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目 录

(总第212期)

二〇一七年第三期

现当代文论与批评

- 文学理论：全球化时代的民族性 南 帆(6)
“十七年”时期的笔名发表与当代文学批评生态 寇鹏程(17)
二十世纪九十年代以来香港文学文化身份认同研究批判
——以本土性与中国性的内在矛盾为核心 徐诗颖(29)
论白先勇的“昆曲新美学” 丁 盛(37)

古代文论与古代文学的理论研究

- 诗书画“三绝”的新古典范式
——赵孟頫文艺思想的三种面相 张 毅(44)
“临川四梦”说的来由与《牡丹亭》的深层意蕴 康保成 陈燕芳(53)
论明清小说书名所体现的文学观念 程国赋(66)
“吴江派”与“临川派”之构建与检讨
——以民国时期戏曲史著为考察对象 程华平(78)
从“诗品”到“曲品”：论吕天成、祁彪佳的曲品批评 汪 超(88)
“重拙大”源于书论说
——晚清词学转向的文化与文学史背景分析 姜荣刚(95)

西方文论与批评

- The Invention of “Japanese” Literature in Colonial Korea, or How Shameless Literary Engagement Could Be under Colonial Conditions Yoshiaki Mihara(108)
论多勒泽尔的文学虚构与可能世界理论 张 瑜(130)
诗人天职与生态伦理
——海德格尔《诗人何为》重读 赵奎英(141)

超越“语-图”之辩

——论 T. J. 克拉克《瞥见死神》的写作试验 诸葛沂 (149)

经验主义、感官与美学的现代性

——中世纪美学视野下的博克《崇高与美》 陈 辰 (156)

美学与文化研究

殷商乐钟命名·乐悬概念体系·乐钟观念定位

——试论青铜乐钟的三个问题 张 法 (164)

触觉文化还是听觉文化：也谈视觉文化之后 刘连杰 (172)

艺术的美学体制及其政治维度的构建

——雅克·朗西埃美学思想考察 郑海婷 (182)

专题：德勒兹与文论

生成、强度与贯通性的沟通：德勒兹与道家思想的跨文化对话 姜丹丹 (187)

思想即是折曲：德勒兹的巴洛克问题 杨凯麟 (199)

事件文学理论探微

——“理论之后”反思文学研究的重建 尹 晶 (209)

Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art

Volume 39 No. 3, 2017

Contents

Modern and Contemporary Literary Theory and Criticism

- Nan Fan. Literary Theory: Nationality in an Age of Globalization (6)
- Kou Pengcheng. Pen Names in the “Seventeen Years Period” and the Ecology of Contemporary Chinese
Literary Criticism (17)
- Xu Shiyong. A Critique of Studies of the Cultural Identity of Hong Kong Literature since the 1990s: the
Case of Inherent Contradiction between Nativeness and Chineseness (29)
- Ding Sheng. Pai Hsien-yung’s New Aesthetics of *Kunqu* Opera (37)

Classical Literary Theory and Criticism

- Zhang Yi. The Perfect Trinity of Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting as a Neo-Classicist Paradigm in
Zhao Mengfu: the Three Aspects of Zhao Meng-Fu’s Thought on Literature and Art (44)
- Kang Baocheng, and Chen Yanfang. The Origin of the Title “the Four Dreams of Linchuan” and the
Deep Significance of *The Peony Pavilion* (53)
- Cheng Guofu. The Literary Concepts through Novel Titles of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (66)
- Cheng Huaping. The Construction and Review of the Wujiang School and Linchuan School: A Study
of the History Research Books of Traditional Chinese Theatre in the Republic of China (78)
- Wang Chao. From “Poetry Critique” to “Drama Critique”: Lü Tiancheng and Qi Biaoja’s Critique of
Drama (88)
- Jiang Ronggang. The Origination of “Zhong Zhuo Da” from Calligraphy Critique: the Cultural and
Literary Historical Background of the Turn of *Ci*-poetry Criticism in the Late Qing Dynasty (95)

Western Literary Theory and Criticism

- Yoshiaki Mihara. The Invention of “Japanese” Literature in Colonial Korea, or How Shameless Literary Engagement Could Be under Colonial Conditions (108)
- Zhang Yu. Lubomir Dolezel’s Literature Fiction and Possible Worlds Theory (130)
- Zhao Kuiying. “What Are Poets for” and Ecological Ethics (141)
- Zhuge Yi. Transcending the “Word-Image” Debate; the Writing Experiment of T. J. Clark’s *The Sight of Death* (149)
- Chen Chen. Empiricism, Sense and Modernity of Aesthetics; Edmund Burke’s *The Sublime and Beautiful* from the Viewpoint of Medieval Aesthetics (156)

Aesthetics and Cultural Studies

- Zhang Fa. The Naming of Bronze Bells in the Shang Dynasty; the Concept System of *Yuxuan*; Bronze Bells’ Definition; Three Issues about the Bronze Bell (164)
- Liu Lianjie. Tactile Culture or Auditory Culture; A Different Future of the Post-Visual Culture (172)
- Zheng Haiting. The Aesthetic Regime of Art and the Construction of Its Politics; on Jacques Rancière’s Aesthetic Thoughts (182)

Highlight: Deleuze and Literary Theory

- Jiang Dandan. Becoming, Intensity and Transversal Communication; the Cross-cultural Dialogue between Deleuze’s Thoughts and Taoist Thoughts (187)
- Yang Kailin. Thinking is Foldng; Deleuze’s Problematique of the Baroque (199)
- Yin Jing. A Probe into the Theory of Event Literature; Reflections on the Reconstruction of Literary Studies from the Perspective of “After Theory” (209)

The Invention of “Japanese” Literature in Colonial Korea, or How Shameless Literary Engagement Could Be under Colonial Conditions

Yoshiaki Mihara

Abstract: This is the full-paper version of the 338th Si-Mian Lecture delivered at ECNU on March 17, 2017, which focuses on the “shameless” act of intellectual collaboration committed by Ch’oe Chaes ō(崔載瑞), an eminent scholar of English literature and criticism as well as a prominent “pro-Japanese” intellectual in Colonial Korea, who encouraged Korean writers to contribute to Japanese “*kokumin bungaku*” [national literature] by writing in the Japanese language. Rather than simply denouncing him as a “shameless” traitor, however, the author of this article tries to salvage the *potentially* postcolonial problematics he has posed in his *theoretical* struggle as regards possible literary engagement under colonial conditions while, at the same time, critically analyzing how his universalistic, Order-obsessed Theory *logically* reaches the wrongheaded conclusion that “resistance” to the Imperial Order is futile whereas “assimilation” promises a fertile ground for colonial literature to survive and even thrive. In the course of analysis, particular attention is drawn to Ch’oe Chaes ō’s rather uncanny employment of Scottish analogy and T. S. Eliot’s idea of “Tradition” in order to *theoretically* justify his call for necessary collaboration, so that it be suggested that this particular case of a failed colonial intellectual is not exceptional but indeed exemplary of the predicaments that intellectuals must face in their public life under colonial conditions (hence, by extension, Modernity in general). Finally, brief and scattered speculations are offered on the concepts of “shame of being human” and “gray zone” (Primo Levi) as fundamental to the human condition regulated by Empire / Modernity.

Keywords: invention of “national” literature; intellectual collaboration; Universalism and Universality; Tradition (T. S. Eliot); postcolonial theory; shame

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标题: 朝鲜日治时期“日本”文学的发明: 殖民条件下文学活动何以无耻

摘要: 该文基于2017年3月17日华东师范大学思勉讲座第338期的演讲, 着重探讨朝鲜日治时期英国文学与批评著名学者、“亲日”知识分子崔载瑞“无耻”的文学行为。崔载瑞鼓动朝鲜作家用日文写作, 以推动日本的“民族文学”。本文主旨并不在贬斥崔氏之叛徒行为, 而是要解决他的关于殖民条件下的文学活动的理论迷茫所引出的后殖民时代的问题域, 同时, 分析其全球主义的、强调秩序的理论如何在逻辑上得出这一错误结论: 反抗帝国秩序只会徒劳无功, 而朝日融合则能提供殖民文学生存甚至繁荣的土壤。崔载瑞援引苏格兰之例以及T. S. 艾略特的“传统”说以从理论上为其“知识分子合作说”辩护, 对此, 本文在分析过程中特别关注。崔载瑞虽然是个案, 但亦具代表性, 他诠释了在殖民条件下(推而广之即现代性)知识分子在其公共生活中面临的种种困境。最后, 论文简要呈现了作者对与帝国/现代性密切相关的“羞于为人”与莱维的“灰色地带”概念的思考。

关键词:“民族”的发明; 知识分子合作; 全球主义与普遍性; 传统(T. S. 艾略特); 后殖民理论; 羞耻

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This year 2017 celebrates the 100th anniversary of a Korean “national” poet, Yun Dongju [尹东柱]. He was born in 1917 in Buk-Kando [北間島] in Manchuria, today’s Longjin in Jilin Province [吉林省龍井] in Northeast China, and attended Soongsil Middle School [崇実中学校] in Pyongyang briefly till it underwent difficulties with the Japanese colonial authorities because the Protestant school refused to comply with the enforced collective Shinto-shrine worship.^① He then went to Yeonhui Technical School [延禧専門学校], today’s Yonsei University, in Seoul, and after graduation he left the “Peninsula”^② for the “Mainland” (i. e., Japan) to pursue a university degree in English Literature. After briefly sojourning at Rikkyo University [立教大学] in Tokyo, he transferred to Doshisha University [同志社大学] in Kyoto in October 1942, where he was arrested as a “thought criminal” in the following year and was eventually sent to Fukuoka Prison. On February 16th 1945, just half a year before the liberation of his home country, he died in prison-aged 27.

In his lifetime, he was just an unnamed student and didn’t publish a single book of poetry, merely leaving a personal collection of poems mostly written in his notebook, but when his poems were published in Korea after the liberation, he was immediately acclaimed as a “resistance” poet, and up to this day he is one of the most beloved poets in South Korea, where virtually everyone learns his famous poem, “Foreword” [「序詩」], by heart:

I wish to have not a taint of shame
Towards Heaven till the day I die
[……]

Yun Dongju’s life and poetry seem too pure and

righteous to have any “taint of shame”- indeed, it’s so pure that the title of a “resistance” poet does not appear quite applicable to him, since in his writings there cannot be found any overt reference to such mundane issues as the current political affairs. Perhaps the single “evidence” of his “resistance” is the simple fact that he never used any language but his mother tongue till the day he died.^③

The protagonist of today’s talk, Ch’oe Chaes ō (崔載瑞 1908—1964), is, in a sense, an anti-hero, diametrically opposite to Yun Dongju. In the same month as Yun Dongju wrote the above poem (Nov. 1941), Ch’oe Chaes ō as *the* leading intellectual in Colonial Korea commenced “the only cultural journal in the Peninsula”, named *Kokumin Bungaku* (『国民文学』1941. 11 ~ 1945. 5)- a journal that was to promote Korean writers’ critical and creative writings *in the Japanese language*. While Yun Dongju is crowned with glory as a “resistance” poet and martyr because he wrote only in Korean and, while in prison, was forced by the Japanese police to translate his poems into Japanese only to get them destroyed, Ch’oe Chaes ō is disgraced as a “traitor” because he encouraged his fellow Koreans to write in Japanese. If Yun Dongju, an aspiring poet who was wholly unknown in his lifetime, has become a “national” poet, Ch’oe Chaes ō, the best-known intellectual at that time, naturally became a *persona non grata* in the “national” history right after the liberation. But today I’d like to let him re-enter through a backdoor, as it were, as a potentially “postcolonial” theorist *avant la lettre*, without minimizing his “shameful” act of collaboration with the Japanese Empire.

The Title —“Invention” of “national” literature

But before we actually bring Ch'oe Chaes ō up on stage, let me briefly comment on the title of this talk—what does it mean to talk about an “invention” of a “national” literature? If you are familiar with English studies, you probably know that the “Invention of English Literature” has been a hot topic for the past couple of decades in our academia. At first sight, you may find it difficult to understand why it ever becomes an issue- “Of course,” you may say, “English Literature was born- not invented- naturally among the English people.” Maybe so, but the issue here is the *institution* called “English Literature”, or English literary studies, and the question is when and where such an institution was invented. Then, you may say, “Oh, if you’re talking about the *institution* of English literary studies, then, yes, it was certainly invented some time in history by a group of English academics, probably Oxford or Cambridge dons [……]”—Wrong! Even the English Department of Tokyo University (from which I graduated) is older than that of either Oxford or Cambridge, where “Literature” meant only classical Greek and Latin so that English literature had long been regarded as not a proper subject of any academic interest. Then the question remains: When and where was “English Literature” *invented*, and for what purposes?

The path-breaking work in that field is Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989), which was originally written as her Ph. D. dissertation under Edward Said at Columbia University. In this work, Viswanathan has put forward a striking thesis, now generally agreed as compelling, that English Literature was actually invented in British India by the utilitarian officers of the East Indian Company. According to her study, English Literature was invented and introduced in the 19th century British India in order to “educate” (or “civilize”) Indian colonials into good British subjects, after they realized that the religious makeup of India was just

too complicated and indeed precarious to touch, so that christianizing the natives would only do grave harm to their colonial management and business from the utilitarian point of view. Here, English Literature came in as the best measure of persuading the natives that the British rulers were so culturally superior that any native, if they wish to escape from their state of barbarity, should willingly accept and imitate English culture by learning the canons of English literature, and even be thankful of being conquered by the people that produced Shakespeare and Dickens — hence, the title of Viswanathan’s book, “Masks of Conquest”. Her work has proved to be a great contribution to the then-emergent postcolonial studies, in which a kind of cultural emanation model (i. e., everything *emanated* from Europe to the rest of the world) is seriously questioned and almost everything (including “Europe” itself) has been *invented* through various, often violent, “contacts” with non-European worlds.^④

Not necessarily denying, but rather supplementing Viswanathan’s thesis, a group of Scottish scholars, led by Robert Crawford of St. Andrews, started to insist on the “Scottish Invention of English Literature”.^⑤ I certainly should not go into details of their argument here, but, as you will see, this Scottish case bears a rather significant resemblance to our topic today, so let me summarize very roughly several points of this thesis. As a result of the Acts of Union between English and Scottish parliaments (hence, peoples) in 1707, the “United Kingdom of Great Britain” was virtually born, and one of its practical as well as philosophical consequences was the so-called “Scottish Enlightenment”, which flourished in the 18th century with such great thinkers as David Hume and Adam Smith. And, as an important part of this cultural movement, “English Literature” as an institution was born as a necessary tool for the Scottish people to participate in the “civilization”- in fact, it is not only the kid of metropolitan culture London had to offer that the Scottish people wanted to assimilate, but the immense wealth of the rapidly growing British

Empire. Let me quote a passage from Crawford:

The growing wish for a ‘pure’ English in eighteenth-century Scotland was not an anti-Scottish gesture, but a pro-British one[. . .] Such figures were pro-British because they were pro-Scottish; it was in the promise of ‘Britain’ that they saw the richest future for a Scotland which would soon ‘improve’. Linguistic ‘improvement’ would be a major step towards that. (*Devolving* 18)

It is well known that “improvement” was a keyword among the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment, for whom mastering the hegemonic (or even “imperial”) English language was far from an act of “treason” against the Scottish nation, but indeed a way of “improvement” from the universalistic perspective they generally shared, and, possibly, it was even regarded as patriotic. What is significant here is that it was not a simple assimilation-as-subjugation, but that they did so by strategically shifting the emphasis from “English” to “British”, so that they could appeal to the higher synthesis of “British” (or, indeed, the rapidly growing “British Empire”), sublating the antagonism between “English” and “Scottish”, rather than accepting the unequal power relationship. Please keep in mind this highly suggestive Scottish case, as it will bear great significance in my following argument. For now, let me give you just one anecdote before we move on to the main topic. Do you know who the very first lecturer of English Literature was in the world history? It was, according to Crawford, a Scottish man named Adam Smith, who gave a lecture course in English Literature in Edinburgh in 1748. Of course, there are thousands of Adam Smiths, but this one is, believe it or not, *that* Adam Smith, whom we all know as the “father of classical economics”. At first sight, it seems odd to have the father of classical economics and the father of English Literature in one person (and this person is

not “English”!), but if you look at his life and ideas, there is certainly a definite line of coherence: As a brilliant boy born in the post-Union Scotland, Adam Smith acquired scholarship to study at Oxford, and returned to Scotland as an enlightened intellectual. For him, to become “British” by speaking “proper” English and contribute to the British rule over the world on the one hand and to become an abstract economic agent by understanding the market economy properly and contribute to the “wealth of the Nation (i. e., the Empire)” on the other are one and the same “improvement” and hence a very “moral” attitude.

Ch’oe Chaes ō- the Intellectual Universalist

Let us now return from the Scottish detour and come to the protagonist of today’s talk. I am sure that nobody in this room has ever even heard of Ch’oe Chaes ō and there is good reason for that. Ch’oe Chaes ō would probably have been credited as the founder of modern literary criticism in Korea, only if he had not committed “pro-Japanese” activities during the colonial period. He was indeed a child of Japanese Imperial rule (1910—1945). Born into a wealthy Korean family two years before the Japan-Korea “Union” (which is, of course, nothing but Japanese annexation of Korea), he grew up reading Western literature through Japanese translation. He studied English Literature at Keijo [京城 = Seoul] Imperial University (the 6th of the Imperial Universities, the top of the hierarchy of Japanese educational system) and its graduate school. After a brief period of research in London, he was honored as the first graduate to be employed as a lecturer at his alma mater. Needless to say, he was one of the most successful cases of colonial Koreans, and he even left his mark on the “Japanese” academia.^⑥ But he soon quit the academic post- apparently because, as a Korean, he had little hope to get tenure- and launched a career as the most prominent literary critic in colonial Korea as advocate of the so-called “Intellectualist criticism” and editor of the major literary journal,

Inmun p'ŷ ōngnon (『人文評論』1939. 10 ~ 1941. 4), which he modeled after T. S. Eliot's prominent journal, *Criterion*.^⑦ Under the strong pressure of the ever-tightening assimilation policy implemented by the colonial government- the invasion of China was already at a deadlock and a war with the U. S. was imminent- it is not hard to imagine that Ch'oe Chaes ō read Eliot's "Last Words" in the final issue of the *Criterion* (Jan. 1939) most seriously, even personally: "For this immediate future, perhaps for a long way ahead, the continuity of culture may have to be maintained by a very small number of people indeed- and these not necessarily the best equipped with worldly advantages . . ." ("Last Words" 274). Albeit briefly, Ch'oe Chaes ō was successful in forming a Korean "phalanx"- a watchword of the *Criterion* group^⑧- composed of all the major literary and critical figures across the political spectrum (e. g., Im Hwa [林和], Yu Chino [俞鎮午], and Paek Ch' ōl [白鉄]) as well as the promising younger generation (e. g., S ō Insik [徐寅植] and Pak Ch'iu [朴致祐]), which may legitimately be called a colonial Korean version of the "Popular Front"- but, of course, with exclusively cultural emphasis. And yet, due to the scrap-and-build policy of the colonial government, all the existing journals were abolished, and Ch'oe Chaes ō was entrusted with the publication of "the only cultural journal in the Peninsula", named *Kokumin Bungaku* (『国民文学』1941. 11 ~ 1945. 5). As I will discuss presently, the catachresis involved in the Japanese word "*kokumin*" [国民]- which literally means "nation-state [*koku*] subjects [*min*]", but which can and must mean, when used by the assimilated Koreans, "imperial subjects"- is at the center of Ch'oe Chaes ō's *critical* wager and his ultimate "treason against the Korean *minjok* [民族 = race]". As he had been the sole dominant figure in the colonial Korean literary and cultural scenes towards the end of Japanese colonial rule, so was he, as a matter of course, obliterated from Korean history after the "liberation" (i. e., the demise of the Japanese Empire). From the liberation in 1945 till his death in 1964, his name was barely

remembered as a genuinely academic personality and non-political professor of English Literature who produced voluminous academic works in Korean- much like his contemporary New Critical pundits in the U. S.^⑨

As a late-comer of the Great Game of Imperialism, the Japanese rulers in Colonial Korea implemented unprecedentedly rapid and brutal assimilation policies, such as "*naisen ittai*" [内鮮一体, which literally means: "Japan and Korea as One Body"], "*sōshi kaimei*" [創氏改名, or forced adoption of Japanese-style names] and, needless to say, banning the use of the Korean language. In the face of losing their native language as well as their native names, every Korean intellectual had to take a stand- some insisted on "*tetteiteki ittairon*" [徹底の一体論 = "outright assimilation"- their slogan was to "produce a Japanese Prime Minister out of our Korean *minjok*"], and others flung themselves into the underground resistance movement. Ch'oe Chaes ō had a different strategy- a strategy that may be called "postcolonial" *avant la lettre*.

Since the very beginning of his academic career, Ch'oe Chaes ō has been a universalist. It is often argued that intellectuals like Ch'oe Chaes ō with their first-rate Western discipline (usually acquired through the Japanese Imperial education system) were trying to overcome the Japanese cultural domination by virtue of immediate access to the "universal" Western culture. As I have argued elsewhere,^⑩ it is this very obsession with universality- what the authors of *Éloge de la Créolité* call "the obsessional concern with the Universal"^⑪- that has trapped Ch'oe Chaes ō into a *theoretical* justification of his collaboration. His "intellectualist criticism" is, without doubt, fruit of his academic research in English literature and criticism- a kind of genealogical search for the "intellectual" elements inherent in Romanticism (e. g., "Limits of Poetry" (June 1931), "On Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*" (Nov. 1931), and "On Addison's Theory of Imagination" (March 1933)- all published in *The Bulletin of the Keijo Imperial University English Association*), as well as his keen

interest in the contemporary Anglo-American literary criticism (e. g. , “On Wyndham Lewis” (*Bulletin*, March 1933), “ Preservation of Literature ” (*Bulletin*, June 1933), “The Critical Thought of T. E. Hulme” (*Shisō* [『思想』],¹² Dec. 1934), “Current Critical Scenes in Britain” (*Kaizō* [『改造』],¹³ March 1936), “The Problem of Personality in Contemporary Criticism” (*Studies in English Literature*,¹⁴ Apr. 1936) and, as already mentioned, the Japanese translation of Irving Babbitt’s *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1939—1940))- he has published all those works in Japanese. Around the time he resigned from the lectureship at Keijo Imperial University in 1934 (still in his mid-20’s), he began to distinguish himself, rising in the ruins of Marxist as well as “nativist” literary criticisms, as the “Intellectualist” literary theorist in the Korean critical scenes by publishing numerous articles in Korean, such as “Construction of the Modern Intellectualist Literary Theory” (Aug. 1934), “Criticism and Science” (Sept. 1934), “The Mission of Korean Literature and Criticism” (Jan. 1935), and “On Satiric Literature, or a Way to Break the Deadlock of Current Korean Literature” (July 1935)- those essays were written for one of the major Korean daily newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo* [『朝鮮日報』]. This last essay in five installments is of particular interest, in that Ch’oe Chaes ō is directly engaged with the current issues, defining the “mission of criticism” as “presenting the direction of [national] literature and defending the zone of its creative activities” (II) and thus offering (intellectual) satire as a possible “breakthrough”- an odd amalgam of a moralist sense of crisis à la Irving Babbitt and the “destructive elements” of immoral satire à la Wyndham Lewis. Such oddness does, I submit, covertly but eloquently speak of the fate of colonial intellectuals. Read, for instance, the following reasoning for satire (“a kind of revenge”) to be a possible “breakthrough” to the current deadlock of Korean literature and criticism: “Even if one has lost everything in life, insofar as he possesses the power of intellect so as to anatomize his despair, expose its

vanity, and satirize its worthlessness, then he is still the master of himself” (IV; my translation [from Korean]). In a colonized society, Order always comes, in the form of executive orders, from the Imperial / Metropolitan center abroad, so that the colonial subjects cannot even set their land in order by themselves, so that all that the creative and/or critical *intellect* can do is to become “the master of himself” by radically satirizing himself in order to prove, rather desperately, that he is at least an *intellectual* agent capable of exercising “the power of intellect”. In that respect, “the zone of creative activities” is not simply a symbol, but the very last fortress they have to defend- so it seemed at least to Ch’oe Chaes ō the Intellectualist.

Ch’oe Chaes ō’s editorship of *Inmun p’y ōngnon* (1939.10 – 1941.4), modeled after T. S. Eliot’s *Criterion*, is such an attempt to “defend the zone of creative activities” in Korean literature, and, as briefly mentioned above, there is certainly a strong sense of what may legitimately be compared to the (cultural) “Popular Front” in Europe or the “phalanx” of the *Criterion* group. Korean literature may, as it were, be “the master of [it]self” at least on the pages of this journal- apparently without mediation of the Japanese Imperial rule- in the name of the universal “intellect”. However, it is, in a sense, an *imaginary* autonomy in the service of what Étienne Balibar calls “fictive universality”: “not the idea that the common nature of individuals is given or already there, but, rather, the fact that it is produced inasmuch as particular identities are relativized, and become mediations for the realization of a superior and more abstract goal” (*Politics* 157). Balibar also labels it “Hegelian universality”, in that what is at stake is a kind of Hegelian concerns with “the intrinsic relationship between the construction of *hegemony*, or *total ideology*, and *autonomous individuality*, or the *person*”. In this context, Ch’oe Chaes ō’s celebrated theory of satire may be understood as an attempted mediation between the satirist as an autonomous individual and his/her artwork as an intellectual Order-in-itself- without regard to the actual and

actually-regulatory Imperial Order. It then follows that, as this sort of generality that is disguised as universality tends to be “transcended” by, or “assimilated” to, a bigger or more powerful generality,¹⁵ so is Ch’oe Chaes ō’s theoretical universalism that aims to “defend the zone of creative activities” vulnerable to assimilation by the more powerful Imperial Order, because it is, after all, not a subversive “contact zone” but a subsumptive mediation between autonomous individuality and an *imaginary* intellectual Order. In fact, as the demise of the journal draws near, Ch’oe Chaes ō’s universalistic views are, slightly but significantly, getting tainted by the “logic of species” (i. e., generality). Read the following passage from his “Transformation of Literary Spirit”, the leading essay of the final issue of *Inmun p’y ōngnon* (April 1941):

As far as Literature is concerned, it is expected that the modern idea that an individual may contribute to cultural creativity solely by virtue of his unique talent is, whether it is true or not, no longer tolerated. It is as though the Olympiad in which cultural athletes of all nations gather to compete with their creativity had been closed down. And such creativity is now required to be backed up by a little more concrete and serious issues, such as the subsistence of *minjok* [“race” in Korean] and activities of *kokumin* [“national / imperial subject” in Japanese]. (9; my translation [from Korean])

The Singular-Universal scheme (“his unique talent”- “cultural creativity”) is clearly intercepted by the logic of Generality, or “species” (*minjok* and *kokumin*), although these generalities are still ambiguous, as “*minjok*” in this context still has a connotation of *Korean* race or nation, while “*kokumin*” clearly reflects the prevalent ideology of consolidation of the Japanese Imperial subjects.

Such a “turn” in theoretical standpoints (i. e., replacement of the Universal by downright Generality) requires “courage”, rather than “theory”. Ch’oe Chaes ō writes in his “Editor’s Prefatory Note” to the same issue:

The cause of the current doldrums of Korean literature is, of course, due to the state of emergency. However, we should not appeal to stop-gap measures for the sake of the current state of affairs [時局], but we must instead enhance the national / imperial [国家的] mission on the basis of Literature’s eternity. For that purpose, we need courage, rather than a shrewd theoretical inquiry- that is to say, we, too, need the kind of courage that is always necessary for those who leap over the gap and reach the height of new historical creativity. (3; my translation [from Korean])

As the universalistic Olympiad has been closed down, History now rules- and the Subject of this History is clearly “*kokka* [国家 = Nation-State]”, which is, in this context, the Japanese Imperial-Nation-State. With this rather pathetic pronouncement of “courage”, *Inmun p’y ōngnon* was abruptly shut down, and after half a year of preparation (i. e., negotiation with the colonial government), Ch’oe Chaes ō commenced the new and “only cultural journal in the Peninsula”, *Kokumin Bungaku* [『国民文学』*National = Imperial Literature*], in November 1941.

“*kokumin*” — Appropriation

Although, in retrospect, *Kokumin Bungaku* may be regarded as a downright propaganda machine of the colonial government ever since its inauguration, it should be noted that Ch’oe Chaes ō’s original plan was “4 Japanese issues and 8 Korean issues a year”. This plan of bilingual publication was, as a matter of course, soon abandoned, and

the journal became, indeed, nothing but a propaganda machine. Having said that, however, should we simply discard this colonial intellectual’s single-handed efforts as a wholly worthless, definitely damnable act of treason against his *minjok* [民族]? Was there any moment of subversion in his *excessive* investment in the word “*kokumin*” [国民]? That is to say, was there any potential of inventing/discovering a new *problematic* by deliberately *misreading*, hence *appropriating*, this prevalent Japanese word “*kokumin*”- a *critical* potentiality that may well be called “postcolonial” in our current theoretical language? In other words, when Ch’oe Chaes ō used the word “*kokumin*” repeatedly and almost compulsively, was it simply no different from what the “Mainland” Japanese would mean by the same word?

In the inaugural issue of *Kokumin Bungaku* (Nov. 1941), Ch’oe Chaes ō contributes a manifesto-style essay, “Requisites for *Kokumin Bungaku*”, the second paragraph of which reads as follows:

It is certainly not right to regard the term “*kokumin-teki*” [国民的 = adjective of “*kokumin*”] in an offhand manner, and yet, at the same time, we mustn’t take “*kokumin bungaku*” for too restricted a meaning. *Kokumin bungaku* is a great literature that is yet to be created by the hands of the whole *kokumin* [i. e., Japanese imperial nation that now includes colonial Koreans as members of “One Body”]. We don’t have to put up a fence and confine its significance. Especially, if one thinks that only a certain limited method and object of writing can make *kokumin bungaku*, it is, in fact, wrongheaded. *Kokumin bungaku* must needs uphold a high goal and retain its wide radius. We don’t have to forcibly limit its scope insofar as we keep the *kokumin-teki* backbone at the very center, do we? (34; my translation [from

Japanese])

At the very beginning, it is already apparent that Ch’oe Chaes ō’s aim is a deliberate (thus *performative*^⑩) maximal interpretation, or *misreading* in the sense of over-interpretation, of the term “*kokumin*”- in fact, all through this essay, he repeatedly emphasizes that not only “*kokumin bungaku*” but also “*kokumin*” itself is yet-to-be-created and shall be created by “us Koreans”- here, needless to say, the word “*kokumin*” borders on catachresis. From the point of view of the “Mainland” Japanese, “*kokumin*” belongs- has always belonged ever since the mythical past-exclusively to the Japanese *minzoku* [“race” in Japanese], and what the colonial subjects can hope to achieve at best is to become “almost the same, but not quite”^⑪ so that they may serve the Empire efficiently. On the other hand, Ch’oe Chaes ō’s *project* would potentially deconstruct such a “commonsensical” meaning of the word by constructing (or fabricating) the yet-to-come “*kokumin bungaku*” (hence “*kokumin*” itself) from the colonial periphery, so that, as Ch’oe Chaes ō wishfully predicts, it may be said in one or two hundred years that “*Kokumin bungaku* has been commenced in Keijo [Seoul]”- in other words, it is not the “native” Japanese but colonial Koreans who should *invent* a “Japanese” (national) literature to come.^⑫ It is therefore fair to maintain that Ch’oe Chaes ō’s “*kokumin bungaku*” project is *potentially* endowed with the moment of *epistemological break*-precisely in the sense that the postcolonial theory has made a clear break with the time-honored *problematic* of “national” literatures.

“*kokumin*” - Assimilation

However, Ch’oe Chaes ō fails in the end. It is as though his persistent obsession with Universality, Order and Intellect- hence, Theory- together with his unrivalled ability to produce exact and *transparent* translations of those complicated English and Japanese texts had prevented him from letting

actualized the potentially *critical* moments that would have taken the form of such subversive alternatives as *creolization*, *mis-reading*, and *mis-translation*- i. e., the “permanent parabasis”^⑩ or *resistance* to Theory. In this context, it is of great significance that, in “The Present Stage of Korean Literature” (Aug. 1942), which gives an overview of the “stages of renovation [革新]” of Korean literature up to the “present stage”^⑪ and is thus the single most important *theoretical* justification of his *tenkō* [転向^⑫], Ch’oe Chaes ō has chosen to translate T. S. Eliot’s celebrated theory of “Tradition” into transparent, authentic Japanese:

Let us consider what happens when a new literature is introduced into one literary Order. “The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervision of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new”^⑬. This is T. S. Eliot’s theory as regards the relationship between Tradition and the individual talent, but this is certainly true of our case, too. It must be a *shock* that Korean literature, in the form of *kokumin bungaku*, makes a new entry into Japanese literature. However, I sincerely believe, Japanese literature will not flick this *shock* off, but will instead embrace it so that the *whole* may recover its stability, form an even greater Tradition, and make use of this *shock* to propel its progress. (15 - 16; my translation [from Japanese])

T. S. Eliot’s theorization of the relationship

between “Tradition” and “the Individual Talent” is now *translated* (or *mis/read*) into that between “Imperial Literature” and “Colonial Literature”. When Eliot published this famous essay, he was actually an American living in London, who claimed his “European” cultural authority, authenticity, and even privilege over “native” Europeans themselves. Such a sense of the “true” cultural authority owned not by the natives but by the *metics* is now *transplanted* in Colonial Korea as the logic of assimilation. Ch’oe Chaes ō continues:

First of all, Japanese literature ought to extend its limits wider and uphold a higher ideal. In order to incorporate as its own the Korean poets and authors with different customs and pathos, Japanese literature must provide a much, much wider perspective. This is true in the case of Taiwan, and so it shall be in the case of Manchuria sooner or later. Besides, Japanese literature must always possess such a high, lively ideal that the freshly-assimilated *minzoku* [民族] may be able to fully realize its own creative abilities and, furthermore, to get its creative will stimulated. For that purpose, the Japanese State itself must firmly maintain its high morality, and, in that respect, it is, I believe, profoundly significant from a cultural point of view that General Koiso, in his inauguration speech as the Governor-General [of Colonial Korea], held “Moral Korea” high up as his goal. (16; my translation [from Japanese])

This is a desperate plea from the periphery, combined with a complex sense of superiority over the other lesser peripheries (such as Taiwan and Manchuria) as the closest to the Metropolitan center. There is no longer a *performative* potential in “*kokumin bungaku*” here- no trans-formative, trans-gressive, trans-culturating moment of the “contact zone” or “mimicry”, but merely a con-formative (i.

e, assimilationist) strategy to make the best of their closer-to-the-center status so as to gain an advantage over other lesser colonials and to secure its status as a more necessary member of the “*whole* existing order” [i. e., the Greater East Asian Empire]. Hence, his Theory no longer posits the Korean subject as “the master of himself”- which may be regarded as a kind of *ethical* attitude in the sense that the subject-*qua*-creative-agent sticks to its own *conatus*, albeit desperately and even tragi-farcically-but instead only appeals to the Master (its viceroy, General Koiso) for a “high morality” that would allow their active *subjection* to be valuable and even advantageous. Here one may also hear an echo of Eliot’s famous words in the same essay: “a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable” (*SW* 52 – 3).

Scottish analogy

It is in this context that Ch’oe Chaes ò brings up, rather abruptly, an analogy with Scottish literature. Just before the above-quoted theoretical take on Eliot’s “Tradition”, Ch’oe Chaes ò has tried to vindicate the particularity of Korean literature and distinguish it from- thus, implicitly, privileging it over — other “provincial literatures”, such as “Kyūshū [九州] literature”, “Tōhoku [東北] literature”, and “Taiwan [台湾] literature”. Then he illustrates this observation by way of analogy:

If a comparison were to be drawn, it should be, I submit, Scottish literature within English literature. It is part of English literature, but, by firmly maintaining its Scottish characteristics, contributes to it in various significant ways. When the controversies over the “language question” were once clamorous here, there was a tendency among the intellectuals to compare Korean literature to Irish literature, but that is obnoxious. It is true that Irish literature is written in the English language, but its spirit is through

and through anti-English, and its goal is secession from England [Britain]. (15; my translation [from Japanese])

Ch’oe Chaes ò’s Scottish analogy seems, in fact, quite eccentric, since in Colonial Korea, as it is often argued, many intellectuals showed great interest in Irish literature as a “model” for their predicaments, while apparently Scotland was barely distinguished from England among them. It is not entirely sure where this idea came from, but I would like to suggest that Ch’oe Chaes ò, as an ardent researcher in the field of contemporary Anglo-American literary criticism in his earlier academic career, might well have read T. S. Eliot’s 1919 review essay, “Was There a Scottish Literature?” (*Athenaeum* 4657 (Aug. 1st 1919): 680 – 81), which was published just before the famous “Tradition” essay. Whether it may indeed be positively proved to be *the* source or not, I believe it is of great *theoretical* significance to compare Ch’oe Chaes ò’s Scottish analogy to Eliot’s provocative essay.

“Was There a Scottish Literature?” is a review of Gregory Smith’s *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). To this rather provocative question in the title, Eliot’s answer is simply and emphatically No, as “Scottish literature lacks, in the first place, the continuity of the language”, and he even goes as far as to state, “We are quite at liberty to treat the Scots language as a dialect, as one of the several English dialects which gradually and inevitably amalgamated into one language”, where “[i]t was important as a dialect among the other English dialects”, so that it should properly be treated as “a provincial literature” that retains “its local peculiarities” better than other provinces (681). This is clearly an assimilationist view of national literatures, and should certainly be criticized as “politically incorrect” in today’s multiculturalist standard. But such a suppressive opinion cannot be simply written off as an English bigotry, since Eliot is not English but an American *metoikos*²³ in London, and, in fact, he even makes

an analogy of “Edinburgh in 1800” to “Boston in America fifty years later” (where the Eliot family was indeed one of the key players) so as to illustrate “the importance of a provincial capital”, whose significance is, however, not permanent but merely “the matter of a moment” (*ibid.*). Instead of deploring the tragic fate of the demised Scottish language and literature, Eliot, in fact, congratulates the Scotsmen on not sticking to their independence but getting themselves successfully assimilated to English:

We may even conclude it to be an evidence of strength, rather than weakness, that the Scots language and the Scottish literature did not maintain a separate existence. It is not always recognized how fierce and fatal is the struggle for existence between literatures. In this struggle there is great advantage to be won if forces not too disparate can be united. Scottish, throwing in its luck with English, has not only much greater chance of survival, but contributes important elements of strength to complete the English. (*ibid.*)

This (socio-historical) Darwinist view of “the struggle for existence between literatures” is, just like Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations”, a view from the hegemonic Subject of the World History, and does, as in the case of Ch’oe Chaes ō, provide the colonial elites with justification for their *collaboration* with- their “throwing in [their] luck with”- the Empire. And, as the opening general statement of this review clearly reveals, such a view is fundamentally related to the forthcoming “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Just as Eliot is to insist, at the beginning of the “Tradition” essay, that “[mere] ‘tradition’ should be positively discouraged” while “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance” (SW 49), so he speaks here of “History” with a capital “H”, distinguishing it from mere “history”, at the incipit:

We suppose that there is an English literature, and Professor Gregory Smith supposes that there is a Scottish literature. When we assume that a literature exists we assume a great deal; we suppose that there is one of the five or six (at most) great organic formations of history. We do not suppose merely “a history,” for there might be a history of Tamil literature; but a part of History, which for us is the history of Europe. We suppose not merely a corpus of writings in one language, but writings and writers between whom there is a tradition; and writers who are not merely connected by tradition in time, but who are related so as to be in the light of eternity contemporaneous, from a certain point of view cells in one body, Chaucer and Hardy. We suppose a mind which is not only the English mind of one period with its prejudices of politics and fashions of taste, but which is a greater, finer, more positive, more comprehensive mind than the mind of any period. And we suppose to each writer an importance which is not only individual, but due to his place as a constituent of this mind. When we suppose that there is a literature, therefore, we suppose a good deal. (“Scottish” 680)

It is probably unnecessary to explicate the similarities we can find in the above passage with such celebrated terms as the “historical sense” or the “mind of Europe”, nor is it necessary to elaborate on the way in which Eliot’s idea of “Tradition” is deeply rooted in his view of “History”- Huntington’s “Clash” *avant la lettre*- as composed of “the five or six (at most) great organic formations”. However, what is of particular note here in our context is that the celebrated “Tradition” has preliminarily been conceived as “History” in which individual talents “are related so as to be *in the light of eternity* contemporaneous”- here, the

phrase “in the light of eternity” is no doubt translation of Spinoza’s “*sub specie aeternitatis*”, and will be turned into the (in) famous rhetorical phrase, “a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together” (SW 49). Although how consciously Eliot has employed this Spinozian term here is a matter of conjecture, it seems highly significant that Eliot *mis*/reads Spinozian “eternity” of every *singular* existence by virtue of God or Nature as its cause, and instead turns it into Hegelian “History”, assimilationist as well as progressive, viewed from its end-point, i. e., from the victor’s point of view- it is precisely in this Hegelian sense that Eliot’s use of the term “Mind” of Europe is utterly appropriate.

Against the backdrop of such a Hegelian, assimilationist historicism, what really counts is the “continuity”, rather than singularity, of each language in the struggle for survival (“in the long run we can see that the continuity of the language has been the strongest thing” (“Scottish” 680)). Here, obviously, “language-nationalism” is *necessarily* imperialistic and so is coextensive with what may be called language-“imperial nationalism”.²⁰ Hence, in the name of the more general (i. e., more powerful) language that is English, assimilation of Scottish literature (and, by extension, annexation of Scotland in the name of the “Union”) is to be *culturally* (or *culturalistically*) justified:

A powerful literature, with a powerful capital, tends to attract and absorb all the drifting shreds of force about it. Up to a certain limit of dissimilarity, this fusion is of very great value. English and Scottish, probably English and Irish (if not prevented by political friction), are cognate enough for the union to be of value. (681)

If we recall Ch’oe Chaes ō’s Scottish analogy, in which he cautions that the prevalent Irish analogy is “obnoxious”, the similarity of their “value”

judgments- hence their political motivations- is quite clear. Indeed, the condition Eliot sets for a valuable “union” in the above passage (i. e., “cognate enough”) speaks very much to Ch’oe Chaes ō’s logic of the Korean advantage in assimilation due to their being “closer” to the metropolitan center and the hegemonic language. At the same time, we must not overlook the violence of exclusion involved in such a logic, as Eliot symptomatically inserts a phrase of reservation, “Up to a certain limit of dissimilarity”, in the above passage. Then he goes on to finish the review as follows:

The basis for one literature is one language. The danger of disintegration of English literature and language would arise if the same language were employed by peoples too remote (for geographical or other reasons) to be able to pool their differences in a common metropolis. The chances of its survival, as a language and a literature in the tradition of European civilization, would be diminished against such a concentrated force as the French. For France, of course, a different danger, real or apparent, has been announced, we believe in an intemperate and fanatical spirit, by such apostles of French culture as M. Maurras: the danger of attracting foreign forces which might be received without being digested. That is at present, we trust, not an imminent peril for Britain. (*ibid.*)

According to Eliot’s observation, the “one language” as the “basis for one literature” is in danger of “disintegration”, or *adulteration*, due to its proliferation among those who are not “cognate enough”: for example, “peoples too remote”, such as colonial Indians speaking English, and those “foreign forces which might be received without being digested” that Charles Maurras apparently warns against. The reference to Charles Maurras in this concluding passage is obviously anti-Semitic, as

he was an advocate of limiting the number of Jews in France, whom he calls “*métèques*”. In fact, the logic here is typical of what Étienne Balibar has theorized as “neo-racism”,²⁵ so that it is fair to say that Eliot’s as well as Ch’oe Chaes ō’s “literary” theory is indeed highly political. In that sense, an ambivalent place that Irish literature occupies in their observations is rather revealing, in that, despite their emphasis on the purely “literary” criterion, they both bring in the current political situations in this particular case (Eliot: “if not prevented by political friction”; Ch’oe Chaes ō: “its spirit is through and through anti-English, and its goal is secession from England [Britain]”). Meanwhile, History has eloquently proved, *pace* Eliot, that the chances for survival of both of these “national” literatures, especially English, are indeed maximized by a wide varieties of those postcolonial writers who are indeed “peoples too remote” or “foreign forces” in the metropolises.

Such is the *ideologeme*,²⁶ latent in T. S. Eliot’s celebrated “Tradition” essay, which Ch’oe Chaes ō has employed in order to justify his cultural collaboration with the Japanese Empire. It is Hegelian, expansionist and assimilationist (i. e., “imperialist”²⁷), differentialist [= exclusionist] and culturalist [= essentialist] (i. e., “neo-racist”), and, philosophically speaking, Naturalist-turned-Historicist. To sum up the comparison so far, it is safe to conclude that T. S. Eliot’s apparently “literary” theory has carried such an imperialist and neo-racist ideologeme to East Asia, where a prominent colonial intellectual named Ch’oe Chaes ō, who is also a serious scholar of English literature and contemporary literary theory, finds it most pertinent to the political predicaments into which they have been thrown. The crucial contrast between these two intellectuals is, needless to say, their standpoints, i. e., Eliot is on the victorious side of History, whereas Ch’oe Chaes ō belongs to the oppressed people but feels his task is to “improve” them so as to ride on the victor’s back, rather than to “brush history against the grain” (Benjamin 392).

The “shameful” end

With this ideological critique in mind, let us return to the moment of Ch’oe Chaes ō’s “*tenkō*” [転向] and follow him to the bitter end. Just after elaborating on the Scottish analogy, he goes on to explain his “intention”:

I do not agree with those who despair over extinction of Korean literature, nor do I agree with those who insist on its eradication by all-out integration. My intention is to let Korean literature contribute to the establishment of a new Japanese culture by virtue of Korean creativity. (15; my translation [from Japanese])

Ch’oe Chaes ō is indeed navigating between Scylla and Charybdis- between rejection of assimilation and all-out assimilation- or, as he might have said, between the Irish way and the Welsh way. Instead of choosing between the seemingly inevitable all-or-nothing choices, Ch’oe Chaes ō has decided to “throw in his luck” with the yet-to-come “*kokumin bungaku*”, just as the prominent figures of the Scottish Enlightenment invested in “Britain” by “re-inventing” English literature as “British”. Such a precarious navigation is *potentially* “postcolonial”, in that the yet-to-come “*kokumin bungaku*” would transform each and every “national” literature (Japanese as well as Korean) altogether, where a *singular* textual event with its “microbic” infectability is always-already transgressive of any “national” (or *minjok* / *minzoku*) thinking. In short, by problematizing the *idée reçue* of “*kokumin bungaku*”, Ch’oe Chaes ō might, unwittingly, have “picture[d] the transformation of the problematic”²⁸.

Nevertheless, Ch’oe Chaes ō would rather reach the conclusion that his Theory has demanded- the (re)solution by virtue of the Imperial Order, which was then the only remaining Order available, in

order to satisfy his obsession with Universality. In 1944, when it was quite apparent that the Japanese Empire was already on the losing side, Ch’oe Chaes ō contributed to his journal as the lead-off article of the April issue his most infamous essay entitled “*Matsurou Bungaku*” - an essay he wrote for the first time under his Japanized name, “Ishida Kōzō [石田耕造]”. In a pathetically confessional mode, he declares that, now that the “questions” have all vanished into air, there remains only “a clear answer”:

The question has always been simple and plain: Are you fully confident that you can become Japanese outright? This question has led to other questions: What is “Japanese”? What should one do to become Japanese? In order to become Japanese, how should one deal with his being Korean?

These questions were the last remaining barriers that cannot be removed by any intellectual understanding or theoretical maneuver. Unless we break through these barriers, however, we can hardly understand the overall significance of the Great East Asian War- *hakkō i[chi]u* [八紘一字, which means “All the world under one roof”], *naisen ittai* [内鮮一体, which means “Japan and Korea as One Body”], establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere [大東亜共栄圏], and foundation of the New World Order. Even if you talk of “comprehending the idea of the fatherland”, it cannot be concrete or actual, unless you have a clear answer to those questions.

Here, let me write about my own experience. Towards the end of the previous year, I made a firm resolution to set my various affairs in order, and so, to begin with, I changed my name into Japanese on the New Year day. Then, on

January 2nd, I visited Chōsen Shrine^㉑ to make a reverent report to that effect. At the moment I bowed deep to the Gods,^㉒ I felt as if I were lifted up by the fresh air and liberated from all doubts.

(5; my translation [from Japanese])

Ch’oe Chaes ō has flung himself onto a kind of ecstatic identification with the Japanese Imperial House [皇室], and transformed himself, rather than transforming the Japanese “*kokumin*”, into a new identity, an authentic “Japanese outright” named Ishida Kōzō. The trick here is that the “Emperor” or “Imperial House” is not *human* at all, but incarnation of the *superhuman* law of History beyond any positive laws and theories, so that *becoming-Japanese* has nothing to do with the pressing (thus transient) issues concerning *minjok*, but instead that it is simply the way to become “the embodiment of the law”, which is certainly not a pragmatic choice (rather ridiculous at this stage of the devastating war) but a purely metaphysical (re) solution.^㉓

Such was the final standpoint that his Theory had *logically* reached, from which he made his final piece of “literary” theory, “*Matsurou Bungaku*”. The deliberately antiquated title, “*Matsurou Bungaku*”, may be descriptively translated as “Literature that hallows and/or serves the Emperor”. The prose style is a genuine *mimicry* of the typical Japanese cultural fascist style, such as the *Nihon Roman-ha* [日本浪漫派 = Japanese Romantics],^㉔ quoting the ancient scriptures with Motoori Norinaga’s annotations and drawing heavily on the etymological as well as quasi-anthropological knowledge (e. g., “*matsurou*” (hallow, serve) is cognate with “*matsuri*” (festival) and “*matsurigoto*” (politics)- a call for return to the ancient theocracy, pure and simple). In the midst of such a mimicked Japanese-fascist-style prose, however, Ch’oe Chaes ō’s characteristic comparison with European literature comes in and the prose style momentarily reverts to his earlier academico-critical one. This queer disjunction in the prose style should

itself be an interesting object for symptomatic reading, but let us here focus on the content of this “comparison”. Ch’oe Chaes ō surveys the whole history of European literature in such a way as to combine Eliot’s historiography with those of T. E. Hulme and Irving Babbitt; “Insofar as the Europeans recognized the human fallibility and original sin, and aspire to the classical ideal of perfect personality or follow the Divine Law in imitation of Christ, they were able to maintain the Kingdom of Spiritual Order for quite a great length of time”, but Renaissance individualism begot “all those monsters of Modernity”, such as “European Imperialism, Naturalist literature, Rousseau, Faust, and others” (“*Matsurou*” 8 – 9). Then, probably to the surprise of contemporary readers,³³ Ch’oe Chaes ō talks approvingly of “those select few who are aware of this predicament”- Charles Maurras in France, Irving Babbitt in America, and T. S. Eliot in Britain- singling Eliot out as the “painful embodiment of this century’s maladies and an attempt to overcome them- in his capacity as an acute critic as well as a shrewd poet” (9). Then Ch’oe Chaes ō deviates towards a kind of very short introduction of T. S. Eliot:

Eliot, who started as a Paris-loving Modernist, was temporarily absorbed in the Classical Humanism *à la* Babbitt, but did nevertheless flee to [Anglo-] Catholicism, seems to take on the heavy burden alone, that is, the spiritual *errance* and agony of the European intellectual class today. What is it that he has never ceased to seek all through his spiritual *errance*? It is an escape from excessive personality (“Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917 [sic.³⁴]))- his very first critical work) and a surrender to something stable like a rock (“The Rock” (1934)). Hence, he pronounced his standpoint as “a classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion”.

I do not mean to talk about Eliot in detail. I have only presented to you a most sensitive patient in order to show how European individualism has come out to be today.

Nevertheless, should the problem of those European intellectuals be solved, even if they were to recognize the maladies of individualism and convert to piety and loyalty? As the collection of essays, published just before the Second Great War in Europe broke out [presumably, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936)], shows, it seems that Eliot had already lost interest in both classicist literature and royalist politics, and was then pursuing Catholicism alone with all his heart and soul, so that he was apparently ruminating over the possibility of establishing the Catholic World Order. Should the current European turmoil ever subside by virtue of Catholicism? Or, more specifically, should Eliot’s personal loyalty be satisfied? A clear answer shall be brought forth by the current War. (9 – 10; my translation [from Japanese])

Although Ch’oe Chaes ō has earlier pronounced his ecstatic identification with the Japanese Emperor, his real sympathy- if not necessarily identification, certainly a sense of comradeship- obviously lies still with Eliot. In fact, his sympathy with Eliot here seems, oddly enough, stronger than ever. In the academico-critical phase of his career, Ch’oe Chaes ō has evaluated the *literary theories* of T. E. Hulme, Irving Babbitt, I. A. Richards, and Herbert Read more highly than that of Eliot; in the *Inmun p’y ōngnon* phase, he has modeled himself, *practically* as well as idealistically, upon Eliot as the editor of the *Criterion*; and, at the moment of his *tenkō*, he has *appropriated* (or *mis/read*) Eliot’s idea of “Tradition” into the logic of assimilation (thus, in effect, uncovering the *ideologeme* latent in Eliot). Now, at this final stage, his sympathy with

Eliot is genuinely *theoretical*, in that they are both seeking, at least in Ch’oe Chaes ō’s understanding (which is indeed legitimate in my opinion), the “Kingdom of Spiritual Order” in the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is a contemporary history” by virtue of Theory. It is, as it were, a feeling of comradeship shared by the fated rivals- the World-Historical rivalry between the two competing Universalisms, the European “Catholic World Order” versus the Japanese “New World Order”. The “clear answer” to this rivalry should, as Ch’oe Chaes ō was well aware, only be brought forth by the *deus ex machina*, the World War. In the end, both of these Universalisms, in one sense, failed in the face of the other, much more powerful pair of the competing Universalisms, namely, the U. S. Imperialism and the Soviet Imperialism. And yet, in another sense, both shrewdly survived by way of complicity with the U. S. Imperialism- the former in the form of EU-NATO ideology and the latter in the form of the U. S. -Japan Alliance (under which Japanese economy, hand in hand with American military presence, was to dominate over East Asia again, after all). Ch’oe Chaes ō, like *his* Eliot, was indeed “a most sensitive patient” who embodied the fate of a universalistic Theory under colonial conditions, or perhaps under *Modernity* in general. That is to say, insofar as he was obsessed with Order as the last instance of his Theory (hence, no subversion by way of *creolization*, *hybridization*, etc.), it was *logically* inevitable for him to reach the conclusion that he had actually reached, where there was only one *totalizing* (and *totalitarian*) existing Order, i. e., the Imperial Order, which “is constituted not by the abolition of circular segmentarity [e. g., an individual will to Order like Ch’oe Chaes ō’s], but instead by a concentricity of distinct circles, or the organization of a resonance among centers” (Deleuze & Guattari *Thousand* 211)- hence, in Ch’oe Chaes ō’s logic, “resistance” is futile, while “collaboration” is not merely the only viable way to “defend the zone of creative activities” by Korean writers, albeit in the language of their oppressor, but also the road to a

fertile land where Korean creativity should flourish in the “global” language that Japanese is.

“Shame” it was indeed- the “shame” that this shameless “pro-Japanese” public intellectual had to account for. After the liberation of Korean people and their language, he was naturally disgraced as a “national” shame. Meanwhile, the poet, who privately wrote a handful of poems in his notebook in his mother tongue, leaving not a single “taint of shame” in his all too short lifetime, has become a “national” pride. To end this talk, let me quote a passage from one of Yun Dongju’s last remaining poems, “A Poem Easily Written” (1942.6.3.)⁵⁵

It’s such a shame;
While life is so unbearable,
A poem is so easy to write.

Life is indeed so unbearable under colonial conditions, especially when the colonizers are so brutal and inhumane as to deprive the people not only of their liberty but also of their patril names and mother tongue. In such a state of emergency, to live in the public sphere is to accumulate “shame” *as a nation* [*minjok*] in each and every utterance- it is certainly far from easy to write anything *in public*. The only way to escape from such “shame” seems to be to live and die *in private*, being only accountable “towards Heaven”, thus staying absolutely *shameless* on earth. Ch’oe Chaes ō was, it seems to me, too intelligent to be ignorant of the mundane state of affairs, too orderly to be subversive of the Imperial Order and, above all, too proud of himself as a public intellectual to murmur or to be mute. He then chose to accumulate maximal “shame”, as if too much “shame” should nullify the imposed national “shame” all together- only to find that the road he had taken was to lead to the most “shameful” end.

Coda: Two Monuments

Last week, while in Kyoto, I visited the two monuments dedicated to Yun Dongju- one on the site of Takeda Apartment, where the poet lived till he

was abruptly arrested by the Japanese police, and the other on the campus of Doshisha University, where he studied English Literature. The former stands, quite unknown, in the middle of a residential area, east of Takano River, and one small white stone was placed in front of the monument, as if the poet's pure soul incarnated in it. The other stately stands in the middle of Doshisha University, fully decorated with flowers and two flags crossed- the "national" flags of South Korea and Japan. This is the poet's 100th anniversary, so they were perhaps preparing for a grand version of the annual ceremony that is held on or around the date of the poet's death, February 16th. Looking at the crossed flags, I couldn't help murmuring, "What a shame. . ." - He who was born and bred in the borderlands shared by Northern Korea, China and Russia, studied in Pyongyang, Seoul, Tokyo and Kyoto, and was brutally murdered by the Japanese Empire in Fukuoka Prison, is now celebrated as the symbol of "friendship" between *South* Korea and Japan, or, I would rather say, the symbol of complicity between the two nationalisms under the aegis of the U. S. imperialism. His life and legacy's utter lack of "shame" (or shame-less-ness) seems to serve the purpose of oblivion of all the nationalist as well as imperialist "shame" accumulated over the years. To live is to accumulate "shame", but we wish to exonerate ourselves from "shame" by building monuments- or laying the blame exclusively upon those who have accumulated maximal "shame". In the dead of winter, I stood in front of the monument, feeling as if the poem engraved on the stone were asking, "And have you not a taint of shame at all?"^⑧

2017. 2. 16.

Postscript; 3. 11 and the shame-quake

3. 11 has rolled around- again this year. This is the 6th anniversary of the Great Earthquake and the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. On this day of 2011 and the days following, I was in Kyoto, feeling no quake at all and watching on TV the gigantic

tsunamis and the horrendous explosions of the nuclear plants. Although I did not physically experience the earthquake, I quaked- not so much with horror as with *shame*. First, it was a sense of *shame* as someone who continued to live safe and sound away from the disaster, instead of suffering together with my family and friends. Then emerged a much more overwhelming sense of *shame* as someone who was born and bred in Tokyo, having long enjoyed a comfortable life owing to the electricity generated by those nuclear plants- hence, without knowing it, being a "collaborator" in exploiting *in advance* the disaster thrust upon the soil of Fukushima and all the creatures living on it. This is no longer a psychological shame that I have *in the face of* some particular persons, but instead an ontological *shame of being* the person that I am, which could indeed lead to "a shame of being human"- the concept that Primo Levi had struggled with all through his life till the day he committed suicide, the concept that inspired many thinkers into further speculations, including Tzvetan Todorov, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben and my colleague Satoshi Ukai among others. Here, let me quote Gilles Deleuze's words in his conversation with Antonio Negri:

I was very much struck by all the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us "a shame of being human" ["la honte d'être un homme"]. Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us believe, but that we've all been tainted by it; even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive. There's the shame of there being men who became Nazis; the shame of being unable, not seeing how, to stop it; the shame of having compromised with it; there's the whole of what Primo Levi calls this "gray zone [zona grigia]". (*Negotiations* 172; translation modified)

We all live in this “gray zone” - or, rather, we all must *live* this “gray zone” - not in a clear-cut moral(istic) world that consists only of black and white, although we must quickly add that it doesn’t mean that we may “confuse the victims with the executioners” (Deleuze & Guattari *Philosophy* 106). Herein lies our *ontological* shame, which is ever intensified when we face certain extreme cases such as concentration camps or colonial conditions. In our distracted daily life, however, it is not so easy to admit that we are forever *tainted* by this ontological shame that we are (rather than that we have), and so we tend to divide the “gray zone” into black and white- either by putting maximal blame on those who appear more “black” than ourselves or by imaginarily identifying with those who appear more “white” than ourselves- so as to incessantly escape from this affect that is probably most fundamental to our human condition. A rather dismal prospect.

And yet, as Deleuze pronounced in his last televised interview *L’Abécédaire* (1988—89), it is indeed the foundation of art- creation *as* resistance:

I believe that, at the basis of art, there is this idea or this very intense feeling; a certain shame of being human that makes art liberate the Life that man has imprisoned. Man does not cease to imprison Life; he does not cease killing Life. The artist is the one who releases Life- a potential life [une vie puissante], a life more than personal. It is not “his” life[...] To liberate Life, to liberate Life from the prison- that’s resistance, that’s resistance[...] There is no art that should not be liberation of a potentiality of Life. (“R comme Résistance”; my translation)

We quake with shame, *ergo* we create = resist.

2017. 3. 11.

Notes

① Many students at Soongsil left school in protest against the

colonial government forcing the Headmaster George McCune to resign. Meanwhile, Horace Horton Underwood of Yeonhui made a tactical compromise with the authorities (“reverently bow but not pray”), so that it survived the “shrine-worship” affairs- at least for the moment.

② Much like Algeria under the French rule, Colonial Korea was then regarded as an integral part of Imperial Japan, so that it was simply called the “Peninsula” as opposed to the “Mainland”.

③ It is reported that in prison Yun Dongju was forced by the Japanese police to translate his poems into Japanese, apparently in the hope of finding “evidence” for his link to the underground resistance movement. Those poems during his last years were then destroyed, which probably means that there was no “evidence” to that effect, and lost forever- so, in a sense, his last poems were first tortured by the forced translation and then executed, as it were.

④ For example, Benedict Anderson’s famous study of “imagined communities” is based on his not-so-famous historical observation that nationalism was in fact born in the New World and then “imported” to Europe. On a more theoretical note, Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “contact zones” is exemplary here with regard to such “retours” of ideas (See her *Imperial Eyes*).

⑤ See, for example, Crawford, *Devolving* and Crawford, ed. *Scottish*.

⑥ For instance, the Japanese translation of Irving Babbitt’s *Rousseau and Romanticism* is Ch’oe Chaes ō’s. He not only actively participated in the “Mainland” [i. e., Japanese] academia, but also contributed to such prestigious Japanese journals as *Shisō* and *Kaizō*.

⑦ In the inaugural issue (Oct. 1939), Ch’oe Chaes ō wrote a kind of obituary for the *Criterion*, which had just ceased its publication earlier in the same year, as follows: “In the midst of turmoil of the postwar cultural scene, the journal that reflected Eliot’s own critical view that its sole mission was to achieve adjustment between present and past had firmly maintained Classicism at its core, being multilateral and at times revolutionary towards the outside world, so that its contribution to maintenance of Culture cannot be overestimated” (my translation [from Korean]).

⑧ For example, E. R. Curtius, in his contribution to the *Criterion* (Nov. 1927), plead for restoration of “a hidden aristocracy in Europe [who] does not know about itself”: “if we knew one another, we should form a phalanx, and save the sacred objects of our past, as Æneas the *penates* of Troy, to set them up and do them honour upon a new soil that holds the promise of future greatness” (394).

⑨ For more details on the vicissitudes of Ch'oe Chaes ō's political as well as critical career, see my "Ch'oe Chaes ō's Order", published in Japanese and Korean.

⑩ See my "The Problem of *Kokumin Bungaku*" and "Between Universality and Universalism".

Cf. "One of the hindrances to our creativity has been the obsessional concern with the Universal. Old syndrome of the colonized; afraid of being merely his depreciated self and ashamed of wanting to be what his master is, the colonized accepts therefore- supreme subtlety- the values of his masters as the ideal in the world. Hence exteriority vis-à-vis ourselves. Hence the defamation of the Creole language and the deep mangrove swamp of Creoleness. Hence- except for unique miracles- our aesthetic shipwreck. Creole literature will have nothing to do with the Universal, or this disguised adherence to Western values, it will have nothing to do with this concern with exhibiting the transparency of oneself, exhibiting oneself to the attractiveness of the obvious. We want to deepen our Creoleness in full consciousness of the world" (Bernabé et al. *Éloge*111).

⑪ This article was, in fact, the very first contribution by a Korean to the prestigious journal *Shisō*, which was then the main organ of publication for Nishida Kitarō's works.

⑫ One of the biggest, left-inclined journals in Japan at that time. The word "kaizō" [改造] literally means "reconstruction" or "reorganization".

⑬ The most prestigious quarterly in the field of English literature, issued by the English Literary Society of Japan. Nishida Kitarō's lecture at the Society, "T. S. Eliot and Traditionalism", has also been published as "On Traditionalism" in the same journal in the previous year.

⑭ Balibar nicely illustrates this mechanism in terms of "how one great historical 'fiction', that of the universalistic church, could be substituted by another historical 'fiction', that of the secular, rational institutions of the state (in practice, the nation-state), with equally universalistic aims" (*Politics* 156).

⑮ Cf. "The assertion of universality by those who have conventionally been excluded by the term often produces a performative contradiction of a certain sort. But this contradiction, in Hegelian fashion, is not self-cancelling, but exposes the spectral doubling of the concept itself. And it prompts a set of antagonistic speculations on what the proper venue for the claim of universality ought to be" (Butler, "Restaging" 38-9).

⑯ Cf. "What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture'

the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. . . The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 86). In a sense, Ch'oe Chaes ō's *mimicry* of "*kokumin*" could have been such a "menace", although, as I presently discuss, he himself has chosen to "resolve" the *ambivalence* by becoming "Japanese outright" in the end.

⑰ It seems appropriate here to recall Mary Louise Pratt's fascinating example of the Venezuelan writer Teresa de la Parra's autobiographical novel *Memorias de Mamá Blanca*, whose narrator says, "I believe that like tobacco, pineapples, and sugar cane, Romanticism was an indigenous [American] fruit that grew up sweet, spontaneous and hidden among colonial languors and tropical indolence until the end of the eighteenth century. Around that time, Josefina Tascher, unsuspectingly, as if she were an ideal microbe, carried it off [to Europe] tangled up in the lace of one of her headdresses, gave the germ to Napoleon in that acute form which we all know, and little by little, the troops of the First Empire, assisted by Chateaubriand, spread the epidemic everywhere" (qtd. *Imperial* 135). Pratt's following comment seems applicable to a great degree to Ch'oe Chaes ō's abortive project: "Arguments about origins are notoriously pointless. It is not pointless, however, to underscore the transcultural dimensions of what is canonically called European Romanticism. Westerners are accustomed to thinking of romantic projects of liberty, individualism, and liberalism as emanating *from* Europe to the colonial periphery, but less accustomed to thinking about emanations *from* the contact zones *back* into Europe" (*ibid.*). Perhaps, what Ch'oe Chaes ō lacked was the kind of "microbic"- or "rhizomic"-sense of *humor* that *Mamá Blanca* possessed. He was, in short, too intelligent.

⑱ Paul de Man, reading Friedrich Schlegel, conceptualizes "irony" (and, by extension, "poetry" in general) as the "permanent parabasis": "irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes[. . .] The allegory of tropes has its own narrative coherence, its own systematicity, and it is that coherence, that systematicity, which irony interrupts, disrupts" (de Man 179).

⑲ It is interesting that Ch'oe Chaes ō's narration of the "stages" starts with the "Fall of Paris on June 15th in *Showa* 15th [1940]"- notice here that he even specifies the exact date (due to the time difference, it was June 14th in Paris). Its significance is, according to Ch'oe Chaes ō, that this date marked the end of Modernity, so that Korean literature,

which had followed the “fashions” of European Modernism, had to renounce its past and search for different principles, i. e., “liquidation of culturalism and transformation into statism” - hence, the inauguration of *Kokumin Bungaku*. Even here, Ch’oe Chaes ō cannot but *theorize* everything that pertains to the present predicaments.

⑳ A highly-charged keyword in the intellectual history of Japan during the 1930’s and 40’s, which may be translated as “[political] conversion” or “turn [as in the German term “Kehre”]”.

㉑ qtd. T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919). *SW* 50.

㉒ Eliot sometimes called himself “metoikos” (or “metic” in English). For the theoretical significance and potentialities of this self-image, see my “Empires of the Metoikoi- T. S. Eliot, Nishia Kitarō and Ch’oe Chaes ō”, published in Japanese.

㉓ In an open letter to the inaugural issue of the *Transatlantic Review*, in which Eliot declares his support for the already-defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire, Eliot posits “a genuine nationality” against the post-WWI “outburst of artificial nationalities” as well as “artificial internationalism”: “a genuine nationality depends upon the existence of a genuine literature, and you cannot have a nationality worth speaking of unless you have a national literature” (*LI* 251). And such language-nationalism is *necessarily* coextensive with language-“imperial nationalism”, in that any universalistic value-judgment, aesthetic or otherwise, that denies *singularities* of Whatever beings (Agamben, *Coming*) entails the survival of the more powerful (or valuable), as Eliot declares in the same letter that the “number of languages worth writing in is very small, and it seems to [him] a waste of time to attempt to enlarge it” (*ibid.*). As for “the very relationship between the transcendental project of universal philosophy and imperial nationalism”, see Naoki Sakai’s “Subject and Substratum” and “Imperial Nationalism and the Comparative Perspective”.

㉔ Cf. “In fact, what we see is a general displacement of the problematic. We now move from the theory of races or the struggle between the races in human history, whether based on biological or psychological principles, to a theory of ‘race relations’ within society, *which naturalizes not racial belonging but racist conduct*. From the logical point of view, differentialist racism is a meta-racism. . . you have to respect the ‘tolerance thresholds,’ maintain ‘cultural distances’ or, in other words, in accordance with the postulate that individuals are the exclusive heirs and bearers of a single culture, segregate collectivities (the best barrier in this

regard still being national frontiers)” (Balibar “Neo-Racism”. 22 – 23). It is particularly pertinent that Balibar finds a significant moment of the epistemic shift to “neo-racism” in the “interwar period, another crisis era” that leads up to the “logical culmination in the Vichy regime’s contribution to the Hitlerian enterprise” (20 – 21).

㉕ Fredrick Jameson’s term to describe the minimal units of ideology. Cf. “The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice- a conceptual or protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the ‘collective characters’ which are the classes in opposition” (87).

㉖ Frank Kermode famously began his T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent by stating: “Eliot was, in the special sense to which I shall hereafter limit the word, an imperialist” (15). I do agree with Kermode’s shrewd insight as to Eliot’s “neo-Dantean compromise between universalism and nationalism” (*ibid.*)- that is to say, the complicity between universalism (i. e., generality disguised as universality) and particularism (bound by “essential kinship”) in our context. However, Kermode’s take on this issue is rather too idealistic, in that, while its critique of the “mystique of Empire” is sharp and precise, he is blind to the “inner darkness of exclusion”, such as the material consequences of assimilationism and/or racial exclusionism, that is involved in such an idealistic view and that emerges sometimes patently (“Scottish”), sometimes latently (“Tradition”). In short, shrewd as Kermode’s idealistic critique of Eliot’s idea[1] of Empire may be, it still belongs to the same *problematic* without the necessary *epistemological break*.

㉗ “[...] we need an *informed gaze*, a new gaze, itself produced by a reflection of the ‘change of terrain’ on the exercise of vision, in which Marx pictures the transformation of the problematic[...] It is enough to remember that the subject must have occupied its new place in the new terrain, in other words that this subject must already, even partly unwittingly, have been installed in this new terrain, for it to be possible to apply to the old invisible the informed gaze that will make that invisible visible.” (Althusser 28 – 9)

㉘ Chōsen Shrine was the Shintō shrine built on the peak of Mt. Namsan, looking down on the whole city of Seoul, in 1925 as the head of the Shintō hierarchy in Korea [*Chōsen* in Japanese]. Colonial Koreans, notably school pupils, were required to visit the Shrine on various occasions, so it was regarded as a symbol of Japanese oppression. Naturally, one of the first things Korean people did after the liberation was to

go up the mountain and destroy the Shrine.

㉔ Chōsen Shrine was dedicated to Amaterasu (Goddess of the Sun and the Universe, the alleged progenitor of the Japanese emperors) and Emperor Meiji (grandfather of Hirohito, Emperor Shōwa).

㉕ Hannah Arendt's ingenious analysis of totalitarian rule best captures the *logic* behind such a metaphysical leap: "It is the monstrous, yet seemingly unanswerable claim of totalitarian rule that, far from being 'lawless,' it goes to the sources of authority from which positive laws received their ultimate legitimation, that far from being arbitrary it is more obedient to these superhuman forces than any government ever was before, and that from wielding its power in the interest of one man, it is quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital immediate interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature. . . . [Totalitarian policy] can do without the *consensus iuris*, because it promises to release the fulfillment of law from all action and will of man; and it promises justice on earth because it claims to make mankind itself the embodiment of the law" (461–2).

㉖ It must be noted here that the common notion that identifies the *Nihon Roman-ha* with a simple-minded, reactionary Japanist ideology is rather misleading. Drawing on re-valuations of the German Romantics by Philip Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Paul de Man, Takeshi Kimoto amply shows that Yasuda Yojurō, the most representative of the *Nihon Roman-ha* and himself a Germanist, had ingeniously taken over the problematics of the German Romantics, so as to present the subversive moment ("Romantic revolt") in his critical discourses. See Kimoto's Ph. D. dissertation, "The Standpoint of World History and Imperial Japan".

㉗ It may even be possible, though I am not ready to pursue that direction, to discuss this abrupt insertion of "European comparison" in terms of what Leo Strauss calls the "art of writing under persecution", i. e., an *esoteric* way of conveying the true message without letting it censored.

㉘ Ch'oe Chaes ō is also misled by Eliot's own (deliberate?) mistake in dating the 1919 "Tradition" essay as 1917 in the table of contents of the *Selected Essays*.

㉙ There remain only 5 poems Yun Dongju wrote when he was a student at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. All the poems he had written in Kyoto were confiscated and then, presumably, destroyed by the Japanese police after he was arrested.

㉚ I feel it necessary to mention here another monument- or, rather, a group of gigantic monuments- in the poet's birthplace, Longjin in Jilin Province. With the stately

presence of those monuments today, one may probably be surprised to learn the fact that the poet's gravestone had been long abandoned till a Japanese scholar, Masuo Ōmura, "discovered" it in 1985- Ōmura reports that no scholar in Yanbian knew even the name of Yun Dongju at that time. Right next to the gravestone stands a large marble plate that designates it as a cultural heritage- interestingly enough, the plate was built just recently, in 2014. In the nearby village, the poet's house, which had been demolished by 1985, was apparently rebuilt later and is now well preserved, with another gigantic marble monument placed in front of the gate, whose inscription shows, again, that it was built quite recently, in 2012. Obviously, those monuments have been built in the most recent decade as part of the Chinese "patriotic education". In his birthplace as well, the shameless poet is being "re-invented", again and again, for the purpose wholly unrelated to the poet himself. Walter Benjamin's dictum rings ominous: "[...] *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious" (391).

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