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The figure of the translator

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Introduction

Watching the news today, we seem to be tottering on the cusp of a truly post–Cold War era of moving beyond past divides while experiencing the reversion to an uncanny repetition of this same past.¹ This chapter is a preliminary inquiry into such divided and competing memories in the nexus of postcolonial and post–Cold War legacies in the Asia-Pacific as one node of this broader dilemma. As part of a broader project that considers the new postcolonial and post–Cold War archaeology of trans-Asian or transpacific methodologies, this chapter calls for the pursuit of more transnational archival excavations and remappings among hitherto historically divided regions. Post-1945 Cold War histories seem to have constructed a discursive divide among various nations and between memories of colonial and wartime pasts. In the Asia-Pacific and beyond, memories of wartime and memories of the colonial past appear compartmentalized—as if they happened in parallel but separate worlds. This compartmentalization is not necessarily unique to the region; but the imposition of the so-called Cold War as an actually intensive hot war with repressed colonial origins strained these divided dynamics in particular ways in the region.

As a Korean author who wrote in between the colonial periphery of Korea and the metropolitan center of Japan and who served as a war correspondent during the subsequent onset of the Cold War during the Korean War, Kim Saryang (1914–50) was an instrumental figure during the post-1945 transition from the colonial era to its postcolonial Cold War aftermath in Northeast Asia. However, he has been forgotten or marginalized in the region’s variously divided national literary fields since then. Remapping Kim’s precarious literary life in transit offers us an important entrance into examining and perhaps even bridging these long-standing historical and historiographical divides. Further, Kim’s literary reputation has been scattered in multiple and divided national and ethnonational literary fields in the region; a postcolonial and post–Cold War remapping of his life and works as a case study may open a window into illuminating how certain historical figures are remembered and forgotten in different contexts in the divided postcolonial and post–Cold War afterlives in the Asia-Pacific. As an exploration into these larger concerns, this chapter considers the significance of the forgotten figure of the translator that repeatedly haunted Kim’s oeuvre.

¹ The Cold War began in 1947 and ended in 1991.
Kim Saryang was a prominent author during Japan’s colonial rule in Korea, and he worked in both Korean and Japanese for the two linguistic readerships, although his literary reputation had been lost in between multiple divided colonial and Cold War national literatures until recently. Kim was also a prolific translator between languages and wrote substantially about the task of the translator in a colonized society, about the challenge of bridging communication with the colonizers, and about the conundrum of representing the colonized people, many of whom were illiterate, to a broader imperial audience, given that he was a relatively privileged bilingual intellectual.

The figure of the translator appears in the life and works of Kim Saryang, in several manifestations. These translators often negotiated the borderlines of class, territory, language, and the political economy between the colony and the metropole. They offer us a productive entrance into exploring the significance of the author’s own legacies vis-à-vis multiple literary fields and their representative geopolitical divides in the region. The illusive figure of the colonial translator is scattered throughout Kim’s oeuvre written in multiple languages and for various audiences and haunts Kim’s works repeatedly: as a ubiquitous character in his literary writings; in Kim’s theoretical essays on the task of the translator in the Manichean colonial world; and in Kim’s own role as a prolific, restless, and frantic translator between the Korean and the Japanese languages. This chapter explores the significance of the repetition of this figure throughout Kim’s writing life—both textual and meta-textual, especially as manifest in the failure of translation—as a segue or a productive entrance into re-examining divided and incommensurable memories between wartime and coloniality in the Asia-Pacific.

As a bilingual writer who was a prolific translator, Kim’s writings encode sophisticated commentaries on the question of translation. Kim highlights the questions of origin, translation, authenticity, copy, and counterfeit in ways far ahead of his time and with resonance even in today’s global dynamics of border-crossing cultures. Therefore, it is timely to revisit the forgotten details of Kim’s literature, not only as a way to reflect on the forgotten past but also to examine important but repressed linkages to our present.

**Translations without origins**

Kim often wrote the same or similar stories in two or more versions, in Korean and in Japanese, for several audiences throughout the Japanese Empire. In a sense, it is impossible to determine which of these works are the originals and which are the copies or translations. For example, stories such as “The Man from the Penitentiary” (Yuch’ijang esŏ mannan sanai, 1941) or “Chijimi,” (Chijimi, 1941) emerge again in variant forms as “Count Q” (Q Hakushaku, 1942) or “Pest” (Mushi, 1941), written in Korean and Japanese respectively. The relationship between the paired stories appears to be more complex than simply of that between an “original” and its “translation.” As pioneering studies on these overlapping texts by scholars such as Chŏng Paeksu, Takahashi Azusa, and Kwak Hyŏng-dŏk have alerted us, there exist fascinating intertextual entanglements among these doppelganger texts that call for further study and scrutiny. Building on this important body of scholarship, I want to focus here on the fact that many of these translations without originals ironically leave uncanny and imperfect facsimiles or palimpsests of themselves that reveal their ultimate failure to reproduce or seamlessly mirror their other versions. Kim’s extraordinary efforts to work as a translator between colonial Korea and Imperial Japan as well as his own theoretical writings advocating for the need for bilingual writers to continue their work of translation may be unsurprising at a time when the colonized language...
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The figure of the translator was threatened. What I emphasize here is how much of his own literary works focus on such a figure of the translator as an embodiment of failure. Before we delve into further analysis of this curiosity, let us briefly consider Kim’s background.

Kim Saryang was one of many among his counterparts from colonized lands who “voyaged in” to the heart of empire, as discussed by Edward Said regarding those colonized by European empires. Traveling to Tokyo for what was valued as colonial tutelage and “enlightenment,” Kim received imperial recognition, even garnering the coveted nomination for the prestigious metropolitan Akutagawa Literary Prize, thus inspiring envy and admiration among many other writers in Japan’s vast empire. When Kim was coming of age, colonial language and education policies actively worked to police and devalue the Korean language, which was not only demoted to second-class colonized status but also heavily censored and forbidden. A two-tiered education system was established to produce and maintain hierarchies in the colonized population.

In this context, the fact that an ambitious young author from the colony would aspire to write in Japanese, the imperial language, is not surprising. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that despite Kim’s meteoric rise and recognition throughout the expanding empire (and even while facing the promise of the potential to garner further recognition in the global arena for imperial-language writers from colonized lands), he nonetheless insisted on the inordinate labor of writing in both Korean and Japanese in order to simultaneously address each literary field and its separate readerships.

Rather than focusing on monopolizing the adoring limelight shone on him by the metropolitan literary establishment, Kim took advantage of this attention to work ceaselessly as a translator and wrote several theoretical pieces on the politics and theories of translation, constantly honing his skills as a translator and mediator between colony and metropole while also aspiring to reach a broader audience beyond the region. As Takahashi has cogently argued, Kim made a point of writing many of his works in Japanese and in Korean, tediously putting pen to paper for two linguistic readerships while meticulously inscribing two copies, each one marked in varying signs of linguistic difference. His choice to undertake this double duty is remarkable given that, at this time, the Korean language, as previously mentioned, along with other colonized languages, was being actively suppressed and devalued in the colony and the metropole alike. The significance of a writer who was already recognized for his imperial or so-called paper-language writings to stubbornly insist on continuing to write in the devalued language of the colonized is simply staggering. It becomes yet more striking when we keep in mind that imperial policies had drastically reduced publication venues in the colony. Furthermore, Kim was educated primarily in the Japanese colonial education system in Japan, and by the time he debuted as a colonized author in Japan, he had internalized a lifetime of anxieties about his literary capabilities of writing his mother tongue. In other words, Kim’s double duty as a colonial translator entailed an uphill battle against both the public devaluation of the language of the colonized and his private discomfort with his linguistic abilities as someone tottering between languages deemed unequal by the official standard of his time.

Failure and the colonial translator

Now I’d like to turn to another aspect of the problem of translation manifest through Kim’s works, by examining examples from Kim’s labor of translation. Kim was a prolific translator who translated Yi Kwangsu’s story Mumyŏng (Unenlightened, 1939) into Japanese (1939). But in addition to such works of so-called translation proper, Kim experimented with various other forms and formats of translation more broadly. For example, he actually wrote multiple versions of similar works in Korean and in Japanese, with subtle to substantial differences. It is important
to point out the political economy of this labor of translation in the colonial context, especially when Korean, Kim’s mother tongue and the language of the colony, was demoted to secondary status in relation to the imperial, paper-language of Japanese. In his own theoretical writings about translation, Kim also had much to say about this political economy of translation for the colonized translator.

Let us take a look at one example. In his essay “Dispatches from Colonial Korea” (Chōsen bunka tsūshin, 1940), Kim advocated for the preservation of the Korean language and argued for the task of the colonial translator as a necessary mediator between Japan and Korea. This piece on the task of the colonial translator reads almost as a negotiation on the political economy of the colonial translator. Although there is no mathematical equivalency that can be added up in the unequal and divided context of empire, Kim was offering up the labor of translators like himself in the service of bridging the empire’s constricted linguistic spheres. This is not only a much-more-complex position than that of a colonial collaborator, as subsequent nationalist perspectives have argued but a way to negotiate for the right for the Korean language to persist and exist even in the imperial context of its devaluation and disappearance.

Similarly, Kim’s fictional writings were also performative engagements with the art and labor of the translator. Through these writings, Kim negotiated in the uneven social terrain of imperialism, beyond aesthetic or theoretical experiments. Rather than appearing to be a celebratory or triumphal homage to both languages equally, jetting freely and effortlessly from one to another, Kim recorded marked traces of the painful work of translation and the innumerable moments of mental blockage at every turn of the page, with corresponding starts and stops that appear to have been inscribed deeply in both his life and his works. Indeed, many of Kim’s writings were repeated engagements with and documentations of the very incommensurability and untranslatability of languages in unequal imperial contexts. On the other hand, Kim nevertheless also seems to have sensed the absolute necessity of striving to translate and to engage the most disenfranchised among his audiences across linguistic, cultural, and political divides. We see this evidenced through his tireless efforts, even despite his demonstrated awareness of such impossibilities and perhaps even of inevitable failures.

In fact, for all of Kim’s extraordinary labor as a seasoned translator and despite his varied expositions on the theory and practice of translation—as well as his more performative creative works, which played on various themes of translation on multiple levels—what may be most remarkable is how he insisted on featuring translators qua traitors as central figures of abject failure in so many of his works. How might we understand the failure of these seemingly traitorous figures beyond simply equating them one to one with national condemnation of the colonial collaborator?

“Pegasus” (Tenma, 1940), “Into the Woods Deeply” (Kusafukashi, 1940), and “Pest” are just a few stories among many that highlight the tragicomic foibles of the failed colonized translator and that offer clues to this broader question of how their collective failures are to be understood. Let us take a closer look at “Into the Woods Deeply.” Here we meet Insik, an anthropologist on an ethnographic excursion into a remote mountainous village, as he eavesdrops on an official rollout of imperial policies of assimilation. An extended passage has been translated and included here, since the Anglophone translation of the story is forthcoming and not yet available elsewhere:

[Insik’s] uncle, an elder of a remote hermitage, was a true believer in the Japanese Imperial Language Policy [Naichigo seisaku]. Accordingly, he insisted on delivering his lectures in Japanese with Mr. Runnynose then inserting simultaneous interpretation in colonial Korean [Chōsengo] for the commoners assembled before them. Insik had
already witnessed several times before how his uncle would speak in Japanese even to his illiterate concubine who didn’t know the Japanese language at all, and in some highfalutin manner at that. So when he accidentally stumbled upon this scene of his uncle speaking in Japanese to an audience full of mountain folk who obviously didn’t understand a lick of it, Insik was underwhelmed. What he couldn’t quite stomach was the sight of his former teacher—Mr. Runnynose—who happened to be hovering in a subservient posture right next to his fattened uncle. His bright red face glowed as he habitually wiped his nose with the same dirty old handkerchief that Insik recalled from his school days.

“That teacher . . . is . . . a true tragedy,” he muttered to himself.

For Insik, running into Mr. Runnynose after all these years, a teacher he had once looked up to, someone he even thought he had a special bond with, was much more than a shock. For him, this accidental encounter was a truly unspeakable tragedy.

As Insik’s cheeks burned, an onslaught of memories of his school days came flooding back into his dizzying head. He pursed his lips tightly and stared blankly at the stage. Mr. Runnynose, clenching his dirty handkerchief in one hand, was concentrating with all his might as if determined not to miss a single syllable falling out of his uncle’s mouth:

“Ehhh, so in other words, one must discard white-colored clothing and start utilizing colored clothing instead.” Insik’s Uncle was pontificating proudly with his chest spread wide open. . . . “The reason that Chōsenjin [tr. derogatory term referring to Koreans] have become so improferished is because of this white clothing. Econonomically and time-efficiently, it is simply no good at all. In other words, white clothing gets dirty much faster, and it wastes too much time to wash.”

The impoverished mountain folk in the audience were staring in wide-eyed bemusement, mouths agape. They sat crouching with backs bent, clearly not comprehending a single word. Insik’s uncle pronounced each phrase deliberately, then paused meaningfully to look around at the audience while slowly fingering his moustache. That was when Mr. Runnynose would step right up as if on cue and begin the Korean translation, punctuated with a sniffle from time to time. Insik, of course, knew that the reality was that the people gathered here didn’t care a wee bit whether they were wearing black or white. He was overcome with disgust.  

As can be seen in this excerpt, Insik accidentally stumbles onto this tragicomic scene of colonial mistranslation, in which imperial policies of language and hygiene are being implemented simultaneously in the colony. This scene uncannily reminds us of Marx’s old adage about repetition in history, with history appearing first as tragedy and then as farce. Here, though, tragedy and farce seem to be competing in one dizzying scene, pacing back to back as a repartee of missed-relay translation. The imperial language policy prescribes Japanese as the official language in the colony and demands that the colonized discard their language. Likewise, imperial hygiene policies prescribe the colonized to discard their familiar white-colored hanbok, which are now considered uneconomical (“too easily soiled and time-consuming to wash”) and are even blamed for the alleged laziness of the colonized in new imperial labor relations of efficiency. However, rather than serving as a direct mouthpiece of imperial policies and communicating them seamlessly to the reader, this scene instead interrupts this message and exposes how neither policy is being communicated effectively to those for whom it was intended.

Should readers laugh or cry at such tragicomic scenes in Kim’s writings? It is difficult to say. On the one hand, the scene may be read as a scathing exposure of the ridiculousness of both the colonial project itself and the violence and exclusions inherent in that project for those most
impacted. On the other hand, it can also be read as a repetition of a racialized, ethnographic satire for an imperial readership in which the joke is delivered at the expense of the ignorant antics among colonized subjects. Thinly veiled behind such a comic exterior may be the “truly unspeakable tragedy” underlining the scene: a situation in which the colonized have aligned themselves (apparently voluntarily) with the imperial hierarchy. In fact, every character in this scene is a colonized Korean, and it is apparent that among them a new colonial hierarchy has been internalized, seemingly of their own accord, without the need for an external, imperial, disciplinary gaze to monitor them. The structure of existing hierarchies among the colonized is represented by each character’s proximity or distance to the imperial language and works as a self-regulating apparatus of colonial self-surveillance.

The most contemptible characters appear to be the elites of the colonized society—Insik’s Uncle and Mr. Runnynose—who have been co-opted and promoted to carry out the imperial deed among their own people. The uncle’s misuse of pompous Japanese words (marked in italics in the translation that I just provided) represents the gap between the top-down decree of imperial power and the powerless colonized audience to whom the message was intended, with translators serving as mediators in between. Despite this multitiered communication apparatus and the inordinate labor of relay translation involved, the message is completely lost in translation on the illiterate peasant audience, who are alienated from the imperial language from start to finish. Even more pathetic is Mr. Runnynose, the redundant translator for the translator. Together, the two translators cancel each other out and represent slapstick doppelgangers of a multitude of other figures of the failed translator that haunts Kim’s works. At the heart of many of his stories, these figures are represented more as tragicomic figures than as objects deserving of utter and unambiguous contempt. Kim highlights the failures of translation and cross-cultural communication at the scene of the imperial encounter through the foibles of such translators amid the discriminating, unequal violence of inequality that structures such a convoluted imperial encounter.

What might be the significance of Kim repeatedly featuring these failed figures of translators in so many of his own translated writings? How do we make sense of what appears to be a contradiction between Kim’s theory of translation (as an essential task of the colonized translator, for example) and his own praxis as a translator, or what might be an impasse, embodying an almost obsessive perversion of the concept of translation proper? The foibles of Kim’s many traduttore and traditore (translator and traitor) figures do not signify celebration, commensurability, or the unimpeded communication between languages. Instead, they gesture toward the very predicament of untranslatability that befalls each of these translator figures. In Kim’s oeuvre, this failure is squarely situated in the unequal economic, cultural, and political context of imperial relations. As such, the incommensurability appears almost as an ontological lack beyond the individual translator’s control. In “Into the Woods Deeply,” the tragicomic figure of Mr. Runnynose first appears to be a pitiful social outcast; but we find out that his downward social mobility was first triggered by discriminatory hierarchies in the colonial school system. In other stories, this figure may appear in various guises, as an individual with a disability, such as a debilitating stutter, a hunched back, a drug addiction, or schizophrenia; a sexually transmitted disease; or social isolation.

While Kim seems to have had an almost-intuitive understanding of such incommensurability or untranslatability in the unequal landscape of empire that triggers such disabilities, he nonetheless expended tremendous energy on his own practice of translation and through his theoretical writings about translation. His persistence seems to reflect his keen awareness of just how much was at stake in his ongoing labor of translation. Kim’s awareness of the low probability (if not the impossibility) of the success did not deter him from his efforts; he simply did not
allow himself to stop translating, perhaps because the consequences of absolute alterity, silence, or disengagement were even-more detrimental. Kim insisted on being a witness to the naked discrimination and disregard meted out to colonized subjects, especially those without access to their historically rich language. Kim’s failed labor of translation thus dramatized the persistent conundrum and the impossible condition of the colonial writer qua translator.

Looking forward

Jing Tsu, while discussing failure in the context of modern Chinese cultural history, wrote that failure is not something one often sees as a productive impetus in a society. However, in the case of those who see themselves as defeated by history, failure can ironically work not only as a site of productive force but also as a platform to claim a moral high ground against oppressors wielding insurmountable force (or unfair advantage) at a particular historical moment. Along with this call to a higher moral judgment in the present context, I suggest that there may also be a tendency to seek reckoning in another time: the future anterior. In highlighting the haunting figure of the failed but persistent colonial translator, Kim may have been anticipating future readers that were unimaginable at the time of his own writing: a future postcolonial readership that could imagine a different reckoning and narrative than what was not yet permitted to a colonized translator caught amid the extreme limitations of the reality of unequal colonial exchange. Such a powerful anticipatory imagination may be one way that today’s postcolonial readers might make sense of, or piece together, a possible reason or motive behind Kim’s otherwise irrationally repeated experiments—against all odds—with the foibles of the colonial translator as failure.

In lieu of a conclusion

In this chapter, we have been exploring the question of the significance of the figure of the failed translator in Kim Saryang’s works. In lieu of a conclusion, I link this theme to the failure of Kim himself—as an author and a translator—to translate across various literary fields and archives in the divided and tumultuous terrains of mid-century Northeast Asia.

At the turn of the twentieth century, East Asia—as elsewhere—saw the waning of older empires of brute territorial aggrandizement and the waxing of newer empires of Cold War realignments. During these violent times of transition, significant traces of Kim Saryang can be detected inside and outside of literary fields that were at times distinct and at other times overlapping: Imperial Japanese literature, colonial Korean literature, ethnic Korean minority literature, emerging North Korean literature, emerging South Korean literature, postwar Japanese literature, diasporic or ethnic Korean literature (known as Zainichi literature in Japan and Chaoxianzu literature in China), and colonial and postwar Taiwanese literature. In each of these fields, Kim occupied a precarious position just off-center.

After the collapse of the Japanese Empire, in the newly formed postcolonial ethnic Korean minority or Zainichi literary community in Japan, Kim was called on as an ethnic representative, a paternal figure anticipating a minor canonical genealogy at its inauguration. However, many of these assessments focused on the perceived ideology of anticolonial resistance and devalued the ambivalence in Kim’s writings. Later generations of critics even corrected Kim’s Japanese mistakes when editing his works, to produce an aura of perfection, while omitting any traces of Kim’s linguistic anxieties, ambiguities, or ambivalence, in the name of constructing a strong, unequivocal, and fluent ethnonational literary hero.

Likewise, in postwar North Korea, publications also excised the hybridity inherent in Kim’s works. For example, the character Haruo, born of a Korean and Japanese intermarriage in Kim’s
most famous story “Into the Light” (Hikaru no naka ni, 1939) caused extreme discomfort for North Korean critics. Similarly, the fact that Kim wrote in the Japanese language was erased in earlier critical assessments, by translating them into Korean without attribution to the labor of translation. Even more-recent critics lament this fact of Kim’s Japanese-language writings, although they reluctantly acknowledge their impact on earlier colonial literary fields.12

In post-imperial or postwar Japan, Takeuchi Yoshimi, the famous critic of Chinese literature, wrote that the glaring absence of mainstream discussions on colonial literature, especially of writers like Kim Saryang, reveals a significant blind spot in postcolonial-era and Cold War-era Japanese discursive spaces. In the context of postcolonial or postwar South Korea, Kim was excised from South Korean literary histories until 1988, when the national ban on those categorized as wŏlbuk chakka, or writers who went north, was finally lifted. Since then, South Korean scholars attempting to recuperate Kim’s reputation have predominantly seen Kim as having resisted imperial power, in contrast to the vilification of writers such as Chang Hyŏkchu.13 Critic Kim Yunsik later compared Kim to Lu Xun (1881–1936), arguably one of modern China’s most prominent writers, in an effort to posthumously recuperate Kim Saryang’s status in South Korea’s national literary canon; nonetheless, Kim Saryang is still barely known outside of critical circles.

Kim Saryang was never fully at home in any one of these literary fields, as evidenced by the fact that he ended up vanishing from each (albeit to various degrees of obscurity). In other words, despite Kim’s own efforts as a translator, his divided literary afterlives register his untranslatability across the multiple ethnonational borderlines formed and reformed during the long twentieth century. With remarkable speed, in the early to mid-twentieth century, literary and corresponding national boundaries were established, destroyed, and reestablished, thus reflecting the broader conditions of political and social turmoil and imperial divisions beginning in the late nineteenth century. While many of these fields overlapped during the first half of the twentieth century, the divisions installed in and between them in the second half of the century became prominent and then at times absolute and irreversible. For example, the appearance or prominence of an author in one location was enough reason to oust or exile them from another.

It bears emphasizing again that in South Korea, because Kim went north after 1945, any mention of him was censored in subsequent literary collections until as late as 1988. A no-return policy was imposed where impossible and often violent choices about affiliations were demanded of writers as new Cold War literary territories were being carved out. In the geopolitical tumult of the times, Kim apparently disappeared into obscurity, remaining almost unknown in discourses on global literature until recently.

Yet beyond the exclusions of censorship and the no-return policy, how might postcolonial readers today understand the significance of Kim’s untranslatability across the divided literary worlds in the region, from the colonial to the postcolonial and Cold War orders? Kim’s homelessness in numerous literary abodes (even though he planted feet in each of them) may be understood best as a microcosm of universal mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion or the all-too-human defensive strategy of building borders. His work mirrors the traumas inflicted by geopolitical ruptures, divisions, exclusions, and silencings. It seems likely that across shifting geopolitical conditions, Kim’s tragicomic exposures would discomfit readers on all sides, who therefore might hesitate to claim his writing as their own.

Kim Saryang’s texts, especially those conjuring the figure of the translator, bring into focus the violating exclusions usually visible only to those who are situated at the borders. In this way, Kim’s role as a failed translator illustrates the way that authors positioned outside or in between are often the ones who interrogate and dare to push the envelope of otherwise-invisible
social boundaries that the rest of us either cannot or will not see. In other words, Kim’s rapid rise and fall as a translator into and out of one literary field after another (in sometimes overlapping and other times mutually exclusive or oppositional and antagonistic fields) may stem from the power of his exposures of these blind spots. Perhaps it was precisely because Kim wrestled with and questioned externally imposed territorial and ideological divisions from the frontlines as a translator that he had to be excised from literary canons in the Asia-Pacific during the postcolonial and post–Cold War periods in order for their violent and arbitrary border formations to be naturalized and then forgotten.

Kim’s forgotten legacy also offers a methodological point of entry for postcolonial or decolonial scholars today. The exceptionally dramatic paths treaded by Kim as he stumbled in and out of literary fields and languages leave a valuable trail for literary historians, especially offering insight into the moments when impossible choices are being imposed at the margins—choices that are formative for the empire and the nation. In uncovering the logic of inclusion and exclusion that may no longer be visible amid other more gradually formed borderlines, Kim’s case allows us to see such dynamics as a much broader and persistent problem. Rather than being understood as an exceptional case study, of a bygone past and an obscure place, Kim’s experiences beckon us to reconsider the slippery logic behind the mutually reproducing categories of nation and its others and of empire and its others. For postcolonial readers, the process of following Kim’s peregrinations may shed light on aspects of our own persistent blind spots as we attempt to remember categorical borderlines that are taken for granted today as timeless, natural, and fixed.

A fuller study of writers such as Kim who similarly embody the fragments of multiple national and ethnic literary fields across which their writings have been scattered can clarify the region’s yet-little-known postcolonial and post–Cold War estrangements, entanglements, and aporias. In the face of such fragmented and divided legacies in an ongoing coloniality, new methods in the postcolonial and post–Cold War archaeology of transwar or transpacific frameworks and archives may help us navigate inherited borders to suture histories that have been torn apart in the tumult of the long twentieth century. The fascinating case of Kim Saryang’s failure as a translator gives a rare glimpse into such processes of border formations at the moment of the dissolving of former imperial boundaries and the emergence of newly formed national and imperial boundaries in the Asia-Pacific, the forgotten legacies of which we are just beginning to uncover.

Notes
1 See Kwon, The Other Cold War, about the historic misnomer “Cold War” for the majority of the world that experienced ongoing violent wars during various times, often as proxies for superpower rivalries.
3 Said, Culture and Imperialism, 239–61.
4 See Kleeman, Under an Imperial Sun and Thornber, Empire of Texts in Motion for important studies on inter-Asian correspondence and recognition among colonized writers during this era.
5 Caprio, Japanese Assimilation Policies, 11.
6 For Kim Sarayng’s reflections on world literature, see for example, “Ch’ŏsen bunka no tsūshin.”
9 At this time, the Korean language was being phased out from various political, social, and cultural spheres. Kim tried to convince the metropolitan authorities and cultural figures that the Korean language should continue to be permitted in this climate, and he explained why writers should be allowed to continue to write in Korean to address a Korean-language audience, despite the draconian attempts to prevent it. Thematically, Kim continued to write about colonial subjects who found themselves stuck at the borderlines or checkpoints, linguistic and otherwise, of the empire.
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10 Kim Saryang, “Kusafukashi” (“Into the Woods Deeply”), 147–69. Italics have been added to indicate misuse of pretentious nonwords by the colonized translator in the original story. All translations are my own.


12 For more on North Korean critics’ ambivalence toward Kim’s colonial-era Japanese-language writings, see Sŏk’s introduction to Kim Saryang Chak’ŭnji. 

13 See Kim Chul, Reading Colonial Korea Through Fiction, especially chapter 12, for a cogent critique of this persistent binary in the literary criticism.

Works cited


