural and academic fields.

Came Easily”). Here, the poet’s reflection of “Aren’t I, as a poet living in a six-mat room in another country, living in too much ease” evokes colonized Joseon and the poet’s sense of his duties in such realities.

In the late 1930s, the period in Korea when an increasing number of intellectuals, beaten down by the harshness of Japanese colonialism, changed their life’s directions to assist Japan, Yun Dong-ju exhibited the practices of a conscientious intellectual. The reason why this is even more valuable is because his changes were gained through continuous self-reflection and introspection as well as hardships encountered in the process of dealing with reality. Therefore, the understanding of Yun Dong-ju’s literary works must also take into consideration the poet’s concerns of contemporary history and human growth, as well as his creative works based on these circumstances (J. Kim 2007).

In the cynically titled essay “Kankoku bungaku nado yomanakutemo ii wake 朝鮮文学など学まなくてもいいわけ” (Why You Don’t Have to Read Korean Literature), Saegusa Toshikatsu 三枝壽勝, a Japanese scholar of Korean literature, encourages students in Japan to read Korean literature only as foreign literature, instead of linking it to colonial history (2000). The critic points out that first, despite the seeming sense of guilt towards the colonized in the studying of Korean literature, there actually exists attitude of superiority over the colonized; and secondly, to approach treat Korean literature with a sense of atonement can psychologically affect people to think themselves ethically superior compared to other ordinary Japanese. In addition, criticizing that the Japanese are actually talking about themselves and not about the colonized in the study of Korean literature, the critic stresses the importance of thinking about “what they themselves have to do in the future” rather than focusing on reflecting upon the past of East Asia. Saegusa’s argument is significant in that it warns Japanese scholars from assuming an imperialist attitude. However, recognizing the past history in a reflective and critical manner is the basic foundation of building an East Asian future. The discussion of East Asian identity can only start from Japan’s Pan-Asianism of the past and its criticism (Yim 2010). In this sense, if the three countries of East Asia accept Yun

Dong-ju's texts as a substitute for a monument—ultimately fossilizing it as a memory of the *past*—or as a text that evokes a message of peace and reconciliation across periodical and national borders, neither way would be sufficient to properly deal with the past or the present. This is because properly understanding East Asian history of the early twentieth century when Yun Dong-ju's works were created is linked to properly imagining East Asia's future landscape.

Why is East Asia continuously summoning Yun Dong-ju to the present? This indicates that East Asia is not free from the memories of past history, and that the power of the past is still influencing the present. Then, instead of stopping at just talking about the present and future, there should be a reconsideration of past history, and its projection on the present and future. The current flow of financial and military power structures in the region is headed for peace, but still evokes militarism. Also, there exist differences and fissures between the memories of Korea, China, and Japan concerning past history, and these differences are multilayered and complex. Therefore, the history of today's reality makes us wonder if it is possible to simply seal the past and if the East Asian community can truly gain future peace.

The ways of remembering in the respective countries of East Asia erase the historical and cultural traces of the text of Yun Dong-ju while simultaneously simplifying the crossed and multilayered characteristics, excluding the self-reflective consideration of history on the part of future historical subjects who will remember and regenerate Yun Dong-ju. The imagination of East Asia's future is fissured. To bridge the gaps, there has to be an acknowledgement of the gaps and differences, and the plan for the future of East Asia must be devised not based on a single country's logic, but on the criticism and reflection of East Asia's crossed and dynamic history. The text of Yun Dong-ju, which lives in the past, present, and future of East Asian history, requires responsible reading by us.

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