8

FRACTURING LITERARY BOUNDARIES

Connecting with the Korean Peninsula in postwar Japan

Jonathan Glade

Introduction

To this day, August 15, 1945, is celebrated as a day of liberation by Koreans. Officially commemorated as “Liberation of the Fatherland Day” (Choguk haebang ēi nal) in North Korea and “National Liberation Day” (more literal translation would be the “return of light”; kwangbokchŏl) in South Korea, this date would seemingly function as a point of convergence for all Koreans. Somewhat paradoxically, then, August 15 marks the beginning point of a fracturing process of the Korean ethnonation (minjŏk). Millions of Koreans (including approximately 2 million in Japan) were spread throughout the Japanese Empire at the time of its fall, but all Koreans, regardless of location, shared a common identity as imperial subjects. On a broader scale, the empire’s collapse initiated a redrawing of borders and corresponding construction of nation-states, which resulted in the partitioning of ethnic Koreans into several separate, clearly defined geopolitical spaces: North and South Korea, Japan, China, etc. Although Imperial Japan was composed of a complex web of subjectivities and hierarchically defined relationships (colonizer/semicolonizer/colonized and metropole/semi-periphery/periphery), the establishment of distinct nation-states and categories of citizenship, as well as the subsequent limits placed on mobility, resulted in the fragmentation of Korean subjectivity as well as notions of “national” culture.

After the collapse of the Japanese Empire, newly “liberated” Koreans faced the daunting task of constructing a new “national” culture and decolonized Korean subjectivity. Groups such as the Korean Writers Alliance (Chosŏn munhakka tongmaeng; hereafter, KWA) defined this project of decolonization as one that combined the dismantling of colonial hierarchical structures and institutions with a transformation in consciousness and subjectivity. Inspired by the efforts of the KWA, Koreans in Japan, such as Kim Talsu (1919–97) and the core contributors of the magazine Democratic Korea (Minshu Chōsen 1946–50), sought to participate in and contribute to the construction of a new national Korean culture. These attempts, however, were disrupted not only by the emerging “national” governments of Japan and the two Koreas but also by the US occupation of Japan and southern Korea. Early on in the occupation, boundaries—e.g., those separating Koreans living on the peninsula and “Zainichi” (resident) Koreans—were porous, but as the Cold War order became entrenched and efforts to decolonize were suppressed or thwarted, the boundaries of nation, language, race, and ideological affiliation became rigid and exclusionary.
Fracturing literary boundaries

Japanese and South Korean literary history would have us believe that August 15, 1945, marked an immediate severing of any connection between Korea and Japan, but the actual process of forming new “national” literary boundaries was far from smooth and straightforward. Separating colonial-period literature from “post-liberation” literature, the year 1945 serves as sharp line of division in the periodization of modern Korean literature. In studies on colonial-period literature, “Japan” represents a pervasive presence that, even when not directly addressed, is always lurking in the background. Much has been written about how Korean writers were not only shaped by but also resisted the dominant influence of and colonial cultural policies. After 1945, however, Japan largely disappeared from Korean literary history, with the lingering effects of colonial rule often being ignored. As such, Korean writers who remained in Japan after the end of World War II have largely been overlooked by Korean literary scholars. This chapter is an attempt to shed light on how Korean writers who remained in Japan after the end of World War II actively engaged with the work of their counterparts on the peninsula and sought to contribute to the establishment of a “national” Korean literature. In tracing these literary activities, I argue that the date August 15, 1945, functions as a line of division that obscures ongoing intersections between Korea and Japan.

Democratic Korea: Koreans in US-occupied Japan

In the case of the Japanese Empire, the early stages of decolonization and deimperialization took the form of a mass physical population shift as the scattered imperial populace endeavored to “return home.” In 1945, there were nearly 2 million Koreans living in Japan—many forcefully relocated to factories and mines in Japan as part of the war mobilization policy—as well as large numbers of Koreans spread throughout Manchuria and China. Koreans, who had been mobilized throughout the Japanese Empire, suddenly found themselves in geographic and legal limbo.

In the case of Koreans in Japan, US military occupation policy did not help resolve issues relating to legal status. As outlined in “The Basic Initial Post Surrender Directive,” Koreans were placed in a different category from that of the Japanese “enemy”: “You will treat Formosan-Chinese and Koreans as liberated peoples in so far as military security permits. They are not included in the term ‘Japanese’ as used in this directive but they have been Japanese subjects and may be treated by you, in case of necessity, as enemy nationals.” This directive left the status of Koreans in Japan ambiguous, since their status as “liberated people” was effective only if permitted by “military security.” This ambiguity was exacerbated by the postwar Japanese government, which, depending on the expediency of a given situation, defined Koreans as both Japanese and non-Japanese. The legal status of Koreans vis-à-vis the US military occupation and Japanese government remained in an unstable state of fluctuation throughout the 1945–52 occupation—at times “foreign resident” and at others “Japanese national” (although never full citizen).

The majority of Koreans who had relocated to Japan during the colonial period returned to Korea within the first two years after the war’s end. Koreans who chose to remain in Japan, however, soon realized that they could not depend on the US Military and the Japanese government to adequately represent their interests and deal with the myriad issues they faced in the chaotic environment of the immediate postwar period. Further, seeing the fall of the Japanese Empire as an opportunity to redefine their position in Japanese society and to participate in efforts to construct a Korean “nation” and “national culture,” Koreans in Japan quickly formed organizations and constructed platforms from which to make their voices heard. As part of this broader movement, Kim Talsu and some Korean associates seized the opportunity to publish their literary works and give voice to their views on Korea-related matters by establishing the
Jonathan Glade

general-interest magazine Democratic Korea (Minshu Chōsen) in April 1946. The publication’s objectives are outlined in the introduction to the first issue:

To what extent are Koreans trying to carry out, through a process of progressive democratic revolution, the historical mission of engaging with historical reality from all angles? That is to say, what are Koreans thinking? What are they saying? What are they trying to accomplish? Their objective conditions and subjective movements, particularly related to the trusteeship issue, have become the focus of attention worldwide. Through this publication, we will express to the world our views on how we should move forward, as well as correct Japanese consciousness regarding Korean history, culture, and tradition, which was distorted throughout the long period of thirty-six years. This magazine is an attempt to provide the intelligent members of society—those who try to understand Koreans—with our ideas concerning impending developments in politics, economics, and the construction of society.

This introduction clearly parallels Kuan-Hsing Chen’s definition of decolonization: “By decolonization, I do not simply mean modes of anticolonialism that are expressed mainly through the building of a sovereign nation-state. Instead, decolonization is the attempt of the previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically.” Democratic Korea was to function as a platform for informing readers or “intelligent members of society” about Korea. From the outset, then, the founders saw their publication as a conduit through which knowledge about the current state and future direction of Korea would be transmitted to a Japanese audience.

**Ongoing connections to the Korean Peninsula**

During the first two years of publication (1946–7), activities on the Korean Peninsula served as the main focus of Democratic Korea; the majority of the articles covered topics such as Korean politics and economy, including numerous translations of articles and literary works originating in Korea. In particular, the KWA—the central literary group in southern Korea during the US military occupation there (1945–8)—was featured prominently in the magazine. KWA members Kim T’aejun, Yi T’aejun, Im Hwa, Kim Namch’ŏn, and Kim Kirim all had work published in the magazine. Other notable Korean contributors include Kim Saryang and Ch’oe Namsŏn. Democratic Korea, though certainly left leaning, sought to maintain connections with writers in Korea that represented various points across the political spectrum.

The KWA promoted a process of decolonization that was remarkably similar to the views expressed in the pages of Minshu Chōsen. The KWA saw the wiping out of the remnants of feudalism (pŏngŏn chuŭi) and Japanese imperialism (Ilche chuŭi) as processes of crucial importance that would allow for the overcoming of the colonial past as well as the establishment of an independent Korean nation.

Many literary texts written by alliance members take up the theme of rooting out imperial remnants. In the short story “Fire” (Pul, 1946) by An Hoenam (1909–?), the annual burning of the fields in a Korean village serves as a symbolic metaphor for the individual decolonization process undertaken by a former (Korean) soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army. In “Before and After Liberation” (Haebang chŏnhu, 1946) by Yi T’aejun (1904–?) and “Path” (Tojŏng, 1946) by Chi Haryŏn (1912–?), representations of ambivalent reactions by the general populace to the news of “liberation” are combined with individual struggles to develop a political consciousness and to overcome guilt stemming from colonial-period inactivity.
As part of their effort to construct a new national literature, the KWA launched the publication *Literature (Munhak)* in July 1946. To accomplish this task, the publication established three main objectives:

At the very moment of Imperial Japan’s last-ditch effort to destroy our language and impose “national literature” (*kungmin munhak*) upon us, our people were liberated by Japan’s defeat. This leaves us faced with the task of establishing a new national literature (*shinminjok munhak*). We adopted the following as the basic platform for the national literature construction movement: the removal of all feudal remnants, the cleansing of remnants of Imperial Japan (*Ilche chanjae ui sot’ang*), and opposition to ultranationalism.12

Here, a direct connection is made between the oppressive policies of the former colonial regime—the imposition of a non-Korean “national literature”—and the objective of removing imperial remnants, suggesting that the construction of a “new [Korean] national literature” would both perform a decolonizing function and contribute to the construction of an independent Korean nation.

The KWA’s literary movement, based as it was on a process of decolonization, found a great deal of resonance with similar movements in Japan. Kim Talsu, an active member of the New Japanese Literature Association (*Shin Nihon bungaku kai*), introduced the KWA to a Japanese audience while presenting at the Third New Japanese Literature Association Conference in November 1947. Kim’s presentation was later published by the New Japanese Literature Association in August of the following year in a special volume of essays titled *Democratic Literature Movement (Minshu shugi bungaku undō)*. In his presentation, Kim details the evolution of the democratic literature movement in Korea (focusing on southern US-occupied Korea). Kim also discusses the literary activities of specific writers, listing the names of the members of the KWA and introducing works that had been published in *Literature (Munhak)* and *Literature Newspaper (Munhak sinmun)*. In reference to Yi T’aejun’s “Before and After Liberation,” discussed in detail below, Kim states that the text “provides an image of many Korean writers.”13

In reference to the KWA, Kim Talsu remarks that “The announced united front came together in the form of the Korean Literature Alliance which agreed to establish a democratic literature that is anti-imperial, anti-feudal, and anti-ultranationalist.”14 Here, then, Kim’s speech to the New Japanese Literature Association creates a connection between Japan and Korea (reflecting the previously outlined objective of *Democratic Korea*) by transmitting the KWA’s call for a literature of “decolonization” by Koreans on the peninsula to the Japanese archipelago.

During its first few years of existence, *Democratic Korea* published numerous articles written by members of the KWA (translated into Japanese from the original Korean). The December 1947 volume of *Democratic Korea*, for example, featured Im Hwa’s “Basic Task of Constructing Korean National Literature” (*Chosen minzoku bungaku kensetsu no kihon kadai*), which was originally presented at the founding meeting of the KWA. The article establishes a direct link between Japanese imperialism and a previous inability to carry out democratic revolution in Korea: “Democratic revolution, the basis for national independence (*minzoku dokuji*), could not be achieved as long as Japanese imperialism ruled in Korea.”15 Further, as Im points out, “What are the most important objective truths of Korean literary history? First is that there are remnants of the Japanese Empire’s cultural rule (*bunka shihai*), and the second is that the relics of feudalism have not been removed. Why do these past systems (isei) remain with us? Because Korea has not yet achieved democratic revolution in all of its territories.”16
The printing of this article marks the partial fulfillment of Democratic Korea’s stated objective: to inform Japanese readers about Korea. As quoted earlier, the introduction to the first issue of Democratic Korea reads, in part, “Through this publication, we will express to the world our views on how we should move forward and correct Japanese consciousness of Korean history, culture, and tradition, which were distorted throughout the long period of thirty-six years.”

Taken from its original context as a speech at the KWA’s first national meeting and published in Democratic Korea, Im’s article transforms from a rallying cry directed at fellow Korean writers into an attempt to “correct Japanese consciousness.” In the article, the reader’s attention is repeatedly directed to the KWA’s project of constructing a decolonized (national) democratic literature. Publishing work written by Im and his fellow KWA members represents not only an attempt to maintain ties between Koreans in Japan and those on the peninsula but also an effort to engage with like-minded Japanese writers, critics, and readers who supported deimperialization and decolonization in Japan.

**Yi Taejun’s “Before and After Liberation”**

A year after debuting in Literature in 1946, Yi T’aejun’s short story “Before and After Liberation” was translated into Japanese and published in Democratic Korea in two installments. Now considered one of the major Korean literary works of the occupation period, the short story provides a specific example through which to examine the overlap between Koreans in Japan and those on the peninsula as well as the influence that US military occupation policies had on the eventual emergence of a separate category of Zainichi literature.

The structure of “Before and After Liberation” can be divided into two narrative halves—a “before” and an “after”—that straddle the delineating chronological border of “liberation.” The text narrates exclusively from the present and, other than a brief recollection of protagonist Hyŏn’s time as a student in Japan, follows a linear trajectory that persistently moves toward the future and away from the “past.” The text’s contrasting two-part narrative creates a comparative distinction between passivity and inability to create during the colonial period and activity and creation during the post-“liberation” period. This structure parallels Hyŏn’s own transformation from a (political and literary) activity-shirking colonial subject to a consciously political subject who actively participates in the national literature construction movement.

Hyŏn’s attempt to distance himself from the imperial and feudal past manifests itself symbolically in his interaction with Kim Chigwon—the other central character in the text. The narrative revolves around the relationship between these two: Hyŏn, a modern novelist, and Kim Chigwon, an elderly Confucian scholar. They form a strong bond during the colonial period through a shared experience of oppression and longing for Korea’s independence, even though they differ both in scholarly background and generation. Korea’s independence, which they both yearned for during the colonial period, establishes a rift between the two in that after “liberation” Hyŏn joins forces with leftist writers who are promoting the formation of a new national democratic literature free from the constraints of the past, while Kim supports provisional government returnees and advocates for a return to Taehan—the period just before the formal colonization of Korea. The narrator describes how Hyŏn’s changing views affect his perception of Kim:

Kim Chigwon, who he had so greatly admired before liberation, was now stubborn as a rock and would not even try to understand what Hyŏn was saying. Kim Chigwon’s disappointment in Hyŏn for criticizing Taehan, even though he is Korean, and his
With the uniting sense of purpose that the two had shared during the colonial period having vanished, Hyŏn and Kim now occupy opposing positions in regard to the direction of Korea’s future.

Hyŏn’s political stance gradually shifts toward the left when he sees Rhee Syngman and other leaders claim that they will unite the Korean people but, at the same time, allow colonial-period “traitors” to go unpunished and take on important political and economic roles:

Dr. Rhee Syngman returned to the frenzied cheers of the people and proclaimed that all members of the Korean nation must band together. Seeing their chance, national traitors and profiteers reemerged, producing the opposite effect of Rhee’s actual intention, as is evident in the case of the colonial period airline company president who became the vice-president of the newly formed national airline company.

After an initial joyous greeting, Hyŏn and Kim Chigwŏn’s post-liberation interactions devolve into heated arguments. The unwillingness of provisional government leaders to engage in a thorough decolonization process by punishing or purging collaborators becomes a significant component of the disagreements that arise between Hyŏn and Kim Chigwŏn.

With Japan’s colonial rule now over, Hyŏn and Kim Chigwŏn can no longer find a common cause through which to base a continued close relationship. Their final meeting ends with Kim Chigwŏn declaring that he is returning to his colonial-period hideout in the country (the place where their initial bond was formed) since he “does not want to return to a Seoul that is like this.” In the closing scene of the narrative, Hyŏn watches from the roof of the “assembly hall,” where he now actively participates in the literary activities of a new Korea, as Kim Chigwŏn fades into the distance: “Kim, who had managed to maintain his topknot despite being on the receiving end of persecution and scorn throughout the colonial period, had braved the 38th parallel to come to the capital only to slip away like a speck of dust in the current of world history.” Here, then, Hyŏn’s separation from the past combines a repudiation of the colonial regime, which doggedly pressured him to participate in activities of support for Imperial Japan, with a symbolic farewell to Korea’s feudal past represented by the thoroughly Confucian character of Kim Chigwŏn. There is no room for compromise between Hyŏn, who is endeavoring to construct a future Korea divorced from the past, and Kim Chigwŏn, who struggles to hold onto the past. In this way, the short story promotes the ideals of democratic literature on which the KWA was based. For the most part, the Japanese translation closely follows the original Korean text. As addressed in detail in the following section, however, the version published in Japan was altered slightly after undergoing the censorship process.

Severed connections: censorship and solidified boundaries

Published in both Japan and southern Korea, “Before and After Liberation” highlights how Koreans in Japan sought to maintain connections with the peninsula while also informing Japanese readers about the political situation in Korea. It is of particular interest, then, that the short story was censored in Japan but not in Korea. Although only one passage was deleted, this instance of separation highlights the disruption of the connections that were being forged across solidifying geopolitical borders.
The passage marked for deletion by the examining censor criticizes the way US military occupation authorities dealt with the Japanese colonial government upon arrival in Korea (as translated into English by the censor):

The Provisional Government did not come up to the expectations of the people. In the north, the Soviet Army was said to be thoroughly routing the Japanese Army, and with complete understanding of the Koreans feelings of hatred and resentment towards the Japanese, the Soviet began a complete purge of the Japanese bandits. But the US forces, ignoring the expectations of the Korean people, distributed among the Japanese, leaflets that implied their magnanimity. This led the governor-general of Korea and the Japanese troops to entertain self-conceit, as heretofore displayed, and prompted them to assume attitudes as if it says, “Look! US still regards Japan as her equal; she pays no attention to such a nation as yours!”25

Clearly critical of the US military occupation in southern Korea, the reason given for deletion—“Criticism of the US”—is apt, even if the passage and text do not address the actual occupation of Japan. The direct comparison in the removed passage to the actions of the Soviet Army in the North overtly criticizes the American policies in the south. Moreover, the direct condemnation in the text of the US military occupation for “ignoring expectations of the Korean people” critiques how occupation policies obstructed Korean efforts to decolonize. As a silencing of expression in Japan that calls attention to demands in southern Korea for a more thorough process of decolonization, this case of censorship disrupted the discursive flows that crossed the Korea–Japan border.

The original publication of “Before and After Liberation” in Literature went uncensored, which illustrates the difference between the lack of a clearly defined system of censorship in southern Korea and the meticulous censorship system in postwar Japan. This does not mean, however, that Literature escaped censorship entirely; the magazine was subject to confiscations and severe limitations in the number of pages allocated for publication. Rather, it demonstrates how southern Korea faced a different system of censorship—one that employed tactics such as confiscation, shutting down publications, arresting editors, and limits placed on allocated resources—from that of Japan.

While the writings of KWA members were optimistic and hopeful about Korea’s future, the US military occupation was always a concern. The scene of Kim Chigwŏn’s departure in the closing scene of “Before and After Liberation” is conspicuously marked by the presence of American Jeeps that “swarm like beetles” over the urban Seoul landscape, casting shades of doubt on the text’s optimistic look toward the future. Although the American military presence is basically only background material in the setting of the short story, the symbolic power signified by the Jeeps implies a threat to the national literature construction project of Hyŏn and his colleagues.

“About Miss Kim”

Pak Wŏnjun’s short story “About Miss Kim”—published in the February–March 1948 issue of Democratic Korea—closely parallels “Before and After Liberation” and the other literary texts that were part of the KWA’s project of constructing a national democratic literature. More specifically, the text promotes decolonization by narrating protagonist Kim’s transition from an Imperial Japanese subject to a decolonized Korean subject. The reader observes “Miss Kim” through the filter of first-person narrator “Sensei,” who works as a teacher at Kim’s school and
mentors her as she undergoes an individual process of decolonization. Kim’s transformation culminates in her symbolic acceptance of her Korean name. Sensei describes Kim’s growing Korean consciousness:

After a month or two, Miss Kim started to understand the changes the world had gone through. The holy war [seisen] had actually been a war of aggression [shinryaku sensō]. . . . Miss Kim started doubting herself and realized that it was unnatural to think of herself as Japanese. Bidding farewell to “Misono Fumiko,” she was reborn as “Kim Chudŏk.”

In the text, the name is a space of conflict and transformation where identity is constructed and negotiated. Miss Kim’s act of reclaiming her Korean name by discarding her Japanese name represents the negation of Imperial Japan’s “name-change” policy (ch’angssi kaemyŏng; sōshi kaimei)—a coercive measure that required Koreans to adopt Japanese names. Her “rebirth” as a Korean is a form of decolonization through which she reverses the effects of Japanese colonialism by slowly dismantling her colonized subjectivity and replacing it with a newly formed Korean subjectivity.

Mirroring the language of decolonization used by the KWA, the text mentions the need to address the (colonial) past several times with the repeated use of phrases such as “wiping out the remnants of Japanese imperialism” (Nihon teikokushugi no zanshi no seisan), “settlement of the past” (kako no seisan), and “throw away the past” (kako wo suteru). Korean subjectivity is formed in the text through a dual move of removing remnants of the colonial past and accepting one’s “natural” Korean identity. As with “Before and After Liberation,” a reference to the obstruction of attempts to decolonize draws the wrath of the censor’s pen. A passage (censor’s translation) removed from the original text reads as follows:

Nevertheless, since the turning-point when a group of political refugees including Kim Ku made an anti-trusteeship demonstration, the agitation of pro-Japanese and racial traitors’ groups became gradually active. The intensification of the opposition in South Korea made the people in general apprehensive of perfect independence. Until then, the Koreans residing in Japan [zainichi Chōsenjin] rushed home [kokoku], but since doubts have arisen about the future independence of Korea, people leaving for home have greatly reduced [gekigen].

The reason given for censorship is “criticism of occupation forces,” but there is no actual direct mention of the US military occupation; rather, this passage contains an implied critique of the occupation’s support of and reliance on those whom most Koreans at the time considered to be pro-Japanese (ch’innipa) and national traitors (panyŏkcha)—the passage simply makes a connection between “imperial remnants” and the inability to achieve “perfect” independence in Korea.

“T. Iwasa,” the censor who examined “Miss Kim,” left the following explanation: “The underlined passage should be deleted, for it may cause the resentment of the American Occupation Authorities. The deletion does not give any change of meaning to the text. The article is a novel [sic], but the material can be said to express real state.” What did the examiner mean by “American Occupation Authorities” when referring to a passage that does not mention said authorities? Since the examiner worked for the Civil Censorship Detachment in Japan, he more than likely meant authorities in Japan, not southern Korea. Here, then, the censor establishes a link between occupation policies in Japan and southern Korea, implying that criticism of the lack of independence in “liberated” (southern) Korea posed a threat to occupation authorities in Japan. Although the censor claimed that the text is about the main character’s “communist
activities,” the passage highlighted for deletion addresses the issue of continuity with Japan’s colonial rule and doubts about the possibility for true independence in Korea, not Miss Kim’s participation in communist activism. The fact that Kim Ku (1876–1949)—the Korean leader mentioned in the deleted passage—was far from a leftist makes the mention of “communist activity” as grounds for censorship seem rather peculiar.

Conclusion

In the end, the KWA’s objective to construct a national democratic literature free from imperial and feudal remnants went unachieved, thwarted by pressures coming from both the US military occupation and domestic ruling elites. By 1947, most of the central members of the KWA had already left southern Korea, due to concerns about the lack of progress in the decolonization process. Yi T’aejun, who traveled to the Soviet Union before eventually ending up in North Korea, was among the many writers to cross the thirty-eighth parallel.29 As part of his report about the KWA and the democratic literature movement in Korea to the members of the New Japanese Literature Association, Kim Talsu describes the ultimate failure of the movement: “The changing political situation, particularly that of the conflicts in southern Korea in October [of 1947], has had a great effect on the organization of the KWA. Almost all of the leadership departments have been dispersed, not just those in central Korea.”30

Clearly, the politics of the KWA were deemed threatening by the US military occupation and the domestic government leaders that they backed. According to a March 1948 CIA report on the political climate in southern Korea,

The leadership of this group of [rightist] parties is provided by that numerically small class which virtually monopolizes the native wealth and education of the country. Since it fears that an equitarian distribution of the vested Japanese assets would serve as a precedent for the confiscation of the concentrated Korean-owned wealth, it has been brought into basic opposition with the Left. Since this class could not have acquired and maintained its favored position under Japanese rule without a certain minimum of “collaboration,” it has experienced difficulty in finding acceptable candidates for political office and has been forced to support imported expatriate politicians such as Rhee Syngman and Kim Koo. These, while they have no pro-Japanese taint, are essentially demagogues bent on autocratic rule.31

In the beginning, the KWA was somewhat successful in establishing their literary movement, but by 1948, they became the object of harsh criticism as the “official” historical narratives of a new South Korean state began to emerge. The founding of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) headed by Rhee Syngman on August 15, 1948, served as the last blow to what had been the KWA’s hegemonic domination of the (southern) Korean literary world. The potential that members of the KWA had once seen in the “liberation space” (haebang konggan) of post–World War II for the construction of a democratic national literature had vanished, and their efforts to define literature as necessarily political had been all but stamped out.

After the establishment of the Republic of Korea, the works of writers and literary critics who went north (wŏlbuk chakka), such as KWA members Yi T’aejun and Im Hwa, were banned (until 1988), silencing occupation-period voices that called for an extensive decolonization of social institutions and cultural production.

For Koreans in postwar Japan, though, August 1945 did not result in an immediate sense of separation from the “homeland.” Most continued to see themselves as part of a broader Korean
nation (minjok) and, as was the case with Kim Talsu and Democratic Korea, sought to maintain connections that spanned the Japan and Korea divide. Further, as I have argued here, many, like the contributors to Democratic Korea, actively sought to participate in the construction of a national Korean culture. These efforts were short-lived since the designation of Koreans in Japan as belonging to the geographical location of the Korean Peninsula (not an actual state) by the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty effectively cut Koreans in Japan off from the two established Koreans nation-states. Somewhat ironically, Koreans in Japan continued to maintain important connections with those on the peninsula, later functioning as a channel through which information passed between North Korea and South Korea.

There is no shortage of scholarship on the KWA and their attempt to construct a new national literature in US-occupied southern Korea.32 These studies are thorough in their examination of the different literary movements of the time period and the contentious struggle between political factions over the future direction of Korean literature. They do not, however, address the influence of the KWA on Koreans in Japan.

Although, upon reflection, it may seem rather obvious that Korean writers who remained in Japan after 1945 continued to see themselves as “Korean” and hoped to actively contribute to the formation of a decolonized national Korean literature, this has largely been ignored by Korean literary historians. Similar to the way the rigid boundaries of (South) Korean “national” literature have been dismantled and expanded to include “writers who went north” (wŏlbuk chakka) as well as colonial-period works written in Japanese, there is a need to reconsider how the literary endeavors of Korean writers in Japan (as well as writers throughout the Korean diaspora more broadly) fit into, or even undermine, our understanding of modern Korean literature.33

Notes

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1 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2 I use the modifier “southern” to designate the geographical portion of Korea occupied by the US Military because South Korea (or the Republic of Korea) was not officially established until 1948.
3 Chŏng Paeksu, Han’guk kandae ū shingminji ch’ŏl’ŭm; Kim Hye-yŏn, Han’guk kandae munhak kuwa ijungŏ; Kim Yun-sik, Ilche malgi Han’guk chakka ū Ilbon’ŭ kul ssāgon; Yun Taesŏk, Ŝingminji kungmin munhangnon.
4 One exception to this is Suh, Treacherous Translation.
6 Basic Initial Post Surrender Directive to Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.
7 Kim Talsu recalls the history of the publication’s founding in his autobiography Waga bungaku to seikatsu, 135–53.
8 “Sōkan no ji.”
9 Chen, Asia as Method, 3.
10 An Hoenam, “Fire” [Pul], 35–47.
11 Chi Haryŏn, “Tojŏng”; Yi T’aejun, “Haebang chŏnhu.”
12 “Ch’anggansa.”
14 Ibid., 224–25.
15 Im Hwa, “Ch’ŏsen minzoku bungaku,” 11. A total of four of Im’s works were published in Minshu Chōsen.
16 Ibid.
17 “Sōkan no ji.”

125
Jonathan Glade

18 Yi T’aejun was a central member of the Korean Writers’ Alliance (Chosŏn munhakka tongmaeng) and served as the editor for Munhak until he traveled to the Soviet Union and eventually settled in northern Korea.

19 Yi T’aejun, “Kaiho zengo” (short story appeared in volumes 12 and 13).

20 For example, O T’ae-yŏng, in his analysis of the politics of memory in occupation-period literature, refers to “Before and After Liberation” as a representative work of the time period (2010), 176.

21 Ibid., 33.

22 Ibid., 28.

23 Ibid., 33.

24 Ibid., 34.

25 Prange Collection. Deleted passage appears on page 54 of the original. The awkward syntax and grammar are typical of the translations made by Japanese censors employed by CCD.

26 Pak Wŏnjun, “Kin jŏ no koto,” 43.

27 Ibid.

28 Prange Collection. Deleted passage appears on pages 45–46 of the copy in the censorship records.


31 Central Intelligence Agency, “The Current Situation in Korea.”

32 Hughes, Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea; Kim Yunsik, Haebang konggan ūi munhak saron and Haebang konggan ūi munhak undong kwa munhak ūi hyŏnsil insik; Sin Hyŏnggi, Haebanggii sooël yŏn’gu; Song Hŭibok, Haebanggi munhak pip’yŏng yŏn’gu.

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Fracturing literary boundaries


