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Across the Yellow Sea:
Colonial Korean Literature, China, and Transregional Futures

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in
Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Minseung Kim

2026

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Across the Yellow Sea: Colonial Korean Literature, China, and Transregional Futures

by

Minseung Kim

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles 2026

Professor Christopher P. Hanscom, Chair

This dissertation examines how colonial Korean literature imagined transregional affiliations through China during the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than approaching China as a unified national entity or simply as the counterpart of colonial Korea, it argues that Korean writers mobilized Shanghai and Northeast China as literary spaces through which they rethought the nation, empire, and the regional future of East Asia. By shifting attention from nation-based comparison to transregional encounters, the dissertation demonstrates how colonial Korean literature challenged the assumption of discrete, homogeneous national cultures and imagined alternative forms of political and social community.

Opposing the scholarly assumption that colonial Korean literature emerged solely from the relationship with Japan—its colonizer and a significant mediator of Western modernity—this

dissertation foregrounds how colonial Korean writers engaged with China as their literary background and as a site for exploring notions of nation, empire, and East Asia. Building on recent scholarship in transregional East Asian literary studies while departing from nation-centered literary historiography, the dissertation analyzes short stories by Chu Yosöp, Kim Kwangju, Ryu Sö, and Sim Hun, situating their works within the historical contexts of exile, migration, anarchist and socialist movements, and multilingual cultural exchange across the Chinese mainland.

Each chapter explores a different mode of transregional affiliation. Chapter One examines multilingual encounters and the limits of the national language in Chu Yosöp's fiction. Chapter Two analyzes Korean migrant communities across Northeast China and Shanghai in Kim Kwangju's writings to challenge the myth of a unified exile community. Chapter Three investigates Ryu Sö's anarchist vision of a Korean–Chinese community beyond ethnic divisions, while Chapter Four examines Sim Hun's socialist conception of East Asia through revolutionary networks extending from Shanghai across the region. Together, these chapters demonstrate how colonial Korean literature reconfigured China as a literary space for imagining alternative political affiliations and regional futures beyond both Japanese imperial discourse and nation-centered conceptions of East Asia.

This dissertation of Minseung Kim is approved.

Namhee Lee

Ju Hui Judy Han

Hyun Suk Park

Christopher P. Hanscom, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

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Introduction: Thinking Through China in Colonial Korean Literature

In an article titled “My Years in Overseas Exile: Two Years in Shanghai” (Na ūi haeoe mangmyŏng sidae: Sanghae ūi i nyŏn kan) published in the January 1932 issue of *The Three Thousand Ri* (Samch'ŏlli), novelist Yi Kwangsu (李光洙, 1892–1950) recalls his flight from political upheaval and arrival in Shanghai in 1919, where he participated in the Korean Provisional Government until his return to colonial Korea in 1921. Yi notes how he ended up in Shanghai against the backdrop of protests led by Korean students in Japan in February 1919. Though conflicted and realizing the gravity of his decision—“How could I leave my friends in danger and go overseas?” (29)—Yi disguised himself and sneaked into Shanghai, then headed to Beijing to work as an English-language reporter for a newspaper, evading pursuit and investigation by a Japanese detective (29). “Shanghai!” he tells the reader, “There is so much I have to say about it” (31).

Well-known as a pioneering figure in modern Korean literature as well as for his later pro-Japanese collaboration during the Asia-Pacific War, Yi’s recollection draws attention to the early 1920s scene in which colonial Korean writers became connected to Shanghai against the backdrop of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist demonstrations led by young Korean intellectuals. Shanghai, located outside the territory of the Japanese Empire, became a destination for Korean exile intellectuals, a refuge for those whose activities were deemed “suspicious” by the Japanese police forces. While of biographical interest, such anecdotes also spark our curiosity about how Shanghai and China were situated within the colonial Korean literary scene during the expansion of Japan’s empire, while at the same time raising

questions about a mode of literary history adequate to the regional connections and affiliations that the exigencies of the period gave rise to.

Within the processes of entering the world order in the early twentieth century, the Japanese imperial order took the initiative to reduce colonial Korea's imagination of the nation, region, and world to a dyadic relationship between the colonizer and the colony. Reconsidering a hierarchy of standards of comparison limited to a binary between Japan and Korea—center and periphery, civilization and outpost, modern and belated, original and translation—this dissertation focuses on colonial Korean literature produced in and set during 1920s Shanghai. It centers on the question of how colonial Korean writers imagined transregional affiliations beyond the national boundaries of Korea and China by rethinking the notion of separate, unified nation-states working within the Japanese imperial system. It particularly analyzes short stories by Korean writers in Shanghai—Chu Yosöp, Kim Kwangju, Ryu Sö, and Sim Hun—arguing that they mobilized China as a literary site in which they rethought the notions of nation, region, and East Asia. Moving beyond a comparative framework that presumes pre-fixed national boundaries and one-to-one relationships between national literatures and pre-fixed national boundaries, I emphasize how these writers approached China not simply as a unified nation-state but as a constellation of localities and regions. Through these local sites, they envisioned alternative regional formations of East Asia that did not conform to the dyadic relationships of colony and colonizer or even as a region made up of distinct nation-states.

The dissertation's main question examines how to reshape our understanding of the contact zone in colonial Korea. Among its different forms, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized has often been regarded as the defining site of encounters with cultural others. Mary Louise Pratt describes the contact zone as a space where distinct cultures “meet, clash, and grapple” under highly asymmetrical conditions, producing

“spontaneous and reciprocal” encounters that generate heterogeneous cultural formations (7). Yet these formations are ultimately understood within the framework of the nation-state, which organizes cultures as discrete units defined by language, ethnicity, and territory. Consequently, cultural mixture is imagined primarily through the encounter between colonizer and colonized. In colonial studies, the contact zone is thus frequently reduced to an “unbreakable dyadic relationship” (Nandy 7) between colony and colonizer, a relationship through which colonies are expected to cultivate national culture by emulating the colonizer’s institutions while reconstituting their own traditions and histories.

Like many other places, Korea, from premodern to modern history, has had many different “significant others.” Especially within the context of complex dynamics in East Asia, Korea’s engagement with modernization from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century is often explained as a meeting with “the West,” an external power that arrived unbidden on the Korean peninsula. The process involved reshaping its relationship with the Chinese Empire—the hegemonic power in the tributary order and the epistemic center of the Sinographic sphere during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910)—and acknowledging the newly rising position of the Japanese nation-state and its Empire as Korea’s colonizer. This transition led to Korea’s renegotiation of relations with both, through a series of wars (the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905), the opening of ports (1876), the declaration of independence from the tributary system (1894), and the imposition of Japanese supervisory control (beginning with the protectorate treaty in 1905, with formal colonization from 1910). Through this process, Korea’s understanding of its relationship with regional power was turned on its head, as the Japanese discourse of modernization portrayed the former imperial power China as anything but civilized, a latecomer defeated by Japan due to its so-called feudalized customs (Schmid 10-11). Korea extended its contact zones with Western civilization mainly through Japan—a new colonizer

and a significant mediator of Western modernity—while leaving questions about how to deal with the cultural legacies of the Chinese Empire and how to perceive contemporary transformations in China after the collapse of the Qing dynasty.

Japanese colonial discourses on East Asia have emphasized Japan's hegemonic power in colonial Korea, presenting its affiliation with Japan, a new colonizer, as the primary and significant constituent of the modernizing Korean nation-state. Japan's project to conceptualize Asia is double-sided: Japan's neighboring countries—China and Korea—should be differentiated from Japan, while Asia should be unified as a counterpart to Europe-America (Yamamuro 2003, 45). Entering the modern nation-state system, Asian countries were forced to assimilate into the standard European-American model of the nation-state, while Japan, in this process, attempted to recreate a regional identity for East Asia, based on hierarchical differences among national cultures (99). Japanese historians' category of "Tōyō" (the Orient) emerged from this context. Modern Japanese historiography constructed "Tōyō" as a category that allowed Japan to assert its pioneering role in Asian civilization while simultaneously distancing itself from other Asian societies, particularly China, which was disparagingly referred to as "Shina" and portrayed as a "feudal" nation incapable of attaining modern nationhood (Tanaka 3, 16). Japan set itself apart from the Oriental despotism practiced in the Chinese central world and embarked on its pioneering role in modernization by "leaving Asia and entering the West."

Japan's Orient disregarded the possibility of finding contemporaneity or a sense of simultaneity among non-Japanese Asian countries, as Japan was supposed to be the only credible source for leading the circulation of modern knowledge and culture from the Empire's metropolitan center to other parts of Asia. As Takeuchi Yoshimi critically pointed out, after the end of the Pacific War, Japan's progress within the capitalist system appears as a development from the feudal stage into higher civilization, but it's not actually meant to

transform or escape the fixed coordinates of Japan and Europe, nor to question the universal values premised on European rationalism and scientism (Takeuchi 55). Within Japan's coordinate plane, each nation-state appears as a point along a spectrum from pioneer to latecomer, each understood to constantly move forward to fill the gap between historical stages toward the telos of capitalist modernity, each limited to a linear pathway toward the level of a supposedly European rationality. However, such perspectives simultaneously leave open critical questions about the centrality of Japan's position: as the firstcomer of capitalist modernization in East Asia, does Japan preclude all attempts to think about cross-cultural and transnational connections emerging in colonial Korea? Can we not find attempts in colonial Korea to think beyond Japan's imperial discourse—which locates each Asian nation on a linear pathway toward capitalist modernization—by navigating and engaging with the world order in their own way in the early twentieth century? The remaining question is how to approach colonial Koreans' views of other Asians—including “feudalized” China—as a reference point to break through the world-order system.¹

Within this nation-state world order in East Asia, individual nation-states are understood to exist as presumably independent and separate unities of nations—bound to the same language, ethnicity, and territory—moving toward the conditions for Western modernity yet perpetually situated as lagging behind. It is also not easily admitted that the

¹ My examination of China in colonial Korean literature—as not merely an object of comparison but as a spatial and political intervention that challenges the empire's epistemic order—directly engages with broader scholarly debates concerning how Korea has imagined and situated itself within Asia. I situate my research within debates on inter-Asia connections, which broaden the focus beyond a single central location and trace the relational conditions of modernity across Asia within North American area studies. This research shares a common interest with voices that have criticized the division of the West as the knower and the rest as its object of knowledge, which ultimately reinforces the knower's power to impose a fixed identity on non-Western regions (Walker and Sakai 8). I am motivated by this critique, which calls for a reevaluation of a unified, fixed identity of Asia.

nation-state consists of multiple agents, and that national subjects reside in regions beyond national territories and conduct their trans-lingual and trans-cultural practices. Taking those limitations into consideration, this dissertation broadens the East Asian horizon in modern Korean literature by moving beyond the colonizer–colonized binary and emphasizing China as a site where modern Korean literature emerged outside the Japanese Empire. It considers China to be a constitutive yet underexplored presence within Korea’s contact zone in the early twentieth century. Those connections across (semi-)colonial regions can be drawn to reconfigure Japanese imperial discourses that sought to fix Asian nations, except Japan, as lagging behind in modernization, caught up within the vertical hierarchy of the metropolitan center (Japan and the West) and linked hierarchically with other peripheries (other Asian nations). Transregional affiliations across Korea and China—given their labeled positions as colony and semi-colony—are suggested as colonial Koreans’ attempt to refuse the Empire’s logic on managing the nation-state world order under the hegemonic power of Japan’s status as a credible mediator of Western civilization. I thus view East Asia as a historically contingent, internally differentiated field shaped by transnational and intercolonial interactions that transcend the binary division between colony and colonizer.

Framework

This dissertation explores aspects of the field of colonial Korean literature that can be seen as emerging in relation to China, which has often been overshadowed by the imperial epistemological approach to China and other East Asian nations considered “feudal” or as late comers to modernity. Breaking through those approaches, this dissertation examines the concrete connections between texts and cultures, as well as the authors' practices of thinking through situations in China, which emerge from their experiences as writers in exile living on

the Chinese continent. As introduced in the concept of “minor transnationalism” (Shih and Lionnet), examining exchanges and encounters between “peripheries” reveals the inherent complexity of minor expressive cultures across multiple registers (11), which are produced and performed without requiring mediation by the center (5).² This chapter assumes that those authors did not merely repeat the Japanese imperial discourse that defined China as a nation defeated by the rising dominance of Japanese imperialism. Writers and intellectuals under colonial occupation were capable of promoting their own understanding of the local and regional contexts, leading to an alternative imagination of the international world order.

The dissertation critically approaches a comparative framework that positions Korea, China, and Japan as distinct yet equivalent cultural units to be understood in parallel, focusing instead on modes of cultural mediation, considering Korean literature as a perspective, Chinese society as an object of observation and a horizontal point of reference, and Japanese imperial systems of governance, language, and knowledge as constitutive elements of colonial society.³ Grounded in this perspective, this dissertation seeks to inquire about the meaning of referring to other (semi-) colonial regions—that is, similarly labeled as latecomers to modern culture in East Asia—in order to rethink the power that Japanese

² Shifting the focus from the vertical and “unbreakable” relationship with a colonizer, this dissertation explores horizontal relationships among (semi-) colonial nations. In this dissertation, social and political transformations occurring in mainland China are understood as involved in a semi-colonial situation, given the establishment of a concession area in Shanghai, the opening of main ports and industrial resources to European military power, its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, and the encroachment of Japanese military force in Manchuria.

³ Further discussions remain on why the Japanese and the Japanese Empire were neither articulated nor addressed in colonial Korean media, including key representative narratives. Avoiding any reference to matters related to Japan may indicate an attempt to evade potential censorship or an unconscious refusal to confront the issue. Simultaneously, the abstract conceptualization of Japan as a pervasive and invisible system remains inseparable from the expectations of modernization held by colonized peoples under the colonial framework.

imperial discourse assumed to position individual nation-states' location and status as "comparable" under the standard of Japan's progress.

Examining the Korea-China relationship does not aim to discover another "other" based on a conventional understanding of co-figuration within a comparative framework. Naoki Sakai argues that modern translation operates through a "schema of configuration," which constructs languages and their corresponding communities as separate, internally unified, and mutually comparable entities (Sakai 1997, 15). However, this approach to a dyadic relationship is simultaneously at risk of repeating a basis for comparison often rooted in the standards of Western modern culture, where national identities and cultures are seen as "equivalent" and "comparable" according to the so-called universal standard (Chow 294). Moving beyond a model of co-figuration that focuses on the formation of stable collective identity through relations with other cultures, this project instead asks how China in colonial Korean literature can function in diverse roles, a motive, a backdrop, or a site in which authors critically approach national differences and similarities based on fixed boundaries of cultural entities by imagining affiliations that transcend the boundaries of discrete nations and languages.

While Sakai's formulation reveals how modern translation retrospectively constructs languages and nations as separate, internally unified, and mutually comparable entities, this dissertation asks what other kinds of affiliations possibly emerge beyond those separations. Existing studies have attempted to move beyond national comparisons through the concept of the contact zone, yet encounters are still narrowly understood in terms of the asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. As a result, colonial experience continues to be narrated through a dyadic framework that presumes clearly bounded national and cultural communities before they encounter one another. This dissertation instead centers on colonial Korean writers' perceptions of overseas localities in China and their recreation of

those places' meanings for imagining alternative futures. Rather than filling in the missing pieces of modern Korean literary history, it critiques a comparative framework that presumes separate and comparable national cultures and asks how literature might exist beyond those assumptions.

The dissertation thus analyzes fictional works by exploring what other relationships are possible beyond a dyad of two nations—including Korea and China, but also Korea and Japan (colony and colonizer). Moving beyond a dyadic relationship—which presumes fixed boundaries between two entities in language, traditions, ethnicity, and territories—each chapter aims to identify relationships between two national entities, constructed or imagined in fictional texts, that go beyond the conventional one-to-one correspondence assumed between so-called comparable or equivalent national entities. These attempts are shown to challenge the purportedly obvious boundaries that divide two different languages and communities. Forms of association between two national units (such as Korean-Chinese solidarity) are examined as creating a space for co-thriving of residents. A set of dyads is extended through ternary relations that promote transregional connections as national entities are embedded in a large space.

Within such a framework, the experiences of Koreans in China—which situate them in an exiled, migrant relocation outside the Japanese Empire—are considered a significant basis for prompting different models and configurations involving two national entities beyond a dyadic co-figuration. Colonial Korea experienced East Asia through varied forms of border-crossing beyond the metropolitan center of the Japanese Empire, through people's political engagement and intellectual and cultural exchanges. Northeast China, Beijing, and Shanghai in the early twentieth century provided historical contexts in which Korean exile actors engaged in political movements, including provisional government-led national independence resistance and socialist and anarchist underground movements. Northeast

China and Manchukuo were among the largest migrant destinations where colonial Koreans lived their diasporic lives. The Chinese continent seemed a place where colonial Koreans' memories and practices unfolded, rather than a land of a past empire that had nothing to offer to under Japan's new rule.

Such transnational and intercolonial "encounters" often brought up different forms of affiliations beyond the boundary of the nation-states, exceeding Japan's imperial chart that fixed each nation-state—identified as the unity of a "comparable" national culture—into a ranked hierarchy according to its degree of development into capitalist modern world. This perspective resonates with Orsini's proposal to examine the "multilingual local," where diverse stories, trajectories, and networks intersect within particular places (352). Orsini urges scholars to attend to the "significant geographies" that mattered to particular writers and readers instead of presuming a singular "world" or "global" sphere (346–47). This dissertation adopts this perspective in order to examine Shanghai and Northeast China not merely as settings but as significant geographies through which colonial Korean writers negotiated nationalism, exile, revolution, migration, and transregional solidarity. By foregrounding these sites, the dissertation moves beyond a bilateral Korean-Chinese comparison to examine how literary encounters with multiple Chinese localities reshaped the boundaries of the Korean nation and generated alternative political and social imaginaries.

The spaces, places, and sites represented in literature encompass not only depictions of physical characteristics but also convey implicit meanings that serve to evaluate and challenge the significance of the space, as well as to contest the power governing the circulation of diverse meanings and interpretations associated with those specific spaces. This dissertation examines imagined space in literature as a means to explore possibilities for alternative regional affiliation, arguing that these geographical visions are not seamlessly incorporated into the Empire's vertical geographical policies but rather function as challenges

to the imperial spatial order (Sinae Ha 2018, 6). By applying this perspective to the colonial Korean context, I argue that when colonized subjects seek to produce their own spatial imaginations, they engage in situating themselves within the area, thereby demonstrating their evolving sense of identity and awareness of boundaries (T. Oh 2016, 26).

Likewise, the dissertation is rooted in understanding that literature actively shapes discourses of the nation-state, national culture, and further regional imagination. It focuses on how those settings serve as a vantage point for the characters to reconsider their home, colonial Korea, and the imperial structure; it interprets how those political engagements operate beyond forming a collaborative combination of two nation-state unities. In this way, the Chinese setting serves as a third, intermediary space that mediates colonial Korea's perception of empire, so it does not follow a model of comparison that assumes a one-to-one, equal relationship between identifiable cultural unities. It mobilizes a model of referencing a third point to rearrange the power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized, thereby understanding those contact zones as an intermediary space—in between colonial Korea and the Japanese empire—which is a lived, imagined, and textual space in which characters cultivated nuanced, intersecting modes of understanding imperial rule.

As will be explained further below, literary works that capture those interpersonal and trans-colonial encounters across the Yellow Sea serve not simply as a historical record of Korean-Chinese encounters. Each narrative's setting in China, wherein revolutionary changes erupt, socialist movements develop, and Korean border-crossing migrants build on their own exile communities, serves as a space in which literature reconfigures regional identities and imperial hierarchies. By showing how those stories reveal transregional affiliations through interpersonal connections, political solidarities, and ideological explorations, the dissertation will show how colonial Korean literature set in and produced in China challenges the

Japanese Empire's discourses on an East Asia that presumed to exist only through vertical and hierarchical difference in position from the Japanese imperial center.

Literature Review

Recent publications on Korean-Chinese comparative literature and transnational literary settings have emerged in both Korean literary studies in South Korea and East Asian literary studies in North American academia. In the history of Korean literature, the significance of the modern Japanese literary scene is often reckoned to have shaped the establishment of Korean literature, through the colonial Korean writers' experiences of education in both the imperial metropole and in the newly established school system in colonial Korea, as well as through the reading, translation, and circulation of relevant texts.⁴ In particular, literary movements, including romanticism, naturalism, realism, and modernism, throughout the 1920s and 1930s in the Korean literary scene have been mainly understood as accepting Western trends in modern literature through Japanese translations. The significant presence of Japanese knowledge of modern thought and literary genres in colonial Korean literature is often epitomized by the Hyōnhaet'an complex—the cultural and psychological orientation toward Japan as the locus of modernity (Y. Kim, 559-560). A disproportionate emphasis on the Korea-Japan Strait, compared to the Yellow Sea between

⁴ As many prior studies have evinced, the writers' experience of reading Japanese texts and Japanese translation of Western literature was paramount to establishing vernacular Korean stories, to which more readers began to be exposed in the 1920s (S. Son 2019, 178-180). Paralleling their writing of modern literature, Western ideologies imported through Japanese channels were also important resources published in Korean magazines and newspapers (K. Han 2006, 273-278). These shifts in reading culture and the publishing industry, promoted by print capitalism, were definite material grounds for the production of Korean literature (Ch'ŏn 24-25).

the Korean peninsula and the Chinese mainland, has been prevalent in Korean literary history, with far less attention paid to the role of China and Chinese literature in the formation of modern Korean literature.⁵

To fill this gap in conventional Korean literary history, recent studies on modern Korean literature and China have emerged. Studies of modern Korean literature have expanded the scope of the East Asian horizon, focusing on topics that reveal Korean perspectives on contemporary China, transnational and transregional memories of border-crossing people, linguistic and cultural differences, and the lives of Korean migrant and diasporic communities. Early studies have focused more on colonial Korean writers' experiences of exile in China, particularly in Northeast China, Beijing, and Shanghai. Literary works depicting writers' experiences of exile in China are conventionally categorized as exile literature (*mangmyŏng munhak*), a term primarily used to describe the overseas national independence movement.⁶ Shanghai was a destination for exiled politicians involved with the provincial Korean government and resistant protests, students studying

⁵ In the field of East Asian transnational literary studies, Karen Thornber's *Empire of Texts* profoundly contextualizes the influence of Japanese texts and cultures on Korea and China through different processes of assimilation, adaptation, rejection, and ultimate transformation (24). Her work serves as pioneering research that uncovers and organizes invaluable materials demonstrating those textual circulations, while still leaving open the question of how to address the unilateral relationship between imperial power and other subject states.

⁶ The genre of "exile literature" tends to expect exiled activists and their writing to reflect the belief that the exile envisions a better future for their homeland and is deeply concerned with the nation. If anticipated national liberation is posed as an ideal future, their exile is assumed to be only temporary, and that they will ultimately return to their homeland to continue working for the nation. The exile metaphor is considered a tool to develop a narrative that depicts dislocation beyond the borders of familiar places and local territories, imagining the outland outside the home, which ultimately expresses a desire for an ideal home (Seidel 11). Those exiled victims who are assumed to bear the standard of a truer version of their native place typically appear to be wanderers in a foreign land, yet they remain inseparable from inhabiting a home—a world of familiarity, security, and sanctuary (10)

abroad, women working as actresses or dancers, and day laborers who had gone broke in colonial Korea. Grounded in these understandings, research on colonial Korean writers in China has focused on their works through the lenses of nationalism, Shanghai modernity, anarchist activities, and Chinese writing. This scholarship regards Shanghai as an important setting for anti-colonial and anti-Japanese literature. In line with those perspectives, early studies of modern Korean literature and China attend to writers' nationalist perspectives by reading exile literature as a collective genre within the recurring binary division of pro- and anti-Japanese literature. Recent studies on Korean exile writers to China analyze the narratives of those Koreans who engaged with socialist and anarchist movements in China to depict "resistance" and "anti-Japanese experience" (K. Yi eds., 2021), or "Korean-Chinese solidarity and the longing for independence" (P. Kim, 2021).

Such scholarly approaches to Korean writers' status as exile actors, however, are limited in that they define the writers' political commitment solely as anti-Japanese resistance, reducing their view of the nation to merely an aspiration for independence. In reckoning with those limitations, studies have begun to delve into those writers' literary worlds by examining multi-dimensional relations that they had to China while expanding the scope of archival materials. Two examples of edited books, including *Modern Korean Literature and China* (Han'guk kŭndae munhak kwa Chungguk), edited by Kim Chaeyong and Yi Haeyŏng in 2016, and *Modern Korean Literature and East Asia vol. 2: China* (Han'guk kŭndae munhak kwa Tong Asia 2: Chungguk), edited by Kim Chaeyong and Chang Munsŏk in 2018—collect articles on Korean writers who resided in China, and ventured to Manchuria, Beijing, and Shanghai, such as Sin Ch'aeho, Chu Yosŏp, Kim Kwangju, Sim Hun, Kim Saryang, Han Sŏlya, Kim T'aejun, Ch'oe Tokkyŏn, and Yi Yuksa. Topics also range from providing writers' biographical information—such as their interactions with Chinese writers—to analyzing their reactions to social shifts in Beijing and Shanghai, largely

related to critiques of the expansion of Western imperialism and Japanese military encroachment. A sense of displacement and concerns about the colonial situation on the Korean peninsula are other topics that articles address in their discussion of the aforementioned writers.⁷

Interests in discovering biographies of Korean writers in China and in linking their literary works to their political engagement have shifted toward translation and comparative literary studies. Relevant studies critically examine the conventional assumption that modern Korean literature emerged solely through its relationship with the Japanese intellectual and literary field, treating modern literature as a medium for disseminating ideas of modernity. Particularly in the fields of literary translation, Chinese literature, and literary history, scholars have begun to delve more deeply into how Chinese literary works serve as a significant resource for political ideologies and literary forms that engage with the Korean literary scene. Hong Sŏkp'yo, a scholar of modern Chinese literature, facilitated the debate on the relationship between Korean and Chinese literature in his two monographs, *The Origin of Modern Korean-Chinese Literary Exchanges* (Kŭndae Hanjung kyoryu ŭi kiwŏn, 2015) and *The Conversation between Korean and Chinese Literatures* (Hanjung munhak ŭi taehwa, 2021). They highlight a sense of solidarity shared by Korean and Chinese writers through extensive literary exchanges among Yi Yuksa and Lu Xun, Kim T'aejun and Guo Moruo, and

⁷ Their archival materials are significant in understanding literary exchanges between Korean and Chinese writers, the Korean history of Chinese literature, and the literary history of Korean exile writers in China. But some books show limited perspectives on colonial Korean literature, which remain to be resolved in future studies. Colonial Korean writers' views of Shanghai modernity are said to reproduce Western imperialist discourses, thereby excluding colonized writers from shaping their own critiques (Zhou 187, 221-222). But those cases repeat the assumption, under critique in this dissertation, that colonial Korean writers' literary world is shaped and fixed solely by their resistance to Japan. Under this interpretation, literature in a colony is reduced to either being socially engaged or individualistic in the face of colonial power.

Chŏng Raedong and Zhou Zuoren, as reflected in their essays and translations. In line with these approaches, Kim Miji, in her 2021 monograph, *Modern Korean Literature, Imagining Crossings* (Han'guk kŭndae munhak, hoengdan ūi sangsang) recognizes China as a space for Korean writers to come not only for political exile but also ideological exile through cultural and lingual flows, while Pak Chinyŏng, in his 2019 monograph, *The Emergence of the Translator and East Asian World Literature* (Pŏnyŏkka ūi t'ansaeng kwa Tong Asia segye munhak), analyzes Korean translations of Chinese literature as sources of a hybrid space where different imaginations of the world beyond a linear transition of knowledge from the West, stopping in Japan, and finally arriving in Korea.

Prior studies have focused more on substantiating materials about Korean writers' biographies, covering their political engagement in China and their network formation with Chinese writers. Despite efforts to move beyond a nation-centered perspective, many studies have explained Korean-Chinese literary exchanges and comparative literary studies by unconsciously repeating pre-formed divisions between Korean and Chinese national literatures. In the meantime, a presumed Korean national literature is held to maintain its integral boundaries even in the context of interaction with different ethnicities, languages, and cultures, serving as a medium for projecting hopes for national independence and an anti-Japanese spirit. Korean literature set in and produced in China during the Japanese colonial period still needs to be studied with a question of how to interpret contact zones beyond the framework of Korean literature in exile, assumed as an integral part of national literature in a foreign setting.

Drawing on these achievements of past scholarship and also reflecting on its limitations, this dissertation situates China as a geographical, ideological, and political space in which colonial Korean literature thrives through ongoing cultural exchanges with local Chinese settings. As the following methodology section explains, this dissertation examines

these potentialities to uncover new aspects of colonial Korean literature by analyzing short stories that reveal imagined political and cultural affiliations across Korea and China. It analyzes short stories set in the Chinese mainland written by Chu Yosöp, Kim Kwangju, Ryu Sö, and Sim Hun, who were exiled to or traveled to China in the 1920s. These writers have in common not only their writings about social transformations and Chinese cities, but also their interest in capturing different forms of transregional connections across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. In this way, the dissertation's interest is beyond how those stories represent the Korean community in China and their lives in detail as historical facts, and lies rather in how their literary world, set in China, prompts us to imagine different forms of political affiliations, especially represented as questioning the myth of exile unity and advocating for trans-colonial experiences in anti-imperialist movements, anarchist revolutionary change, and imaginations of liberated East Asia through a transnational socialist network.

Methodology

This dissertation examines colonial Korean short stories set on the Chinese mainland in the 1920s and 1930s, written by Shanghai-based exile writers, including Chu Yosöp, Kim Kwangju, Ryu Sö, and Sim Hun. Those writers lived in Shanghai during that period for various reasons, including studying abroad or engaging in political resistance in exile. Their short stories are set against the backdrop of Shanghai, a semi-colonial cosmopolitan city, and encompass political and historical events related to socialist activism and anti-imperialist demonstrations in both Shanghai and Northeast China. These stories mobilize China as a backdrop for Koreans' exile and migrant lives, raising questions about the fixed, unified boundaries of a nation (Korea or China) through their linguistic, political, and cultural

encounters. While depicting those experiences, the stories mobilize events to explore alternative forms of political affiliation beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, as well as how Korean-Chinese transregional affiliations—exemplified by untranslatable multilingual settings, dispersed Korean towns, Korean-Chinese anarchist new villages, and socialists’ travels across an alternative East Asia—resisted the hierarchical classificatory schema imperial discourse.

I develop the methodology of this dissertation in conversation with recent scholarship on transregional East Asian literary studies, particularly Miya Xie's *Territorializing Manchuria: The Transnational Frontier and Literatures of East Asia* (2023) and Satoru Hashimoto's *Afterlives of Letters: The Transnational Origins of Modern Literature in China, Japan, and Korea* (2023). In the fields of East Asian comparative literature and transnational literature, both studies challenge nation-centered literary historiography by reconstructing East Asia as a transregional literary formation. Xie analyzes Manchuria as a multilingual frontier where literature territorialized competing national projects, while Hashimoto examines the transregional cultural and textual traditions that underlay the emergence of modern literature in China, Japan, and Korea. Building on these interventions, this dissertation shifts the analytical focus from literary territorialization and literary genealogy to the spatial production of transregional relations through colonial Korean writers' movements across Chinese localities.

Miya Xie argues that Manchuria should be understood not simply as a contested frontier but as a shared multilingual literary field in which Chinese, Korean, and Japanese writers collectively participated in competing projects of nation formation. She reconstructs Manchuria as a space where writers from different linguistic and national backgrounds negotiated ethnicity, language, territory, and political belonging through literary production (4–5). To theorize this process, Xie introduces the concept of "literary territorialization,"

arguing that literature not only territorializes geographic space by transforming it into modern national territory but also becomes territorialized itself as national literature (6-9). Frontier texts, therefore, participated in the production of competing national imaginaries and were later incorporated into separate Chinese, Japanese, and Korean literary histories, obscuring the multilingual and transregional relations from which they originally emerged (16–19).

This dissertation shares Xie's critique of nation-based literary history by treating China as a multilingual, transregional literary space rather than as an external national object of Korean representation. My project, however, departs from her emphasis on literary territorialization. Whereas Xie examines how frontier literature participated in the production of national territories and national literary traditions, I question the assumption that territorial nation-formation constitutes the primary horizon of literary practice. Although Xie demonstrates that literature actively participates in the production of national space, her argument ultimately continues to privilege the consolidation of national territory and community as the central political trajectory. By contrast, I examine how colonial Korean literature produced in Shanghai and Northeast China unsettles territorial thinking itself. I focus on how interconnected localities generated multilingual encounters, mobile forms of exile, and anti-imperial regional solidarities that exceeded nationally bounded conceptions of East Asia.

Satoru Hashimoto challenges the dominant narratives that explain the emergence of modern East Asian literature either through a radical rupture with the classical past or through the continuous development of national literary traditions. Instead, he argues that modern literature in China, Japan, and Korea emerged between classical and modern cultures through writers' engagements with a shared transregional literary heritage mediated by classical Chinese writing. By drawing attention to the contested relationship between rupture and continuity, Hashimoto reconceptualizes the origins of modern literature as simultaneously

anachronistic and transnational, emphasizing that modern literary production reconfigured the cultural past in response to the demands of the present rather than simply inaugurating a new historical epoch (5–6). Building on this premise, his transregional comparative method uncovers a regional structure of modern literature grounded in the “*longue durée*” of East Asian letters, proposing regional comparison not as a substitute for national identity but as a critical practice that recovers the self-reflexive potential of literary history (14).

This dissertation resonates with Hashimoto's rejection of methodological nationalism. Like Hashimoto, who contends that modern literature should be understood through transregional relations rather than as the product of discrete national traditions, I approach East Asia not as a collection of separate national literatures but as a relational field constituted through movement, translation, and historical entanglement. Building on this, the dissertation shifts its focus from his emphasis on literary genealogy to space and movement. I examine how colonial Korean writers imagined alternative forms of affiliation through their movements across the Chinese continent. Consequently, the central question is not how modern literature emerged from a transregional literary past, but how specific localities within China enabled colonial Korean writers to exceed the assumptions of comparable nations, unified languages, and territorially bounded conceptions of East Asia.

In each chapter, I analyze short stories by examining how Shanghai and other parts of mainland China function in colonial Korean literature. The dissertation's primary concern is not the representation of urban modernity in Shanghai itself or the social history of everyday life within a particular city. Rather, it examines how Chinese settings function as sites through which colonial Korean subjects encountered alternative social, political, and cultural worlds and reimagined the possibilities and limits of national belonging. These approaches are grounded in the question of how short stories represent perceptions of China as a counterpart through which colonial Korea could be understood. Each chapter focuses on

Shanghai and other areas of the continent as sites where protagonists appear as exiled intellectuals, students, and migrant workers. Instead of analyzing these settings for their detailed representation of local environments, I examine how they function as comparative frameworks through which characters reimagine the nation-state and imperial East Asia. The texts are first situated within a transregional context, depicting movements across Chinese cities, the Korea–China border, and the Japanese Empire's borderlands. Shanghai, in particular, appears as a concession city characterized by cosmopolitan mobility and migrant labor markets connecting Korea with other parts of Asia. These stories therefore reveal multidirectional flows of people, cultural encounters, textual circulation, and ideological dissemination, creating zones that challenge predetermined national identities and generate unexpected forms of connection.

Drawing on these perspectives, the dissertation does not seek to reconstruct the historical realities of Shanghai in detail. Rather, it examines how literary settings shape imaginations of the future of the nation, region, and empire. Following Appadurai, I understand literature as actively projecting new ways of relating to space rather than merely representing it (24). Shanghai and other Chinese settings therefore become not only geographical locations but also literary spaces through which colonial Korean writers imagined alternative forms of political affiliation and envisioned futures for East Asia beyond Japan-led colonial discourse. Within this approach, political affiliations encompass various forms of human connection that extend beyond formal party collaboration, including, but not limited to, the alliance between the Korean Provisional Government and the Chinese Nationalist Party. I examine how the stories depict encounters among people of different languages, nationalities, and social backgrounds within colonial and imperial contexts.

Each chapter, through the topics of translation, migrant communities, anarchist solidarity, and socialist revolution across East Asia, addresses how Korean–Chinese

transregional connections and spaces are imagined in literature by Korean writers who resided in or traveled to China during the colonial period. Rather than reading stories set in China as autobiographical evidence of the writers' political engagement, I examine how their experiences and perceptions of China are projected onto literary settings to critique the nation-state system and the structure of empire. Their different visions of alternative communities emerge either by challenging the notion of a unified nation or by foregrounding forms of human connection that exceed national boundaries.

Chapter 1 examines Chu Yosöp's "The Price of First Love" (Ch'öt sarang kap 1927) by focusing on its challenge to the concept of national unity associated with national language. Rethinking Sakai Naoki's concept of co-figuration, this chapter argues that Chu's story depicts Chinese and Korean locales that cannot be confined within national-lingual unities. Examining the juxtapositions of Shanghai and P'yöngyang, this chapter foregrounds the Korean student character Ri Yugyöng's struggle to achieve presumed transparent communication—first, through untranslatable exchanges between Korean and Chinese, and second, through unintelligibility in his native language, Korean. This chapter explores how Chu Yosöp interrogates the notion of national unity predicated on a monolingual framework by suggesting the potential for human and regional affiliations in Shanghai that transcend the confines of national language and ethnicity.

Chapter 2 examines Kim Kwangu's works, "The Elderly Man with Long Hair" (Changbal noin 1933) and "Old Man from 'Beiping'" (Pukp'yöng esö on yönggam 1936), by focusing on the function of the Chinese regional area from Northeast China to Shanghai in forming the Korean exile community. Examining the depictions of Korean migrant workers and lumpen proletarians who move across the Chinese mainland, this chapter shows how Kim's stories question the idealized notion of a unified Korean exile community in Shanghai—often imagined as collectively resisting Japanese imperialism as an extension of

the Korean peninsula. By focusing on Shanghai as a setting where Korean migrants arrived, after their long series of dislocations across the Chinese continent, the chapter shows how literature mobilizes transregional movement within China to imagine a community that remains outside the framework of nationalist solidarity.

Chapter 3 explores how colonial Korean literature envisions anarchist revolutions by highlighting a Korean-Chinese utopian village in Northeast China. Focusing on Ryu Sŏ's "The Sea of Lament" (Wŏnhan ūi pada 1927), the chapter traces the life of the Korean-Chinese protagonist Yi Ch'angsŏn/Wang Jiying, who looks after the livelihood, safety, and freedom of Korean-Chinese residents in Northeast China. Incorporating Ryu's viewpoint on Chinese anarchism as a key moment for East Asian liberation against imperialist and colonial domination, this chapter argues that "The Sea of Lament" envisions a utopian village in Northeast China, where the protagonist, Yi, anticipates that Koreans and Chinese can live together beyond their ethnic divisions.

Chapter 4 explores colonial Korean literature situated at the intersection of China, a locus of socialist movements, and Japanese imperial censorship aimed at suppressing such portrayals. Focusing on Sim Hun's "Lover of the East" (Tongbang ūi aein 1930), this chapter contends that Sim's story extends to imagining socialist affiliation on a broader scale across East Asia—including colonial Korea, Shanghai, Mongolia, and as far as the Soviet Union. In the characters' journey, Shanghai serves as a symbolic hideout, depicted through the figure of the small underground hideout where the Korean socialist characters organized their movements toward an ideal of liberation within the context of international socialist movements.

Chapter 1: Untranslatable Shanghai, Unintelligible P'yŏngyang: Chu Yosŏp's "The Price of First Love" (1927)

Introduction

Chu Yosŏp's (朱耀燮 1902–1972) "Mama and the Boarder" (Sarang pang sonnim kwa ōmŏni, 1935) is a well-known work of popular fiction from the Japanese colonial period, particularly noted for the young narrator Okhŭi's observations of her mother's love affair with a guest. The film adaptation, especially the one released in 1961 that achieved great success, has been recognized as a lyrical romance seen through a child's innocent eyes. Although Chu became widely known for "Mama and the Boarder," which attracted scholars' attention, his literary world extends beyond the realm of romance novels. Chu's early literary works—which are geographically set in both China and the U.S.—depict Koreans' lives as exiles and migrant laborers beyond the Japanese Empire's territory. His broad interests in various types of Korean movement —across the Yellow Sea and further across the Pacific Ocean—have not received sufficient attention within modern Korean literary history and related studies.

Focusing on Chu Yosŏp's experience of living in 1920s Shanghai, this chapter analyzes his short story "The Price of First Love" (Ch'ŏt arang kap), originally serialized in *The Korean Literary World* (Chosŏn mundan) between September 1925 and March 1927. The later installments were republished in 1927, and the story remained unfinished. The narrative depicts the internal agony of a colonial Korean student torn between his love for a Chinese woman and his aspiration to devote himself to the national enlightenment movement and ends with his suicide upon his return to Korea. The story opens with the narrator, Kim Mansu, learning of his friend Ri Yugyŏng's death after Ri returns to his hometown following

seven years in Shanghai. In Ri's room, Kim discovers a letter and a diary left behind for him. Through this embedded diary narrative, Ri's voice unfolds the main story. A Korean student studying in Shanghai, Ri, had become acquainted with N, a Chinese female classmate at college. As their relationship deepened, Ri struggled to suppress his sensual and emotional desires for her, believing he must instead dedicate himself to the national enlightenment movement. Struggling with divisions between nation and individual, rationality and bodily desire, as well as public duty and private emotion, Ri ultimately chose the former and left N behind in Shanghai. He convinced himself that marrying a Chinese woman would undermine his commitment to the public and moral responsibility of working for colonial Korea. After returning to his hometown of P'yŏngyang, however, he remained haunted by regret over abandoning her, sinking into depression and emotional despair. As he later considers marrying K, a Korean kindergarten teacher he meets in P'yŏngyang, Ri condemns himself for pursuing marriage for its stability without genuine love. The story remained unfinished after the serialization ended.

This chapter examines Chu Yosŏp's "The Price of First Love" (1927) by comparing Shanghai and P'yŏngyang as sites that expose the unstable relationship between language and the nation. Drawing on Naoki Sakai's argument that translation presupposes discrete linguistic-national units, I argue that the story first unsettles the model of translation in multilingual Shanghai and then questions the presumed transparency of the mother tongue in P'yŏngyang. Rather than functioning as a space of successful Korean–Chinese translation, Shanghai emerges as a multilingual environment in which English, Chinese, Korean, and broader regional imaginaries of Asia continually disrupt the binary relationship between Korean and Chinese. Through his encounters with these overlapping linguistic and geopolitical worlds, Ri discovers forms of communication and human connection that exceed the logic of translation between separate national languages. Upon his return to P'yŏngyang,

however, these experiences reveal a different contradiction. What had appeared to be the familiar space of a shared mother tongue becomes marked by linguistic difference, as Ri repeatedly fails to understand his neighbors' speech. Together, Shanghai and P'yŏngyang expose the limits of both translation and the mother tongue as models for imagining language as the natural foundation of national community.

This chapter supports the dissertation's argument that China is a crucial site where colonial Korean literature critiques models of the nation-state and the modern international order by illustrating how the settings of Shanghai and P'yŏngyang transcend linguistic and national boundaries. It expands upon the dissertation's approach to colonial Korean writers' experiences in Shanghai and other parts of the Chinese continent, arguing that the story engages with distinct localities, cities, and regions rather than China as a unified nation-state. By interpreting Shanghai and P'yŏngyang not as representative spaces of China and Korea, but as interconnected localities along the protagonist's return narrative, this chapter illustrates how the protagonist's experiences transcend a straightforward comparison between the Chinese and Korean languages, which are traditionally linked to the respective nations. In doing so, it contends that the narrative challenges the assumption of the nation-state as a distinct and unified model.

Chu Yosŏp, born in 1902 in P'yŏngyang to a Christian family and influenced by his father, the pastor Chu Kongsam, pursued his early education in Tokyo at the middle school division of Aoyama Academy (青山学院) before returning to P'yŏngyang during the March First Movement in 1919. During this period, he became involved in nationalist activities, including the publication of an underground newspaper titled *Rose of Sharon Youth Association* (*Mugunghwa Sonyŏnhoe*). In 1920, Chu left Korea for China and enrolled at Anseong Middle School (安晟中學) in Suzhou (蘇州), later relocating to Shanghai, where he

transferred to Hujiang University (沪江大学) in 1923. While participating in political and intellectual circles associated with figures such as An Ch'angho and organizations including Young Korean Academy (*Hŭngsadan*),⁸ a Korean nationalist youth organization, he began to establish himself as a writer. He made his literary debut in 1921 with the short story “The Cold Night” (Ch'uun pam, 1921) published in *The Great Opening* (Kaebyŏk), and gained fame with works such as: “The Broken Jar” (Kkaeŏ chin hangar, 1921) in *Daily News* (Maeil Sinbo), “Rickshaw Puller” (Illyŏkkŏ kkun, 1925) in *The Great Opening* (Kaebyŏk), “Murder” (Sarin, 1925) in *Daily News* (Maeil Sinbo), and “The Price of First Love” (Ch'ŏt sarang kap, 1925) in *The Korean Literary World* (S. Lee 402).

Chu's diasporic trajectory extended to the United States when he left China in 1927 to enroll in a master's degree program in education at Stanford University, where he observed Korean diasporic communities, including working students and migrant laborers. After returning to Korea in 1931, he moved to Beijing again with his partner, Kim Chahye (金慈惠, 1910–?), a journalist at *New Family* (Sin Kajŏng), and was appointed professor at Fujen University (輔仁大學) in 1934. Expelled from Beijing by Japanese police in 1943, he settled in South Korea. Beginning in 1953, he served as a professor of English at Kyunghee University while continuing to publish novels and short stories through the 1960s until his death in 1972 (Kang 255–256).

Chu Yosŏp's early works have been discussed in relation to the historical and social contexts of Shanghai society. They have often been classified in modern Korean literary

⁸ The Young Korean Academy was a Korean nationalist organization founded by Ahn Changho in San Francisco in 1913 to promote national independence through education, self-cultivation, and civic leadership.

history as early proletarian literature (*sin kyŏnghyang munhak*). Short stories depicting the working class in 1920s Shanghai, including the aforementioned “Rickshaw Man” (1925) and “Murder” (1925), are introduced as featuring themes of arson and murder, driven by the economic depravity of their subjects.⁹ The “realistic” depiction of the Shanghai labor environment for rickshaw men and prostitutes lends Chu’s works a reportage-like quality that exposes social injustice. In a similar vein, “The Price of First Love” was also understood as a literary work that reported on reality in Shanghai, reflecting autobiographically on Chu Yosŏp’s days in Shanghai and particularly his personal memories of a romantic relationship with a Chinese woman and of the social transformations following the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925 (S. Yi 406, 412)¹⁰. Supposing that Chu’s fiction reflects his participation in the May Thirtieth Movement when he was a student activist at Hujiang University, critics have written that his stories show “international solidarity among nations under colonial suppression” (Ch. Kim 153) and “socialist internationalism and Koreans’ and Chinese’s shared revolution against imperialism” (Yuk 2020, 327).¹¹ Such comments are further

⁹ Colonial Korean literary critics and writers Kim Kijin and Pak Yŏnghŭi made these comments, respectively, in their critiques titled “Recent Literary Trends” (Mundan ch’oegŭn ŭi il kyŏnghyang, 1925) and “The Literature of the New Tendency School and Its Position in the Literary Field” (Sin kyŏnghyang p’a ŭi munhak kwa kŭ mundan chŏk chiwi, 1925), both published in *The Great Opening* (Kaebyŏk).

¹⁰ The May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 began on May 15, when a cotton mill worker named Gu Zhenghong was shot and killed by Japanese guards at the Nei Wai Number Five Mill in Xiaoshadu. This incident triggered massive student demonstrations protesting foreign control in Shanghai. The tension escalated on May 30, when students were arrested, and riots broke out as crowds demanding their release clashed with the police. Ten people were killed, and fifty were injured when Sikh policemen under British command opened fire on the crowd. The next day, May 31, the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce declared a strike of workers, students, and merchants. The strikers’ demands ranged from establishing Chinese control over the police in Shanghai and representation on the Municipal Council to improving labor conditions in Shanghai’s factories (Honig 27).

¹¹ In a recent study, Yuk Ryŏng has discovered bibliographical resources to prove Chu Yosŏp’s engagement with political movements surrounding his college. As an English

premised on the assumption that Chu's participation in the May Thirtieth Movement and his representation of that movement through the narrative setting of his fiction may be equated with political advocacy of Korean-Chinese solidarity in opposition to imperialist encroachment across East Asia.

As such, previous studies have concentrated on the character Ri Yugyŏng's involvement in the May Thirtieth Movement, often read in relation to Chu Yosŏp's own experiences in Shanghai. While these studies have enriched Korean literary history by uncovering materials that illuminate the author's biography, they leave open the question of how the story might be analyzed beyond serving as evidence of the author's political engagement. Shifting the focus from biography to literary representation, I examine how the story stages Shanghai as a space in which the protagonist experiments with diverse forms of political and cross-cultural association, rather than merely as a site that confirms the author's participation in contemporary social movements. I further extend existing scholarship by tracing the protagonist's journey from Shanghai to P'yŏngyang. By comparing these two sites along the routes connecting colonial Korea and the Chinese continent, I argue that the story moves from Ri's faith in a multilingual and translatable world to a recognition of its limits.

Kang Jihee argues that semi-colonial Shanghai should be understood not as a homogeneous representation of China but as a multilingual contact zone shaped by capitalist modernity, cosmopolitan encounters, and colonial oppression. Within this setting, Ri comes to recognize possibilities for connection that exceed the nationalist ideal of a unified

reporter and editor for *Heavenly Sounds* (Tianlai 天籟), the bilingual student newspaper of Hujiang University, Chu published several politically engaged essays in 1925, including critiques of Nitobe Inazō and imperialist capitalism, discussions of Sun Yat-sen's attempt to combine nationalism with socialism, and reports on Soviet Russia, revealing his strong interest in anti-imperialism, transnational politics, and socialist thought during his Shanghai years (Yuk 2020, 329–39).

linguistic community (Kang 28–29, 43). Building on Kang’s point, I propose interpreting the protagonist’s experience as indicative of frustration with malfunctioning communication—revealed by the failure of Korean-Chinese translations and the fragility of the Korean language, which is presumed to be transparent in the character’s hometown in colonial Korea. While Shanghai encourages Ri to imagine connections across distinct linguistic and national communities, his return to P’yŏngyang reveals that communication cannot be guaranteed even within a presumed mother-tongue community. The story thus exposes the fragility of monolingual assumptions that underpin nationalist understandings of community and belonging.

The chapter begins by examining the first half of Ri’s diaries, which recount his years as a college student in Shanghai. Focusing on his transnational romance with a Chinese woman, N, and his encounters with multilingual texts, Ri initially understands linguistic competence as a means of participating in an international order organized around discrete national languages and cultures. As a speaker of Korean, Chinese, and English, he imagines these languages as corresponding to distinct and comparable national communities connected through translation. As the Shanghai narrative unfolds, however, this framework becomes increasingly unstable. English repeatedly intervenes in Korean–Chinese communication, broader regional imaginaries of Asia complicate bilateral national relations, and Ri’s relationship with N develops through forms of communication that exceed linguistic translation. Rather than affirming the possibility of transparent translation, the Shanghai episodes expose the limits of translation as the basis for human and political connection.

The second half of the chapter examines Ri’s return to P’yŏngyang, where the presumed transparency of the mother tongue and the linguistic unity of the homeland prove insufficient for meaningful communication. Whereas in Shanghai Ri experiences potentiality and limits of faith in multilingualism as means of connecting with the wider world,

P'yŏngyang confronts him with the limits of linguistic belonging within the nation itself. Through Ri's encounters with a "madwoman" and a porter whose speech he struggles to understand, I show how his expectation that Korean functions as a unified and communicable national language begins to unravel. These moments expose fractures within the linguistic community that nationalism assumes to be coherent. By juxtaposing Shanghai and P'yŏngyang, the story reveals the instability of the linguistic and national boundaries through which self and other are conventionally distinguished.

Shanghai as a Multilingual but Untranslatable World

Naoki Sakai has argued that modern translation operates through a "schema of configuration" in which two languages and their corresponding communities are imagined as separate, internally unified, and mutually comparable entities (Sakai 1997, 3). In the process of translation, the relationship between self and other is historically produced through practices such as translation, as categories like "Japanese" and "foreign" appear as stable, bounded, commensurable, and communicable entities (8). By assuming equivalence between languages and by positioning one language as the source and another as the target, translation retrospectively constructs each linguistic community as internally coherent and externally distinct. The figure of the "other" is, therefore, indispensable to the formation of collective identity. In this way, the nation comes to recognize itself as a unified subject only through its differentiation from an external other (15).

Translation practices in the early-twentieth-century colonial Korean literary scene have often been explained by drawing on Sakai's concept. The very distinction between a foreign language and the national language implicitly establishes an equation between the Korean language and the Korean nation. The act of translating foreign literature into Korean

thus supposed preexisting linguistic communities; it simultaneously constituted separate but corresponding units between self and others, such as Korean and “foreign” nations. By assuming the equivalence and translatability of meanings across languages, translation creates the impression that discrete languages and bounded cultural communities already exist in complete form. In this way, translation naturalizes particular regions, identities, and linguistic boundaries. The Korean language is understood as a standardized national language and Korea as a homogeneous, exclusive collective subject, which generates the effect of consolidating the nation as a unified community (H. Hwang 392-393).

Naoki Sakai and Hodök Hwang have held that translation presupposes separate linguistic and national units and, in the very act of translation, distinguishes and reinforces those boundaries. In contrast to such one-to-one configurations between national units, “The Price of First Love” constructs Shanghai as a multilingual space in which such configurations cannot operate smoothly. Here I argue that, rather than engaging in Korean–Chinese translation, Ri encounters untranslatable situations that exceed the exclusive binary relationship between Korean and Chinese. Rather than inhabiting a space structured solely by Korean and Chinese, Ri is constantly situated within broader multilingual networks. English texts and conversations permeate his daily life in Shanghai, directing his attention to a modern world order centered on the West. Moreover, when communication in Chinese reaches its limits, English serves as an alternative medium, enabling interaction. At the same time, Ri is led to imagine Asia as a regional formation that encompasses both Korea and China without being reducible to either nation. By navigating these overlapping linguistic and geopolitical spaces, Ri comes to experience the untranslatability of the Korean–Chinese relationship itself.

As revealed in the opening section of his diary, Ri’s early experiences as an international student in Shanghai are largely devoted to preparing himself to participate in

what he perceives as the civilized world of modernity. The Shanghai setting at the beginning appears as a site where Ri gains an international perspective, rather than as a place where Ri delves into Chinese daily linguistic and cultural life. The streets of Shanghai remind Ri of a Western man's comment on Asians' gait, prompting him to become self-conscious about his own manner of walking and to discipline himself to walk more quickly and confidently (56). Grounded in an understanding of the world order as a competitive hierarchy of nations—one that distinguishes between those that have advanced and those that must struggle to survive—Ri optimistically envisions the future of the Korean nation as part of a global race toward development and civilization modeled on the West.

Ri's study-abroad experience in Shanghai, marked by his constant movement among Korean, Chinese, and English, is closely tied to his aspiration to understand the international world. In particular, his English communication skills are considered important to understand the international world order. Ri's position as an elite male youth from colonial Korea is defined by his ability to learn about the world through English. That English-Western world appears as Ri's prioritized interest in optimistically envisioning the future of the Korean nation as part of a global race toward development and civilization modeled on the West. As part of his plan, he intends to construct a "new Chosŏn"¹² after returning to Korea or Kando

¹² The early twentieth-century modern world order, structured around a Western-centered temporality of "progress," positioned nation-states within a competitive hierarchy of development that presupposed the unity and coherence of each national entity. In this framework, national histories were constituted not in isolation but through relational differences among Europe, Japan, Korea, and China, while the aspiration to "catch up" to an already established trajectory of modernity produced an endless logic of belatedness. As Harry Harootunian argues, national history sought to project the image of homogeneous and linear historical time by displacing the unevenness, mixed temporalities, and lived inequalities embedded in everyday life (Harootunian 4). The very formation of national identity emerged through transnational spaces of comparison and mediation, where the perceived gap between self and other authorized the historical consciousness of ethnicity and nationality itself. In this sense, transnational history often remained deeply national insofar as the modern imagination of the nation-state depended upon a global structure of uneven

and devote himself to educating children (80). His personal transformation as an educated and disciplined subject is closely linked to a broader vision of national advancement, in which knowledge acquired abroad can be transmitted to the homeland through education and enlightenment.¹³ Ri's commitment to the Korean nation through education is closely tied to his aspiration to engage with the wider world.¹⁴

The English-Western world inevitably preoccupies his daily life in Shanghai. Shanghai, with its background as a concession area, always offers opportunities to meet people from around the world with whom he can communicate in English, not limited to Han Chinese. His college, described as "a stage of modern education" (55), serves as a site where he internalizes scientific and biological principles, such as the struggle for survival (58),

development organized around center and periphery (Im, 85).

¹³ Inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Taishō democracy movements in Japan, colonial Korea witnessed a prominent reform movement that critiqued militarism, imperialism, and the global order established by imperial powers after World War I. Korean intellectuals associated reconstruction with the creation of a more equitable world, free from distinctions between "strong and weak" nations and between "rich and poor" classes, thereby linking the national question to emerging labor and social issues. Simultaneously, the movement predominantly evolved along reformist and culturalist trajectories, emphasizing "cultural movements" (*munhwa undong*), self-strengthening, education, economic development, and the advancement of modern civilization rather than the pursuit of an immediate socialist revolution. Partially influenced by thinkers such as Bertrand Russell and Edward Carpenter, advocates of reconstruction championed ideals of freedom, equality, humanitarianism, gender equality, and the enhancement of everyday life through campaigns aimed at social enlightenment, rural reform, and the eradication of "backward customs." Following the dashed hopes for national self-determination after the 1921 Washington Conference, the previously unified nexus of cultural reform and class politics progressively diverged into distinct paths of cultural nationalism and socialist class movements (C. Pak 1997, 177-200).

¹⁴ Ri is formulating those plans through his education in Shanghai and his involvement with the Korean exile organization led by Mr. An, aiming to actualize his conviction of enlightening the Korean people. Mr. A's counsel to willingly sacrifice his family, wealth, prestige, happiness, and even endure repeated rejections, alongside his relationship with Ms. N in the narrative, offers a poignant reflection on the plight of an unfortunate nation (Chu 95).

through English or Chinese language classes that translate this knowledge. It's a place where, he tells the reader, he can read the British novel *Kimono*, either in English or in Chinese translation, and develop his thoughts on the so-called "inevitable" cultural differences across linguistic, cultural, and ethnic boundaries.¹⁵ These multilingual settings introduce linguistic trajectories that extend beyond the practice of translation between Chinese and Korean. English occupies a particularly significant position: at times, it is presented as the primary language for connecting with the international world, while at other times it serves as a mediating language in Korean–Chinese translation.

Alongside the English-speaking sphere, the concept of Asia provides another spatial framework through which Ri understands the relationship between Korea and China. For Ri, thinking about Asia moves beyond the bilateral relationship between the two nations. Asia encompasses a geographical space larger than the territories of Korea and China, overlaps with the spatial boundaries of the Japanese Empire, and is broadly imagined as a regional counterpart to the West. One scene, in which Ri reads a magazine called *Asia* (Asea) on a train returning to his dormitory from a school field trip, captures the moment when Ri's world expands beyond Korea and the Western-led world.¹⁶ Ri reflects on his position as "one

¹⁵ *Kimono* was originally published in 1923 by Frank Ashton-Gwatkin (1889-1976), known as John Paris, a British diplomat and Foreign Office official. Asako Fujinami, a Japanese woman raised by French adoptive parents, grows up with a largely Westernized sensibility. She marries Geoffrey Barrington, a British aristocrat and military general. Upon arriving in Japan for their honeymoon trip, Geoffrey is disillusioned by the stark contrast between his romanticized vision of the East and the reality he encounters—poverty and social conditions he perceives as backward. At the same time, he becomes increasingly unsettled as Asako gradually re-assimilates into Japanese society and customs. The sense of shared cultural ground he once felt with her has been replaced by an acute awareness of racial and national differences. Their marriage collapses under the pressures of empire, culture, and class. Geoffrey subsequently enlists in World War I, and his impending death is strongly implied.

¹⁶ Both in Tokyo and Shanghai in 1925, there were similar magazines dealing with political issues in Asia. *The Asia Review* (亞細亞公論) was a Japanese-language monthly magazine founded in Tokyo in May 1922 by the Korean student Yu Taegyŏng. Advocating pan-Asian

tiny speck glittering among countless others” (103) in “one corner of Asia” (103). Standing between colonial Korea and the Western-centered international order, Ri comes to understand Asia as a regional framework that repositions Korea and China within a broader geopolitical configuration. The relationship between the two nations is therefore no longer conceived as an exclusive bilateral connection but as one mediated by the larger spatial and political category of Asia.

Against the backdrop of Ri's multilingual experiences, which also generate regional connections beyond linguistic and national boundaries, the story foregrounds the transformation of Ri and N's romance, revealing a changing understanding of the relationship between Korea and China. As their romance develops, Ri comes to recognize that the relationship between Korea and China cannot be reduced to a process of Korean–Chinese translation. Instead, he and N can understand one another only through forms of communication that exceed linguistic boundaries. The story's beginning focuses on how China is represented as a Chinese woman, N, to Ri, who presents China/N as a distinct linguistic-national unit. Ri constantly refuses to get closer to what he perceives as N due to inevitable cultural and national differences. He rationalizes his decision to suppress his attraction to N on the basis of her Chinese nationality. Ri believes that N, as a Chinese woman who has not experienced colonization, may be unable to fully comprehend the collective memories of victimization and the sense of unity shared by colonial Koreans, and thus cannot support his plans to dedicate himself to national reform. This issue is critical for

solidarity and humanitarianism, it featured contributions from Korean, Japanese, and other Asian intellectuals and addressed issues of imperialism, colonialism, race, and international affairs. *The Asiatic Review* (大亞雜誌) was a Shanghai-based monthly periodical published by the Asian Peoples Association (亞洲民族協會). Issued in both Chinese and English, the magazine promoted discussions of Asian affairs, international politics, and pan-Asian cooperation in Republican-era Shanghai.

Ri, as he imagines that N may be unable to reside in colonial Korea or within the Korean migrant community in Northeast China due to irreconcilable cultural differences (80).

Ri's primary interest lies in understanding N and determining whether they can become a couple, despite this presumed cultural difference. Ri acknowledges the boundary between himself and N—between Korea and China—and might have attempted to overcome them through translation; however, his approach does not rely on translation, which assumes and reinforces those boundaries. Their conversations are shown to always include breaks, pauses, and interventions in a third language (English), rather than a smooth translation from Chinese to Korean for Ri, or vice versa for N. Most of their conversations are presumed to be spoken in Chinese, but the text is written in Korean; when the dialogue is spoken in English, the lines are written in English. In conversations in Chinese, their dialogue is often marked by pauses that arise from Ri's misunderstanding of N's words or from the terms Ri uses to interpret N's implied nuances. Those pauses appear as ellipsis dots ("...") (114) or as Ri's internal thoughts embedded in conversations, constantly guessing N's intention and implied message.

In bridging the gap, Ri comes to look for what other forms of communication can convey each person's meaning beyond Korean and Chinese. As mentioned, their conversation is often interrupted by English. The text reveals its linguistic practice by distinguishing the parts written in Korean—presumably spoken in Chinese due to N's lack of prior knowledge of Korean—from those in English. For example, when N calls Ri, it is written either as "Misŭt'ŏ Ri" (the Korean transliteration of 'Mr. Ri,' 74) or as Mr. Lee in English (114). Toward the climax of their romance, when N and Ri confess their love and admit their feelings for each other, their conversation is conducted entirely in English. "Do you know what life is?" "Mr. Lee!" "Yes, I do know!" And "No, you don't" (115).

Their English conversation is, however, neither smooth nor successful at delivering a message. When N confesses, "I love you," to Ri, Ri does not respond promptly but later suddenly replies, disconnected from the previous conversation, by saying, "I do not love you" (95). N's message, "I love you," is one of the most impactful and articulate confessions to Ri, but the conversation is paused and delayed after her confession. Ri cannot respond promptly, lingering on his doubts about whether he can be with N, then later replies to deny her confession, causing an irreparable misunderstanding for N. The third language, English, intervenes in their process of translating Korean and Chinese, but its use does not ensure complete understanding between them. In addition to depicting a third language, the story shows nonverbal gestures that confirm their intended messages to each other (116).

As such, Ri's internal Korean-Chinese translation, as well as the Chinese conversation with N, is supplemented by other foreign languages and non-verbal communication. By the end of the Shanghai section, the romance between Ri and N, unfolding alongside political engagement with local student protests, has been interpreted as a transgressive challenge to national borders and an attempt to imagine meaningful human connections despite linguistic difference and incompleteness (J. Park 2020 277–278). Ri's unification with N, despite his initial refusal to bring her into his life in Korea, leads him to question how communication functions transparently within the system of language.

Our eyes met, almost becoming entangled with one another. The expression in her eyes and the space between her brows trembled from moment to moment. She said nothing, and neither did I. Yet we spoke to each other through our eyes. In *Triumph of Death*, Gabriel D'Annunzio declares that "language is the most imperfect instrument for making one person's thoughts known to another."

Indeed, this is true. Language can convey no more than the shadow
or the empty shell of a person's thoughts (115).¹⁷

As reflected in his confession that language is an "incomplete machine" incapable of fully conveying human thoughts and feelings (115), Ri comes, toward the end of his life in Shanghai, to question the very function of language. On the surface, this realization coincides with the culmination of his romance with N, as the two finally acknowledge their emotional and physical attraction to one another. At a deeper level, however, it leads Ri to reconsider his earlier attempts to understand N through the translation of Korean and Chinese, a process that repeatedly proves incomplete and interrupted. In doing so, the story calls into question the assumption that separate linguistic-national units can achieve mutual understanding through translation alone.

Thus the Shanghai setting—where the English-language West and the Asian region engage in everyday life and speech—is presented to the reader as a space within which translation as a co-figural relation of equivalence between two internally coherent and bounded language-cultures fails. Shanghai is at the same time presented as an untranslatable lingual space in Chu's short story—his romance with both the city and with N not only end in failure but come to the reader in "broken" language, marred by pauses and hesitations, insufficient translations, and the interposition of a third language (English) when the dyad of Korea and Chinese falls short in making meaning available to both the characters and to the reader. Finally, the "transposition" of Ri's character from nation-bound to cosmopolitan and multilingual, suggested in the story's opening passages, also fails. Ri's participation in May

¹⁷ Gabriel D'Annunzio (1863-1938) was an Italian poet, playwright, journalist, and Royal Italian Army officer during World War I. His *The Triumph of Death* (1894) is the story of Giorgio Aurispa, who leaves his lover in Rome for his family's decaying estate.

Thirtieth Movement—surrounding Shanghai student protests against Japanese-owned factory owners’ exploitation of Chinese laborers—might have shown a vision for human and regional connections beyond territorial, ethnic, and lingual boundaries.¹⁸ However, the Shanghai episode ends as Ri leaves it behind and return to his hometown in Korea, without further elaboration of what could be imagined beyond national competition in the international world order. Ri ultimately does not abandon the nationalist project that initially brought him to Shanghai. He continues to evaluate his relationship with N through the moral framework of service to the nation, describing himself as “morally degraded” (119) for yielding to personal desires.

Ri ultimately leaves Shanghai and returns to P’yŏngyang, yet his experiences of untranslatability there leave unresolved tensions in his earlier assumptions about the correspondence among language, nation, and community. Having encountered forms of communication and meaning that exceed the binary framework of Korean–Chinese translation, Ri comes to recognize that Korean itself cannot function as a self-evident mother tongue shared by members of the national community. The following section examines how Ri's return to P’yŏngyang further exposes these tensions.

Failed Communication in the Mother Tongue in P’yŏngyang

As revealed through Ri's romance with N, Shanghai emerges in Chu’s fiction as a space in which Korean–Chinese translation no longer guarantees mutual understanding.

¹⁸ While the earlier entries focus on civilization, enlightenment, and Korea’s place in the world, the entries become increasingly frequent as May 30 approaches, as Ri begins recording events almost daily, documenting meetings, demonstrations, workers’ strikes, and escalating anti-imperial protests. Correspondingly, the diary adopts a more journalistic style, chronicling relief activities and political violence in the foreign concessions (Chu 109–111).

Instead, the overlapping linguistic and geopolitical worlds of Shanghai—including the West and Asia—continually disrupt the binary framework through which Ri seeks to translate between Korea and China. Through his relationship with N, which he initially understands as unviable precisely because of the supposition of unbridgeable cultural-lingual distance between them, Ri gradually comes to recognize forms of human connection that exceed linguistic translation, calling into question the very boundaries of language and nation on which such translation depends. His relationship with N gradually exposes the limits of this framework, leading him toward forms of human and political connection that exceed the binary logic of linguistic-national difference.

This vision expands to the question of the native language as Ri returns to P'yŏngyang, where communication repeatedly breaks down despite the presumed shared mother tongue. Sakai contends that “the thought of the mother tongue as determined by an immediate relation to language is simply a fantasy of communion” (Sakai 2005, 18) and that “the unity of a language is posited as an idea” rather than given through lived experience (22). After deciding to leave N behind in Shanghai, Ri is reminded of his original intent to educate the people of his hometown upon returning to Korea. Believing that P'yŏngyang constitutes a unified Korean-speaking community, he expects to translate the knowledge, values, and global perspectives acquired in Shanghai into forms readily intelligible to local residents.

The latter part of Ri's diary, then, recounts his daily life in P'yŏngyang after returning to his hometown. At first glance, his return appears to fulfill the mission he had envisioned while studying in Shanghai: to devote himself to educating ordinary people and contributing to the advancement of the Korean nation. Yet the narrative quickly reveals a growing gap between this ideal and the reality he encounters. Although Ri continues to embrace the language of enlightenment and national improvement, P'yŏngyang does not

emerge as the coherent linguistic and cultural community that his nationalist aspirations presuppose. Instead, the city is populated by individuals who appear alienated, marginalized, and disconnected from one another despite their shared membership supposedly homogeneous national community.

As Park Jayoung observes, “The Price of First Love” refuses a straightforward nationalist resolution, instead foregrounding tensions and unresolved experiences that cannot be fully assimilated into a narrative of national development (J. Park 2020 277–84). Ri's experiences in Shanghai are transformative not only because they constitute his first experience of romantic love but also because they fundamentally unsettle his assumptions about discrete linguistic-national units connected through translation within the international order. Although he initially returns to Korea determined to devote himself to the nation, he gradually loses both the conviction and the motivation to sustain this commitment. His physical and emotional decline is inseparable from the loss of N and his abrupt departure from Shanghai, which prevents him from pursuing forms of human connection that had begun to transcend the linguistic and national divisions. These unresolved experiences do not disappear upon his return to P'yŏngyang; rather, they continue to haunt his encounters with his presumed native-language community, revealing that neither translation nor the mother tongue can provide a stable foundation for human understanding or national belonging.

Upon returning to P'yŏngyang he appears increasingly detached from the educational mission that had once animated him. Rather than enthusiastically pursuing programs of enlightenment and reform, he finds himself “absorbed in daydreaming” and overwhelmed by feelings of isolation (130). As he revisits familiar sites such as Moran Hill and Ŭlmildae, he encounters a city transformed by colonial modernity. Brick buildings, the renovated Taedong River railway bridge, military aircraft, and other signs of urban development testify to the profound changes that have taken place during his seven years away from home. Ri

acknowledges that “Pyongyang has changed dramatically” and that it is no longer embarrassing to regard it as a modern metropolis (135). Yet the narrative complicates any straightforward equation between material development and meaningful social transformation. Significantly, a censored section interrupts Ri’s observations of the city, obscuring his immediate response to these changes. When the diary resumes, the tone shifts abruptly: “What should I come home to? All I see, hear, and think is only despair and boredom” (135). Although P’yŏngyang appears to embody many of the external markers of progress that Ri once associated with national advancement, the city fails to provide the sense of connection and belonging that he had anticipated.

The story ultimately positions Ri within the very social world he had hoped to reform, calling into question his role as an enlightened intellectual capable of guiding and educating others. This tension becomes most apparent in his encounters with a “crazy woman,” whose husband has been imprisoned after a violent crime and who now wanders through the city searching for him. Shortly after returning to P’yŏngyang, Ri observes a wide range of figures populating the city—young women, drunken men, middle-aged women, children, street vendors, medicine sellers, and entertainers—whose movements, voices, and bodily presence fill the urban landscape with noise and activity (129). Among them, the crazy woman occupies a particularly significant position. She appears not merely as an isolated social outcast but as a figure through whom the narrative exposes the limits of Ri’s assumptions about language, community, and social reform.

The crazy woman speaks the same language as Ri but remains completely unintelligible to him. Her speech consists of fragmented murmurs and incoherent sounds that resist comprehension (142). Neighbors call her “madwoman” (*mich’in nyŏn*) or “goblin” (*tokkaebi*) because of her status as a beggar and her murmuring speech, which is incoherent, rambling, and filled with false information. While holding a beef bone that a neighbor had

thrown away, the woman rambles, “All of my thirty-two sons have died, even the twins. Ah, because of that baster! My ex-daughter-in-law is now living in Seoul”(142), but her words sound uncertain and may be exaggerated. Even while eating a beef bone, she says, "I do not know anything about beef at all" (142). As the neighbor tries to evict the woman, she retorts, "Do you even hit your sister-in-law?" (142), although they are not related by family ties. Her statements and speech appear to stem from traumatic memories and delusions unrelated to her current neighbors or daily life. Ri and the woman belong to the same linguistic community, yet communication fails to occur. The woman’s voice interrupts the fantasy of a transparent linguistic community by revealing forms of suffering and experience that cannot be easily translated into the rational language of enlightenment, or national development.

The encounter also destabilizes Ri’s confidence in his own linguistic authority. Rather than occupying the position of an educator capable of interpreting and reforming society, he begins to identify with the woman’s condition. “Maybe I am crazy too,” he reflects (145). This moment marks a profound crisis in Ri’s belief in language as a medium of knowledge and social transformation. The unintelligibility he initially attributes to the woman gradually becomes his own. As he struggles to articulate his thoughts in the reality of P’yŏngyang, language itself appears increasingly inadequate. Ri’s final opportunity to reintegrate into a coherent future lies in the prospect of marrying Ms. K, a kindergarten teacher introduced to him by his parents. By marrying a Korean woman, Ri is supposed to overcome his loss after leaving N in Shanghai and fulfill his original intention to work for colonial Korea. This pathway might have been a quick and guaranteed way to restore a sense of normalcy—decent communication skills, intellectual abilities, and public responsibility to become an elite male leader in colonial Korea.

In colonial Korea, the apparent relationship between Korea and Japan primarily shaped society, as the hierarchical division between colony and colonizer was maintained

through Koreans' assimilation of Koreanness by learning the Japanese language and experiencing metropolitan culture in Tokyo, which, especially for the intellectual class, was followed by the attainment of social and economic privileges. Marrying a Korean woman, K, may be a pathway to this roadmap. K represents a socially sanctioned path toward stability, education, and middle-class respectability. Her family's Christian background and educational connections promise material support for further study, while the possibility of studying in Japan offers Ri access to the institutional and linguistic centers of imperial modernity. Through marriage, Ri could resume the path that had originally brought him to Shanghai—a path aimed at cultivating knowledge, acquiring educational authority, and ultimately reforming the nation through enlightened leadership. Ri, however, rejects the K family's suggestion, which cannot be explained solely by his lingering attachment to N. His denial is associated with his discouraged belief in a translatable world, which purportedly guarantees successful participation in the international world.

The path represented by Ms. K ultimately depends upon re-entering a world structured by educational advancement, social mobility, and the mastery of languages associated with imperial and nationalist projects. Yet Ri can no longer fully believe in the promise that such forms of knowledge will generate meaningful human connection or communal belonging. From this perspective, Ri's suicide signals his inability to return either to the nationalist dream of social reform or to the imperial pathways of advancement represented by Japan and its educational institutions. The narrative refuses to resolve the contradictions that have emerged throughout his journey. Rather than restoring Ri to a position of educational leadership, the story concludes by collapsing these possibilities. His death leaves the question of whether meaningful forms of connection can be secured through the languages of nation, enlightenment, and development suspended.

Conclusion

On the surface of the narrative, Ri continues to interpret his experiences through the opposition between national duty and romantic love. His relationship with N appears as a temptation that distracts him from the task of national reform, while his return to P'yŏngyang is understood as a sacrifice for the Korean nation. Yet the story repeatedly unsettles this binary by embedding their romance within the multilingual and transregional environment of Shanghai. Rather than presenting Shanghai simply as "China" opposed to colonial Korea, the narrative constructs it as a space where English, Chinese, Korean, and broader regional imaginaries of Asia intersect, rendering the imagination of a binary framework of Korean–Chinese translation increasingly untenable. As Ri's relationship with N develops, their communication repeatedly exceeds direct translation, relying instead on English, nonverbal gestures, and forms of mutual understanding that cannot be reduced to linguistic equivalence. Ri's eventual reflection that language is an "incomplete machine" incapable of fully conveying human thought thus marks not only the limits of language itself but also the collapse of translation as the privileged model for understanding relations between linguistic-national communities.

The significance of these experiences becomes more visible after Ri returns to P'yŏngyang. While he initially imagines his return as part of a larger national reform project, he encounters a social world in which communication repeatedly falters. Most notably, the speech of the "crazy woman" remains unintelligible despite her participation in the same linguistic and national community as Ri. At the same time, the visible signs of urban development in P'yŏngyang fail to produce the sense of communal belonging that Ri once anticipated. Rather than reaffirming Korean as a transparent mother tongue shared by members of the national community, P'yŏngyang exposes the instability of linguistic

commonality itself. Ri's return, therefore, extends the questions first raised in Shanghai: if translation cannot fully bridge linguistic difference, neither can the mother tongue guarantee mutual understanding within the nation.

In this regard, the juxtaposition of Shanghai and P'yŏngyang invites readers to reconsider the relationship between language, translation, and community. Whereas Shanghai reveals forms of communication that emerge beyond the binary framework of Korean–Chinese translation, P'yŏngyang exposes the limits of the shared mother tongue as the basis for mutual understanding and communal belonging. His refusal to marry Ms. K and his decision not to continue his studies in Japan leave unresolved the tensions between national commitment and the forms of human connection he encounters beyond linguistic-national boundaries. “The Price of First Love” is not simply a narrative of failed romance or frustrated nationalism. It is also a meditation on the possibilities and limits of human connection that both depend upon and exceed language. By placing multilingual Shanghai alongside the seemingly homogeneous space of P'yŏngyang, the story ultimately calls into question both translation and the mother tongue as self-evident foundations for imagining national community and human belonging.

Chapter 2: Dispersing the Korean Enclave in Shanghai: Kim Kwangju's "The Elderly Man with Long Hair" (1933) and "The Man from Beiping" (1936)

Introduction

Kim Kwangju's (金光洲, 1910–1973) poem "Embracing the Twilight over the Sea" (Pada e hwanghon ūl an'go), published in August 1935 in the *East Asia Daily* (Tonga Ilbo), captures the lives of working people in the Shanghai area during the early 1930s. Looking out over the Delta where the Chinese mainland meets the Yellow Sea, the speaker observes "flocks of coolies who seem like exhausted cows" (499), foregrounding the physical exhaustion and hardship of labor. Then the poem situates this laborer within a maritime landscape of movement. The speaker embraces both "the melancholy of the people" (499) and "the gray sorrow surging into the other side of the sea" (499), imagining this sorrow flowing through the river into the ocean and toward distant shores. The poem culminates in an invocation of "the Eastern continent," envisioned as a space that will one day "shake heaven and earth along with the ocean" (500). As a borderland where river, delta, and ocean converge, the poem captures an interconnected seascape inscribed with the workers' hardships and the possibility of transregional connections across the Chinese mainland and the Yellow Sea.

Notably, the poem does not depict the Shanghai area as an isolated locale; instead, it evokes an interconnected maritime landscape, a flow of people and laborers, and an anticipated future for the region across the Chinese continent and beyond. This picture of Shanghai within the maritime landscape expands our understanding of the lives of Korean migrants who crossed the Yellow Sea or traversed the borderlands of Northeast China to reach Shanghai. As part of the dissertation's question—how China, as a site, functions in

colonial Korean literature to prompt alternative ideas of a nation-centered political entity—this chapter focuses on Kim Kwangju’s representations of the Korean community in Shanghai. Centering on the issue of a series of dislocations experienced by Korean migrants in China, I offer an example of colonial Korean literature that imagines Korean communities overseas beyond the notion of a unified exile government. In this way, this chapter answers the dissertation’s question by demonstrating a part of Korean communities composed of migrants, which do not fit into the international world system centered on individual nation-states.

In this way, this chapter offers an alternative means to define the Korea-China relationship by suggesting concentric circles in motion. It begins by rethinking the situation in which the Korean exile community is imagined as an inner circle enclosed within the larger space of Shanghai. As an inner circle, the Provisional Government, as a Korean exile community, is assumed to be surrounded by, yet insulated from, the outer circle of Shanghai. Such a spatial imaginary presupposes a stable and homogeneous colonial Korea whose anti-Japanese identity remains intact despite its displacement onto Chinese soil. However, Kim Kwangju's short stories unsettle the idea that the Provisional Government is a self-contained enclave by foregrounding the continuous movements of migrant workers, vagabonds, and itinerant Koreans who circulate in and out of the exile community. Their trajectories dissolve the boundaries separating the enclave from its surroundings, revealing the exile community as a provisional formation continually reconstituted through mobility.

Two short stories, “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” (Changbal noin) published in *Korea Daily* (Chosŏn Ilbo) on May 13–20, 1933 and “The Man from Beiping” (Pukp'yŏng esŏ on yŏnggam) published in *New East Asia* (Sin Tonga) in February 1936,¹⁹ have in

¹⁹ Beiping (北平, meaning “Northern Peace”) is a former name for Beijing (北京, meaning

common that both portray Korean wandering men—lumpen and migrant workers—who first arrived in Northeast China and then moved to Shanghai. This chapter reexamines the notion that Shanghai serves solely as the backdrop for the Korean independence movement in exile, particularly by investigating how the enforced, continuous movement of wandering characters across the Chinese continent reshapes understanding of the Korean exile community in Shanghai. In this way, I examine how these stories reshape the imagination of the Korean exile community in Shanghai, often imagined as a unified, settled community centered on the Korean Provisional Government.

Kim Kwangju has been introduced as a colonial Korean writer, playwright, and translator who lived in China and engaged with both Korean and Chinese literary scenes during the 1930s. He arrived in Shanghai and joined Nanyang Medical College (南洋醫學院) in 1929, and lived in China until the Sino-Japanese War culminated in 1938. Kim Kwangju was remarkably prolific in literary production. He made his literary debut in 1932 with his first work, “Shanghai and a Woman” (Sanghae wa kŭ yŏja), and subsequently contributed short stories such as “When the Night Deepens” (Pam i kip'ŏ kal ttae, 1933), “Melancholy on the Pavement” (P'odo ŭi uul, 1934), “Old Man from Beiping” (Pukp'yŏng esŏ on yŏnggam, 1935), and “The Blue Sky of Nanjing Road” (Namgyŏng-ro ŭi ch'anggon, 1935) to various literary magazines, including *New East Aia* (Sin Tong-a),²⁰ *The Korean Literary Scene*

“Northern Capital”), used specifically during the periods 1368–1403 and 1928–1949. The name was changed back to Beijing in 1949 after the Communist Party won the civil war against the Nationalist Party.

²⁰ A monthly magazine launched by the *Tonga Ilbo* Company in November 1931, published under the leadership of Song Chinu (宋鎮禹, 1890-1945) and Chu Yosŏp. It covered a wide range of topics from current affairs and social commentary to science, sports, entertainment, and culture until it ceased publication in 1936.

(Chosŏn Mundan)²¹, and *The Korean Literature* (Chosŏn Munhak)²². These works are mostly set in Shanghai and depict the diverse lives of Koreans living there, including exile writers, migrant laborers, and politicians who were once committed to the Korean independence movement. His works are known for their critique of Korean exile groups led by intellectuals who lost sight of their original purpose of working for the future of the Korean nation and became obsessed with winning factional competition within the party. His satirical criticism targets those who abused opium and blinded themselves to the reality of colonial Korea. During the late 1930s, he moved among several cities in China before repatriating to the Korean Peninsula and resumed writing after Korea was liberated in 1945. Since his short story, “I Don’t Like You” (Nanŭn nŏrŭl sirhŏ handa 1952), was censored because the Director of Public Information’s wife misinterpreted it as based on her personal life, Kim Kwangju focused on writing martial arts novels, including “Record of the Emotion-Chivalry” (Chŏnghyŏp chi 情俠誌 1961), which was translated and adapted from “Lonely Swan in the

²¹ A literary magazine published by Chosŏn Mundan-sa and edited by Pang Ingŭn (方仁根 1899-1975) and Nam Chinu (南進祐, 1899-1933). It was first launched in October 1924 and underwent multiple suspensions and resumptions before finally ceasing publication in January 1936.

²² A literary magazine edited by Yi Muiyŏng (李無影, 1908–1960) and Chŏng Yŏngt’aek (鄭英澤, 1916–?) from 1933 to 1939. The magazine collected works by writers affiliated with the Circle of Nine and KAPF.

Sea of Swords” (劍海孤鴻 1961) by the Taiwanese writer Wei Chiwen (尉遲文) (Y. Lee 102).²³²⁴

Prior studies focusing on his exilic life in Shanghai have examined the city’s cosmopolitan modernity—characterized by the coexistence of decadence and revolutionary fervor—through portrayals in short stories (Sö 2008) and his political and artistic approach to anarchism, as reflected in his literary criticism and translations (Kim 2017; Hong 2016). These studies thoroughly examine the portrayal of Shanghai modernity in his literary works and uncover primary sources related to his Korean-Chinese bilingual publications on the anarchist literary movement, modern Chinese literature, and Chinese cinema. Building on those studies—which primarily examine Kim Kwangju’s understanding of Shanghai

²³ During his time in Shanghai, Kim Kwangju worked as a translator and film critic from 1931 to 1935. In Korean magazines and newspapers, he published literary criticism of modern Chinese literature and translations of Chinese works, including “The Past and Present of the Chinese Proletarian Literary Movement” (Chungguk p'uro munye undong ūi kwagō wa hyōnjae, Chosŏn ilbo April 4–August 7, 1931), “An Introduction to the Chinese New Literary Movement” (Chungguk sin munye undong kaeron, Chosŏn ilbo, May 12–May 25, 1931, translated Tian Han’s work). He also wrote dozens of essays on his experiences in China—primarily in Shanghai—recalling his reading of Chinese texts, his encounters with former members of the Korean Provisional Government, and his participation in Korean theatrical arts movements as a playwright and translator. Along with his publications in Korean magazines, Kim Kwangju contributed writings in Chinese to literary journals and newspapers published in the Chinese language, such as *People’s Journal* (Minbao), *Morning News* (Chenbao), *Northwest Wind* (Xibefeng), *Literary Film* (Wenyi Dianying), and *Current Affairs Ten-Day Report* (Shishi Xunbao). (C. Kim 2015, 242-243). As a member of the Korean anarchist group Namhwa Hanin Ch’ōngnyōn Yōnmaeng, Kim Kwangju worked as an editor and publisher of institutional magazines such as *Namhwa Tongsin* and *Bohemian* (C. Kim, 255).

²⁴ His writings have been discovered as evidence of Kim’s involvement in the Chinese literary scene, ranging from his critiques and essays on the cinema industry, technology, and the relationship between the nation and cinema—published in *Morning News* (Chenbao) and *Daily Cinema* (Meiri Dianying) (S. Ch’oe 2018)—to writings published during the Second Sino-Japanese War between 1937 and 1945 in magazines such as *New People’s Journal* (Xinminbao 新日報), which was organized by a pro-Japanese group, New Citizens of the Republic of China (Zhonghua Minguo Xinminhui), affiliated with the temporary government in the Japanese-occupied area of Hwabei (Wang and Ch’oe 2023).

modernity and the literary circles he participated in—I focus on his portrayal of the Korean community in Shanghai, a theme present in his short stories but insufficiently explored in scholarship. The concept of community can be understood as enclave or migrant communities, which Kim Kwangju represents through depictions of streets and residential areas inhabited by Koreans, or as Korean human networks. Examining how Koreans are described in their relationships is important to explore how the Korean community can be recognized beyond the symbol of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai, which has often been regarded as the sole representation of colonial Korea in the city.

As Pak Chayŏng succinctly observes, Kim Kwangju's stories have greater potential to explore Shanghai as more than merely a backdrop for the independence movement or the city's stereotypical image of decadence and debauchery (294). I contend that Kim Kwangju's works avoid both the tendency to focus solely on *political* themes, such as the national independence movement, and the apolitical *atmosphere* of Shanghai's consumer culture, as they portray Korean characters whose life journeys are complexly intertwined with the city of Shanghai. Those characters' continuous and compelled movements from Korea to Northeast China, then to Beijing, and finally to Shanghai warrant consideration in rethinking the concept of the Korean community in Shanghai. Given that the focus of existing scholarship has most often been on his political tendency toward anarchism or on his Korean-Chinese translations, this rarely-examined formal aspect of his work, the characters' multiple stops and non-unilateral routes need to be explored not only to deepen our understanding of Kim Kwangju's perspective on 1930s Shanghai but also to reshape the literary perception of the Korean exile community, which has often been assumed to be a unified extension of the Korean Peninsula.

The following section begins by explaining the context in which the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai holds primary and unique significance in the historical

and literary studies of Korean overseas communities. It discusses how Kim Kwangju focuses on Koreans who were migrant workers rather than exiled politicians, portraying Shanghai as a place where these migrants pursued various motivations after extended relocations. The analysis of the readings “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” and “The Man from Beiping” focuses on the past lives of these two men as wandering migrant lumpen and laborers against the backdrop of Shanghai. The section discussing “The Elderly Man” focuses on how the character’s veiled background—moving from Northeast China without a clear identity—can be used to criticize the vanity and hypocrisy of the exiled political group. The analysis of “The Man from Beiping” emphasizes a series of displacements experienced by the title character in Northeast China, Beijing, and Shanghai, exploring how these movements can extend to imagining Korean communities alongside these migrants beyond fixed and unified exiled political group.

Korean Communities in Shanghai

Throughout his writing career, Kim Kwangju published short stories focusing on Koreans in Shanghai, including lumpen writers, exiled activists, female prostitutes, and migrant workers. Among the works in his oeuvre, both “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” and “The Man from Beiping” depict the lives of Korean men who wandered across Northeast China and arrived in Shanghai. “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” is set in late 1920s Shanghai, where the narrator, Mr. Kim, a Korean playwright, lives in his “Chǒngjagan” (Tingzijian, 亭子間)²⁵ with his roommate, Mr. Pak, a playwright. Only the elderly man with

²⁵ Tingzijian, or pavilion room, is a type of small room in the traditional Shanghai Shikumen (石库门) house, a building style found in lilong (里弄) lane neighborhoods. It is typically located on the half-landing between the first and second floors of communal housing, or

long hair visits and communicates with these writers, whose plays are criticized by other Koreans for lacking specific ideological commitments. While the old man's personal life remains a mystery, the three characters continue to stay connected despite being excluded from the Korean exile group. The elderly man has feuds with people visiting Bar Korea—a central gathering place for Korean exiles on the street where most Koreans reside—because of his criticism of the exile group's political ambitions, which ignore sincere concerns about the future of colonial Korea. The elderly man is later shot by an unidentified suspect, who presumably harbors a grudge after receiving verbal criticism, and dies at the bar. Mr. Kim and Mr. Pak recall a man who said that anyone who wants to dominate others is utterly desolate.

While the protagonist in “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” originates from the educated elite but has become a lumpen vagabond, “The Man from Beiping” chronicles the journey of a Korean man who is an uneducated, impoverished day laborer facing economic hardship. It centers on a Korean male migrant worker who, after his wife leaves him and their newborn daughter dies, leaves his homeland to seek day labor opportunities in Northeast China. While working on the land and farms, his neighbor introduces him to a new job serving a wealthy Korean man and his family in Beiping (Beijing), where he eventually becomes involved in the master's illegal opium and prostitution trade. After being scammed by a Chinese broker, he is imprisoned and eventually relocates to Shanghai, where he struggles to make a living. In Shanghai, he begins working as a peddler selling beef to Korean families. He meets a Korean woman named Mary, who is said to live in Hawai'i and was engaged to a man working at a Western bank; he falls in love with her because she closely resembles his ex-wife. His reckless and baseless belief—that Mary might be his ex-

attached to the hallway stairs between the main room and the outer room.

wife who left him a decade ago—leads him to break into the newlyweds’ room and threaten the couple with a knife. After the incident, the man is imprisoned, and a rumor that he was insane circulates among Korean residents.

As such, both stories have a similar structure in which Korean exile writers or lumpen intellectuals meet Korean migrants and wanderers in Shanghai, becoming involved in these men's past and present lives. What Kim Kwangju highlights about Koreans’ lives in Shanghai prompts us to consider the position of Korean exile writers during the Japanese colonial period. His attention to Korean people clearly distinguishes him from Euro-American modernist writers, who sought to find aesthetic modernity in their places of exile. Euro-American exile intellectuals are often regarded as free travelers or explorers who sought to maintain distance and detachment from both their homeland and exile by residing in European cities, in search of “aesthetic gain” and the opportunity to “creatively contemplate life in the West” (Kaplan 38). In the context of colonial Korea, the exile of Western modernists to Europe to experience “authentic” modern culture can be paralleled with studying abroad in Tokyo, the metropolitan center of the Japanese Empire. The experience of colonial Korean intellectuals studying abroad in Japan was considered a common form of border crossing to the empire’s metropolitan center, symbolically reproducing the hierarchies of the empire-colony system and advancing modernity, civilization, and empire (T. Oh 2024 178). In contrast to movements toward Tokyo, exile movements outside the empire were regarded as unauthorized border crossings—antagonistic acts opposing the imperial regime (207).

As reflected in Oh Tae-young’s critique, exile movements of colonial Korean writers to China or outside of the Japanese empire can be understood as pathways to reconstruct individual lives, and should not be subsumed under a nationalist framework that reduces all personal acts to a singular narrative of national liberation against colonial oppression (T. Oh

2024, 179). Despite its intent, studies on Kim Kwangju and Korean literature set in Shanghai have often closely adhered to a nation-centered framework. This approach is not irrelevant to the backdrop of the Korean independence movement overseas. After the March First Movement in 1919, one of the largest protests against the Japanese colonial regime, many Korean politicians exiled themselves to Shanghai and established the Korean Provisional Government. Within the Western concession area, which exercised extraterritoriality, the Korean Provisional Government was able to avoid direct surveillance by the Japanese police to some extent. The French Concession, where the government was located, attracted Korean exile activists and their family members, leading to the formation of a street populated to a large extent by people from the Korean colony. (Sun, 42–46). The Provisional Government's central position contributed to expanding the scope of Korean anti-colonial resistance through anarchist and socialist movements and to radicalizing the Korean independence movement in exile (T. Hwang 2011, 241). In this circumstance, Korean residents in Shanghai who were involved in either the Korean Provisional Government or other resistance groups drew the attention of Japanese patrol forces.

Given this context, Shanghai has often been regarded in literary studies as an important setting for anti-colonial and anti-Japanese literature (H. Chŏng, 275-298). In the colonial Korean context, expectations for exiled activists and their writing reflect the belief that they envision a better future for their homeland and are deeply concerned with the nation. Anticipated national liberation, as an ideal future, must be proposed on the assumption that their exile is only temporary and that they will ultimately return to their homeland to continue working for the nation.²⁶ Literary works depicting writers' experiences of exile in China are

²⁶ The exile metaphor is considered a tool to develop a narrative that depicts dislocation beyond the borders of familiar places and local territories, imagining the outland outside the home, which ultimately expresses a desire for an ideal home (Seidel 11). Those exiled

conventionally categorized as exile literature (*mangmyŏng munhak*), a term primarily used to describe literary works thematically focused on overseas national independence movement. Among the works written by colonial Korean writers exiled to China, those that depict the lives of Korean socialists and anarchists in Beijing and Shanghai are called narratives of “resistance” and “anti-Japanese experience” (K. Yi eds., 2021), or of “Korean-Chinese solidarity and the longing for independence” (P. Kim 2021). The study of Kim Kwangju’s literature, which highlights the writer’s nationalist works (P’yo 2003), is no exception to the overall tendency to read exile literature as a collective genre within the recurring binary division of pro- and anti-Japanese literature.

Moving beyond conventional approaches to Korean literature that depict exiled activists within the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai, Kim Kwangju’s broad interests encompass Korean communities in Shanghai without reducing those communities to the status of a mere appendix to the Korean peninsula. In Kim Kwangju’s recollections of Shanghai, it is difficult to identify the concept of the nation, nor does he portray the exiled group—represented by members of the Korean Provisional Government—as simply made up of socialist and anarchist resistance activists or as an extension of the Korean nation abroad. Instead, in his own critical writings, Kim Kwangju advocates for fictional works that allow readers to closely observe and experience daily life (*saenghwal*) (“Chungguk kūktan ūi tonghyang kwa haksang undong ūi yakchin” 225), and works that “approach to real life (*hyŏnsil*)” (“Chungguk mundan ūi hyŏnse wa ilp’ye” 241). This close focus on people’s daily lives already reflects the stories of different routes taken by these characters to Shanghai—characters who cannot always fit under the nationalist slogans of the anti-colonial movement.

victims who are assumed to bear the standard of a truer version of their native place typically appear to be wanderers in a foreign land, yet they remain inseparable from inhabiting a home—a world of familiarity, security, and sanctuary (10)

Kim's meaning of exilic writing is found in "establish[ing] an artistic tower of poems that interweave with the diverse lives on the land" ("Sanghae rŭl ttŏnamyŏ yurang ŭi hanggu esŏ" 467). He focuses on Shanghai not as a central site for the overseas independence movement, but rather as a place where people gather and continue to live according to their own purposes. By observing the people on the main commercial streets, Kim found "a microcosm (縮圖) of human life," revealed through a "sorrowful contrast" between "the plump legs, flushed with pleasure and the scent of women," and "the bony legs of Chinese coolies" ("Namguk p'yŏnsin" 419). The lives Kim hoped to capture in Shanghai revolve around people who were constantly working to make a living. These living conditions are suggested to be more broadly connected to displacement from colonial Korea, as well as to the globalized labor market marked by Western dominance in the concession area. From Kim's perspective, the lives of coolies reflect multiple intersecting layers of Korean migrants' living conditions.

His sensitivity to different modes of living, revealed through various Koreans in Shanghai outside the Provisional Government's office, demonstrates how Kim sought to view the nation as a collective of Korean people beyond the exile activists' slogan focused on anti-colonial resistance. Edward Said's notion of exile intellectuals from the non-Western world emphasizes their creative way of redefining the safe territory of home by existing in "an unhealable rift between a human being and a native place" (173) and being "aware of simultaneous dimensions" that arise through encounters with different races, languages, and cultures. Yet rather than simply repeating the privilege of exiled intellectuals to redefine the meaning of home through their voluntary distance, as presumed in Said's text, Kim Kwangju engages with this approach by considering the position of moving Koreans rather than focusing on his own isolation. Kim Kwangju focuses on the lives of Koreans in Shanghai in a

way that, rather than reproducing the exilic perspective which creatively redefines a homogeneous “home” out of its own supposed homogeneity, instead reshapes the notion that such a community should be identified primarily as a symbolic and unified community in exile, challenging the nation-centric perspective that overlooks the complex historical interactions among people, languages, and cultures within migrating communities.

The fact that Kim Kwangju did not invoke notions of an ethnic-nation (*minjok*) but instead emphasized human living conditions encourages us to consider how the Korean exile community does not exist as an isolated, unchanged island amid the surrounding influx of people into Shanghai. As further discussed in the following section, Kim Kwangju’s focus on daily life centers on the Korean communities in Shanghai. The issues extend beyond whether exile resistance can achieve national liberation, focusing instead on how Koreans in Shanghai engaged with their relocated and displaced living environments, while also considering how the Korean exile movement might respond to these changes. Shanghai was not only a center for the Korean Provisional Government but also a destination where Koreans from various backgrounds and routes arrived. The following sections will analyze Kim’s short stories by focusing on the experiences of Koreans who move and wander. It will then examine how their routes from colonial Korea are, first, unidentifiable—contrasting with the exiled government’s recognizable slogans for anti-colonial resistance—and second, not fixed but characterized by serialized displacements. Those highlighted movements will be presented as challenging the concept of a unified Provisional Government and the exiled Korean community, which have been predominantly emphasized in historical and literary studies of the colonial Korean community in Shanghai.

Dismantled Korean Exile Community: “The Elderly Man with Long Hair” (1933)

“The Elderly Man with Long Hair” explores the question of the Korean exile community's central role by depicting the elderly man's ambiguous travels, which challenge the exile group's pursuit of nation-centered resistance. Foregrounding the Korean enclave and its residents, the story sheds light on the situation in which an exiled political group loses its authoritative role in leading a political movement. While they are still said to be dedicated to the movement and promote preparation for anti-colonial liberation, these characters are depicted as having lost their sacred status as patriotic exiles. The story foregrounds this situation by beginning with a conflict between the narrator, a lumpen playwright from colonial Korea, and the other members of the exiled political group. The narrator and his roommate, both young Korean male students and intellectuals, released the play for Korean audiences in Shanghai. The play criticizes Korean exile politicians for their personal vanity and hypocrisy, rather than genuinely working for ordinary Korean people. The exile group reacts to the play by harshly labeling the two young Korean men as "not nationalists," as if caring about the exile group's sole goal. By foregrounding this rift and internal conflict, the story raises the question of how a unified exile group could be possible in Shanghai.

The story also depicts different locations called “Korea town” or “Korean street,” featuring multiple sites, which contrasts with the image of the Provisional Government building. Characters—including lumpen intellectuals, exiled group members, and ordinary Korean migrants living around the main street on which the Korean community is centered—are depicted visiting Bar Korea, a place filled with a nihilistic atmosphere and the scents of alcohol, cosmetics, and meat, and where “political exiles” meaninglessly repeat chaotic arguments over who leads the group amid fractious conflicts. Bar Korea, a symbol of the central place in the Korean community, reveals an ambivalence spreading throughout the town, dissolving political fervor into personal desire. At the same time, the story also depicts the narrator's room, which is somewhat removed from the crowded street. Their location is

not only isolated from other Korean residential areas but also stands out distinctly due to the narrator and his roommates' presence. As such, the Korean community in Shanghai is depicted not as a fixed town within a bounded area, but rather as a network of loose connections across different locations on the streets.

Set within a Korean migrant community characterized by fragmented locations and divided groups, the story centers on an elderly man's mysterious past and the journeys he undertook before arriving in Shanghai. This elderly man with long hair expresses the most intense conflicts with Korean exile politicians by directly criticizing them. He is described as not belonging to any particular Korean group and, especially as having a poor relationship with the politicians who frequently visit Bar Korea. The arrival of wandering people, such as the elderly man, in the Korean community in Shanghai—where multiple individual desires challenge the centripetal force toward the exile government—is not surprising. Focusing on the elderly man, described as a monstrous figure, the story reveals the dissolution of the façade of an exiled community.²⁷

Most Koreans living in Shanghai—especially those residing in the French Concession—referred to him as “the long-haired old man.” He was sometimes called a “monster” by the younger fellows who knew a bit of English. This nickname arose without explanation,

²⁷ Kim Kwangju's focus on characters, such as the elderly man with long hair, seemingly is not intended to depict the bare life conditions of other urban poor. Like the urban poor in Shanghai—rickshaw pullers, dockworkers, street beggars, and countless casual workers who lacked stable skills, money, and a strong social network, as they were excluded from urbanization (Lu 65)—the elderly man is also part of the lower class within the city. But the story focuses on the man's externality toward the so-called Korean community, exploring how his ostracized position can challenge the centrality of the exile group rather than focusing on the wealth-poverty divide.

simply because he was well past fifty and wore his gray hair long. Of course, he certainly had no family name or given name, and no one ever called him by either. Even small children repeated the term “long-haired old man” without knowing what the words meant. This elderly man—his hair long and uncut, dressed in a filthy, worn-out Chinese robe—walked calmly and unperturbed along Shanghai’s mirror-smooth asphalt streets amid the slick, polished Yankees (320).

The elderly man’s “monstrous” aspects come from his appearance—with uncut long gray hair and a worn-out Chinese robe—and from his background as a lumpen, vagrant wanderer with no home, no wife, and no children (320). The elderly man is described as an outsider among other Korean residents due to his status as a vagabond who has neither family nor home in Shanghai; at the same time, the story highlights the “monstrous”—unknown, mysterious, yet impactful—qualities of the elderly man. As Shanghai serves as a destination for wandering people, the story of the elderly man’s past life represents multiple intersecting routes from different regions, each accompanied by its own stories of migration and exile. The story imagines Shanghai as a place where unidentifiable routes intersect, erasing the possibility of constructing the facade of the Korean exile government, whose political and ideological direction is portrayed solely as a respectable, nation-centered independence movement.

The elderly man is also seen as monstrous because of his mysterious personal life before arriving in Shanghai. Shanghai is described as a secondary destination and was previously involved in the resistance movement overseas; his life in Northeast China is known only through rumors, with no specific information about whom he worked with or

which political groups he joined. His personal story is veiled, known only by the fact that “he was twenty-five years old when he left Chosŏn.” Since then, he was nearly lost in Northeast China for a decade. During his heyday, he went on adventures, unafraid of the gun. He moved to Shanghai twenty years ago because he was dissatisfied with the situation in Northeast China. “That’s all we know about him” (322). Northeast China and Shanghai have often been noted, respectively, for their bases of anti-Japanese militant resistance and for exile governments operating under the protection of the concession areas. By highlighting the potential connection between two regions throughout the elderly man’s life journey, the story also opens up the possibility of considering how these seemingly separate locations can interact through the movement of people, which might lead to questioning the assumed nationalism that is central to the exile government.

The elderly man’s life experiences—as a mysterious former resistance fighter and current lumpen vagabond—stand in stark contrast to the exile politicians’ claimed purity, which is clearly centered on the sole purpose of national independence and a prosperous future for the Korean people. Foregrounding the conflict between the man and the Shanghai exile community, the story shows the elderly man as a character who condemns the myth of unified, sacred, elite exile groups. From the elderly man’s viewpoint, those words are used solely to gain political points in factional conflicts among politicians, which stem from a dysfunctional morality that “desires to dominate others” (324). While the politicians list various “-isms” said to inspire resistance against the Japanese colonial system, they emphasize the nation and its future as the only path forward. In contrast, the origin and current standpoint of the elderly man’s monstrosity—which exiled politicians denounce as a lack of “ideology” (*chuŭi*, -ism) (323)—are not easy to identify. The story highlights how the Korean politician’s use of political ideology for national independence can be questioned by the elderly man’s mixed and unknown background as a wanderer who arrives in Shanghai.

The story contrasts nominal ideology (-ism), portraying it as overly simplified and explicit, and is criticized by the elderly man, who debunks the vanity and supposed heroic prestige underlying those values. It is easy to postulate centripetal forces at work in those values, leading to the concentration of Koreans in Shanghai under the banner of the Korean nation, but the elderly man's monstrous, shabby, and mystical life aspects hint at decentralization. That stems from his experiences of wandering across multiple places and facing intractable complexities. The elderly man's last words—"Anyone who wants to dominate others is unfortunate"—highlight the danger of promoting nominal, central values that reduce various aspects of life to mere acceptance of those values' governance.

In the end, the story portrays the Korean exile community rejecting the elderly man, perpetually ostracizing him as an enemy who defames the exile politician's hard work for the nation. At Bar Korea, he is shot by an unknown suspect, presumably a member of an exiled political group seeking revenge against him. Except for the narrator and his colleague, the people at Bar Korea are portrayed as uninterested and detached from the elderly man's death. Rather, Bar Korea removes any denunciation of hypocritical heroism and exclusivism, quietly burying the man's death beneath the surface. Shanghai appears as a place that draws people, like the elderly man who moves and wanders through different regions, into dispersed, complex Korean communities. But his mysterious and monstrous life at the end is excluded and denied as part of it. His life trajectory implies the possibility of critically intervening in the exile movement—seeking a unified nationalist slogan for anti-Japanese resistance; however, the narrator regrets that this potential is denied and ostracized within the Korean community.

Koreans Wandering Manchuria-Beijing-Shanghai: "The Man from Beiping" (1936)

Throughout his journey, the man from Beiping carries a book containing “The Tale of Sim Ch’ŏng,” presumably a version of the *p’ansori* work *Simch’ŏngga*, a classic Korean story of a daughter’s filial piety toward her blind father. He is described as reading the book whenever he has free time. The man originally became interested in the tale of Sim Ch’ŏng, the story tells us, because he deeply sympathized with the father in the tale, who cares for his young daughter as a widower. Putting himself in the same shoes, the man from Beiping reflects on his life, a fraught journey that began when his wife left an infant daughter in his care. As Kim’s short story depicts the man who carries that classical text throughout his journey, it asks the audience how “The Tale of Sim Ch’ŏng”—ostensibly representing national culture and tradition—is refracted through different memories in each new location. That is, as the classical Korean text is uprooted and taken as a model of the wandering life of the protagonist, the question of national provenance is raised. Once the man from Beiping meets other Koreans in Shanghai, and when those Koreans commonly recognize the tale, how might they be connected through their shared recognition of the story while simultaneously imagining Sim Ch’ŏng’s journey alongside that of this wandering man far from his homeland?

“The Elderly Man with Long Hair” depicts the stark conflict between the elderly man and the Korean exiled political group, illustrating how the unity of the exile group can be dissolved and questioned in the context of Shanghai. In “The Man from Beiping,” Kim Kwangju continues to ponder the potential and limitations of having one unified exile community by examining the character of a man who moves around Northeast China and Shanghai. It captures a series of displacements across Northeast China, Beijing, and Shanghai, which the man experiences throughout his life. By doing so, this story foregrounds Shanghai as a site where different trajectories of Korean migrant workers converge. In this way, the story draws readers’ attention to the possibilities of imagining Korean communities

beyond the movement of Korean exile politicians from colonial Korea to the Shanghai exile government.

The Shanghai waterfront, where the narrator first met the man from Beiping, is depicted as a gathering place for those who have left home. Once the narrator, a young Korean man living in Shanghai, meets the man from Beiping at the Huangpu Bund, he describes him as "that man—like many others—who flowed into Shanghai" (387). That description of "flowing into" aptly captures the hopeless desire to find a better job, which leads the man to become a peddler selling meat to Korean residents. The narrator calls Shanghai "a place like hell" (387), where all kinds of people, whose origins are unknown, move and flow in. These mysterious features, stemming from their unidentifiability, form the vibe of a chaotic, crowded city.

Shanghai's invisible power to draw people into it—as the narrator hints by saying "flowing into" or "drifting into"—can be understood as having different roots. As it serves as Korean migrant workers' final destination, Shanghai's Korean community and its globalized labor market have attracted him to the city. The man from Beiping is not an exception. As the narrator gets to know the man better, the story unfolds the man's past life since he left home in colonial Korea. And his ongoing story about his move repeats the situation in which he had no other choice, forced into it without his intended plans or awareness. Upon their swift entry into the Shanghai labor market, the man from Beiping recalls the journey to Shanghai as a series of displacements forced by fraud. The man first went to Kando (Northeast China) and fell victim to someone's trick. His work as a tenant farmer does not go as well as he had hoped. As his plan to settle down with a stable income fails, the man meets a guy in Beiping who persuades him to move there for work. The man's relocation to Beiping is driven by his hope for a better life, but he again faces a miserable existence involving work as a broker in the opium trade and prostitution (396).

The Man from Beiping's itinerary is not shown as a straight, linear path from Korea, the starting point, to Shanghai, the destination. Rather than linear travel, they experience unwanted wandering with multiple stops—in Northeast China and Beiping.

“Still, I am not sure who was involved in the conflicts every day. I was surrounded by gunfire and cannon booms. When I tried to settle down somewhere, I was evicted because they did not permit Koreans to farm. When I made a shabby bed in another place, the bandits kicked me out. I know I am not the only one who has gone through this. For seven and eight years I wandered around Kando and Manchuria, and I have already turned thirty. How can I dream of having a baby?” (393)

The excerpt is from the scene in which the man recalls his days living in Northeast China. The man from Beiping was caught in conflicts with both Chinese bandits and farmers who disrupted his settlement. His initial plan to live a better life in Northeast China was discouraged because his farming was not guaranteed. The man also notes his feeling of scarcity amid the threat of Chinese bandits who frequently robbed Korean residents. As he confesses, he cannot establish a settled life, and he ends up moving around Kando and Manchuria—the broader region of Northeast China—without making his own decisions. This force that compelled the man to keep moving for survival is not only present in Northeast China but also continues to drive him to Beijing and Shanghai through an unwanted series of displacements.

This series of movements from Northeast China to Beijing, and then from Beijing to Shanghai, is described as the man coming “tumbling down.” His multiple drifts seem to

reflect the situation in which his surrounding environment took away his choice and forced him into this or that action. Regarding the contexts that shape these serialized displacements, the novella reflects the man's desire to live better. The stories that the man from Beiping tells the narrator reveal his desire to live better. The man is portrayed as constantly being placed in work positions; yet, despite always working, he has a hard time finding jobs. The man is described as walking around sluggishly, searching for work without taking a break. As a peddler, he does not stop to rest in Korean residents' houses while selling meat, and is described as "a cow that will plow a field no matter what incidents occur" (398). Those desires, removed from the control tower of imperial observation, land in Shanghai with hopes and expectations, yet they are also connected to and driven by the living conditions that compel him to work for survival.

The force behind those serialized movements lies in the Shanghai market, which draws day laborers from across the sea. Moving to Shanghai not only involves replanting exiled activists' fervor to dedicate themselves to resistance, but also entails encountering complicated desires and traumatic memories along the way. This trajectory exemplifies the movements of Korean migrants outside the territory of the Japanese Empire. Those who "are not captured by the imperial power to dispatch and assign human and material resources around the empire's territory" (Pak 2020 311) are described as choosing to relocate to Northeast China as their first destination, seeking a better life outside the exploitative poverty of colonial Korea. Once they move beyond Northeast China to different cities, they are driven by various desires linked to the expansion of global urbanization and modernization—alongside the world market—so that the singular imperial center is no longer the sole center influencing their mobility, losing its intensive control over people who cross territorial borders and identities defined by the colonizer (Sinae Ha 2018, 30).

Throughout the story of the man from Beijing, the novella foregrounds Koreans like the man who came trampling into Shanghai for survival through his unceasing work. Those verbs, including “being swept into” and “drifting into,” show how the characters are caught up in the irresistible flow toward Shanghai. Transregional border crossings not only cross national territorial boundaries but also enter regional labor markets that draw resources into Shanghai's cosmopolitan setting. The way the two stories depict Shanghai's cosmopolitan setting does not simply focus on (semi-)colonial modernity rooted in consumption, decadent culture, and crime. Rather, it shows how drifting into Shanghai makes the Korean wanderers, who are constantly exposed to unwanted movement, feel like “someone who has nowhere to go and cannot identify where they have drifted,” like vagabonds (388).

These chained drifts were caused by the precarious status of Korean migrants, but the novella further explores how these mobile Koreans can imagine a new community based on this condition of permanent mobility. Writing about one's moving experiences is said to always be accompanied by new definitions of community and memories of community in exile (Seyhan , 16-17). Travel occurs without clear-cut departure points or destinations and is structured in a disjunctive and circuitous narrative form that reflects the complexity of writing new identities (Seyhan, 128). What Kim Kwangju aims to highlight through the life of the man from Beiping is the possibility that people like him—whose serial mobility, mainly involving enforced relocations and dislocations alongside pathways to the large, globalized labor market—can challenge the notion of a single, unified Korean community centered around the exile government. Their moving routes intersect, going beyond a unilateral and linear road from a starting point to an endpoint, and are seen as ongoing and continuous. The way Kim Kwangju follows the man's past story leads us to consider not only who the other Koreans beside elite exile politicians were but also how the Korean community in Shanghai could never be settled or fixed.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes Kim Kwangju's short stories, "The Elderly Man with Long Hair" and "The Man from Beiping," focusing on a series of dislocations of Korean migrant men across the Chinese continent and on Shanghai as the setting where these wandering movements culminate. By tracing the two men's movements from colonial Korea to Northeast China, Beijing, and Shanghai, this chapter examines how their experiences of constant wandering challenge the notion of a single, unified exile government in Shanghai, which is often portrayed as a fixed, bounded Korean community. This chapter shows that Kim Kwangju's interest in the lives of Korean migrants in Shanghai extends to imagining what other Korean communities might exist beyond the boundaries of the Korean Provisional Government.

"The Elderly Man with Long Hair" is examined as an example that illustrates how his literature addresses the purported central force of the elite-led exile community. By contrasting the group of exiled politicians with the elderly man, who is linked to a mysterious past of wandering in Northeast China, the story reveals how a political message for the nation is criticized as vanity and heroism through the elderly man's critique. The elderly man is labeled as monstrous, his past unknown to other Koreans, and his current life unsettled in Shanghai; he is excluded from the exile group. Because of his monstrous and mysterious background as a wanderer, which ultimately leads him to Shanghai, he is positioned as someone who can criticize the presumed façade of the exile group, who chase personal interests and heroism rather than genuinely caring for the Korean people. In this way, the story offers an opportunity to reconsider the centrality of the exile group in Shanghai, often

equated with the Provisional Government, by portraying the complex, wandering movements of elderly men as a means to reflect on the diverse Korean communities in Shanghai.

“The Man from Beiping” is examined as another example illustrating Shanghai as a site where different migrants’ routes converge. The story depicts a series of displacements from the Korean Peninsula to Northeast China, and then to Shanghai, following the character’s forced border crossings for survival. In this way, the story portrays the Korean enclave in Shanghai not as an extension of the Korean Peninsula, but as a sphere marked by transregional traumatic memories spanning the Chinese continent. As the story highlights the existence of the Shanghai labor market that draws wandering characters to work as peddlers, it follows the life of a man from Beiping, envisioning Korean communities composed of migrants like him, who are constantly on the move and whose different migration routes intersect. Thus, the sole exile government cannot represent the diverse aspects of these Korean communities.

By drawing attention to the wandering lives of Koreans in Shanghai, Kim Kwangju questions the tendency to treat the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai as the sole example of Korean communities overseas, particularly as an appendix to the Korean Peninsula, which is often assumed to be a unified, anti-colonial, anti-Japanese resistance group. Kim Kwangju found the potential to rethink this approach by looking not at the lives of wandering people—who are mysterious, even monstrous due to their lumpen, unsettled vagabond lifestyle—and their constant relocation of workplaces for survival. As he presents Shanghai as the site where those people ultimately arrived, his stories envision a loose network of Korean migrants who can question the purported goals of the exiled political group focused on national independence.

Chapter 3: An Anarchist Utopian World in Northeast China: Ryu Sŏ's "The Sea of Lament" (1926)

Introduction

Ryu Sŏ (柳絮, original given name is Ryu Kisŏk, 柳基石, 1905–1980) recalled reading "Diary of a Madman" (Kuangren Riji 狂人日記) by Lu Xun during his middle school days in Yanji, around the time the story was first published in 1918.²⁸ He confessed that he believed Lu Xun's "madman" referred not only to a Chinese figure but also to a Korean one (Li 51). Almost 10 years after first reading "Diary of a Madman," Ryu Sŏ published his story "The Sea of Lament" (Wŏnhan ũi Pada) in 1926, and the following year he published a Korean translation of "Diary of a Madman," both in the Korean magazine *New People* (Sinmin).²⁹ The final line of "The Sea of Lament," which is the protagonist Mr. Yi's outcry

²⁸ "Diary of a Madman" is a Chinese story that follows the narrator who comes to believe that the people around him practice cannibalism. Using the madman's voice as an allegory, the author Lu Xun is said to expose the violence embedded in Confucian social ethics and calls for the liberation of future generations through the story's closing plea, "Save the children." Ryu later recalled that when he visited Lu Xun in 1925 and shared his plan to translate "Diary of a Madman" into Korean, Lu Xun responded with encouragement (Li 51). The completion of the translation in 1927 was likely facilitated by Ryu's anarchist network, particularly through figures such as Shi Youheng and Yi Ugwan, both of whom maintained connections with Lu Xun (Hong 2013, 122–25).

²⁹ Ryu Sŏ's translation of "Diary of a Madman" was released in 1927 and is noted as the first translation of Lu Xun's works into Korean. In the Korean literary scene, the 1920s was the time when the name and works of Lu Xun were rarely mentioned until the following generation of translators, Chŏng Raedong, Kim Kwangju, and Yi Yuksa, expanded the list of Korean translations of Lu Xun in the 1930s. The article "Hu Shi ssi rŭl chungsim ũro Han Chungguk ũi munhak hyŏngmyŏng" by Yang Kŏnsik, published in *Kaebŏk* in 1920,

to rescue young sisters and brothers from a prison-like situation (92), resonates with the final phrase of “Diary of a Madman”—“save the children”—which has often been interpreted as a critique of the feudal system and Confucian traditions embedded in the Qing Empire (H. Kim 276). His trajectory of reading, translating, and reflecting on Lu Xun’s madman in colonial Korea draws our attention to the question of what common horizon of liberation Ryu imagines across the two languages, nations, and regions. Ryu’s figure prompts us to see how a shared condition of oppression transcends national boundaries.

Focusing on Ryu Sŏ’s efforts to imagine a shared context of imperialist oppression across colonial Korea and China, this chapter analyzes “The Sea of Lament” by exploring how the narrative highlights an anarchist utopian community that transcends Korean and Chinese national boundaries in Northeast China. “The Sea of Lament” is an epistolary story narrated by a Korean-Chinese activist, Yi, to his old colleague. The story begins by stating that Yi (whose full name in Korean is Yi Ch’angsŏn and whose Chinese name is Wang Jiying) sent a letter written in classical Chinese, which unfolds the recalling of his past life and his long-term regrets. He moved to the Korean migrant community in Northeast China when he was young. After his father died and his mother married a Chinese man, Yi attended school pretending to be a Chinese citizen. Despite his efforts to conceal his Korean ethnicity, he was bullied by both Korean and Chinese groups and derided as mixed-blood. He decided

provides a glimpse into how Korean intellectuals paid attention to the literary revolution during the New Culture Movement led by Sun Wen, Hu Shi, and Chen Duxiu (Ch. Ch’oe, 34). Lu Xun is only briefly mentioned at the end of Yang’s article as one of the Chinese writers pioneering the establishment of vernacular Chinese literary writing (Hong 2015, 96-114). In the context of the 1920s, when the literary revolution led by Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu was taking place, Ryu’s spotlight on Lu Xun sounds surprising. Ryu’s recollection, that most Korean intellectuals during that time read Lu Xun’s works by finding books either in China or Japan (Li 50), suggests that the literary scene in Korea was relatively late in recognizing Lu Xun’s influence.

to advocate for the rights and benefits of ethnic Koreans by working as a police officer in China. However, his lament grew as he was falsely accused of accepting bribes from Koreans. His life faced another hardship when his first love, a Chinese girlfriend, ended because of her father's objection. Yi's wandering life, which was not rooted in any ethnic group, seemed to end when he was accepted into the Chinese military academy. Pursuing his dream of establishing liberated Korean and Chinese communities in Northeast China, he sustained fatal injuries in combat against Chinese warlords. On his hospital bed, he finished writing his letter to the narrator, leaving a message for his Korean comrades to inspire the younger generation.

This chapter examines the short story "The Sea of Lament" by exploring how it portrays China—particularly Northeast China—in a complementary relationship with colonial Korea, a partner nation engaged in anarchist resistance against the colonialist structure. Examining the process by which the protagonist Yi in the story finds his way to working for a stable, liberated life for people across ethnic divisions, this chapter argues that "The Sea of Lament" hints at the potential to build an anarchist utopian village in Northeast China. It suggests that Ryu's focus on the anarchist solidarity between two collectives (nations), as well as the important role of the Chinese continent as a key center for East Asian anarchist movements, is reflected in the protagonist Yi's life, which is described as caring for people's safety and liberty, freed from all forms of oppressive powers. This chapter examines Ryu's essay and the story by focusing on how an ideal world for ordinary people across ethnic divisions can be imagined and experimented with within the story set in Northeast China.

Tied to the dissertation's question, this chapter shows that Ryu's case exemplifies how colonial Korean writers approached China as a key site where the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist future of colonial Korea could be jointly projected and implanted. While this

might seem to be a matter of Korean-Chinese solidarity against Japanese imperial rule in East Asia, this chapter goes further to show how those networks can be discussed beyond a framework of transnational solidarity based on the idea of Korea and China as separate, independent nation-states. I consider Ryu's interest in people living in China and his view on China as a site comprising multiethnic populations as an exemplary way of thinking about regional connections. In this way, this chapter supports the dissertation's framework, which presents China as a site where colonial Korean writers mobilized to expand their imagination of transnational and transregional affiliations—in this case, particularly through the anarchist perspective proposed by Ryu Sō.

Korean–Chinese political solidarity within the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement is often addressed as an association between two already-constituted national communities. In this formulation, Koreans and Chinese remain distinct political subjects whose relationship is imagined as additive—a Korean community plus a Chinese community joined together by a shared anti-imperialist cause. Such a model continues to presuppose national difference as the primary unit of political community. This chapter sees that “The Sea of Lament,” in contrast to this conventional model, imagines a different form community. Rather than constructing solidarity between Koreans and Chinese, the novel envisions a regional community of co-thriving among the residents of Northeast China. In this way, the story raises the question of how a mode of living together, grounded in everyday coexistence, shared residency, and regional life, can foster a joint association of Korean and Chinese national communities.

In his early childhood, Ryu Sō moved to northern Kando, where his father, Ryu Ch'anhŭi, participated in Korean independence movements and attended schools for ethnic Koreans living in Yanji. His political activism was influenced by the March First Movement in 1919, which significantly encouraged the Korean immigrant community in Northeast

China to participate in the independence movement. Amid the whirlwind of political ambition following 1919, Ryu remained in Shanghai and expanded his political network across both nationalist and anarchist Korean groups. He began his early career as an anti-colonial activist by joining Young Korean Academy (*Hŭngsadan*), organized by An Ch'angho in 1925, while interacting with Yi Tonghwi, Yŏ Unhyŏng, and Yi Kwangsu. At the same time, he also studied at Chaoyang University (朝陽大學) in Beijing, which merged into Renmin University of China (中國人民大學), in the mid-1920s. He later left Young Korean Academy to join the socialist anti-imperialism movement, which led to his commitment to anarchist activism and participated in several protests, most of which involved planning bombing attacks on Japanese institutions, alongside his Korean anarchist colleagues, including Sim Yŏch'u (formal name Sim Yonghae), Yi Ugwan (formal name Yi Chŏnggyu), and Yi Hoegwan (formal name Yi Ŭlgyu). Along with them, Ryu Sŏ engaged in several other anarchist activities, which included establishing an autonomous community for Korean migrants in Quanzhou as an instructor. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, Ryu Sŏ continued to lead underground activities targeting the Japanese army alongside other Korean nationalists in Korean Patriotic Organization (*Hanin Aeguktan*), led by Kim Ku.

Throughout his activist career as an anarchist, Ryu Sŏ primarily published translations of literary works, critiques, and political opinions in Korean and Chinese magazines. From 1924 to 1925, he worked as a contributor and editor for the first Korean-Chinese anarchist group, The Black Flag League (*Heukgi Yeonmaeng*), alongside members Xiang Peiliang, Ba Jin, and Gao Changhong. They founded the group's magazine, *Eastern Miscellany* (Dongfang Zazhi), sponsored by Cai Yuanpei, Li Shizeng, and Wu Zhihui, who were representative Chinese anarchists (T. Hwang 2016 8). His efforts to develop printed media for the Korean and Chinese anarchist network continued through the publication of

Korean Youth (Koryŏ Ch'ŏngnyŏn) in 1927, written in Chinese and supported by Ba Jin (Hong 2013, 110); *The Conquest* (T'alhwan) in 1928, organized by The Federation of Anarchist Communist Koreans in China (chae Chungguk Chosŏn mujŏngbu kongsan juŭija yŏnmaeng) and published in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese from 1928 to 1929 (H. Yi 82-84); *Contemporary Culture* (Xandie Wenhua) in Shanghai, in collaboration with Chinese anarchists such as Lu Jianbo (T. Hwang 2016 8); and *South China News Agency* (Namhwa T'ongsin) in 1930, which involved Korean anarchist members including Yi Hoeyŏng and Yu Chamyŏng (T. Hwang 2016 9).

In the meantime, Ryu also engaged with the Chinese literary scene by participating in the Revolutionary Literature Debate (Geming Wnxue Lunzheng 1928–early 1930)³⁰ and translating Korean novelist Yŏm Sangsŏp's literary criticism titled “Collective Consciousness and Individual Consciousness in Literature” (Munhak sang ŭi chiptan ŭisik kwa kaein ŭisik), given the Chinese title “Wenxue shang de jituan yishi yu geren yishi,” which was published in *Masses Monthly* (Qunzhong yuekan) in 1929.³¹ These Chinese publications focus on his Korean works released between 1926 and 1928, which discuss the forms and themes of proletarian literature from an anarchist perspective.³²

³⁰ The intellectual and literary debate in late 1920s China focused on the relationship between revolutionary literature and political advocacy for class struggle and liberation. Chinese writers, critics, and literary organizations engaged in the debate over whether literature should serve as a medium for political revolution and which literary forms are necessary to reach a mass readership. In response to the Creation Society's advocacy for consolidating Marxist literary theory in literature, other groups, such as the Sun Society, questioned whether literature should be entirely subordinated to political movements.

³¹ *Selected Materials on the Revolutionary Literature Debate* (Geming wenxue lunzheng ziliao xuanbian), published in Renmin Literature Publication (Renmin wenxue chubanshe) in 1981, includes several critiques written by Ryu: “A Reexamination of the Marxist Theory of Class Art” (Jiantao makesizhude jiejiyishulun), published in *Folk Culture Weekly* (Minjian wenhua zhoujian) in May 1928, and “Popular Art and Writer” (Minzhong yishu yu zhujia), published in *Contemporary Culture* (Xiandai wenha) in August 1928.

³² Related articles include “Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Soviet Union” (Musan

Recent studies have shed light on Ryu's multilingual writings in Korean and Chinese in terms of textual circulation, translation practice, and the intellectual history of anarchist thought across colonial Korea and China.³³ Along with other anarchist literary critiques and magazine articles on socialist transformation, his short story "The Sea of Lament" has yet to attract scholarly attention.³⁴ In his recent monograph, Kim Chonguk highlights the story's

kyegŭp chŏnje wa Ssobett'ŭ) in *The New People* (Sinmin) in July 1926, "The Soviet Union and the OO Movement in Chosŏn" (Ssobett'ŭ Rosŏa wa Chosŏn OO undong) in *The New People* in August 1926, "Proletarian Writers and Historical Materialism" (P'ŭro munsa wa yumul sagwan) in *The New People* in December 1926, "The Basis of Marx's Theory of Class Struggle" (Marx kyegŭp t'ujaengsŏl ŭi kŭn'gŏ) in *The New People* in May 1927, "A New Theory of Proletarian Art" (Musan kyegŭp yesul sinnon) in *Central and Foreign Daily* (*Chunggo Ilbo*) in April 1928, and "The Class Consciousness of Emerging Poets" (Sinhŭng siga ŭi kyegŭp kwan) in *Central and Foreign Daily* in March 1923.

³³ For example, according to Kim Miji's research, the first article listed above is assumed to refer to the Japanese translation of *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* (1905) and the Chinese-language secondary source *Kropotkin's Thought* (Kelupaotejin de Sixiang, 1920) (M. Kim 212). The second article is, as Kim notes, a translation of Huang Wenshan's "Kropotkin's Perspective on Morals" (Kelupaotejin de Daode Guan), published in *Liberation and Reconstruction* (Jiefang yu Gaizao) in 1919 (213). Hong Sŏkp'yo has also suggested that Ryu may have read *Handbook of Kropotkin's Studies* (Kelupaotejin Xueshuo Gaiyao), published by *Free People's Press* (Ziyouren She) in 1924. A copy of the book was owned by Shi Youheng, one of Ryu's close associates (S. Hong 2013, 120). Although further research is needed to establish these textual connections, the available evidence confirms that Ryu Sŏ engaged extensively with multilingual writings on Kropotkin.

³⁴ Ryu's translations and critiques within the Korean and Chinese anarchist literary scenes remain a field to explore. In the early twentieth century, each nation had to cope with a new wave of modernization from the West. Modern Korean literature "manifested cultural resistance and efforts to develop a unique form of literature" by engaging in "the appropriative and domesticating translation practices of Western literature" (H. Cho, 19). However, once we consider that modern Korean literature emerged by recognizing foreign literature as objects of translation (Pak 2019, 428), we cannot overlook the context in which China was compared to colonial Korea during the process in which the idea of the Korean nation was formulated as an object of study. Ryu's bilingual writings are noteworthy for rethinking how the colonial Korean sphere of translation was shaped beyond the geographical and ideological boundaries of the Japanese Empire. This challenges the notion of the West as the origin, Japan as the middle mediator, and other Asian countries as arriving points at the end. Within the "vibrant nebula of intra-East Asian textual contact," which gave birth to "writings on and adaptations, translations, and inter-textualizations of Japanese literature" in Korea and other Asian countries (Thornber 5, 6), Japan, as the colonizer, played a leading role as the main mediator guiding the road to modernization through negotiation with

depiction of an anarchist future—one that dreams of and hopes to establish a liberated society free from any form of authoritarian oppression—in the context of Ryu’s advocacy for an East Asian anarchist revolution as a form of solidarity among nations under colonial and imperial dominance seeking liberty and equality in the world (180). Reviewing Kim’s book, Chang Munsŏk has noted that the story illustrates how transnational solidarity occurred flexibly before nationalism became fixed and settled (M. Chang 378). Its portrayal of an anarchist world failed to be realized in reality, but the literary depiction is understood to reveal the potential to question how transnational solidarity could be possible—not as a form of internationalism based on nation-state divisions, but within the space of Northeast China, where Koreans were said to temporarily reside while evading colonial governance on the Korean Peninsula (ibid).

Based on previous studies, this chapter analyzes “The Sea of the Lament” with a focus on the concept of an ideal community set in Northeast China. Moving beyond the perspective of confirming Ryu’s anarchism in the story, this chapter focuses on the background of China, particularly Northeast China, as a site anticipated to establish an anarchist world beyond national and ethnic divisions, rather than as a political entity functioning as an aligned nation-state within an effort to build international solidarity. It expands on Chang’s question about how transnational anarchist solidarity could have been imagined not as international solidarity. In particular, it weaves this question into the dissertation framework by asking how China, as a site where the authors projected their political beliefs, regional imagination, and rearranged nation-state divisions, is represented.

Western modern culture. In the context of the West and Japan occupying significant roles, Ryu’s bilingual writings can serve as exemplary practices. They not only include China as a participant in a triangular model involving the origin, the mediator, and adaptation, but also reconsider the temporal order within the model.

This chapter follows how “The Sea of the Lament” considers Northeast China as an anticipated, dreamed space for people across Korea and China, free from all forms of imperialist and colonialist suppression.

The following section examines Ryu’s anarchist views through his understanding of Kropotkin and the East Asian anarchist movement. This section introduces Ryu’s profile as a Korean anarchist activist in China and explains why the Chinese continent and the Chinese resistance movement were essential to him in the colonial Korean anarchist movement. This is followed by an examination of “The Sea of Lament,” focusing on how the story foregrounds the protagonist Yi’s personal struggles to live as an ethnic Korean in China, as well as his concern for the safety and stability of both Korean and Chinese communities. The analysis will explore how Yi’s hope of protecting residents of Northeast China beyond ethnic divisions is reflected in his vision for a utopian village in the area. It will end by asking about the potential of a transnational, transregional anarchist future as an alternative vision of Manchukuo under the Japanese Empire.

China as a Site for the Anarchist Revolution

Ryu Sō’s profile as an anarchist activist working in anti-imperialist and anti-colonial resistance was shaped by his partnership with China, a neighbor of the Korean colony. In his personal life as an ethnic Korean living in China, the idea of Korean-Chinese solidarity was essential to promoting his political engagement with anarchism. Advocating the resistance of nations against the Japanese empire, Ryu called China “the nation that Korea had the closest sense of brotherhood with” (Yu 102) and the only people who “felt sympathy for Korea” (Yu 84). In Shanghai in 1925, Ryu Sō claimed that the Korean people supported the Chinese people’s anti-imperialist rebellion. “I hoped that the people in both countries would

successfully protect freedom and bliss. The Japanese Empire is an enemy of all the oppressed people in East Asia. Moreover, if we, the suppressed people, unite and resist, there is no doubt about our victory in the end” (Yu 103). His understanding of China as part of a group of oppressed nations reflects Ryu’s recognition of the two nations’ shared experiences. The ideal of “brotherhood” in East Asia stems from his understanding of China as a separate nation and a distinctive political entity that shared common experiences of imperialist expansion.

“Proposal for Organizing the Great Alliance of East Asian Anarchists” (Zhuzhang zuzhi dongya wuzhengfu zhuyizhe da lianmeng), published in *People’s Bell* (Minzhong) in December 1926, reflects his idea of calling for the building of an East Asian alliance, with a particular focus on China’s role within the network. As noted in this declamation, Ryu considers China to be an important participant in establishing a transnational alliance, but at the same time, China does not appear solely as a unified nation-state with fixed, clearly defined political boundaries. China is highlighted as a central hub where anarchists from various nations come together.

Ryu’s advocacy of an East Asian alliance is based on local resistance against imperialist encroachment and aims to transfer those resistant forces into promoting movements for people’s liberation.

In my view, regardless of where our comrades are from, those in colonial and semi-colonial regions in particular must first ensure that the people understand the significance and necessity of the people’s movement. Otherwise, the powerful resistance of the masses may, unexpectedly, be exploited by a handful of ambitious individuals, ultimately resulting in nothing more than replacing one oppressor

with another (“Proposal for Organizing the Great Alliance of East Asian Anarchists” 717)

Rather than mobilizing terms such as “ethnic-nation” (*minjok*), Ryu specifically addresses “people” (*minjung*), who are assumed to be connected across colonial and semi-colonial regions. He specifically lists colonies such as Korea, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines, while simultaneously positing China as a representative semi-colonial region. What Ryu is cautious about, in both colonial and semi-colonial regions, is the situation in which elite nationalists take the lead in promoting anti-imperialist resistance movements, only to end up establishing their own authoritarian power, which Ryu views as another form of oppression.

Those interests in international alliances across national boundaries stem from Ryu’s transition to anarchism around 1926, the year when he translated essays by Kropotkin into Korean, and a time when Ryu “was deeply involved in anarchist terrorism” (Yu 98).³⁵³⁶³⁷ In

³⁵ Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) is a Russian geographer and anarchist theorist. He argues that mutual aid is the fundamental principle of human society and nature. His works, including *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), *The Conquest of Bread* (1892), and *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1899) are known for criticizing social Darwinism and capitalism from the perspective of anarchist theories that promoted decentralized and cooperative societies without state authority.

³⁶ Ryu Sō’s Korean translations primarily concern Kropotkin’s concept of mutual aid. His translation series includes “Kropotkin’s Perspective on Literature” (K’ropotkin ŭi Munyegwan), published in *Eastern Light* (Tonggwang) in September 1926; “Kropotkin’s Perspective on Morals” (K’ropotkin ŭi Todökkwan), published in *Eastern Light* October 1926; and “An Introduction to Kropotkin’s Theory of Mutual Aid” (K’ropotkin ŭi Hojoron Kaegwan), published in *Eastern Light* February 1927. According to his memoir, Ryu recalled teaching Kropotkin’s ideas while serving as an instructor at the Center for Training Propaganda Personnel in Xiamen, even before he had read Kropotkin’s major works in the original, including *The Conquest of Bread* (1892), *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1898), and *Modern Science and Anarchism* (1901) (Yu, 141).

³⁷ The initial step to becoming an anarchist was also related to his enthusiasm for promoting

the early twentieth century, Kropotkin was the key figure in East Asian anarchism across Japan, China, and Korea, particularly through the circulation of Japanese translations by Osugi Sakae and Kotoku Shuhei (S. Cho 262-264). Ryu's translation of Kropotkin in 1926 reminded Korean audiences of the concept of "mutual aid," making clear his ideological tendency toward anarchism. As a counterpart to "survival of the fittest," mutual aid highlights assistance and interactions aimed at countering dangers commonly imposed on oppressed entities.

His advocacy of forming an East Asian alliance for anarchist revolution closely aligns with his emphasis in his translation of Kropotkin's concepts. Breaking with relations based on hierarchical obedience—historically imposed by laws and religions—Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid is founded on horizontal relationships, presenting it as a means of protecting individuals' interests and fostering a collaborative society ("Kropotkin's Perspective on Morals" 14). An individual's interest is not understood as exclusively undermining collaborative benefits; rather, the pursuit of individual interests increases the benefits of multiple entities as a whole (15). Based on this understanding, the East Asian anarchist alliance aims first to promote each nation's political liberation from colonialist and imperialist expansion. However, it does not merely focus on transforming a single nation but is believed to extend to changes in other colonial and semi-colonial nations.

movements for anti-colonial revolution. Expecting the impacts of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union to be felt in colonial Korea, Ryu's political stance became engaged with socialism, leading to his criticism of Korean nationalist intellectuals' enlightenment campaign, which primarily focused on building new cultures based on capitalist development (Yu 59, 81). However, while believing in the phase of socialist revolution, during which the proletariat emerged as a necessary consequence of capitalism, Ryu soon grew frustrated by the situation in the Soviet Union where he could not find the free and equal lives the revolution promised. Ryu left both An Chang'ho and his nationalist group, as well as giving up his hope for a socialist revolution led by the Bolshevik party in the Soviet Union, to join the anarchist group in Shanghai in 1927.

This is the point at which Ryu Sō became aware of the limitations of the national independence movement. He argues for abandoning national divisions, even when an anti-colonial liberation movement is emerging, recognizing this as a significant task for the people in the colonies (“Proposal for Organizing the Great Alliance” 716-717). On the path to complete revolutionary change, people in each colonial locality should work hard to challenge Japanese imperialism, but at the same time, they should not focus solely on a patriotic, nation-centered perspective (718). Relying on the principle of mutual aid, which recognizes an individual’s liberation and interests as multiple and separate, Ryu calls for the liberation of a “people” not be reduced to the liberation of a nation. Alliances across colonial and semi-colonial regions are ultimately assumed to function as multiple links and networks that protect people’s rights to liberation from political and economic suppression.

In the process of imagining the East Asian alliance, Ryu highlights the role of movements in China as a site for gathering anarchist agents and establishing a base. The anarchist movement in China is considered important as it has played a pioneering role in leading anti-imperialist resistance throughout its enduring history since the late nineteenth century (717). Especially after the 1923 Japanese earthquake, anarchist movements in Japan were seen as being in an unstable situation due to increased imprisonment and intensified police surveillance. As Japan was unable to serve as a central hub for expanding the movement, Ryu highlighted China as a place where agents could come together. In terms of geographical location and ongoing discussions, he considered China an accessible site for anarchist representatives to work in.

Ryu’s idea to form the East Asian alliance is based on beginning with the liberation movement for oppressed, colonized nations. While some view the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial resistance movements in each colony as the first and most urgent issue to address, Ryu emphasizes that these movements should ultimately aim to liberate and secure individual

freedom from all forms of authoritative power—nation-centered governance, ideological conformity, and religious principles. Within this goal, China is not simply a counterpart to colonial Korea, a nation-state participating in the alliance, but also serves as a site where people can experiment with forming networks across national boundaries. In the following section, I examine “The Sea of Lament” by exploring how his political views on China transition into the background of the story. I am particularly interested in how the background of Northeast China is used to envision an anarchist ideal world for liberated individuals across nations.

“The Sea of Lament”: Dreaming of a Peaceful World in Northeast China

Before and after Ryu Sō released “The Sea of Lament” in 1926, he was actively involved in both Korean and Chinese literary criticism. Observing the authoritarian shift of the Bolshevik regime, Ryu argued that revolutionary politics had simply replaced one form of domination with another. Literature, therefore, should protect individual creativity, experimentation, and vitality while resisting political, economic, and cultural forms of coercion (“P’ūro munsa wa yumul sagwan” 16). His emphasis on opposing any attempt to subsume artistic production under dialectical or party ideology led him to take an interest in translating an essay by Korean novelist Yōm Sangsōp on collective and individual consciousness. While acknowledging the importance of national liberation under colonial rule, this critique proposes understanding the nation as a collective sustained by mutual recognition rather than by enforced homogeneity or ideological uniformity (Yōm 2–3).³⁸

³⁸ In August 1929, Ryu Sō published his Chinese translation of Yōm Sangsōp’s literary criticism titled “Collective Consciousness and Individual Consciousness in Literature” (Munhak sang ūi chiptan ūisik kwa kaein ūisik) with the Chinese title “Wenxue shang de

"The Sea of Lament" can be regarded as a work that reflects Ryu's ongoing interest in how literature can capture the ways individuals connect with one another and foster a collective sense of solidarity without reducing them to a uniform or homogeneous national identity. Drawing on his interest in China's role in the anarchist movement across East Asia, "The Sea of Lament" foregrounds Northeast China as the setting in which Korean anarchists' vision of future liberation is projected. It begins by establishing that the story is set within a Korean-Chinese transnational context. Presented in epistolary form, "The Sea of Lament" revolves around a letter written by Yi Ch'angsŏn to an old friend. The story begins with a is prefaced by a brief note from a friend, explaining that Yi originally wrote the letter in Chinese and the friend decided to translate it into Korean for publication. While Yi insists that he is writing neither to seek sympathy for his tragedy nor to offer a broader social critique. The friend has chosen to translate and share the letter, making it accessible to Korean readers.

The letter itself, which recounts Yi's life story as a Korean-Chinese man, primarily foregrounds Northeast China as the region to which he first migrated and where he sought to establish legal residency. After his mother remarried a Chinese man, Yi adopted the Chinese name Wang Jingyi and obtained Chinese citizenship. Hoping to assimilate, he attempted to live like his Han Chinese classmates, forming relationships exclusively within that group while concealing his Korean background.³⁹ The multiethnic environment of Northeast China

jituan yishi yu geren yishi" in *Masses Monthly* (Qunzhong yuekan). Yŏm Sangsŏp was a Korean novelist of the Japanese colonial period. His works are known for their portrayals of everyday life and their nuanced exploration of the social and psychological effects of colonial rule.

³⁹ Dual status as Korean-Chinese is also notable in comparison to the situation of colonial Koreans who resided in Japan. Colonial Koreans, as subjects of the Japanese Empire, were labeled as such, but their Korean ethnicity always conflicted with their registered status. Kim Saryang's "Into the Light" is often addressed as an example that explores how colonial rule

initially encourages Yi's dream of "living well" as he adapts to his new place of migration. At the same time, however, it reinforces rigid ethnic boundaries that separate the region's diverse populations. When his classmates discover his background, they exclude and bully him as a "mixed-blood" (雜種) (88) who has illegitimately pretended to be Chinese. As a result, Yi is left with an enduring sense of "regret" (恨), rooted in the inescapable difference of his Korean ethnic identity.⁴⁰

The Northeast China region is depicted as a contested area, as non-Han ethnic groups—especially people from colonial Korea, such as the Yi—migrate and settle there, revealing a perspective that ties China's territorial boundaries to Han Chinese ethnicities. Northeast China remains complex—an area where it is difficult to determine which ethnic groups arrived first or later, given its long history of border crossings and territorial changes. From the perspective of Chinese characters, Yi is distinctly marked as Korean—unfairly seen as someone who looks after the interests of the Korean migrant community only (89) and who is not allowed to enter into an inter-ethnic marriage with a Chinese woman due to his foreign origins (90). The story reveals how this arrangement, which distinguishes Korean and Chinese ethnicities aligned with each language and tradition, has imposed lifelong frustration

fractures personal identity, revealing that neither complete assimilation nor a simple return to national identity can resolve the contradictions of colonial subjectivity (C. Yi, 38-41). Ryu's work differs from Kim's in that it reflects the progress of immigration in China, rather than leaving it as an unclear area for most Korean migrants residing there.

⁴⁰ Those tensions between the two nations are not entirely new. Given its historical connection to the region, Korean literature produced in Northeast China is often cited in the history of Korean national literature as an example that captures rebellious movements against Japan within the independence movement (T. Cho, 339-441). Within this framework, Korean characters are often portrayed as lower-class individuals who endured economic crises as migrant workers in a foreign Chinese land (453), while Chinese characters, as landowners, appear to side with the oppressors who push Korean migrants into a marginal, precarious status.

on Yi, causing him to constantly endure "anguish" and be "swayed by the wind" (88) without securing a stable place for long-term settlement.

Yi's early life, which centers on assimilating into Chinese society—speaking only Chinese and hiding his ethnic background (88)—gradually shifts toward considering the coexistence of ordinary Korean and Chinese people. His first job is to serve as a Chinese police officer. Yi believes that he could serve the public interest of Chinese residents while at the same time protecting the rights of the Korean migrant community (89). In Jilin, where he works a second job as a shop clerk, Yi dreams of starting a family by marrying the shop owner's daughter, a Chinese woman (90). The source of his lifelong lament does not precisely stem from the need to choose between the two. Rather, his agony stems more from how he arranges and adjusts to facilitate living as part of an inter-ethnic couple, as well as from his efforts to foster residential safety for Chinese and Korean people, which relates to developing a relationship aimed at coexistence. Northeast China is characterized by enduring chaos and intense competition over sovereignty, but because of the presence of multiple ethnicities, Yi begins to consider the conditions of liberated life in these multiethnic settings.

Despite his continual wandering across China, Yi repeatedly imagines a return to Northeast China, where his attachments are shaped not simply by birthplace or ethnicity but by the people and relationships cultivated in everyday life. Such a return differs from the nationalist imagination that has long informed understandings of Korean migration to Kando. Colonial Korean discourse frequently envisioned Northeast China as an alternative national space sustained by Korean settlements that served as bases for anti-colonial resistance (Schmid 216–20). Read against this historical backdrop, Yi's repeated return to Northeast China does not signal a longing for an ethnically homogeneous Korean enclave or an alternative Korean nation-state. Rather, it reflects his desire to return to a frontier where

Koreans and Chinese negotiated everyday forms of coexistence despite overlapping sovereignties and shifting political boundaries.

Yi's vision of the flourishing of both Koreans and Chinese in Northeast China reaches its climax in the passages here he participates in battles against Chinese warlords. Toward the end of his lifelong wandering in Northeast China, Yi ends up registering as a trainee soldier at the Huangpu Military Academy in Guangdong. This military school is supported by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party, and its trainees are described as having participated in the Northern Expedition to resolve military and political conflicts between the party and Chinese warlords. He is described as fighting against the forces of Sun Chuanfang, the warlord who led the Zhili Clique. In the battle of Jiujiang, the city where Sun's headquarters was located, Yi disguised himself in plain clothes and infiltrated the city, setting fire to an arsenal.⁴¹ During combat, Yi ponders the possibility of establishing "a free society that refuses all forms of coercive power" (91). Regarding his position as a Korean enrolled in the Chinese military, he asks himself, "What harm would it do if I worked as a Korean who also cares about the well-being of the Chinese people?" (91). He aims to "ensure the healthy and stable lives of Koreans in Northeast China and to encourage Chinese victims" (91). Protecting Chinese residents from economic oppression by warlords is considered a breakthrough moment that prompts reforms to safeguard people's safety and liberty.

Although Yi is depicted as fighting to liberate ordinary Chinese people from the exploitative conditions produced by warlord rule and Japanese imperial encroachment, his

⁴¹ During the Northern Expedition (1926–1928), launched by the Nationalist Party (Guomindang) to reunify China by defeating the regional warlords, Sun Chuanfang controlled much of eastern and southeastern China and emerged as one of the campaign's principal military opponents. In the Battle of Jiujiang, where Sun maintained his military headquarters, Yi disguised himself in civilian clothing, infiltrated the city, and set fire to an arsenal.

revolutionary imagination ultimately returns to a Korean community in Northeast China. In one letter, Yi goes so far as to identify the wound he sustained in battle with those inflicted upon Koreans in an earlier moment of anti-colonial resistance. As he writes, "The bullet that hit me (during the battle with the warlord clique) was the same one that struck those who cried out, 'Manse!' in Longjing" (92). Longjing was one of the largest Korean settlements in Northeast China, where Koreans organized demonstrations in solidarity with the March First Independence Movement of 1919. The shootings to which Yi refers were likely carried out by Japanese and Chinese police forces attempting to suppress these protests. By identifying his own injury with those sustained in Longjing, Yi connects his vision of a safe and liberated world for the oppressed to earlier Korean resistance against colonial violence.

Although Yi calls for "a free society that refuses all forms of coercive power," his vision remains only sketchily developed throughout the fiction. Rather than elaborating the institutional or political foundations of such an anarchist society, he locates it in a Korean settlement in Northeast China. This spatial choice is significant. While the novella briefly imagines a liberated community open to ordinary people regardless of whether they are Korean or Chinese, projecting this utopian vision onto Northeast China raises a broader question: how can this multiethnic borderland be imagined beyond competing nationalist projects and rival claims to sovereignty? Rather than treating Northeast China simply as a site contested by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean nationalisms, Yi's fiction suggests the possibility of envisioning the region through alternative spatial relations grounded in shared experiences of displacement, colonial violence, and anti-authoritarian aspirations.

Northeast China was becoming a site where competing imperial and national powers sought to consolidate modern sovereignty through the establishment of Manchukuo. Rather than eliminating ethnic difference, this new political order incorporated multiple ethnic groups into a hierarchical structure while simultaneously producing the fiction of an authentic

national community (Yamamuro 2006, 7; Duara 10-11). Korean migrants were themselves drawn into these competing projects of sovereignty, as the regulation of migration, registration, and citizenship became central mechanisms through which states sought to define territorial and political belonging (A. Park 3). Yi's repeated return to Northeast China may not be understood simply as nostalgia for a Korean settlement or an alternative national homeland. Instead, his longing is directed toward recovering forms of everyday sociality that escape the sovereign logic organizing the region. His imagined community is grounded neither in ethnicity nor in the authority of the state, but in the possibility of coexistence among the people who inhabit this contested borderland. Yi's vision of "a free society that refuses all forms of coercive power" thus derives its critical force not because it ignores the realities of empire, but because it imagines a mode of collective life that exceeds the political categories through which empire sought to organize Northeast China.

Yi's last request to colleagues—"protect young sisters and brothers from living like inmates under a prison-like situation of domination" (92)—calls on Koreans living in Northeast China and outlines their future tasks. This request primarily concerns a movement promoting the national liberation of the Korean colony from Japanese imperial rule, which is also intertwined with current social transformations on the Chinese continent. As Yi's life is described as constantly struggling with discrimination against his Korean ethnicity within a Han-Chinese-centered community, his call for a free society sounds ideal enough to transcend all those ethnic and national divisions. In particular, Northeast China serves as a multiethnic region where both the Chinese and Japanese states seek to claim sovereignty, making his dream seem even more distant. But because of this unrealistic projection, Yi tries to see greater potential. His idea of carving out Northeast China as a stage and site after anarchist revolutions contrasts with the historical and political actions taken by the Japanese Empire in the same area. Yi dreams of people thriving beyond ethnic divisions and free from

all forms of oppression, envisioning a harmony similar to the policy of cooperation among different races as one union under the Manchukuo regime.

Conclusion

This chapter examines Ryu Sŏ's short story "The Sea of Lament" alongside his view on the role of the Chinese continent in anarchist revolution across East Asia. It traces his intellectual development and the shaping of his ideas about the relationship between Korea and China, which leads to his incorporation of Chinese anarchist movements into liberations for Korean people. Adding to the background in which Ryu engaged with political anarchist movements as a Korean activist in China during the 1920s, this chapter looks into how the setting of China, especially Shanghai and Northeast China, was anticipated as a key site where East Asian anarchist transformations could be experimented with and planned. The early part of the chapter shows that Ryu's hope for anti-colonial, anti-imperialist resistance among colonial Koreans was mainly discussed by considering current and future transformations occurring in China.

His short story "The Lament of the Sea" is analyzed as an example that situates Northeast China in a future context, as a Korean-Chinese utopian village following an anarchist revolution. The chapter discusses how the story first reflects on ethnic divisions between Korean migrants and Han Chinese as the protagonist, an ethnic Korean who has acquired Chinese nationality, experiences life across Northeast China. The story shows that the protagonist, rather than choosing one clear (ethnic, national) identity and pursuing the benefits of such a choice and the sense of communal belonging that would accompany it, joins the military resistance, guided by his ideal of promoting a thriving, liberated life for both Korean and Chinese residents. His participation in battles against Chinese warlords is

described as a first step, which he hopes will expand to establish a more stable and safe residential environment in Northeast China. What he cares about is the people in Northeast China, a category beyond ethnic divisions.

Following the development of Yi's ideas, expressed in the letter contained within Ryu's short story, the chapter aims to present the idea of Northeast China as a utopian village for multiethnic residents. There is more room to develop a comparative perspective on how this approach to creating a utopian village within Korean-Chinese anarchist movements can serve as an alternative wave against the Japanese Empire's establishment of Manchukuo, another colonial state located in a similar region. Competing visions and plans regarding Northeast China seem more worthy of detailed examination.

Chapter 4: From Shanghai Hideout to the Revolutionary World: Sim Hun's "Lover of the East" (1930)

Introduction

In modern Korean literary history, the colonial Korean writer Sim Hun (沈熏; given name Sim Taesöp 沈大燮, 1901-1936) is widely regarded as a resistant writer, deeply concerned with national independence and the lives of ordinary people under Japanese colonial domination. His poem "When That Day Comes" (Kūnal i omyōn, 1932) gained wide popularity for articulating fervent longing for Korean independence,⁴² while perhaps his best-known novel, *Evergreen* (Sangnoksū 1935), is recognized as a representative work of rural enlightenment literature that depict Korean peasantry's financial hardships.⁴³ Although the

⁴² This poem is epitomized as revealing the narrator's earnest longing for Korean independence from Japan, which is highlighted in the following line: "If that day comes before I perish,/I will soar like a crow at night/and pound the Chongno bell with my head./The bones of my skull/will scatter, but I shall die in joy" (Sim qtd. in C. Sim 21). This poem was initially censored in 1932, and republished in Sim Hun's posthumous collection with the same title in 1949. Its original manuscript with censorial markings was discovered and made public by his family in 2000 (Sim 2000, preface). In a publication note in 1949, Sim Sōlsong, the second-oldest brother of Sim Hun, said, "I hope that publishing this collection will contribute to the achievement of complete national independence and permanent peace, reminding us of the sorrow and determination shared by writers who lived in nations without freedom." ("The Scissors of Japanese Censorship That Silenced Literature" (Munhak ūl chamjaeun ilje ūi kawi chil) qtd. in C. Sim 19).

⁴³ *Evergreen* (1935) is a novel set in Ch'ōngsōkkol, the rural region of colonial Korea where the young intellectuals Pak Tonghyōk and Ch'ae Yōngsin are committed to rural enlightenment and social reform. The novel highlights the protagonists' efforts to educate and empower peasants while exposing the gap between an idealistic commitment to the nation and the harsh realities of poverty under colonial domination.

majority of his works illuminate the realities of Koreans living on the Korean peninsula, Sim Hun was also a traveling writer who journeyed throughout East Asia as a student, exile, and film producer. What he observed about East Asia during his travels was shaped by colonial realities. Shanghai, "crowded with opium addicts and prostitutes," is noted as the place where Korean exiles hopelessly dream of "revolution" ("The Night of Shanghai" (Shanghai ūi Pam), 154). On the deck of a ship crossing the strait between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese islands, the speaker observes "the faces of Chosŏn" on the Korean passengers who were seeking new lives in Japan ("The Korean Strait" (Hyŏnhaet'an) 143). Conspicuous in the night view of colonial Korea's Seoul, which is apparently "peaceful," is an "extra edition of newspapers marked with censorial marks." ("The Night Scene of Seoul" (Seoul ūi Yagyŏng) 217). Images of Korean exiles, helpless migrants, and censored newspapers—captured respectively in Shanghai, on a ship to Japan, and in Seoul—reveal how people lived displaced lives impacted by the colonial system across East Asia.

Serialized in *Chosŏn Daily* (Chosŏn Ilbo) from October 21 to December 10, 1930, the novella "Lover of the East" (Tongbang ūi aein 1930) is typically understood to draw on the author's experiences in Shanghai as a student and an exiled intellectual. The novella centers on Korean socialists who relocate to Shanghai and subsequently travel to Moscow in their commitment to the Korean independence movement. In the late 1920s, in Kyŏngsŏng (the Korean pronunciation of "Keijō," the Japanese name for the colonial capital, present-day Seoul), the protagonist Pak Chin reunites Kim Tongnyŏl and Kang Sejŏng to plan a covert mission, implicitly framed as a strike or guerrilla attacks against colonial governmental institutions. The narrative then shifts back to the early 1920s in Shanghai, where then student protesters Kim, Pak, and Kang relocate after their imprisonment for their involvement in a mass demonstration against Japanese rule. In Shanghai, they continue their underground activism for Korean independence and the socialist revolution by joining a socialist exile

group led by Mr. X. As Kim and Kang marry, Pak begins a romantic relationship with Pae Yöngsuk, who arrives in Shanghai with her father, a Christian elder and member of the Korean Provisional Government. Pak later leaves Shanghai to enroll in a Chinese military training school, while Kim and Kang travel to Moscow to attend an international convention of socialist youth representatives. The narrative reaches the point where Kim and his colleagues visit Lenin's memorial grave and attend an international convention in Moscow, after which the Japanese police suspended the serialization of the novella.⁴⁴

Drawing on Sim Hun's experiences traveling in East Asia, this chapter examines his novella "Lover of the East" as a key text that reveals the literary imagination of revolutionary East Asia through its depiction of Korean socialists' exilic journeys to Shanghai and Moscow in the early 1920s. I argue that Shanghai serves as a symbolic refuge, fostering the imagination of revolutionary East Asia amid the pressures of Japanese censorship. By following the itineraries of Korean socialist characters across colonial Korea, Shanghai, and Moscow, the novella reveals their plans to achieve liberation for colonized peoples by moving toward an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist future. Within the Japanese censorial system that regulated representations of revolutionary movements, episodes set in colonial Korea and Moscow underwent both direct and indirect intervention by the censors, a process which determined the limits of what colonial Korean literature could reveal about those movements. This chapter shows that the novella explores its own way of continuing to tell the

⁴⁴ The serialization was suspended after the novella addressing Lenin and the Soviet Union's social system right before denouement. Sim Hun attempted to publish the novella as a book in 1935, after his first serialization was cut short due to censorship. A classified report by Japanese police notes that the book-version "Lover of the East" was bound to face censorial interventions—suspension of serialization—because of the depiction of Korean students participating in the mass resistance movement and traveling to join independence resistance movements inspired by socialism ("Summary of an Article from a Prohibited Publication," *Purhōga ch'ulp'anmul kisa yoji*, 14-15).

story of Korean socialists' rebellious journey, using the Shanghai setting as a provisional hideout to prepare for a future political mission.

This chapter connects to the dissertation's question by demonstrating how the Shanghai setting portrays the seemingly rebellious or revolutionary travel trajectories of Korean socialist characters. It continues to address the dissertation's question of how China, as both a geographical and ideological setting in colonial Korean literature, offers us a new perspective on Korean writers' imagination of the nation, the Japanese Empire, and the East Asian region. Below, I explore what the Chinese setting in Shanghai reveals about the author's motivation to depict illegal, rebellious journeys amid Japanese colonial censorship regulating such portrayals. I contend that the Shanghai setting functions not only as a physical hideout where the characters can conceal their identities as exilic socialists evading the Japanese police within the text, but also as a symbolic refuge from the censorial order at the text's external level. This chapter argues that Sim Hun's novella imagines alternative regional connections among colonial Korea, Shanghai, and Moscow that resist the Japanese imperial system both geographically and ideologically, and suggests the possibility of recognizing anti-colonial, anti-imperialist futures embedded in the travels of those Korean socialists, which cannot be fully captured within the boundaries of the Japanese Empire.

In this way, this chapter offers an understanding of how the Korean-Chinese relationship was shaped alongside its interconnected relationships with the Japanese Empire. More complex and multifaceted than a simple dyad, Korean-Chinese connections can be understood as being mediated through Japan—as the colonizer and imperialist power expanding in East Asia. This chapter thus further explores how these perspectives on the ternary relationship between Korea, China, and Japan can present a new view of a transregional relationship beyond simply adding an additional national entity. In my analysis of Sim's novella, I explore this potential in representations of colonial Korea-Shanghai-

Moscow, a relation shaped by its tension with Japanese imperial control, which sought to keep individual (semi-)colonies isolated in their positions, without connections to one another.

Sim Hun was born on October 23, 1901, in Seoul, the fourth child of parents, Sim Sangjōng and Ms. Haep'yōng Yun. He attended Kyōngsōng Common High School, where he participated in the March First Movement of 1919 as a student leader (C. Sim 38–39). After imprisonment for his involvement in the protest, he relocated to Beijing, where he interacted with members of the Korean exile community engaged in the anarchist movement for national independence (K. Han 2007, 444). He moved to Shanghai in February 1921, likely to observe socialist and anarchist groups led by Yō Unhyōng and Yi Tonghwi (ibid., 448, 451). After his time in Shanghai, he also lived in Hangzhou and attended Hangchow University (之江大学), now the Zhijiang campus of Zhejiang University (浙江大学). He returned to Korea in 1923 and began his career as a journalist at the *East Asia Daily* (Tonga Ilbo) in 1924. However, he was dismissed in 1926 for participating in the Iron Pen Club (*Ch'ōlp'il kurakpu*), a journalists' association that organized a strike for higher wages and advocated press freedom through public speeches. Sim Hun's career as a scriptwriter and film director was influenced by his brief study abroad in Japan, during which he worked at a studio in Kyoto under the guidance of the Japanese director Minoru Murata. In association with Korean filmmakers, he produced films such as *Until Dawn Breaks* (Mōn dong yi t'ül ttae kkaji, 1927). He expanded his career as a writer throughout the 1930s, producing notable works including the abovementioned “When That Day Comes” (Kūnal i Omyeon, 1930), *The Phoenix* (Pulssajo, 1931), *Smile of Eternity* (Yōngwōn ūi Miso, 1933), and *Evergreen* (Sangnoksū, 1935). He passed away from typhoid fever in 1936,.

Among the works in his oeuvre, “The Lover of the East” has attracted considerable scholarly interest, particularly regarding its settings in Shanghai and Moscow. In contrast to his other stories, such as *Evergreen* or *Smile of Eternity*, which depict anti-colonial resistance movements in rural colonial Korea, “The Lover of the East” is set in overseas places, where Korean exiles carry out their political plans to engage in socialist resistance. Previous research has explored “The Lover of the East” in relation to its significance within the geographical contexts of Shanghai and Moscow. Scholars have noted that Shanghai, portrayed as a concession area where Sim Hun lived temporarily, symbolizes his nostalgia for that period and serves as the backdrop for the rising influence of socialism on national and class consciousness (Sangil Ha 521). Alongside Kyōngsōng, which symbolizes imprisonment and frustration, Shanghai might be viewed as a romantic gateway to revolution, love, and nationhood, while Moscow is recognized as a destination where party members can explore ideal futures that censorship prevents them from fully addressing (Y. Chang 198–199). Such studies explore the concept of the East, connecting colonial Korea to Shanghai as a key center of anti-colonial resistance and to Moscow within the wider context of oppressed nations in East Asia. Focusing on how the novella highlights East Asia as a revolutionary space, Han Kihyōng argues that it does not strongly convey transnational solidarity in the region, noting that the depiction of Shanghai lacks illustrations of Korean exiles’ involvement with Chinese socialist networks and the social transformations occurring there. The protagonist’s eventual return to colonial Korea thus reflects a Korea-centric perspective that, Han argues, fails to advance inter-Asian or transnational solidarity (K. Han 2019, 362–364).

Building on previous studies, this chapter examines how Shanghai functions as a site for envisioning revolutionary East Asia. In particular, in response to Han Kihyōng’s critique, which addresses the limited imagination of Korean-Chinese transnational solidarity, I add a question through Kim Kyōngmi’s notes, pointing out that colonial Korean writers’

representation of Shanghai does not always deal with the historical details of reality in Shanghai, but as well projects the desire to imagine a revolutionary space and postcolonial and post-imperialist futures through the lens of colonial experience (K. Kim 104-105). Moving beyond asking how or why Sim Hun limited his imagination of revolutionary East Asia by reducing detailed descriptions of the local networks of Korean-Chinese socialist groups, I inquire how Shanghai, depicted as a city for international exiles, serves as a symbolic hideout for the characters working on socialist resistance, exile movement, and international solidarity on their routes across East Asia.

One additional point to consider is the context of the Japanese censorship system, which was alert to depictions of anti-Japanese and anti-colonial resistance movements—topics that have been rarely addressed in studies of “*Lover of the East*.” This novella traces the journeys of Korean socialist characters through colonial Korea, Shanghai, and Moscow, but censorial regulations, both direct and indirect, interfere with its depiction of the revolutionary changes and uprisings taking place in colonial Korea and Moscow. The characters’ plans for terrorist attacks in Seoul cannot be depicted in detail, while the representation of their attendance at the socialist youth convention in Moscow ultimately led to the enforced termination of the serialization and a novella without a proper conclusion. Through this unrepresented movement, which was observed by the Japanese censors, the Shanghai episodes depict scenes in which the characters mostly spend their time in a small room used as a hideout for exclusive members, concealing their identities by disguising their appearances when they are out on the streets. Examining the various ways revolutionary places are portrayed in each city, this chapter further explores how the Shanghai hideouts stand out in imagining revolutionary East Asia through the perspective of colonial Korean socialist characters.

In the following section, the chapter first highlights how Kyōngsōng in colonial Korea and Moscow in the Soviet Union are foregrounded under Japanese censorship when representing anti-colonial resistance. It explains how censorial observation defined the limits within which rebellious plans could be represented in certain places. The following section then examines how Shanghai serves as a primary setting for envisioning rebellious and revolutionary change. Analysis of the Shanghai setting focuses on a small room—used as a hideout by Korean exiles—as both a site for preparing the independence movement and an imagined liberated world for colonized nations. This section concludes by showing how “the East” can be reimagined as a geographical and ideological region oriented toward socialist liberation among colonized nations, through the expanding scope of characters’ movements as well as their alternative routes that pass through Mongolia and the Soviet Union. It examines how activities in the Shanghai hideout can reach out to and help reimagine “the East” beyond the Japanese Empire.

Untellable “Rebellious” Activities in Kyōngsōng and Moscow

The story begins by showing Pak Chin’s return to Kyōngsōng in colonial Korea after his long journey through Shanghai and the Chinese mainland. He reunites with his old colleagues, Kim Tongnyōl and Kang Sejōng, to carry out a classified mission, which apparently involves anti-Japanese, anti-colonial terrorism. The story then turns to the past and abruptly ends at a moment almost a decade before the opening event of Pak Chin’s return, depicting scenes in which Kim Tongnyōl attended an international socialist convention for youth representatives held in Moscow. Those two locations, Kyōngsōng and Moscow, which stands at the beginning, and the end of the novella respectively, are connected to Korean socialists’ rebellious movements, which cannot be fully described in the text. Under Japanese

censorship rules, depictions of anti-Japanese terrorism in colonial Korea were beyond the permissible scope of imagination, and Japanese censors had to intervene directly in publications as soon as novellas approached historical events and symbols of the Russian Revolution that led to the establishment of the socialist Soviet Union.

Kyōngsōng is implied to be the primary setting for the characters' secret mission, presumably involving a militant attack on colonial institutions or a resistance demonstration. But throughout the story, colonial Korea is not foregrounded as the main setting in which the characters engage with resistance movements. The first episode, in which Pak Chin returns to Kyōngsōng and reunites with his fellows after almost a decade-long exile, does not develop the story about their secret mission. Filling the empty space of Kyōngsōng are instead the memories of the March First Movement, which the first episode presents as recollections. Kyōngsōng is thus suggested as the starting point of the characters' travels, following their release from imprisonment after the March First Movement in 1919. Although it serves as the starting point of the characters' journey, the March First Movement itself appears more as an aftermath than as an ongoing event, and the text immediately transitions to the second episode, which revisits the main characters' memories of Shanghai in the early 1920s.

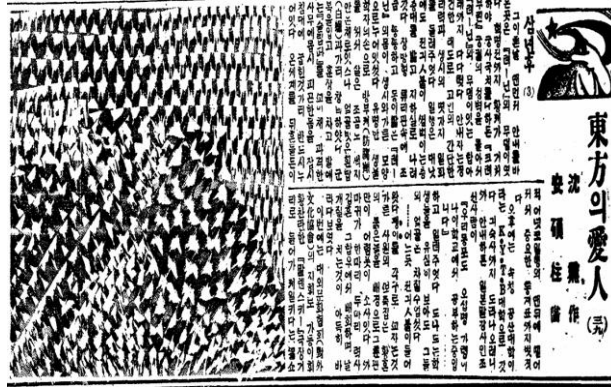
Between the distant memories of 1919 and the upcoming anti-colonial resistance attacks in the late 1920s, Kyōngsōng is prohibited from appearing rebellious, or when it is, such sentiments are conveyed only indirectly. In 1930, when the novella was serialized, the Peace Maintenance Law (治安維持法), promulgated in 1925 by the Department of Censorship under the Police Bureau of the Government-General of Korea (朝鮮總督府 警務局 圖書課), functioned as a censorial regulation prohibiting any texts that "offended public order." Content that insulted the dignity of the Japanese imperial family, sought to subvert the

imperial constitutional order, or denied the legitimacy of Japanese rule over Korea (K. Chŏng 16–20) was subject to redaction and censorship; meanwhile, materials influenced by or reflecting socialist thought were primary targets of public order offenses (Chŏng and Choi 132). Within the framework of the censorship rules strictly enforced in colonial Korea's publishing scene, any direct reference to or explicit portrayal of revolutionary colonial Korea was deemed excessively rebellious. Approaches to representing rebellious movements in colonial Korea had to be sensitively considered during the publishing process. The regional connection among colonial Korea, Shanghai, and Moscow is suggested by the characters' border-crossing movements, but Kyŏngsŏng cannot be foregrounded as the main stage on which the characters' actions unfold.

In this context, the memories of Kyŏngsŏng are more closely linked to the aftermath of the March First Movement. In colonial Korean literary history, memories of the March First Movement were often represented as a form of “aftertale”: a motif in stories that preserved people's experiences and reactions, incorporated them into subsequent political events, or critically reflected on the movement itself (Kwon 219-220). Associated with the memories of the March First Movement, Kyŏngsŏng functions more like a “prion-like” space. Representations of rebellious Koreans, including socialist activists, are said to be allowed only ironically by depicting them as arrested or imprisoned, which does not foster a deeper understanding of their inner thoughts. (H. Yi 2008, 75–76). Those representations associate resistant Koreans with criminality under the colonial juridical system, but at the same time, they serve to reveal their presence, which is supposed to be hidden and underground. In the episode set in Kyŏngsŏng, Kim and Pak, in their early days, are described as being imprisoned for their participation in the March First Movement (35). Set against the backdrop of Seodaemun Prison in the Muhakchae area, the story does not detail the context of the March First Movement or its participants but evokes the prison-like

atmosphere of colonial Korea, highlighting the people's connection to the colonizer's controlling power in political and ideological movements.

While episodes in Kyōngsōng give a sense of an untellable place of anti-colonial resistance, the later episodes in Moscow, which are toward the end of the characters' travels, are where the Japanese censorial system directly intervenes. The serialization was suddenly suspended, but in some respects, this was an expected outcome, as the story increasingly focuses on itineraries centered on the history of the 1917 Russian Revolution and on current political movements led by the party. In the scenes where the characters visit Lenin's grave near the Kremlin Palace in Moscow, lines addressing the history of the revolutionary movements were ordered to be removed by censors, as in the following example: "In a square glass case lay Lenin's body as if he were alive. Shaking the entire world, this [eight words removed by the censor] defined the twentieth century. They took off their hats and silently prayed before the deceased" (129). In describing the scene in which the characters attend a speech criticizing the atrocities of imperialist expansion in Asia, the narrator exercises subtle censorship, concluding: "After spending around ten days in Russia, Kim and his colleagues gained new experiences and returned to Shanghai. I chose not to discuss their specific thoughts and feelings but instead to document their itineraries" (131). The serialization appears to have been on the verge of suspension when an accompanying illustration, possibly depicting Lenin's Mausoleum or the area surrounding it in Moscow, appeared with portions inked out.



Picture 1: Censored illustration on the final day of serialization. *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 10 December 1930, p.4

An editorial note states that the serialization of the novella had been canceled due to certain circumstances (“Novella Written by Sim Hun,” Sim Hun ssi ūi chipp’il hadŭn, 4). The novella’s unexpected ending at the moment the characters are visiting Moscow prompts us to consider how this trespassed the censor’s threshold of legitimate representations. Publications that passed censorial intervention might reveal the writers’ internalization of a sense of legality—an awareness of the permissible boundaries of publication (H. Pak 231) and moments when the author avoids confronting the imperial authorities’ efforts to delimit the form and degree of subversion (K. Han 2019, 30). The transgression of “*Lover of the East*” likely stems from the text’s unusual, direct, and detailed references to political figures—such as Lenin—and its explicit articulation of aspirations to model society on socialist revolutions that advance the emancipatory rights of the working class and colonized peoples against imperialist capitalism. It is precisely at the point where representations of travel to an “ideal world” for colonized subjects become impermissible that the narrative forecloses further development.

The story of the Korean socialists’ journey to Shanghai and Moscow realizes a forbidden vision of revolution in colonial Korea by depicting settings beyond the empire’s

territory. Whereas colonial Korea was limited to being represented as a center of anti-Japanese movements, the story of underground travel beyond the territory of the Japanese Empire might have sought to expand the geographical and ideological imagination of resistance movements. The story of Korean socialists in Shanghai and Moscow is portrayed as part of their efforts to implement socialist reforms, which are presumed to lead to the liberation of colonial Koreans. At the boundary of acceptable representation, the story continues to unfold, questioning how the rebellious journeys of Korean socialists can be narrated and published. While Japanese censorship attempts to eradicate all traces of depictions of anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements in colonial Korea, stories about those movements set in external territories could still be told within the porous boundaries of censorial rule. The novella was thus serialized under the constant risk of censorship, creating a tense dynamic between the censor and the author, centered on the question of how permissible it was to circulate a story about Korean socialists traveling outside the Japanese empire.

A Shanghai Hideout Connected to the World

Episodes set in Shanghai stand out between the beginning of the novella, set in Kyōngsōng, and the end of the novella which marked direct censorial intervention. The Shanghai episodes, within the context of representable, publishable accounts of Koreans' rebellious itineraries, can be analyzed as the story's navigation and exploration of ways to evade censorship, conveying the experiences of Korean socialists in transit. The Shanghai location is suspicious enough to attract the attention of the Japanese police, yet it also provides a space where the characters can move furtively, working to prepare future revolutionary movements against imperialist and colonial expansion. On this threshold of

rebellion and revolution, the Shanghai episode itself serves as a kind of hideout, a space within which inspiring visions of international connections among colonized nations can be imagined.

The novella begins its first episode by highlighting an observing colonial power. The first episode, titled “The Night of Borders,” centers on the Korean border along the railroad linking Shanghai and Kyōngsōng. While traveling by train to Kyōngsōng, Pak Chin, a member of a Korean exile group, is interrogated by a Japanese detective. Pak is on a wanted list because of his political activities and encounters a Japanese detective who is searching for a suspect rumored to have been involved in militant terrorism in Kyōngsōng. While searching for a suspect, the Japanese detective thoroughly investigates every Korean passenger, carefully examining their personal belongings. The Japanese detective is portrayed screening Korean “criminals” at the borders.⁴⁵

The detective’s question—“Then where have you been?” (21)—is important because it reveals his anxiety about the outer territories of the Japanese Empire, which are likely to serve as bases for Korean resistance in exile. A system of knowledge and representation of specific territorial boundaries is often used to shape perceptions of these places and of the

⁴⁵ Observing the Koreans’ relocation to China, Japanese authorities became more suspicious of Koreans and their residency in China. The colonizer was particularly watchful of criminal Koreans (Pullyōng sōnin, 不逞鮮人). Positioning the colonial subject as the criminal, the Japanese discourse on criminal Koreans has racialized Koreans, framing them in terms of crime and subversion, leading to the justification of postcolonial legalized exclusion and discrimination (Matthews 13). The crackdown on criminal Koreans was also observed along the borders with China. A former officer from the Japanese Government-General of Korea recalled his job, mentioning a search for Korean criminals in Andong Province, China, to uncover ties between Shanghai and Christian groups in P’yōngyang (“Former High-Ranking Officials of the Government-General Gather to Discuss Public Order in Korea,” *Ch'ongdokpu chōn kogwan i moyō*, 111). Implied in his interview is that these defiant Koreans were pursued not only within the borders of colonial Korea but also extended beyond the Japanese Empire to the Chinese mainland.

people who cross the border to reach them (H. Yi 2013, 139). In this system of institutionalized representation, certain geographical relocations could be seen as hostile actions—ideological and political challenges to national security and public order—rather than simply as neutral movements to a foreign environment (T. Oh 2022, 278–279). The purpose of the Japanese detective’s investigation into the Korean passengers’ travel destinations is to track their movements as an indicator of political threats to the Japanese Empire. Especially considering that Shanghai was a popular destination for Korean exile actors—while the Russian Far East and Moscow were populated with socialist agents—the Japanese detective’s search along the borders reveals suspicion toward Korean border-crossers, who might have been exposed to rebellious ideas and consequently brought them into colonial Korea.

Despite the detective’s intensive investigation, Pak Chin successfully escapes by transferring to another train, disguised as a ginseng seller. A Japanese detective’s gaze upon Pak is described as omnipresent, and Pak cannot avoid a piercing look that captures his entire body (19-20). However, ultimately, the detective’s interrogation remains incomplete, as he fails to identify Pak’s national and personal identity without specific evidence proving his criminal involvement. Like Pak Chin, who successfully returns to colonial Korea by passing under the detective’s gaze, the novella continues to recount Pak and his colleagues’ journeys to Shanghai and Moscow in the following episodes. In this sense, the novella reveals its drive to account for those illegalized journeys that pass through porous boundaries of censorial principles—principles that were purportedly unavoidable but actually operate within a threshold the text attempts to cross.

The following episodes, set in Shanghai and Moscow, depict the characters’ process of becoming engaged with the socialist mission for national liberation. In a context where the setting of colonial Korea must largely be absent, episodes set in Shanghai and Moscow

suggest how these foreign places are depicted as backdrops for banned exile movements. Set in those two cities, the novella not only expands the geographical settings of the story about revolution but also reveals a temporal extension that conveys the contemporaneity of revolutionary movements across East Asia, while also implying the futurity and potentiality hoped to arrive soon in the colony.

Hideouts are often perceived as rebellious because revolutionary activities occur within them. Mr. X's room offers a revealing example, functioning as an underground office for party members. "It appeared," the narrator says, "that several young men, having locked the doors one after another and armed themselves inside, were standing guard as if preparing to hold a secret meeting" (50-51). The double-layered doors and security guards mark the room as an exclusive space, accessible only to registered members, where "something might be discussed secretly." Unlike trains passing through national borders, where Japanese detectives intervene directly, this room is difficult to access, hidden deep within crowded and cluttered streets. This exclusiveness contrasts with other rooms, such as the one inhabited by the female characters Pae and Kang. Filled with "Western-style bedding, mandolins, and portrait posters of female musicians" (69), their room is a social space for casual gatherings, allowing a fluid flow of Koreans in and out. The characters play a card game, spending time together in ways unrelated to political objectives. In contrast to this openness, Mr. X's house is accessible only to selected members who devote themselves to studying Chinese or to holding meetings to plan activities for Korean exile groups. Because of its exclusivity, the room becomes a site of heightened curiosity and suspicion from those outside its walls, underscoring the tension that the need for political secrecy generates.

In those underground settings—hidden from potential surveillance within the concession area—the characters are depicted as keeping a low profile and remaining isolated from the city environment. The physical distance from others, coupled with the exclusivity of

the Korean exile group in hiding, concurs with the external conditions in which direct censorship did not occur during the serialization of the Shanghai episodes. Within the hideout in the text—also passing the censorial review outside it—the Shanghai episodes unfold, revealing the characters’ visions for the nation’s future. In this way, the setting of a small room is used as a narrative strategy to convey the censored imaginaries surrounding Korean socialists’ political engagement.

As an example, Mr. X’s room functions as a hideout from which missions for national independence are planned and operated. The novella illuminates how the imagination of the Korean nation and a world beyond it takes place within the spatial confines of the hideout. Mr. X’s room is depicted as decorated only with framed items, such as a color map of Chosŏn (Korea) and a document titled “XX” (39). The obscured words beneath overlapping marks appear to refer to a two-syllable Korean term such as “independence” or “liberation.” These objects crystallize a national mission while simultaneously opening it toward broader ideological and intellectual engagement with the colonial system. Characters committed to patriotic aspirations are depicted encountering publications officially banned, implying that the pursuit of national independence is inseparable from transnational circuits of political knowledge and practices across colonies.

Mr. X’s house drew attention from outside, making it unsuitable for conducting secret work privately. Members grew watchful because of rumors that strangers occasionally visited the area. Some of them rented a house in a dimly lit town in China. Their responsibility was to collect all unofficially published pamphlets and newspapers from Korea and Japan. They spent several days immersed in books, having only a few dumplings for their late dinner (84).

The hideouts extend ideologically through textual materials that connect them to circuits of information within and beyond the Japanese empire. Unofficial flyers imported from Korea and Japan, as noted above, are collected with the implied purpose of accessing information about conditions in Korea that official channels are designed to suppress. The books the members read are unspecified, but they suggest socialist thought and political studies. Similarly, Kim's room becomes increasingly cluttered with written materials that would be confiscated if found. Kim improves his Russian by studying newly published socialist texts, including Marx's *Capital*, thereby expanding his intellectual engagement across both language and ideology (123). The concealed office is depicted as overflowing with manuscripts and publications, thereby foregrounding the circulation of socialist ideas as a form of shared knowledge among the characters. Together, these documents materialize an unrecorded flow of information about the colonial condition moving between the Japanese Empire and China.

The novella condenses its portrayal of Shanghai into the confined space of a small room, which holds the potential to evoke imagined connections to the broader world. When the novella broadens its scope to encompass the world, this expansion pertains not only to geographical dimensions but also to an ideological reconstruction of the existing imperial system. Books, flyers, and pamphlets encourage us to understand how the characters began to envision a world interconnected through texts. As the characters accumulate various newspapers and unofficial pamphlets, storing them in Mr. X's home, they produce an increasing amount of documented material—including a chart and a map—that tracks the progress of workers' movements and provides data on factory workers' hours and wages in countries such as Ireland and India (84). This chart is derived from an analysis of statistical data and broadens the scope by incorporating additional colonized nations. The scenes

thereby illustrate how the characters formulate their critique of colonial rule and gesture toward a transnational world as an alternative to the imperial system. This expansion of the world map entails an acknowledgment of contemporaneity among nations under political suppression, a recognition obscured by the imperial system's dominance of the metropolitan center.

A small-room setting—where ideological currents converge through engagement with socialist thought and related materials—serves as the space where the characters prepare for their forthcoming journey beyond the room. The conception of regional affiliations arises when the fixed positionality of colonies within the empire transcends the nation's racial and territorial boundaries, fostering solidarities formed through regional encounters (Sinae Ha 2018, 162). The novella progresses to a point where the characters can implement their plans during their journey to the Soviet Union. Building on their investigations of knowledge and ideas, the characters begin their journeys by leaving their hideouts.

This expanded, interconnected world is already hinted at by Mr. X's travels and Pak's relocation, which take place in the late 1920s after their days hiding out in Shanghai. The protagonists' journey to the Soviet Union is implied as a geographical and ideological expansion toward the ideal socialist world, beginning with Mr. X's earlier movements in Southern China, including Guangdong and Hong Kong, and extending northward to Vladivostok and Nikolsky. The range of those movements was broad enough to connect Southern China to the Soviet Union, mapping a potential political movement toward socialist transformation. In a similar way, Pak also left his hideout in Shanghai, extending the scope of his movements. Departing from Shanghai and leaving his lover behind, Pak relocates to another city to begin his training at a military academy. The characters depart from hideouts in Shanghai to explore the broader region, ultimately reaching the Soviet Union, where they hope to achieve national independence through a socialist revolution. During their journey,

the world beyond the hideouts in Shanghai is intended to serve as a stage for applying and practicing the ideological reconstruction of the imperial system.

Aligned with his colleagues leaving the hideout, Kim also begins his new journey to the Soviet Union. Notably, the episode focusing on Kim's travel features travelogue-style narration, which is rarely found in previous episodes. The third part of the novella, focusing on the protagonists' trip to the Soviet Union, shifts in tone by offering detailed descriptions of Soviet society through the characters' participation in socialist youth conventions. While Shanghai serves as a refuge for preparing for a future revolution, Moscow is suggested as an ideal model of a socialist state. Passing through Inner Mongolia, the Korean youth group led by Kim crosses the land border into the Soviet Union, where they attend the convention and begin their field trip to the historical monuments of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Episodes depicting travel to the Soviet Union differ from other sections of the novella to the extent to which they explicitly reference individuals and institutions associated with socialist movements. The final episode of the trip to Moscow highlights the traveler's ability to move freely and reflect on their observations in a new place. The following scene reflects a travelogue-style narration.

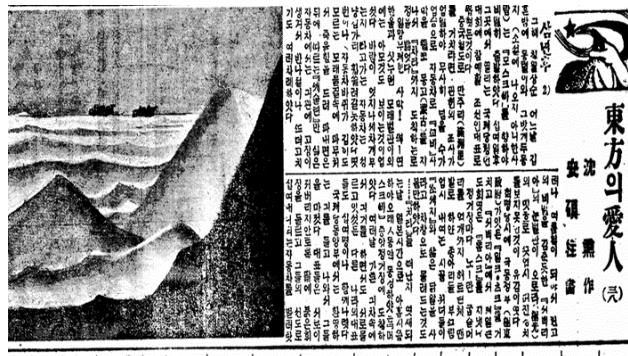
The train, which had been traveling at full speed, slowed as it approached Baikal Lake, known for its scenic beauty. Woods, reaching almost to the sky, cast their upside-down shadows onto the surface of the blue lake, which is so transparent that it reveals a school of fish. A few antique sailboats can be seen passing the horizon. I regret missing a winter scene in which the snow-covered fields of Siberia unfold endlessly beneath the aurora (127).

The travelogue style is evident in the narration of what the characters saw en route, particularly in the depiction of landscapes. Looking through train windows, travelers and passengers become observers. In this way, the novella shows the world that Kim encounters and experiences after leaving his hideout in Shanghai, through his observing perspective, which conveys more details and descriptions of the ideal socialist world. What they anticipated and hoped to envision in colonized nations is depicted as a possible reality they witnessed in the Soviet Union.

The travelers take their time to fully enjoy the scenery. The depiction of the scenery at Lake Baikal evokes a diary in which travelers primarily record their emotions and thoughts during their journeys. The depiction of Moscow presents an idealized view of the socialist state. Kim is portrayed as gaining educational experience by visiting institutions such as the Department of Labor, the Peasant Museum, and the state-owned store. He is said to have uncovered a remarkable accomplishment of the Soviet government through its dedication in the years following the revolution. He is so enthusiastic that he even copies statistical charts to summarize the projects undertaken after the revolution (129-130). In a reporting tone that recounts what the characters learn and observe during the trip, the illustration of Moscow conveys a sense of both direct and indirect experience of the socialist state, which was supposed to exist only as an abstract ideal. The shift in narration might have revealed the author's aspiration to visit, experience, or at least imagine the idealized Soviet Union within the text. The novella in the third part attempts to transition from the idealized future dreamed of in the Shanghai hideout to the real society to explore and observe.

At the point where the account of the Korean exile's journey had to be suspended, we still have two remaining traces to consider what an alternative world might have been imagined. On the one hand, the novella leaves us a question about what an ideal socialist world looks like. The phrase "Lover of the East" in the title is interpreted as a reference to

socialism, which was conceived as a force capable of ushering in an emancipated future for oppressed Asian nations. This world is depicted as the setting of the wedding ceremony of Kim Tongnyŏl and Kang Sejŏng, where the Korean national flag is displayed alongside multicolored flags representing all nations (106), while exiles across Korea, China, and the Soviet Union collectively sing “The International,” a rallying anthem advocating the unity of workers and the oppressed worldwide (108). This international arena presumably encompasses a broader sphere, including China and the Soviet Union, within the framework of socialist solidarity.



Picture 2: Illustration of the Gobi Desert, *Chosŏn Ilbo*, 9 December 1930 p.4

On the other hand, these efforts to seek the world's emancipation leave us with an unresolved question about how the East is intended to be depicted in literature. Due to the censorship, we are unable to get a complete picture; the illustration of the Gobi Desert remains a trace of the potential to reconstruct the East beyond the Japanese Empire. This phenomenon clearly transpires alongside the border crossings of colonial Koreans between Korea, Shanghai, and Moscow, thereby situating the Korean nation within the broader East Asian context. The proposed route connecting these locations is intended to extend beyond the territory of the Japanese Empire, which includes the Japanese archipelago, Korea,

Taiwan, and Manchuria. The novella might deepen the meaning of "route" beyond the geographical and ideological center of the Japanese empire—illustrated by the Gobi Desert via Mongolia—through which the characters continue their prohibited journey to Chita, Irkutsk, and Tomsk in Russia. However, a more comprehensive portrayal of an alternative conception of the East was postponed. Owing to censorship of the denouement, it remains unclear which world the novella ultimately presents as an ideological alternative. The novel ceases to explore the world once its scope surpasses the defined boundaries of representation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Sim Hun's "Lover of the East" in terms of its representation of Shanghai as a symbolic refuge for Korean socialist exiles and of Moscow, in the Soviet Union, as an idealized socialist state. By outlining the censorship system in colonial Korea in the late 1920s, the text demonstrates that the question of how to represent China as the destination for Korean socialists in exile was important to both censorial authorities and the author. Straddling two images of a rebellious and revolutionary world, the novella develops a narrative about censored representations of Korean exiles and their sites of visitation, employing a strategy to convey the exiles' revolutionary journey beyond the Japanese Empire.

Within the bounds of permissible representation, the novella portrays Shanghai as a "revolutionary" place for Korean exiles. A setting of small rooms—used as hideouts—emerges from the competition between the desire to express political fervor and the attempt to censor it. Rather than providing detailed accounts of concrete events related to socialist revolutionary reforms in Shanghai, the novella establishes the hideout's setting to undermine the censorial authorities' suspicions of ideological commitment in the city and to serve as a

space that prompts the characters to engage with a broader world. The hideout room, concealed within a mysterious, clandestine Shanghai, is mobilized to envision a world ideologically and geographically alternative to imperial rule.

The novella hints at a broader, transnational vision. Ideological and intellectual explorations of socialist ideas in a hidden room are suggested to be part of the process of connecting with the outside world. On their way from Shanghai to Moscow, the characters expand their scope of movement not only geographically but also ideologically, as they anticipate implementing plans to form networks of colonized nations and envision an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist future. The characters' final route to Moscow, linking Shanghai, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union, hints at another "East" beyond the Japanese Empire's territory. Exploring its own path under Japanese censorship regulations, the novella highlights Shanghai as a key setting for reflecting on a connected future, even within the underground hideout.

Their continued journey to Moscow reveals the novella's interest in imagining what a revolutionary world could look like for colonized Koreans. At this moment, the anxiety of the colonial regime lay in encounters that exceeded imperial frontiers. The narrative thus leaves an unfinished but suggestive trace of the exilic imagination—an aspiration to connect with a world foreclosed by censorship. "The Lover of the East" not only reflects the limits of representation under colonial censorship but also illuminates the literary strategies used to imagine revolutionary geographies beyond the Japanese Empire.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined four colonial Korean writers who resided in Shanghai during the colonial period, exploring how they perceived China not as a fixed political entity (China as a nation-state) but as a specific region for imagining transnational and transregional connections. Moving beyond a comparative framework that treats Korea and China as equivalent units, my aim has been to draw attention to how China, as a location, or site, was incorporated into colonial Korean writers' representations of the boundaries of a nation, empire, and East Asia. This dissertation argued that, through this approach, colonial Korean short stories set in China experimented with different forms of transnational and transregional connections, rethinking a nation-state system that was presumed to be shaped solely by the relationship with the colonizer within the Japanese empire.

Each chapter examines how individual writers have considered these questions and various topics on how the Korean-Chinese transnational experience carves out space to rethink nation-centered perspectives. Chu Yosöp's "The Price of First Love" approaches this question by reconfiguring the language–nation community that underlies the modern nation-state. I argue that the story, by focusing on the impossibility of one-to-one translation across multiple languages in Shanghai as well as the impossibility of communication even within the presumed mother tongue in P'yöngyang, does not present China and Korea in a co-figurative relationship. Rather than depicting successful translation based on an assumption of unbridgeable and essential differences between China and Korea, the protagonist's experience in Shanghai is marked by failed translation: communication is mediated through a third language, interrupted, or characterized by misunderstanding. Likewise, the Korean-speaking community in P'yöngyang fails to produce transparent communication. The fragmented mutterings of a m

entally disturbed woman represent both the colonial reality in which Korea cannot exist as a coherent language–nation community and the psychological confusion, exhaustion, and melancholy experienced by the protagonist. In this way, the story suggests that the transnational experience between Shanghai and P'yŏngyang is not one of successful Korean–Chinese translation founded upon a self-evident language community, but rather an experience in which the very self-evidence of such a community collapses and becomes suspect. Consequently, the novel invites us to rethink transnational connections not through one-to-one Korean–Chinese linguistic exchange, but through the residual languages that emerge as interruption, murmuring, delay, and the intervention of a third language.

The second chapter reconsiders the image of the Korean government in exile community through two of Kim Kwangju's short stories. Existing depictions often imagine the Shanghai Korean Provisional Government as an appendix of the Korean peninsula—an isolated and self-contained enclave, resembling a diagram of one circle enclosed within another, that preserves the Korean language, the Korean nation, and a pure anti-Japanese nationalist spirit despite the constant circulation of people and goods within the Shanghai International Settlement. Kim's stories instead depict an exile government that is collapsing and fragmenting. This process is driven by the constant movement of migrant workers and vagabonds into and out of the Korean community in Shanghai. "The Elderly Man with Long Hair" examines how the monstrous and mysterious wandering life of an elderly Korean man, who once participated in the independence movement in Northeast China but ultimately survives as a vagabond in Shanghai, challenges the unified political goals of the Korean exile politicians. The unknowability embedded in his wandering unsettles the collective cohesion of the exile political community, which claims a clear political ideology and unwavering nationalist commitment. His exposure of the vanity and hypocrisy of the exile community is grounded in his own life of wandering, yet he ultimately suffers an unjust death and is

permanently excluded from that community. Although his life ends with his death, the story demonstrates that his unidentifiable and veiled trajectory enables him to see through the illusion of unity constructed by the exile community.

“The Man from Beiping” portrays the Korean space in Shanghai as a site where successive and semi-coerced migrations intersect. The Korean protagonist moves from Korea to Manchuria, from Manchuria to Beijing, and from Beijing to Shanghai through an ongoing cycle of labor migration. Trapped in a continuous loop of movement for survival, he becomes exposed to violence and deception. By presenting Shanghai as the destination to which people have been continually displaced, the story suggests that the Korean town and community in Shanghai are not fixed entities but fluid and loosely constituted formations shaped by these cascading flows of migrant labor. Taken together, the similar trajectories of migrant workers and vagabonds in these two stories—with their multiple stops, non-linear routes, and involuntary mobility—suggest the impossibility of imagining either the bounded political space of the Provisional Government headquarters or a unified Korean community that populates that space.

The third chapter examines how political solidarity across nations is imagined through Ryu Sŏ’s “The Sea of Lament.” Movements such as East Asian anarchist solidarity are often understood as associations in which Korean, Chinese, and Japanese anarchists cooperate across national boundaries for the liberation of oppressed peoples. Such a framework still presupposes distinct national units, imagining solidarity as a one-plus-one association between Koreans and Chinese. In contrast, the Korean–Chinese protagonist of Ryu’s story, Yi Ch’angsŏn envisions not an association but a merged utopian village in Northeast China. The novel explores how a space of coexistence and co-thriving can be carved out within the region’s multiethnic environment. Rather than representing either the merger or the dissolution of Korean and Chinese identities, this vision projects an alternative regional imagination shaped by the anarchist ideal of liberation from all forms of oppression.

The final chapter analyzes Sim Hun's "Lover of the East," arguing that the novel presents Shanghai as a hideout for Korean socialist travelers—a space where they imagine and prepare for a revolutionary East distinct from the Japanese Empire. Rather than comparing Korea and China as separate nations, the chapter examines how Korean socialists thought about China in order to reimagine the East and expand their geographical and ideological horizons. I read this relationship as one in which Korea mediates China. Under Japanese colonial censorship, which constrained representations of anti-Japanese resistance, anti-colonial struggle, and the revolutionary Soviet Union in colonial Korean fiction, the novel employs the space of Shanghai to reveal clandestine and covert practices through which visions of liberation were continually imagined and prepared.

The relationships among Korea, Shanghai, the Japanese Empire, and the Soviet Union revealed in this novel are fundamentally opposed to schematic one-to-one national relationships. Shanghai disrupts the seemingly fixed Korea–Japanese Empire relationship by creating a third relational space that destabilizes its coherence. At the same time, it establishes a transregional connection linking Korea, Shanghai, and the Soviet Union, allowing the East to be reimaged as an alternative to the Japanese imperial order. Through Shanghai, the novel ultimately offers a vision of East Asia as a multiplicity of anti-imperial regional connections that exceeds the binary framework of colonizer and colonized.

Throughout my exploration of fictions by four different writers, I have aimed to highlight the various perspectives and interests these writers had regarding China as a counter-nation, an overseas place outside the Japanese Empire, and a site for envisioning an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist future. Their attempts are shown as either a rethinking of the concept of national unity—such as multilingual translation in Shanghai and mother-tongue communication in the hometown for Chu Yosöp, or the Korean exile government and Korean enclave in Shanghai for Kim Kwangju—or as experiments that envision connections between

nations, aiming to anticipate transregional affiliations (such as the Korean-Chinese anarchist village in Northeast China for Ryu Sŏ and the alternative and revolutionary East for Sim Hun). These are suggested as examples that demonstrate how the concepts of the nation and the East Asian region can be newly imagined by thinking through China and writing in Chinese space.

Questions for future research remain. First, this study leaves several theoretical tasks for future research concerning the experiences and worldviews of Korean exile writers in Shanghai. Beyond introducing the works of these previously understudied writers, further discussion is needed to theorize their distinctive position as exiles who lived beyond the territorial boundaries of the Japanese Empire. How should their position be conceptualized? In what ways does it differ from that of traveling Western imperialists or modernist writers who journeyed abroad in pursuit of artistic modernity? Conversely, how do these writers-in-exile differ from figures such as refugees or nomads whose movements were primarily defined by forced displacement from their homelands? A theoretical engagement with the historical condition of colonial Korean writers should also examine how their particular position reshaped their understandings of the world and reconfigured their geopolitical imaginaries of the nation, the region, and East Asia. Such an inquiry requires closer attention to the multiple ways in which experiences of overseas, exiled, and foreign spaces transformed their perceptions of the world.

A second theoretical task is to further develop a critique of the co-figured dyads—such as colony/colonizer and East/West—that have been organized around the master–subject relationship. Rather than explaining colonial Korea solely through its privileged relationship with Japan as the dominant Other, this dissertation attempted to introduce China as a third term, thereby constructing a ternary framework. The significance of this intervention, however, should extend beyond merely adding another node or entity to an existing analytical

model. Instead, the inclusion of China should demonstrate how the empire–colony framework itself can be questioned, revealing communities, networks, and routes of mobility that have remained obscured by that binary structure. More broadly, future work might explore how this ternary configuration unsettles the dialectical relationship between master and subject that lies at the center of postcolonial theory and opens up alternative ways of conceptualizing colonial relations.

Although each chapter of this dissertation examines a distinct aspect of Korean lives in China, further consideration is needed regarding the ways these chapters may be understood as parts of a larger, interconnected argument. Korean students in Shanghai, members of the Provisional Government, migrant workers, and revolutionaries occupied different social positions and lived under different material conditions, yet they all inhabited and engaged with the urban space of Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s. One possible direction for future research is to investigate these diverse migrant and exile experiences through the shared framework of Shanghai’s spatial modernity. Such a project would benefit from being situated alongside studies of the Shanghai International Settlement that emphasize the circulation of people, goods, and capital, as well as the city’s internationalism, modernity, and urbanism.

Finally, while this dissertation examines four Korean writers who traveled to China, the literary corpus is spatially unbalanced, consisting of three works set in Shanghai and only one set in Manchuria. More importantly, Shanghai and Manchuria require distinct analytical approaches, a difference that this dissertation has not fully developed. Future research should provide a more nuanced comparison between these two spaces by examining the differences between treaty-port and borderland environments, between socialist-anarchist movements and armed independence struggles, and between the varying degrees and forms of Japanese imperial expansion experienced in Shanghai and Manchuria.

Overall, this dissertation has aimed to contribute to expanding the field of modern Korean literary studies. First, I have critiqued Japan's apparent dominance in constructing colonial Korean literature. Scholars of modern Korean literature have primarily discussed the relationship between Japan, the colonizer, and Korea, its colony. In emphasizing the obvious dissemination of modern literature from Japan to Korea, they have paid less attention to the potential influence of other languages and cultures. This dyadic analysis narrowly assumes that modern Korean literature emerged solely by assimilating Western literary models through Japan. In critiquing this explanation of the top-down flow of the modern genre from the imperial center to the peripheral colony, I have aspired to create a space in which colonial Korean literature was broadly anchored in transregional connections beyond the Japanese empire.

My research has also aimed to broaden the understanding of sociological and historical foundations for modern Korean literature. On the one hand, the dissertation expands the scope of the geography where Korean literature was produced outside the Korean peninsula. While discovering and analyzing relevant texts, I have examined how Korean writers' experiences in China and their interaction with Chinese literary and political scenes gave rise to narratives. In my view, the works of fiction, reportage, and criticism by these authors and others may provoke a revitalized comparative study of Korean and Chinese literatures, a field which has not been widely recognized. Beyond delving into materials rarely mentioned, my hope is that this dissertation will provide a perspective toward understanding literature written by Koreans in the diaspora. Rather than subsuming targeted texts into the domain of national literature, which presumes a common national desire and traditions regardless of shifts in the milieu, I propose to consider Korean literature as constantly evolving into the question of the conditions of the nation, colonial system, and borderlands in East Asia.

This consideration naturally gives rise to the need for critical thinking from the perspective of North American or Anglophone academics of East Asia, encouraging an ongoing inquiry into frameworks adequate to the study of particular localities. Scholars of East Asian studies, along with many others, have critiqued the positional separation of the West, as the knower, from the Rest, as its object of knowledge, and the perception of an unbridgeable difference that results. Critical of the knower's power to impose a fixed identity of areas in the non-Western world, I propose that the world should not stand for transparency that dismisses all specificities and differences. Refuting the understanding of a peripheral local as a static national unit, presumably always bound to the unified territory and people, my research indicates that the purportedly assumed Rest exists as vibrantly intersecting with connections to other localities. I expect that colonial Korean literature set in China demonstrates that locals from the Rest, far from tamely occupying their assigned positions and identities, constantly engender expanding relationalities with different languages, cultures, and ideologies.

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