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**IN THE SHADOW OF NATION AND EMPIRE**

Northwestern writers in colonial Seoul

Ellie Choi

“The Road to Hometown” (“Kohyang kanŭn kil,” Ch’angjo [Creation] 1919) by Kim Hwan, depicts a Tokyo international student, K, returning to his northern hometown of Chinamp’o, near Pyongyang, during vacation. K sails from Japan on the Shimonoseki Ferry and lands in Pusan, where he boards the northbound train. Published during Kim’s Tokyo years, this travelogue, though obscure, maps a representative spatial imaginary for colonial writers from the northern provinces of Korea who studied in Japan. Briefly laying over in Seoul, K stays overnight with R, a friend from Tokyo, who is publishing the magazine Ch’angjo there. R is clearly not from Seoul either, since he lives at the youth association building, enduring arctic conditions which R and K both agree are worse than “their old Tokyo dorms” (54). When K reaches Chinamp’o, he is unsettled by the rapid development that has occurred while he was abroad, until he greets his grandmother at home and tastes the local noodles that he had missed so much in Tokyo. Seeing his family and tasting kimchi and hometown noodles finally gives the writer a sense of arrival and place, after a long journey from Japan: “The food I missed the most from Tokyo were kimchi (“kimch’i chandŭi” in the northern dialect) and noodles” (57).

Kim Hwan was from a group of writers who identified themselves as Sŏbugin (northwesterners) during the modern era. These Sŏbugin were from the inception of the Korean literary modern a dominant but often undernoted force in Seoul, establishing their own societies, Sŏu (Friends of the West, 1906) and Sŏbuk hakhoe (Northwest Study Society, 1908), and publishing journals, Creation, Yŏngdae (Mystical Place, 1924) and Tanch’ŭng (La Dislocation, 1937). They maintained a distinct group identity in modern history, overcoming centuries of regional marginalization. They honored their northerly origins through their writings, many having spent challenging years abroad in Tokyo and having worked in Seoul in the throes of modern transformation and assimilation.

Remembering kohyang (hometown) with its country scenes, family, and food is an age-old East Asian cultural trope. Modernity, however, brought Westernization and colonialism on ships, trains, and other technologies of mobility, and these in turn linked the reclusive Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) and colonial Korea (1910–45) to new capitalist networks reordering the globe. Young people with means—many from the northern provinces—were increasingly sent to study in Tokyo, where they were exposed to a globalizing cosmopolitanism with a new aestheticism that invented a schema of a contrasting rural place. This metropole aestheticism mimicked the Orientalist gaze of the Western imperialist travelers but at the same time inspired
the international students to seek authenticity in their physical rootedness to their home regions, beyond the glitter of Tokyo modernity and the anxieties of a Seoul in flux.

The means to travel abroad was a proud badge of distinction during this time, but one that also created a sense of dislocation and a longing for a collective national identity (minjok) and home. While one might have understood the relationship between the city and countryside to have been binary, in *The City and the Country*, Raymond Williams extends it beyond just city and country, linking the birth of the imaginary of “home” to global empire. It was surprisingly not the city of London that inspired writers to long for the pastoral landscapes of the British countryside but travel abroad by enterprising young men to the furthest reaches of empire in the 1880s that invented images of the English “home.” Williams links the birth of the English rural imagination to the expansion of the modern empire. For those who sought their futures faraway and returned, “[s]ome of the images of this ‘home’ [were] of central London: the powerful, the prestigious and the consuming capital. But many [were] of an idea of rural England: its green peace contrasted with the tropical or arid places of actual work; its sense of belonging, of community, idealized by contrast with the colonial rule and the isolated alien settlement.” Memories of the “British countryside” served as soothing palliatives to the inconsistencies of colonialism and tensions between locals and ex-patriot settlements, as encounters with strangers overseas “worked only to deepen the longing [for] and the idealization” of home. Their reward for foreign service was “a return to a rural place within this urban and industrial England”: “[t]he birds and trees and rivers of England; the natives speaking, more or less, one’s own language.” It was only by leaving England to the far reaches of the modern empire that “home” emerged as a memory and an idea, with birds, green trees, rivers, and “one’s own languages,” both real and imagined, shedding light on the spatial conditions that similarly fostered “hometowns” in colonial Korea. The symbolic binary between the city and the countryside was replicated in the colonies by the same colonial elements who accepted Westernization first, since “The first converts to the alien religion [were] the marginal people of the traditional society.”

Similarly, the student experience in Japan impressed on the historically marginalized northerners a new “national” solidarity projected onto Seoul as the location of the future minjok and, along with it, a longing for hometown. Seoul, like William’s London, was the in-between place for national labor and a stopping ground where they found fellow Tokyo alums (now nationalists and professional writers) dedicating themselves to the minjok. Most representative Korean writers resided and published in Seoul, while their regional origins were veiled underneath the centrality of the capital on the national literary scene. Thus, in the colonial-era travelogues by Kim and countless other northerners, “home” was the countryside, not Seoul, which they often depicted as unfeeling.

The city-and-country schema ordered colonial and economic difference within a field of spatiotemporal registers that veiled the colonialist tensions and inconsistencies in a pastoral aesthetic. In new telos of global capitalism, “the country” became an image of the past, and “the city” signaled futurity. The allure of the country was its old, human, and “natural” ways, and the city’s allure was its progress, modernization, and development. Thus, in Korean culture, the literature of the north is often placed along another temporality with tragic “Pyongyang kisaeng” (female entertainers), fading village customs, and disappearing local dialects, while Seoul is depicted grappling more overtly with matters of nation and empire.

Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tongin, and Paek Sŏk, treated here, were literary giants from this group who memorialized famous northern sites (myŏngso) and depicted evocative scenes of family and belonging. Their writings revisit happy childhoods in remote locales and historical sites like the Taedong River and Chŏngju Fortress, which function as spatial markers for a northwestern aestheticism, what Kim Yunsik calls a Pyongyang-centered (“P’yŏngyang chungsim chuŭi”)
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literature celebrating folk culture. In Yi Kwangsu’s *The Heartless* (*Mujŏng*, 1917) and *The Soil* (*Hŭk*, 1932); Kim Tongin’s “Boat Song” (*Paettaraği*, 1921) and “Barely Opening Her Eyes” (*Kyŏu nunil ttŭlttae*, 1923); and Paek Sŏk’s “Chŏngju Fortress” (*Chŏngju sŏng*, 1935) and “Hometown” (*Kohyang*, 1938), we trace the circulation of northerly images in modern colonial Korea, invented through a new metropole aestheticism adopted abroad. Their longing for hometown was a byproduct of a new global awareness, one that increased with the growing mobility brought on by modern imperial infrastructure and its attendant global capitalist networks.

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These northwesterners’ retreat to a temporality and aesthetic world set apart from that of Seoul and Tokyo was made possible, ironically, by the very conditions of their historico-political marginalization. Although, I suggest, hometown imaginaries were modern constructs, a defined northern identity in premodern Korea had existed for centuries. Due to their proximity to the Mongols, Jurchen, and Manchu, the northern regions were traditionally associated with the uncertainties of invasion and anxieties over intermarriage with “barbarians.” Southern non-elite groups were encouraged and even forcefully relocated to the north to strengthen border security, further adding to the northerners’ marginalization as undesirables in entrenched yangban society. There were yangban in the north, but they were barred from obtaining prestigious government posts by the central elites, even if they wholeheartedly devoted themselves to Confucian learning and passed the civil service examinations. Centuries of discrimination and near famine conditions famously erupted in the P’yŏngan province during the 1812 Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion, an anti-dynastic uprising against local officials, which culminated in a three-month seizure of the northern city of Chŏngju by government forces who pushed the rebels inside the fortress. The sustained expression of grievances against the Seoul-centered government spoke to the unruly dynamics between north and south as two incongruous topographies of identification and remained embedded in regional cultural memory as fodder for the modern literary imagination.

Northern elites were ultimately unable to obtain top government posts in Hanyang (current Seoul), even in the late Chosŏn. Their proximity to China, however, enabled northerners to participate in border markets and benefit economically from tributary missions to the Ming and Qing courts. Special tributary tax allowances helped northern elites accrue wealth, leading to the emergence of prosperous families during the late Chosŏn through to the modern eras. Moreover, the northerners’ historical marginalization and their consequent dissatisfaction with the status quo made them more receptive to Christianity and, with it, to Western ideas of progress. The combination of accrued regional capital, receptivity to Christianity, and discontentment with the entrenched order in the late Chosŏn motivated northern families to invest in giving their children modern Western educations and commit to “enlightenment and civilization.” This regional openness would later contribute greatly to modern Korean nationalism.

Upon examining the backgrounds of pioneering modernizers and intellectuals, we learn that many prominent Korean leaders were northerners. Pak Êńsik, An Ch’angho, Yi Sŭnhun, Yang Kit’ak, Yi Kwangsu, Hyŏn Sangyun, Chu Yohan, Kim Tongin, Chŏn Yong’t’ak, Cho Mansik, Kim Ŭk, Kim Sŏwŏl, Paek Sŏk, Kim Saryang, Ch’oe Myŏngik, Syngman Rhee, Kim Ku, Yŏ Unhyŏng, Hwang Sunwŏn, and Yi Chungsŏp were just some of the illustrious northerners who contributed significantly to Korean politics, culture, and modernization. The membership of the early nationalist organization, Sinminhoe (New Man Society, 1907), for example, was composed overwhelmingly of northwesterners. And over forty of the men arrested during the Incident of 105, when key nationalists were falsely accused of an assassination plot against Governor-General Terauchi Masatake and jailed, were from Chŏngju alone. An Ch’angho, a lion in the
nationalist movement, had started the Sinminhoe first in the US and then in Seoul and founded the famous Taesŏng School in Pyongyang (1908), his hometown. Yi Sŭnhun, a Chŏngju native (along with Yi Kwangsu and Paek Sŏk) and a wealthy self-made businessperson, founded the Osan School (1908) in his hometown, after converting to Christianity. These two early institutions of modern Western learning became springboards for further study abroad in Japan and training grounds for many future Korean leaders in the twentieth century.

Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tongin, and Paek Sŏk were all writers associated with the Taesŏng School and the Osan School. All three were born in north P'yŏngan province and educated in Tokyo, eventually relocating to Seoul to publish in major colonial newspapers. Travel greatly influenced how these former international students perceived of their identity and place during their formative years. Being from the north but having to work far from their hometowns in unfamiliar Seoul after years spent abroad strengthened their regional identity. Their elite education set them apart from the rest of the Korean “people,” and they could never be Japanese despite matriculating at the best Tokyo institutions. Their writings show that these international students were at home neither in Seoul nor in Tokyo, creating an uncomfortable spatial ambivalence that inspired them to configure literary images of belonging and community associated with their northern origins.23

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Seoul in the larger empire was becoming marginalized as a colonial capital, even as it was the focus of great development. Universalizing urban forms—the train station, department stores, and electric street cars—were replicated, as Honmachi (Japantown) in Seoul was increasingly developing to mimic Ginza, itself looking more like downtown New York City. Pyongyang was also undergoing drastic changes, but because it had always been a provincial capital, it was able to preserve more of its local color. As I have detailed elsewhere, this is how Pyongyang is depicted in Yi Kwangsu’s The Heartless, Korea’s first major modern novel, which, despite being recognized as a literary paean to Seoul and Tokyo modernity, quietly remembers the northern homeland.24

The semi-autobiographical protagonist, Yi Hyŏngsik, is born in Chŏngju, educated in Tokyo, and currently working in Seoul. He is torn between Sŏnhyŏng, framed by a Seoul in the throes of modernization, and Yŏngch’ae, who links him to the past, to memories of home, historical Pyongyang, its kisaeng (female entertainer), and famous places (Taedong River, Chŏngnyu Cliff, Peony Hill). When Yŏngch’ae discovers that Hyŏngsik has forgotten her, she takes off, leaving a suicide note declaring that she plans to “throw herself into the Taedong River.” Hyŏngsik hurries after her on that famous train ride to Pyongyang.

“That would be Peony Hill (Moran pong), and that must be Ch’ŏngnyu Cliff.” He thought of the letter from Yŏngch’ae. . . . “I am going to throw myself into the blue waters of the Taedong River,” . . . He could see in the darkness near Nŭngna Island. “I want to let the waves wash my unclean body. I want the heartless creatures of the water to tear this body to pieces.” Hyŏngsik could almost see Yŏngch’ae’s body floating beneath the steel bridge.25

The Pyongyang landscape is projected with the image of Yŏngch’ae (now Kyewŏrhyang) and, simultaneously, “famous kisaeng” (myŏnggi) throwing themselves into the river. Searching Pyongyang for Yŏngch’ae uncovers memories of himself as a young country bumpkin coming up to the regional capital from his hometown of Chŏngju: “Hyŏngsik remembered the first time he had come to Pyongyang. He had arrived one morning through [the Seven Star Gate] Ch’ilsŏngmun,” his feet wrapped in cotton cloth, his hair still in a long braid, with a white ribbon because he was in
mourning for his parents. Entering on the modern train, this time through the modernizing Great Unity Gate (Taedongmun), reminds him of when he had entered through the Other gate—the locals’ forgotten Seven Star Gate, and even further back, of his hometown: “Hyŏngsik went to his hometown on school vacations just to hear those two cousins calling him older brother [oppa].” Despite these warm, powerful memories of home, Hyŏngsik ultimately returns to Seoul, abandoning his past, Yongch’ae, and the north, to pursue his future with Sŏnhyang in Seoul.

The three spatial markers (the north, Seoul, and Tokyo/the West) from The Heartless recur again and again in Korean culture, from Yi Injik’s earlier Tears of Blood (Hyŏl ŭi nu, 1906), Korea’s first new fiction (sin sosŏl), to the late colonial era film Pando ŭi pom (Spring on the Peninsula, 1941). The Soil, Yi’s later masterpiece, also features characters who have just returned to Seoul from study abroad in the United States and Japan, but with a spatial inversion. The Soil’s Seoul is different from the futuristic city captured earlier in The Heartless. Seoul has changed and developed through the years in its historicity, but the essential shift is in its depiction, which mirrors the “turn” in the interiority of colonial subjectivities from desiring modernity in the 1910s to “overcoming” it in the 1930s. While in The Heartless, northerly images are ephemeral against the main narrative moving toward Seoul of the national future, here, in this 1932 work, the protagonist, Heo Sung (Hŏ Sung), is found definitively abandoning Seoul for his hometown of Chŏngju, marking a turn in the author’s relationship to the city and more importantly to modernity itself.

Heo Sung is another semi-autobiographical version of Yi Kwangsu, but he did not attend university in Tokyo, unlike the other young people in the story (and The Heartless’s Hyŏngsik). He is a brilliant graduate of a chŏnmun hakkyo (professional school) in Seoul, who after passing the National Exam for Government Offices in Tokyo becomes a successful lawyer. Similar to the love triangle in The Heartless, two women, Yu Sun (Yu Sŏn) and Yun Jeong Seon (Yun Chŏngsŏn), serve as foils for Seoul and the north. Although he had long ago promised to return to Salyeoul (Salyŏul) in Chŏngju to help the farmers and to marry Yu Sun, his hometown sweetheart, Heo decides instead to marry Jeong Seon, the daughter of the wealthy Yun family, for whom Heo had been working in Seoul.

Seoul residents are portrayed as morally compromised, in constant competition for economic gain, trying to forge good marriages to promote their social positions and yet alienated from genuine human connection. Dr. Yi Geon-yeong (Yi Kon'yŏng) has multiple degrees from prestigious American universities yet is an unmoored social climber who toys with innocent women. Kim Gap-jin (Kim Kachin), born in Seoul to Baron Kim, who had helped with the Annexation Treaty by collaborating with the Japanese, serves as a foil for Heo Sung. Gap-jin is a law student at the Japanese-run Seoul Imperial University, a hedonistic urbanite out of touch with nature: he has an affair with Heo Sung’s wife Jeong Seon and impregnates her. Gap-jin belittles Heo’s love of the land: “You’ve now graduated from college and should slough off that country attitude, instead of dreaming up justifications for it. . . . You want to go to the country and live with the farmers? What’s the use of all your study?”

Jeong Seon represents the worst of what Yi Kwangsu now identifies with in Seoul, whose “pseudo-religion” is money and status. She disdains her husband as a “country bumpkin”:

Jeong Seon, for her part, tried to forget her loneliness and agony through these gatherings. What they talked about in their meetings was merely idle chatter. The main topics were gossip and love stories. . . . They were living out a sort of pseudo-religion, that variegated mixture of the erotic, the grotesque, and the non-sensical popularly known as “Ero-Gro-Nonsense”: that had originated in Imperial Japan and had come to dominate even Korea’s female intelligentsia.
When the marriage unravels, Heo leaves his wife and returns to Salyeoul to honor his old dream of reviving his hometown, which had suffered under colonial transformation and global depression. This time, in 1932, the pastoral northern kohyang, not Seoul, is depicted as the hope and dwelling place of the untainted heart of Koreans. Unlike the “Ero-Gro-Nonsense” Seoulites, the farmers are the decent and dignified roots and trunk of the Korean people:

The Heo clan had lived in Sung’s village for several hundred years. . . . Sung’s ancestors had cultivated the forest, very likely in tandem with Sun’s ancestors. They must have cut trees, dug out the roots, made water pools for rice paddies, and plowed the paddies in sweat and blood. Eating the rice grown there, these ancestors had dwelt in this place and enjoyed their lives over generations, and Sung’s and Sun’s own bodies, their bones, flesh, and blood, were like flowers that had budded, grown, and blossomed in this soil, a soil mixed with their ancestors’ sweat!

Their “bones, flesh, and blood” have been part of the soil for generations. An instance of such familial connections and intimate knowledge of customs linked to a place is rare in Yi Kwangsu’s fiction, whose works are usually set in the city, the site of the author’s vision of reconstruction.

Yi’s romanticization of his hometown, disaffection with the city, and lush portrayals of the countryside speak to a marked turn in the writer’s literary landscape, from seeing the country as something to relinquish for a greater collective good (the minjok) to seeing it as an idealized place to be cherished and remembered, like the pagoda tree in Salyeoul.

Nobody knew how old the pagoda tree was. . . . The pagoda tree and the ground where it stood had legally belonged to various people in recent years, but it belonged to the village by custom and tradition. Any villager could enjoy its cool shade. Not only people but also cows, horses, dogs, and hens with chicks were allowed to dawdle or nap under the tree, and even a traveler could stop to rest weary legs in the shade of this old, respectable tree without hearing an objection. If all this sounds unbelievable, ask the pagoda tree itself. It has a lot of experience, having witnessed the history of Salyeoul Village at least four or five hundred years.

Similar to the rock-like “Old Man” outside Seven Star Gate in The Heartless, the pagoda tree represents permanence, unchanged for “at least four or five hundred years,” as does the old fortress.

In town were the scattered remains of an old fortress. The gates were all demolished, and the only parts of the fortress were rocks too heavy to carry off. Even these still showed holes made by firearms. The fortress had seen many battles over time. . . . it had been always an important battle site in various wars against Khitans, Mongols, Qing Chinese, and Russians. It had even witnessed domestic conflict, such as the revolt of Hong Gyeongrae [Kyŏngnae] in the early 19th century. . . . Not even the Sino-Japanese War or the Russo-Japanese War had left the fortress in peace. Knots full of gunshots were still to be found on trees thirty to forty years old. The remains of the fortress provided a stubborn reminder of how much the Korean people had suffered from invaders.

The pagoda tree and old Chŏngju fortress are reminders of the enduring spirit of the Koreans, especially the indomitable northern people who protected the country from foreign invasions.
and heroically expressed their independence from the central government in Seoul during the aforementioned 1812 Hong Rebellion.

Many have described *The Soil* as reflecting a bourgeois intellectual’s view of farmers as a backward lot needing awakening and reconstruction, but this reading overlooks Yi Kwangsu’s deep physical connection to Salyeoul as his hometown and his disaffection with urban capitalist development. Even though Yi is remembered as an unapologetic advocate of “civilization and enlightenment,” a close reading reveals a tension between the call to modernity and the pull of permanence. The pastoral scenes appear unusually vested in country life, but they are nonetheless framed by the specter of the city and speak to the relationship of the author to metropolitanism. The city represents the capitalist mode of production in the twentieth century and acts as the most powerful agent for all kinds of physical and social transformations. The literary contrast between the city and the country, therefore, is a barometer for the degree of modern transformation. Disavowing the city, Yi Kwangsu was nostalgic about the northern hometown and mourned the transformation of the countryside. And yet Yi Kwangsu’s was a specific return to the countryside and tradition, in that at the same time, he was virulently opposed to another past, that of the Sinocentric Confucian traditions of the Chosŏn dynasty, a rejection that he believed was necessary to deliver the minjok from decay.

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Kim Tongin (1900–51), another central figure in the Sŏbugin lineage, was from a slightly younger generation, who had eschewed minjok politics for aestheticism. Unlike the student pioneers of modern literature, Yi Kwangsu and Ch’oe Namson, who were tethered to the nation in their writings, Kim Tongin devoted his literature to the idea of art for art’s sake, publicly criticizing the didacticism in Yi Kwangsu’s writings. The dialectic of permanence and change noted earlier also colored Kim’s works, but without the commitment to the minjok. Despite their differences in literary philosophy, however, the two figures had in common their shared connections to the north, with its regional markers like the Taedong River, “Pyongyang kisaeng,” and Peony Hill, and they often collaborated in literary coteries dominated by northerners.

Kim was a native son of Pyongyang, born to a wealthy yangban family in the heart of the city and sent at age fourteen to Tokyo’s Meiji Gakuin. He entered the Kawabata Art School (1918) and, perhaps because of his artistic training, is remembered for his aestheticism rather than didacticism. Kim experimented with pure literary ideals through the representative journal *Creation*, first published in Tokyo, one month before the 1919 movement erupted, with Chŏn Yŏng’ae, Chu Yohan, and other northerner Tokyo international students. When the Japanese discovered that Kim had written a statement for the movement, he was imprisoned for four months. The production of volume eight had to be moved to Pyongyang but was still printed in Seoul, where it remained until the journal was shut down in 1921. This experience of moving between Tokyo, Seoul, and the north is captured in the aforementioned travelogue, “The Road to Hometown” by Kim Hwan, who was one of *Creation*’s editors. After the magazine closed, Yŏngdae, another literary coterie, was formed by Kim Tongin and others, again associated with the P’yŏngan province. It was also edited in Pyongyang but physically published in Seoul.

Kim’s “Boat Song” is regarded as a masterful example in the short story genre and a pioneering pure literature work. It opens in Pyongyang, Kim’s hometown, along the Taedong River banks, and moves through a flashback to Yŏngyu, a nearby seaside village. *Boat Song* is yet another in a long line of northwestern literature spatially moored along the Taedong River, with its famous sites: Kija’s Tomb, Peony Hill, Ļumil Pavilion, Nŭngna Island, and the crumbling...
city walls. The tale opens with the narrator gazing at the river, enjoying a spectacular spring day, lolling about Peony Hill.

It is a fine day . . . without a cloud in the sky—Not the type of sky which mocks us mere mortals with portent we humans dare not even approach, not that kind of arrogant sky, but the type of sky which appears to understand us and want to come down and hold our hands within its voluminous pink clouds. It is a sky full of love.

I am rolling and rolling down the grass which floated atop the banks of Peony Hill towards the Taedong River that flows into the Yellow Sea. It is the first of March.

The first day of the boat festival on the Taedong River."

The opening creates a visual landscape with vivid colors capturing the movement of the water and the undulating clouds. The narrator shares that the idyllic landscape around the river is that much more precious because he had spent much of his youth abroad in Tokyo.

Ah, the intoxicating beauty of verdant spring! It is impossible for someone like me—having lived in Tokyo since the age of fifteen, to not be moved manifold, compared to someone who sees such springs all the time. Inside the walls of Pyongyang city, the appearance of willow buds and plant shoots barely puncturing the ground signals spring, which has not yet completely arrived, and the fertile land framed by tall trees set against the area around Peony Hill past the Taedong River bring forth all the warmth of the season.

The mention of a previous Tokyo life explains the extreme idealism and romanticism. Kim Tongin’s intense attachment to unspoiled idylls frozen in time reflects his visual complicity with a metropole aestheticism adopted during his travels abroad. Compared to “someone who sees such springs all the time,” the narrator’s experience of “having lived in Tokyo since the age of fifteen” creates the anxiety of inaccessibility from abroad and therefore a heightened appreciation for the Pyongyang landscape.

Similar to its function in The Heartless, the Taedong River grounds the Tokyo-educated narrator to a place—the northern home—and serves as a conduit to local stories, discoverable only in songs and places from another temporality. While enjoying the gentle breeze, the narrator becomes captivated by the sound of the paettaragi boat song. He recognizes that the performer is a master of the form and tries to locate the singer, who turns out to be a wizened old sailor from Yŏngyu. This encounter transports the readers beyond the river’s surface, back in time to the singer’s tragic story, which is told in the local P’yŏngan dialect. The flashback heightens the affect of discovery by well-traveled urbanites and readers, who are learning the secrets of the region through the sailor’s tale.

The tale goes as follows. Twenty years ago, the sailor and his brother were the richest in their remote village. The brothers were known not only for their skill at sea but also for their mastery of the Yŏngyu-style paettaragi. The sailor had an unusually beautiful wife whom he adored, but because of a jealous misunderstanding, he accused her of dallying with his brother and kicked her out of the house. Her bloated corpse is found the next morning in the ocean. The younger brother sails away never to return, and the old sailor has been at sea for the past twenty years trying to find him. Except for a fleeting encounter following a shipwreck, the closest that the sailor comes to seeing his brother again is hearing in the distance the heart-wrenching tones of their hometown song. The sailor always arrives too late, to find that his brother has moved on. The haunting strains of the beautiful song and the sailor’s regional dialect draws the reader into this tragic tale, hidden deep in the river stills.
Another one of Kim’s famous short stories, “ Barely Opening Her Eyes,” employs similar visual frames:

It was a restless night where whispers carried about and the young Pyongyang people could barely sit still by the Taedong River. . . . The sky had already turned black. Even the wishing star couldn’t be seen any more. The Milky Way that lit up the night sky like a frosty cloud was the only light. The Pyongyang folk whose blood never grows tired of the river’s sight, even after sitting by the Taedong River or Ryongwang Pavilion watching its flow all day, had already gathered into a large crowd by the Taedong River.43

The very blood of the “Pyongyang folk” are linked to the river, in this story about Kŭmp’ae, a young “Pyongyang kisaeng” inserted into Kim’s landscape. “Pyongyang kisaengs on the Taedong River” was a common literary motif associated with the north, which we first encountered in The Heartless. In The Heartless, kisaeng were depicted as anachronisms from traditional society and associated with the actual historical figure of Kyewŏrhyang, the sixteenth century martyred courtesan who helped vanquish the Japanese invaders.

Challenging the presumed authenticity projected onto these cultural figures, Pak Ch’ansŏng argues that the topos of “Pyongyang kisaeng” was actually a modern construct. In 1910, the colonial police brought the Chosŏn government-registered kisaengs and new trainees together under an umbrella association based in Pyongyang.44 To be sure, kisaengs from Pyongyang had historically been regarded as entertaining objects of foreign desire by the envoys to and from China. But during the modern period, they were deliberately cultivated by the colonial state as commercial products for the Southern Manchurian Railway’s Pyongyang tourism packages.45 A three-year kisaeng school was founded by the Japanese to train girls for the growing tourism industry around the northern capital. Floating down the river on a barge with singing kisaeng became a popular tourist activity during the colonial period, and Pyongyang kisaeng came to symbolize the city itself.

Like The Heartless’s Kyewŏrhyang (Yŏngch’ae), Pyongyang kisaeng made their way to Seoul’s Tabang-gol (Tadong, later Chingogae) in the colonial capital and were celebrated nationally because Pyongyang came to be gendered vis-à-vis Seoul during the colonial era. Kim’s heroine, Kŭmp’ae, a graduate of the Pyongyang kisaeng school, is celebrated for her beauty and song. She and her friends leisurely entertain customers on barges during the fireworks festival, when they pass a boat with young female students who gawk at her, both in awe and envy.

“Look at the kisaengs.”

“Where? For real?”

Kŭmp’ae threw her head back, full of hostility and charm, and gave a contemptuous glare at the boat full of students. One of the girls’ fingers pointed at Kŭmp’ae as though it proclaimed, That one over there—she’s lovely . . . “So what if they dress nicely? You just wait ten years and see what they turn into.”46

This defamiliarizing encounter jolts the Pyongyang kisaeng out of their “traditional” frame along the Taedong River in a temporal disjunct where young female students (modern girls) occupy the same space as kisaeng. This encounter becomes an existential rupture for Kŭmp’ae, whose life had been devoted to fading practices. She had willfully entered a kisaeng school as a nine-year-old and had taken great pride in her talents. Acknowledging that the May festival (Tano) for women on the river is an anachronism, the narrator comments, “There is no need to bring
up the complicated mythos of the past but looking back on the beautiful customs that gradually get tainted and disappear, one painful reflection does emerge” (83).

Kŭmp’ae begins to question her place in a modernizing society, realizing that her very being is an anachronism in a modern world to which she has just “barely opened her eyes.” As the female students said, in ten years, her beauty and appeal would indeed fade and become yet another “mythos of the past.”

During this time, she came to the unpleasant conclusion that she would never be treated as a complete person. The patrons looked down on kisaengs condescendingly as lovable animals. Her parents looked upon her as a gold mine that brought income. Christians looked upon her as though she were the devil. Moralists looked upon her as a wicked being. Children teased her, calling her a doormat. . . . Such insulting thoughts tormented her mind without end. And so Kŭmp’ae came to the realization that not a single person existed who would not cause her grief. This rang loudly inside her skull. And so, Kŭmp’ae who used to be so cheerful, who would smile and tell great stories, turned into a neurotic Kŭmp’ae who laughed then cried then grew angry then fell into a deep state of thought.47

Her previously cheerful personality changes overnight, as Kŭmp’ae realizes that people do not consider her quite human. The worst insult comes from her customer’s friend, Y, who has just arrived from Tokyo:

Y’s guest, had just come up to Pyongyang on the train from Tokyo. They were speaking in Japanese, assuming she didn’t understand.

“She definitely isn’t human. She’s a bat . . .”

“You mean she makes her living in the night??” . . .

“Right . . . A kisaeng is a person who doesn’t quite belong in the same species as humans” (78–9).

The Japanese guest confesses that with “normal” women, he is so shy that he can barely look at them, but with Kŭmp’ae, a kisaeng, he feels comfortable, and he concludes that this is because she “is a person who doesn’t quite belong in the same species as humans.”

Here in “Barely Opening Its Eyes,” we find again the reference to Tokyo and the modern cosmopolitan worldview framing Pyongyang and its bygone practices in a temporality not in sync with Japan time. A kisaeng would have been out of place among international student gatherings in Tokyo universities. Y and the guest speak Japanese, assuming that the Pyongyang kisaeng, a cultural commodity linked to the past, could not possibly speak Japanese, the language of Tokyo modernity. Sadly, Kŭmp’ae understands Japanese and is deeply cut by their careless words that devalue her existence. An existential slippage occurs because Kŭmp’ae speaks Japanese. The colonial apparatus that ran the school had taught all its trainees Japanese so that they could better service the tourists who flocked to Pyongyang seeking a predetermined ideal of an Orientalized Chōsen (Korea). Like many sad stories of Pyongyang kisaeng, Kŭmp’ae’s tale not surprisingly ends in tragedy—the entertainer falling abruptly off a rope swing. She ultimately ceases to exist coevally with the New Women with their modern educations.

For many northwestern writers nostalgizing Pyongyang, the Taedong River provided cultural mooring as a representative literary theme with many possible variations. The river was a primordial space representing belonging and inspiration but linked to a temporality often removed from that of Tokyo/the West and that of Seoul, the capitol more directly imbricated
in the matters of the nation and empire. This temporal unevenness created an aestheticism, which became a discernible tendency of northwestern literature. The consequences of nationalist action under colonial rule were certainly familiar to Kim Tongin, who, as mentioned earlier, had been jailed for his involvement in the March First Movement. Despite or perhaps because of this, Kim deliberately chose not to engage politically, opting instead to tell local stories moored to Pyongyang’s famous sites, conjured through an urbanite’s cosmopolitan nostalgia.

As we have seen in Kim Tongin’s stories, Pyongyang and its river often function as portals to the quotidian practices of northerners. South Korean scholar Kim Yunsik identifies this emphasis on local life, away from the more socially engaged writings from Seoul under colonialism, as “Pyongyang chungsim chuŭi” (Pyongyang-centered) literature. This characterization was even better suited to describing northern poetry, which is celebrated in Korea for its sobakhan (simple) vignettes of rural life. Three such representative northern poets, Kim Ôk, Kim Sowŏl, and Paek Sŏk, like the novelists Yi Kwangsu and Kim Tongin, stood in the line of modern figures descended from the first generation galvanized by An Ch’angho and Yi Sŭng hun through their pioneering education efforts with the aforementioned Taesŏng School and Osan School. Kim Ôk (1895–?) was a student of Yi Kwangsu when Yi taught at Osan in the 1910s. When Kim Ôk eventually became a teacher there (1916), he taught Kim Sowŏl (1902–32), who later influenced Paek Sŏk, another Osan School graduate. Both Kim Sowŏl and Paek Sŏk were born in Chŏngju, the hometown of Yi Sŭng hun, the Osan founder, and Yi Kwangsu. If Kim Sowŏl is conventionally cited as a beloved “Korean” poet, then Paek Sŏk perhaps more than any other poet is identified with the north. This is because after liberation (1945), Paek returned to his northern hometown and remained there until national division, when he was co-opted by the emergent North Korean state. In fact, until the 1980s, Paek’s poetry was strictly banned in South Korea as communist and North Korean even though many of his poems focus on timeless local scenes without engaging in contemporary politics.

In 1924, at the age of twelve, Paek Sŏk (Paek Kihaeng, 1912–1995) became a prized pupil of Kim Ôk, at Osan. Kim greatly influenced the young Paek, especially by exposing him to Western symbolist poetry. After graduation (1929), Paek won a scholarship from the Chosŏn Daily to study abroad and entered Tokyo’s Aoyama School (1930) to learn English literature. During this period, Paek immersed himself in the poetry of Ishikawa Takuboku, whose modern “free-style” influences can be discerned in Paek’s verses, which are looser than the more traditional cadences of Kim Ôk and Kim Sowŏl’s poems.

After graduating from Aoyama, Paek published “Chŏngju Fortress” (Chŏngju sŏng, 1935), when he began working at the Chosŏn Daily in Seoul. The poem publicly announced his regional identity by evoking historical memory around the decaying walls of his hometown. His subsequent publication of a poetry book, Deer (Sasŭm, 1936), on northern village scenes cemented his position as one of the generation’s major poets. Paek lived for years in Seoul, the colonial center, which by the 1930s had been transformed into a modern urban hub, but curiously, he almost never mentions the city in his writings. After Seoul, Paek went north and led a peripatetic life in Hamgyŏng province and also in different cities in Japanese-occupied Manchuria.

Local food and family described through a child’s eyes are memetic registers in Paek’s topophilic poetry about Chŏngju, which he never returned to from 1930, when he left for Japan, until 1945, after liberation. His poems can be divided roughly into early works about his hometown in Deer, published while living in Seoul, and those about other country locales he visited while traveling. The memories of his birthplace are ones conjured while he lived among
unfamiliar sights, customs, people, and sensations. While his readers therefore assumed that he preferred country life, Paek personally led an urban lifestyle.

Except for place names and references to specific regional products, Paek’s poetry might also not read as particularly northern in the English translation, which tends to flatten the writer’s native tongue. In the original Korean, however, his regional identity cannot be overlooked since Paek writes almost exclusively in the old Chŏngju dialect. The accent is so removed from today’s Seoul vernacular that dictionaries have been published to help translate the pangŏn (dialect) into a contemporary vernacular more accessible to today’s readers.52 Most publications contain detailed glossaries, often more extensive than the poems themselves. One must question why Paek preferred his hometown dialect since he was an urbane intellectual, linguist, and translator, who spoke or read at least five “major” languages.53 The Chŏngju dialect from today’s North Korea, inaccessible to contemporary readers, therefore heightens the affect of nostalgia evoked through the author’s childhood remembrances. That there are few South Korean readers who still understand this dialect or remember the Chŏngju regional customs or food contributes to the anxiety of loss over disappearing pasts for today’s contemporary Seoulites increasingly enmeshed in modern global cosmopolitanism.

Paek introduced himself as a poet on the national stage by publishing “Chŏngju Fortress” in Seoul.54 Similar to the function of the Taedong River, the fortress was an important site of the aforementioned Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion, which functioned as a regional signifier through to the twentieth century, an assumption that is based on the number of modern northwestern writers who memorialized it. Kim Sowŏl remembered the rebellion in his poem “Water Chestnut” (Mulmarnŭm, 1924), as did Hyŏn Sangyun (first president of Koryŏ University), another important Chŏngju native, in Hong Kyŏngnae Chŏn (The Tale of the Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion, 1931).55 Paek’s allusion to it is brief compared to Hyŏn’s and Kim’s more sustained treatments, but it is nonetheless notable that Paek made his national literary entrance by alluding to Chŏngju’s pained regional history.

“Chŏngju Fortress”

The hillside lookout seems empty, with lonely light.
I hear the crackling
of the castor oil on the cloth wick.

Along the fallen fortress walls where dragonflies slumber
are fireflies aloft like blueish ghosts.
It is said somewhere a large mountain bird
flies towards a dark ravine.

The undemolished remains of the fortress gate
shine like a bright sky.
When daylight breaks an old man with whiskers like catfish
will come sell green pears.56

The fireflies invoke the ghosts of those northerners who had perished during the rebellion, which had come to a head in 1812, when central government forces laid siege to Chŏngju, where the rebels were encamped. The protestors refused to surrender and were defeated when explosives were placed in underground tunnels by the soldiers, to destroy the walls. Many rebels died during their last fight. Among the survivors, 1917 men and boys above the age of ten.
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were executed for taking part in the uprising. Others have read the poem as expressing life’s hopelessness—the narrator stares at the fallen walls of the old fortress and remembers the tragedy which befell the rebels, but I interpret it as a testament to the tenacity and strength in local everyday lives. There are three temporalities at play: the now of the poem’s narrator at the lookout, the past conjured by the blueish ghosts haunting the fortress walls, and the unchanging quotidian rhythms in the old man’s daily returns selling green pears. The now of the poem’s iteration negotiates the region’s painful history with the steadfastness of the locals (the catfish-whiskered old man, the dragonflies, the fireflies), who have gone about their everyday lives for centuries and survived.

With the exception of “Chŏngju Fortress,” which reintroduced northern regional history to the Seoul-based national audience, most of Paek’s poetry focuses on local village life and memories of family and food.

“Tavern” (Chumak, 1935)

The boiled carp wrapped in squash leaves was always delicious
In the kitchen you could see eight-sided tables worn shiny red and on them eyeball-sized cups with printed bright green bush clover leaves
The son was called Beom [Pŏm] buck-toothed good at catching minnows and same age as me
Outside the stalk-woven fence there were ponies sucking on their mothers’ breasts who came along with the sellers.

This tavern scene would not necessarily be personal, except for the disclosures that the “boiled carp wrapped in squash leaves was always delicious” and that Beom was “the same age as me.” These two phrases place the poet as a young boy directly in the vignette as someone who has lived in the village, at a specific age, which was the “same age” as Beom, the buck-toothed son of the tavern owner who was “good at catching minnows.” The “was always” indicates that sustained time was spent eating the carp in squash leaves to establish a continuity in experiences. Physical linkage through the bodily consumption of food and connection to the young boy Beom—who is “the same age”—are distinguishing characteristics of Paek’s topophilic poetry.

The next three poems, “Storeroom” (Kobang, 1936), “Village with Many Foxes” (Yŏnangol, 1936), and “An Autumn Evening Scene” (Ch’uya yigyŏng, 1938), interweave distinct country sensibilities with happy memories of childhood and sanguineous connections.

“Storeroom”

In the old clay jar pine rice cakes remain like an old runaway daughter with no place to go
The sweet refined rice wine which uncle says tastes better than rice is in the old shiny jar
And copying him my cousin and I snuck a drink of the easy, tart brew.
During the ancestral rites there my deaf grandfather peeled chestnuts and made tofu skewers on bush clover sticks.

“Village with Many Foxes”

... Sitting on a baby arrowroot mat on the storage room floor covered in yellow bush clover,
I ate the pumpkin rice cakes with relish.
“An Autumn Evening Scene”

The chickens have already crowed twice
but the light has been on all night in the big inner room
where people are noisily gathered still awake
slicing radishes and cabbage to be dried and pickled
chopping ginger scallion seaweed and garlic.

In the room where the mustard leaves are being boiled,
the aroma of seasoning floats around and around.

Outside somewhere a water bird cries
while in the storeroom the tofu made of new beans ferments quietly.  

These poems are full of happy memories of sneaking wine and rice cakes with cousins, and they create a sense of wellbeing, with grandfathers, uncles, sisters, and cousins observing traditional roles. Repeated references to storerooms signal ancestral rites and generational linkages to the land. Food originates in the terroir (t’oji) of Paek’s hometown and is compressed and transported through its association with that place across physical boundaries and through time. Pine rice cakes, unrefined sweet rice wine, chestnuts, fermenting tofu, dried radish and cabbage, mustard greens, ginger, scallion, garlic, seaweed, and aromatic seasoning, prepared and consumed by little sisters, grandparents, uncles, and cousins, capture childhood village scenes of evocative Proustian power. His childhood is the time of forever happiness, with no indication of what is happening externally in 1930s colonial Korea.

Paek left Seoul after the publication of Deer and took a position teaching English in Hamhung, leading a peripatetic life up north. He published “Hometown” (Kohyang, 1938) from Hamgyŏng province.

“Hometown”

I was laid up sick alone in the Northern Pass 
And saw a doctor one morning
The doctor with the face like Buddha and the beard of Lord Gwan
... And suddenly asks where my hometown is
When I saw a town called Jeongju[Chŏngju] in Pyeongan Province
He says then it is the hometown of Mr. So-and-So
When I ask then do you know Mr. So-and-So
... With his hand so warm and soft
That my hometown my father and his friend were all there

The narrator is “laid up sick alone” in a hospital room in a strange province. His dislocation is broken by a visit from a doctor who asks where the poet comes from. When the doctor realizes that Paek is from Chŏngju, he mentions his friend Mr. So-and-So, connecting the lonely hospital room among strangers to home through acquaintances who know his father and his father’s friend. His family “were all there” in the doctor’s gentle touch, which links him to his loved ones. According to Williams, “[i]n a world of strangers and forces in apparently external and unrecognizable forms, we look around us for social pictures, social signs, social messages, to which, characteristically, we try to relate as individuals but so as to discover, in some form,
community.” For Paek, it was not just itinerant life in Tokyo, Seoul, Manchuria, and other northern provinces that created nostalgia but also the historical realities of the 1930s, against which the idyll of happy pasts served as the ultimate escape, to an untainted “national interior” beyond the train tracks of modernity and uncertainties of colonial life.

Williams writes that in emerging global capitalist networks, the “idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of childhood: of delighted absorption[,]... illusory ideas of the rural past: those successive and endlessly recessive ‘happy Englands of my boyhood.’” The “happy Koreas of his boyhood” were indeed illusory since the colonial economy swiftly devastated agrarian society by linking it to the global market, as rice prices plummeted and tenant farmers sank deeply into debt following the Great Depression (1930s). The ubiquitous trope of childhood belies the reality of the desiccation of the countryside following colonial development. The fact that Paek was multilingual but chose to write primarily in the disappearing Chŏngju dialect magnifies his disavowal, since the late 1930s was exactly when public Korean language use was prohibited with the ch'angsii kaemyŏng (name-change, 1939) policy.

Three representative northwestern writers, Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tongin, and Paek Sŏk, were linked by their associations to the Taesŏng School and the Osan School and to Tokyo. Although many northerners were the first to go abroad to study, they usually did not return to their hometowns after graduation and instead lived in Seoul to work. From Japan, their lonely international student experiences united them under a collective identity—“Korean,” which transcended regional differences. In Seoul, however, they joined regional associations to find grounding in the unfamiliar city and honored their shared northern origins. Seoul was an in-between place of national labor, and it was rarely depicted as a space of belonging or warmth. Home, as Williams similarly described for English travelers of the empire, became the idealized north of green pastures, local dialects, and connectedness to the soil. Their nostalgia increased with the anxiety felt watching their land (t’oji) being transformed by the rationalizing work of colonial capitalism. Publishing nationally, they continued to closely support fellow northerners, united by regional identity and by their shared experiences abroad. Thus, reconsidering the texts spatially excavates the stories from colonial Korea’s less visible locales and sheds light on the layered alterities of writers who were shaped not only by minjok and empire but also by the northern kohyang and other topographical imaginaries of belonging.

Notes

1 Kim Hwan, “Kohyang kanŭn gil,” 51–58. Kim Hwang (Paek Ak, 1893–?), was one of the founders of Ch’angjo with Kim Tongin and Chŏn Yŏng’ae from Tokyo. Before going abroad to Tokyo to study art, Kim was a teacher at the Osan School.

2 I use “northwesterner” and “northerner” interchangeably.

3 Two short-lived societies, Sŏ’u (Friends of the P’yŏngnan and Hwanghae provinces) and Hanbuk (Hamgyŏng Korea), merged into one, Sŏbuk hakhoe (Northwestern Study Society, 1908), representing northwesterners from the P’yŏngnan, Hwanghae, and Hamgyŏng provinces. P’yŏngnan province was called the Western province, and Pyongyang, its capital, was often called the Western capital.

4 Hyŏn, “Tonggyŏng yuhaksaeng saenghwag,” 110–17. In this travelogue, Hyŏn expresses longing for home while studying abroad, but also comments extensively on the other Korean students in the Tokyo Korean students’ associations, saying that despite all of them being from different provisional backgrounds and classes, they are all united by their shared Koreanness (cf. Japan).

5 Williams, The Country and the City, 279–95.
6 Ibid., 281.
7 Ibid., 282.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 286.
10 Ch’oe Namsŏn, Yŏm Sangsŏp, Pak T’aewŏn, Yi Sang, and Na Tohyang were only a handful of famous Korean writers who were originally from Seoul proper. The majority were born in regional provinces.
11 Pak Un sik, Yi Kwangsu, Hyŏn Chingŏn, Yi Kiyŏng all wrote travelogues about kohyang.
12 Williams, The Country and the City, 297.
13 Pyongyang was free to explore aestheticism because it had always been marginalized and because Seoul was the focus of imperial rigor. Cho Yŏnjŏng, “P’yŏngyang ŭi kyŏnghyang,” 7–8.
14 Kim Yun sik and Chŏng Houng, Han guk sosŏlsa, 94. “Pyongyang-centered” refers to the greater northern Pyongan province, including Chŏngju.
15 Kim, Marginality and Subversion.
17 Hwang, “From the Dirt to Heaven,” 143–51.
18 Ibid., 161–63.
19 Kwon, “Chośŏn–Qing Relations and the Society of P’yŏngan Province During the Late Chŏson Period,” 44.
21 Yun, 105in saǒn kwa sinminhoe yŏng’gu, 175.
22 Ibid.
23 Kim Min suk, “Paek Sŏk si e nat’anan changsosŏng yŏngu,” 68.
24 Choi, “Forgotten Memories of Modernity.”
25 Lee and Yi, Yi Kwangsu and Modern Korean Literature, 197, emphasis added.
26 Ibid., 200.
27 Ibid., 214, emphasis added.
28 Yi Kwangsu, The Soil, 46.
29 Ibid., 194.
31 Yi Kwangsu, The Soil, 7–11.
32 Choi, “Yi Kwangsu and the Post–World War I Reconstruction Debate in Korea.”
33 Yi Kwangsu, The Soil, 120–21.
34 Hyŏng sik describes an Old Man sitting outside Seven Star Gate whom he had known before going abroad. Returning to the area in search of Yŏngch’ae, Hyŏng sik is surprised to find that the Old Man, like calcified rock, has not changed at all, oblivious to the changes around him.
36 Shin, “Agrarianism,” 786–87. “The rural population was considered little more than a subject for sympathy, something to be educated, enlightened, and transformed.”
37 Kim Tongin’s criticism of Yi Kwangsu’s didacticism. “Chunwŏn yŏngu,” 484–582.
38 His short story “Flogging” (T’aehyŏng, 1922–3) is a dark portrayal of Kim’s imprisonment in a Japanese prison and is the closest thing to a political statement in Kim’s literary works.
39 Academy of Korean Studies, “Ch’angjo.”
40 Academy of Korean Studies, “Yŏngdae.”
41 Kim Tongin, “Paettaragi,” 115, my translation.
42 Ibid., 116, my translation, emphasis added.
44 Pak, “Sigminjisigi tachungjŏk p’yosasŏng ŭi P’yŏngyang kisaeng.”
45 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 76.
48 Kim Yonggik, Han guk kündae sisa, 335–41.
49 Kim Yun sik and Chŏng Houng, 94.
50 Academy of Korean Studies, “Paek Sŏk.”
51 No Yongmu, “Paek Sŏk si wa t’op’op’ilia,” 229–60.
52 Ko Hyŏngjin, Paek Sŏk si ŭi mulmyŏnggo: Paek Sŏk siŏ punnyu saǒn.
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53 Choi, “Three Korean Poets,” 17. Paek read classical Chinese, spoke Korean and Japanese fluently, in addition to translating Thomas Hardy (English) and Anton Chekhov (Russian).

54 Paek, “Chǒngju suǒng” [Chǒngju Fortress], 4.

55 Kim Sowŏl, “Mumlarum”; Hyŏn Sangyun, “Hong Kyŏngnae nan.”

56 Hyŏndaesi pip’yŏng yŏn’guhoe, “Tasi ignu Paek Sŏk si, 15, my translation.

57 Pak Hyesuk, “P’yŏngbuk Chǒngju chiyŏk ui munhak p’ung’t’o wa siin yŏngu,” 284.

58 Ibid.


60 Paek, Sasum, 12–13; Hyŏndaesi pip’yŏng yŏn’guhoe, Tasi ignu Paek Sŏk si, 62–63, my translation.

61 Paek, Sasum, 6–11; Hyŏndaesi pip’yŏng yŏn’guhoe, Tasi ignu Paek Sŏk si, 50–57, my translation.

62 Paek, “Ch’uya ilgyŏng,” 78; Hyŏndaesi pip’yŏng yŏn’guhoe, Tasi ignu Paek Sŏk si, 276, my translation.

63 Choi, “Three Korean Poets,” 290. From 1940, Paek moved to the Manchurian city of Changch’un, where he took a government position in the Economic Division but resigned six months later, under pressure to change his name to Japanese. He started to publish poetry about his Manchurian sojourns, finally landing another position in Andong (Manchuria). After liberation from the Japanese, Paek moved back to his hometown and began to work for the Kim Ilsŏng regime, translating Russian literature into Korean. He died in North Korea in 1995.

64 Allusion to Hangyŏng province.


66 Williams, The Country and the City, 295.

67 Goswami, Producing India, 129; Kim, “Paek Sŏk si e nat’an an changsosŏng yŏngu,” 69–71.

68 Williams, The Country and the City, 296.


70 Kim Chong’a’e, “Paek Sŏk si ui segye taegung yangsang yŏngu,” 155–72.

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