“Shakespeare, Thou Art Translated!”: Shakespeare in Korea, 1906-1945

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In talking about Shakespeare in Korea, I have to say at once that we do not have an Akira Kurosawa, and that we have not yet attempted to build a theater in imitation of the Globe. Neither do we enjoy the luxury of drinking ales like The Winter’s Tale or A Midsummer Night’s Dream at a trendy British-style pub named Shakespeare. Shakespeare is not so generally popular in Korea as in Japan. We do our regular samplings of Shakespeare films: Hollywood versions, the BBC television series, Kenneth Branagh’s recent renderings, and so on. Some dramatic companies include in their repertoires adaptations of Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and King Lear. But only one out of thirty Korean college students actually reads Shakespeare even in translation. It is true that the Shakespeare Association of Korea has about two hundred members, convenes biannually, and publishes The Shakespeare Review a biannual devoted to studies of Shakespeare. But we rarely see Shakespearean activities that attract the attention of the general public. Quite a number of distinguished western scholars of humanities and social sciences visited Korea in recent years to give lectures, but none of them was a Shakespearean. Nonetheless, next to Tolstoi and Dostoevski, Shakespeare is the most widely known of the foreign writers, who in one way or another have shaped our image of ourselves as well as that of the West. After all, our occidentalism is not merely our understanding of the Occident but very much an expression of ourselves.

Shakespeare in Korea as in Asia as a whole cannot be detached from larger questions relating to interculturalism and cultural imperialism. Western culture since the

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eighteenth century imported its Orient, as Said tirelessly reminds us, "domesticated for local European use."\textsuperscript{1} But, if the history of orientalism has been the history of the intellectual ownership of the East by the West, one can say with almost equal justice that the history of orientalism has also been the history of occidentalism—the history of the appropriation of the West by the East.

Like most western things Shakespeare came to us not only as a cultural influence but also as a part of political and economic pressure. He came to us in the baggage of empire—with American and European missionaries, with Japanese armies and colonialists, with swords and the Bible, with capitalism and industrialism. Therefore, the history of the importation of Shakespeare into Korea is inextricably bound up with the political history of Korea. But, that is not to say that Shakespeare in Korea was just another typical instance of the frequently-described colonial practice—namely, an enforced insertion of the master's cultural texts into the native life. It was that, but it was also more. Once he arrived in Korea, he became useful—for the Korean people as well as for empire. Their needs, both political and cultural, made him useful. It does not take a Gary Taylor to tell us that Shakespeare can be invented and reinvented, translated and retranslated, as times change, into something and nothing. We have already seen him transformed and translated many times over during the ninety years of his progress through the rapidly changing circumstances of Korea. Thus to study the history of Shakespeare's reception in Korea is, or should be, to ask which "Shakespeare" has been transferred and appropriated by Korea and for what reasons. It is making overt the motives behind the study and reproductions of Shakespeare. When so conducted, a study of Shakespeare in Korea can be a study of the history of our occidentalism, the history of our response to the West and the seductive fruit of modernization it offered.

Having said that, I should quickly add that I cannot present here in this paper every detail of the history of Shakespeare's ninety-year long progress in Korea. I shall only be able to provide a brief history of it, concentrating most of my attention on the translations and adaptations of Shakespeare done during the period between 1906 and 1945.\textsuperscript{2} It will be like showing a series of snapshots of Shakespeare

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  \item [\textsuperscript{1}] Edward Said, \textit{Orientalism} (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3
  \item [\textsuperscript{2}] Any description of the reception of Western literature in Korea must begin with Kim Pyŏng-chŏl's \textit{Han'guk Kŏndaeh P'o'nyŏk Malhaksa Yŏn'gu} [A Study of the History of Translation Literature in Modern Korea], 2 vols (Seoul: Ulyamunwhasa, 1975), which offers a most comprehensive list of translations of Western literature done during the period under focus in this paper. I gratefully acknowledge my scholarly debt to Kim's Herculean labor at the initial stage of this study begun in 1989. But, as a rule, I have checked his citations against the original sources, partly because the analytical nature of this study
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dressed in Korean attire.

1. Shakespeare in Korea, 1906-1919

In 1907, three years before the annexation of Korea to Japan, Shakespeare was a name listed in books of world history translated from Chinese and Japanese. But this name was not just a name, since it, or “Sagüksabia,” as it was transliterated in Korean, stood for the superior power of the Western world. In the books of world history published between 1907 and 1908—Ryu Sŏng-gyŏm’s translation of a school textbook (1907), Hyŏn Ch’ae’s translation of an unidentified Chinese writer (1907), and Yi Ch’ae-u’s translation of On the Evolution of European Civilization in the Nineteenth Century by the Chinese writer Jin Guk-yong (1908)—Shakespeare is presented as an example of how the growth of a nation in its cultural power goes in hand and hand with its growth in political and economic power. The flower of English literature in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—the works of Shakespeare and Francis Bacon as these books have it—grew out of the political and economic soil enriched by the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The event, the authors of the books maintain, opened for England the way to rapid modernization, successfully launching her on a long and distinguished career as an international power. Mixing desire for modernization (or rather westernization?) and theories of Darwinian evolution into a colonial discourse, Mokdan-Sanin, in an article included in T’aegŏk-hakbo 18 (Feb 24, 1908), compared the contemporary English society to an adult, and the Korean one to a child in need of protection and guidance. Shakespeare, the greatest writer of this adult country, came to represent in these books (with due adjustments in logic) all of what the East had to learn from the West in order to be able to modernize itself, grow in power, and come to par with Japan if not quite beat off its threats (8-13). One of the problems with this logic is, as Chŏng Yŏng-t’ae points out in an article printed in Kiho-Hŭnghakhoe Wolbo 1.1 (Aug. 1908), that it turns everything into a matter of culture and sensibility, when in reality it was to take much more than reading Shakespeare to modernize Korea, to raise the level of its material culture to meet that of Japan or the West (31).

But, when he landed on the Korean soil, first in 1906 and attracting more public attention in 1909, Shakespeare was a white-headed figure of wisdom.3 He was tags demands that the cultural context of every translation should be clarified and delineated as minutely as possible.

3 In his book, Kim cites a retranslation of Samuel Smiles’ Self-Help appeared in Choyang-bo 1 1
and maxims quoted out of context. This particular Shakespeare is not a Korean invention, however, albeit he might have easily been the one most congenial to the Korean sensibility tuned to the prudential strains of Confucianism. Shakespeare was first anthologized in 1600 in John Bodenham’s Belvedere, or the Garden of the Muses and England’s Parnassus, collections of quotations designed to offer readers passages by which to enrich and refine their own speech and writing. And from the middle of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century and beyond, Shakespeare circulated in volumes of collected quotations. The format of the collections was devised to encourage the impression that Shakespeare himself was speaking and thinking aloud through the passages: the sententiae, extracted from his works and arranged under given topics, became identified with Shakespeare the person. Shakespeare was a thinker and great teacher of moral precepts. It was this Shakespeare, the bearer of Western wisdom, that Ch’oe Nam-sŏn imported into Korea in 1909 with a translation of two lines from Julius Caesar. “Cowards die many times before their deaths, / The valiant never taste of death but once” (So’nyŏn [Children] 2:2 [Feb. 1909], 28).

As perhaps obvious from the lines he chose to introduce to Korea, however, Ch’oe wanted his Shakespeare a little more practical than philosophical. He wrote in 1910 that Shakespeare had come to Korea to teach all about the world and human nature. Ch’oe went on to say that no matter how poor and friendless one was, one could make one’s way in the world. If Shakespeare was there as a teacher and friend (So’nyŏn 3:3 [Mar. 15, 1910]: 64-65) Ch’oe was modifying the Shakespeare of the quotations with another image of him—the portrait of Shakespeare the self-made entrepreneur presented by Samuel Smiles in his Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Action (1859), an abiding bestseller of the Victorian age. Smiles’s influence on Ch’oe can be measured by the fact that he eventually translated the book into Korean—in 1918—as part of his campaign to enlighten the minds of the younger generation of Korean people.

Smiles’s Shakespeare came to Japan much earlier. In 1871, Nakamura Kei...
lished at Shizuoka his translation of *Self-Help*. The translation entitled in Japanese *Saikoku Risshihen* [Biographies of Self-Made Men of Western Countries] included a few of Polonius's lines from *Hamlet* (1.3. 75-77)—probably the first of Shakespeare's to be translated into Japanese. Along with the novels of Disraeli and Lord Lytton (the author of *Ernest Maltravers, Alice*, and *Rienzi*), Smiles' *Self-Help* was a book most widely read by those of the Japanese people in the Meiji era who wanted to know more about western culture.

Ch'oe must have discovered Smiles's Shakespeare while he was in Japan. He had studied at Waseda University (where the famous novelist, dramatist and Shakespearean translator, Tsbouchi Shoyo, taught Shakespeare) for a year before he was expelled from it for organizing a student-strike in protest of Japanese militaristic policies toward Korea. After the expulsion he returned to Korea in 1906 and undertook a periodical called *So'nyŏn* intended especially for the enlightenment of young people. Here he printed translations of Shakespeare quotations along with his highly moralizing poems. In 1909, he translated Caesar's lines, "Cowards die many times before their deaths, / The valiant never taste of death but once"; in 1910, Lucetta's in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, "Fire that's closest kept burns most of all" (*So'nyŏn* 3:6 [June 1910]: 43), and again in 1910, the Countess's in *All's Well That Ends Well*, "Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none" (*So'nyŏn* 3:7 [July 1910]: 24). However amusingly odd this image of Shakespeare as a Polonius figure uttering words of prudential half-wisdom at every turn might seem to us now, it was in this guise Shakespeare was mobilized for a political campaign of no small significance. The idea this Shakespeare was employed to convey was nothing less than independence and self-help. It was a lesson in survivor skills, which patriotic Korean intellectuals painfully aware of the helpless position of their country in the ruthless international politics of the time, were anxious to teach to younger and more receptive generations. It was a lesson from the strong and successful western world Japan seemed to have learnt by heart and carried into practice with celerity.

In 1909, Aizawaichi-za, a Japanese Sinp'a [New School of Drama] dramatic company, visited Korea. *Hamlet* (probably Kawakami Otojiro's adaptation in 11 scenes) was one of the plays the company staged for the Japanese audience in Seoul. Another Japanese Sinp'a company produced in Seoul the Trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. In 1917, Beethoven Tree's film production of *Macbeth* was shown to a Korean audience. 6 I list these details to stress the fact that

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6 For more details, see Yu Min-yŏng, *Kaehwogu Yŏn'gŭk Sahoesa* [The Social History of Drama in the Age of Korean Enlightenment] (Seoul: Saemunsa, 1987), 72-74, 137-38
Shakespeare came to Korea not merely through, but from, Japan, with other exports of the Japanese empire. Korean nationalist intellectuals welcomed him and "translated" him into something almost divine—the lumen numen of western civilization, so that a subscriber of Maeil Sinbo, the only newspaper licenced by the government at the time, could say in 1912 that Shakespeare had built England as it was with his Orphic power (Maeil Sinbo, 6 Apr. 1912). Yet very few Koreans had actually read Shakespeare's plays or seen them performed.

It may seem that this Bardolatry only shows how eagerly some Korean intellectuals of the period absorbed Western values, and internalized them as their own. It seems to imply that they bought colonialist arguments of cultural determinism at face value. Or rather, I should not say it seems, because it does. They were fascinated with the West even before they saw it. Nonetheless, their Bardolatry expresses, as I have already suggested, a project dear to the hearts of many Korean nationalist intellectuals of the time. The image of the West that they saw reflected in Japanese mirrors stirred up their spirit of emulation, a desire to learn and catch up with Japan. An appeal to Korean young people written by Chang Tök-su, a political activist, illustrates how it worked. In 1915, five years after the loss of Korean independence, Chang put Hamlet's question "To be, or not to be" to an interesting use. In an article loaded with quotations from Shakespeare and Emerson, Chang argues that Korean young people should be more afraid of conquerors of mind than those of body, and goes on to paraphrase the first line of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy: "Our question is not how to survive but what to live for. Should we praise life or curse it? Should we enjoy life or reject it? In short, to be, or not to be, that is the question." He concludes the appeal with an assertion that it is their sacred duty as God's children to exert their will-power for creating a new world of freedom and independence. In Chang's article, Shakespeare comes to be directly associated with the struggle for Korean independence.

1919 was a momentous year in the history of Korean resistance against the Japanese rule. In 1917, Woodrow Wilson, the then president of the United States, delivered before the Senate a speech in which he set forth the terms of a desirable peace, insisting on the principle of the Monroe Doctrine for the entire world, and demanding a concert of Powers capable of maintaining international tranquility and the rights of small nations. His vision of a new world organization that could afford a better chance of world peace while respecting the rights of small nations, stirred

7. Hakchugwang [Lumen Numen] 5 (May 2, 1915) 39-46. This and all other English translations of Korean texts quoted in this paper are mine.
into action the oppressed spirit of Korean people suffering under a foreign yoke. On the first day of March, 1919, Korean men and women, young and old, poured into the street, demanding independence. More than two million people participated in the uprising. They were unarmed and non-violent, but Japanese suppressed them by armed might. More than seventy thousand were massacred; forty-six hundred were thrown into jail and tortured. Yet the demonstrations marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Japanese rule in Korea. Ch’oe Nam-sun, the translator of Shakespeare quotations, was one of those who were responsible for drafting the Declaration of Independence read on the day of the uprising.

In this first stage of the history of Shakespeare in Korea, Shakespeare was primarily a guide to Western culture. But the kind of guidance Korea found in him was dictated by the fact that he had reached the country through and from Japan. Koreans translated those quotations and plays Japanese people found interesting and useful. What Korea saw through the Japanese glass rather darkly, then, was an image of Japan rather than an image of Shakespeare or the Occident. That, however, was precisely the point. Korea tried to learn those things that Japan had learnt from the West in order to overcome the Japanese domination.

2. Shakespeare in Korea, 1919-1945

The note of educational zeal continued to be heard in the period following the uprising. But the strain of cultural determinism already detectable in the writings of the period prior to the uprising became increasingly more apparent and darker. Writing within the same month of the uprising, Kūk’ung emphasized that knowledge was the power that had shaped the world. The European Renaissance in the sixteenth century, for example, was brought about by individuals liberated from bonds of ignorance, he went on to say, and thus Korean people should try to learn more before they took any political action. Kūk’ung seems to have been preaching an acquiescence to the fate, political as well as cultural, assigned to Korea. He was not alone in this. Ch’anghaegōsa, writing a year later, was more outspoken. Characterizing Korea as handicapped in just about everything, in education, economy, culture, and politics, he exhorted Korean people to “eat”: “We should devour

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8 For the statistics, I have followed Lee Ki-baek in his Han’guksa shunron [A New History of Korea], 2nd ed. (Seoul: Iljogak, 1990), 432-39, although Lee’s have recently come under serious scrutiny.
10 Kaebyǒk [New Heaven and Earth] 5 (Nov. 1920) 15
Chinese culture. We should devour Japanese culture, and we should devour Western culture. Let us eat more and grow up.” Chŏn Yŏng-t’aek, in 1920, expressed a similar view, although this time without the metaphor of consumption and digestion. These writers were merely voicing what many Korean intellectuals felt at the time, and what the Japanese colonial government in Korea led them to believe about themselves.

After the massive demonstration in 1919, Japan changed its approach to the problem of Korean discontent with Japanese rule. The Japanese colonial government began to use cultural powers rather than military powers in order to control the Korean people. There were relaxations of restrictive colonial measures, more opportunities for modern education, more importation of (Japanized) western culture, and more freedom of expression. Three Korean daily newspapers—Dong-A Ilbo, Chosun Ilbo, and Sidae Ilbo—were established, and began to function as chief conduits for the propagation of Western literature and culture. Obviously, Japan adapted these policies to take the edge off the Korean unrest. They were sops for Cerberus. But, they had other functions as well. They were strategies designed to reshape the Korean people in a Japanese mould, while producing minimum of resentment. Many Koreans actually found it rather easy to follow the commands that now had become more seductive, if more insidious, than ever before. The last remnants of the resistance against modern education and culture died out fast, as Yu Ch’i-jin observes in his autobiography, and increasing number of people went to Japan to study. The fruits of modernization offered to Korea was not a political independence as the elite Korean nationalists of the 1910s had wished. It turned out to be a lure to a conformity with Japan.

This story, of course, is only a part of a story far more complex. The bait was there, and was taken. But the Korean nationalist elites of the 1910s were not completely deceived in their ardent dreams. What seemed to be slavish imitation on the part of the new class of Korean elites educated in Japan was also their way of finding a place for themselves in the new socio-economic terrain opened by the Japanese. One way of looking at the colonial management of cultural translation would be to note how culture functions as an ideological apparatus in perpetuating dominant power relations. And another way of looking at the same thing would be to examine how the native subjects could undermine colonial authority through

11 Hakchugwang 20 (Feb 1920) 45-51
"simultaneous mimicry and resistance," as Homi Bhabha suggests. The Korean elites appropriated western culture for their own use and for the re-education (as they saw it) of the Korean people, even when it was also used by the Japanese colonialists as a bait.

These years saw several adaptations and translations of Shakespeare’s works. In 1920, O Chŏn-won published in *Haksaenggwe* [The World of Students] a surprisingly accurate rendering of the Trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. It was the first complete Korean translation of a Shakespearean scene. The Trial scene was one of the several Shakespearean scenes most frequently adapted and staged in Japan, the others being the Balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the Forum scene from *Julius Caesar*, and the Nunnery scene from *Hamlet*. It was also a staple in Japanese textbooks for English majors. It is more than likely that O had consulted them while preparing his translation. But that is not the question here. The question is the motive behind this importation. O does not provide any clue to the contexts the scene should be read in. There is no introductory words about Shakespeare, or the plot of the play from which it is extracted. The translation does not seem to operate in any recognizable political context except that it appears to support the anti-Semitic interpretations of the play of the 1920s in England, and discourage other readings potentially more explosive (even when incorrect) in the colonial context of Korea: few, if any, would have thought of taking Shylock’s side when the guy is so mean and terrible. The Venetians are fully justified in punishing him so savagely. What to make of the translation is left entirely up to the reader.

Something similar happened with Yi Kwang-su’s translation of the Forum scene from *Julius Caesar*, which appeared in *Dong-A Ilbo*, 1 Jan 1926. *Julius Caesar* had been a political play in Japan, even before it was translated into Japanese. In 1881, according to Toyoda Minoru, “an Imperial Edict had been issued for the inauguration of a Diet in nine years’ time, political parties were being organized; and in 1882 Itagaki Taisuke, the Liberal leader, was seriously wounded by an assassin. This had made the names of Caesar and Brutus household words among the ‘intellectuals’” (17). When it appeared in 1884 in the Kabuki style, under the title, *Shizaru Kidan: Iju no Tachu Nagori no Kireaji* [The Strange Story of Caesar: The Sharp

14 *Haksaenggwe* 2 (Sept 1920) 38-40
Blade of a Sword for Liberty, the play was put into service as a protest against the bureaucratic "law and order" government in power at the time. In 1901 the play became associated with a political event. In June 21, 1901, an influential politician called Hoshi Toru was stabbed to death in the Tokyo Municipal Office, and three weeks later a Smp’ a company put the Forum scene on the stage. It was obviously chosen for its topicality. It is impossible to tell whether Yi was aware of the politically charged history of the scene’s reception in Japan. But, it is likely that he was. He studied English at Waseda University, and was one of the students who drew up the Tokyo Declaration of Independence one month before the 1919 uprising. Yi himself provides no clue other than a very brief and apolitical afterword to the translation: he says he just thought the “dramatic poem” might be a nice new-year gift to Korean people, if only because it was written by the greatest genius England has ever produced. Again the reader was left to her or his own devices. Readers not in the know about the political significance of the scene for the Japanese audience might have had a serious difficulty in deciding whether s/he was supposed to applaud up, or boo down, Brutus Antony has the last word Caesar is dead. Long live Caesar. Is the Korean reader encouraged to take arms against the Japanese rulers? Or not?

There are other examples that show the problematics (or political possibilities) of cultural importation in colonial context. In 1921, Hyön Ch’öl, an actor and theorist, trained in Japan and Shanghai, began to serialize a translation of Hamlet in Kaebyonk, a pioneering literary journal he himself was working for as one of the editors. Although it was a retranslation of Shoyo’s 1909 Japanese version, it was the first attempt to introduce the public to the play in its entirety. Hyön had just published several articles expounding his views of drama in Kaebyonk and elsewhere, utilizing his experience with Shimamura Hogetzu at Genjutsu-Za [The Art Theater], who organized with Shoyo, Bunger-Kyokai [The Literature and Art Society] and led the Shingeeki [New Drama] movement. In a Mael Sinbo article, Hyön paraphrases Ibsen’s words emphasizing the social function of drama: “the primary responsibility of a dramatist is to depict life as it is, and to reform the country by providing the people with higher criteria of cultural values.” In Chosun Ilbo articles, however, he took a step back, and repeated the classical recipe, dulce et utile. In a Kaebyonk article, Hyön reverted to his initial position to propose a people’s theater movement.

16 The first installment was printed in the May 1921 issue, and the last one in the Dec 1922 issue
17 Mael Sinbo, June 30, 1920
18 Chosun Ilbo, 24 Jan-21 Mar 1921
for a cultural reformation of Korea.\textsuperscript{19} He was to maintain the same position six years later in a \textit{Tonggwang} article, he wrote "Dramatic movements are not merely for artistic reform, because they are for social and national reform .... We in Korea need more artistic reform movements than social in order to achieve a national reformation; we need to start dramatic rather than social movements in order to achieve a social reformation."\textsuperscript{20} After reading these essays, (minor shifts in his position notwithstanding,) one might expect that it was for the causes advocated there that he translated \textit{Hamlet}. But, curiously enough, the commentary he prepared for the translation says nothing of why he chose to introduce the play to Korean people, and what he wanted to accomplish by it.\textsuperscript{21} He only advises the reader to sit back and enjoy without asking where Shakespeare comes from or how and why he brought \textit{Hamlet} into being, because the play is but a play, and a play is (guess what?) but a fiction, a thing of nothing. As far as Hyŏn's \textit{Hamlet} is concerned, we may have to say Shakespeare’s influence on the new Korean drama was negligible, or indirect through Shoyo’s Shingeki movement, and the Shakespeare he used as a model for the creation of a new literary drama.

It is difficult indeed to divine the motives behind the importation of Shakespeare in this period. Self-censorship, more than government censorship, might explain the antiseptic appearance of the translations that were produced in this period in ever-increasing numbers. Or it may be merely because the translators were introducing the public, in a haphazard manner, to the bit of Japanese culture they happened to have tasted. The business of selecting and inventing from materials transmitted to them by the Japanized western culture, “transculturation,” as ethnographers term the process, was left to the readers. In 1921, Chŏng Sun-gyu published in book form an adaptation of \textit{Romeo and Juliet}. In 1923, \textit{Choson Ilbo} began to serialize Yang Hapyŏp's adaptation of \textit{Macbeth} in the form of a serialized newspaper novel. In 1924, Yi Sang-su’s translation of \textit{The Merchant of Venice} in its entirety appeared, in book form, under the title \textit{Inyuk-Chaep’an} [The Suit for a Pound of Human Flesh]. \textit{Chosŏmnundan} [The Literary World of Chosŏn], a literary magazine, in 1924-1925, carried in serial Chŏn Yŏng-t’aek’s translation of Lamb’s prose adaptation of \textit{Othello}. In 1926, Keun Chun translated and adapted Lamb’s version of \textit{The Tempest} for a magazine called \textit{Ch’ŏngnyŏn} [Young Men]. In 1933, Pak Yong-ch’ŏl, the poet, adapted the Trial scene from \textit{The Merchant of Venice} for the stage. In 1934, an

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Kaebŏk} 10 (Mar 1921)
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Tonggwang} 9 (Jan 1927)
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Kaebŏk} 17 (Nov 1921) 148-53
anonymous reporter of Sinyösun [New Woman] published an adaptation of King Lear under the title King Lear and His Daughters.22 During the ten years between 1935 and 1945, when Japan became hostile toward western cultures, hardly any translation of Shakespeare appeared. Most of the translations published during the period between 1920-1945 were retranslations of Japanese versions of Lamb’s prose adaptations, or the adaptations for Sinp’a theaters and newspapers.

As to how to digest the cultural diet administered to them, (such as it was,) the readers of the 1920s and 1930s in Korea might have learnt little from the writings on Shakespeare appearing in newspapers and periodicals. They are mostly introductory comments, with a strong resemblance to student notes hurriedly taken in college English classes. Pyŏn Yŏng-ro, the poet, on two different occasions, introduced the myriad-minded Shakespeare with a due amount of bardolatry.23 In a call for more systematic studies of Tolstoi, Chŏng In-sŏp paraphrased Gervinus’s attempt to defend Shakespeare from the strictures of the Russian writer (Dong-A Ilbo, 20 Sept 1928). Presenting a plot summary of Hamlet, Simgyŏng-Sanin represented Shakespeare as an English national treasure, quoting, inevitably, Carlyle (Chosun-Ilbo, 17 Oct. 1929) Pak Sang-yŏp described Shakespeare’s plays as having an universal appeal both for the West and the East.24 The bardolatry of the 1910s continued well into the 1920s and 1930s, and spread to the general reading public. But the nationalist insistence of the 1910s on political independence as the goal of cultural education became less emphatic—or, almost inaudible

The readers of the 1920s and 1930s might have found more help in the discussions carried on by writers and literary men about the role of western literature in creating a new Korean culture. It is from these discussions that one hears a note of anxiety and caution that had rarely been sounded in the history of Shakespeare’s reception in Korea. It is they that afford a clearer view of how the Korean traditional culture met the challenge of western culture.

The discussions surrounding the New Drama movement are of special interest in this respect. In 1921, Kim U-jin, a young playwright, having just returned from Waseda, called for a theater reform movement, claiming that Korea needed a new theater in order to rouse the all but moribund soul of the people into a new life.25

22 Sinyösun 2 6 (June 1934) 82-89
23 Hyŏndae P’yŏng’ron 4 (1 May 1927) 101-04, Shunsaeng 3 4 (1 Apr 1930) 28-29
24 Sinyösun 7 5 (1 May 1933) 62-66
And to create a new theater, Kim argued, one should import western drama into Korea. His insistence on the role of western culture in the enlightenment of the people places him in the company of the nationalists of 1910s and many other writers in 1920s including Hyŏn Ch’ŏl mentioned above. What is extraordinary, however, is the religious language he uses in the argument. He compares the New Drama movement to Luther’s Reformation, Korea to a wasteland in need of regeneration, and Western drama to the regenerative seed. He uses the same language in an article he wrote in collaboration with Hong Hae-sŏng five years later. But, here, an interesting change occurs in the attitude toward the people, although the arguments about Western culture remain essentially the same. He likens the participants in the New Drama Movement to the Disciples spreading the Word of God, and suggests that if they want to save the people they should teach them how to listen to the news they have to convey, they would not listen, for they don’t know how. In order to create a new Jerusalem, they should teach the people how to swallow and digest the Western cultural fare offered to them. Culture becomes religion. One thing to note about Kim’s cultural utopia is that it does not allow a place for Bardolatry. In a brief essay, he confesses that he is unable to understand why Carlyle found Shakespeare so praiseworthy except that the playwright was very much a child of his own time: in still another essay he says that the Shakespearean plays on the French stage since the time of Hugo represented just about everything the New Drama was fighting against. Kim’s call for more translations was partly answered in 1926 by the appearance of *Haeoe-munhak* [Foreign Literature], a journal devoted to translations of foreign literature. Some of the founding members of the journal, such as Chŏng In-sŏp, Yi Hŏn-gu, Kim Kwang-sŏp, and Sŏ Hang-sŏk, became engaged in the activities of Kikyesul-hyŏphoe, a dramatic society organized in 1931, as translators and dramaturgs. During the 24 seasons between 1931 and 1939, the dramatic society produced 24 translation plays, twice as many as the Korean plays performed during the same period. Its members were vocal in advocating their practice, using the same argument Kim U-jin had used, only with less of its religious fervor, or didactic zeal.

As their voice became more pronounced, so did the other voice, the voice questioning the validity of their position. It is interesting to note that the question was raised mainly by those engaged in popular theater, the type of theater which the proponents of the New Drama movement had opposed as decadent and uneducative. As

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27 Kim, *Works*, vol 2, 107-09, 76-86
early as in 1929, Hong Hae-sŏng, the collaborator of Kim U-jin, emphasized the function of drama as an expression of national identity, thus locating the New Drama Movement not merely in the new context of imported drama but also in that of Korean traditional drama (*Dong-A Ilbo*, 15 Oct. 1929). Shim Hun objected to translation drama because, like western cuisine, it did not agree with the people’s stomach. If the dramatic society had to give the people foreign food, it should cook it in Korean ways: adapt the plays in such ways that would make them entertaining and intelligible (*Chosun Ilbo*, 6 Nov 1929, *Tonggwang* 38 [Oct. 1932]). Shin Bul-ch’ul’s objection was as specific and spirited as that of Shim. He said he was ashamed to see every dramatic societies staging only translation drama, because it merely showed there was no real playwright in Korea. The advocates of translation drama, he continued to say, would have better spent their time in writing some good plays instead of borrowing from other countries or lamenting the sterility of the Korean theater.

3. A Coda—Shakespeare in Korea, 1945-1960

Cultural education, obviously, did not bring about the Independence. But it did help, in a way, to create the politically and intellectually exhilarating atmosphere of the four or five years between the Independence and the Korean War. If one may say every political issue was translated into a matter of culture and by that means was evaded in the colonial period, in these tense years between a war and another war every cultural issue became a serious political problem. Debates raged between the writers on the right and the left, but I have neither the space nor the time to detail them here. Sŏl Chŏng-shik, one of those poets who were on the left, however, deserves a special mention, because his translation of *Hamlet* published in 1949 is the first original translation of the play by a Korean translator. His educational background is also noteworthy in that he was not educated in Japan, as most Korean writers active in the colonial period were. He studied English at Mount Union University and Columbia University for four years after graduating from Yonhee College in Seoul. As he promises in the Preface, he tries to match his translation with the original as faithfully as possible, using side marks to conscientiously point out the places where he departs from literal translation. This translation is clearly superior to Hyŏn Ch’ŏl’s version in intelligibility, and, perhaps, performability. It is interesting to note that Sŏl attaches no political significance to the play or his trans-

28 Preface to *Hamlet* [*Hamlet*] (Seoul Paekyang-dang, 1949), 3-6
lation in the Preface. His motives for the translation seem purely personal and artistic. He wanted to do it, because he found the playwright a much better writer than he would ever be. This is remarkable, coming from the chairperson of the Chosŏn Munhakka Tongmaeng [Chosŏn Writers' League], a left-wing organization, in that time of ideological conflicts.

During the Korean War, Shakespeare enjoyed unprecedented popularity. The people living in the wartime Pusan were delighted in the stories of love and death that unfolded as Othello, Hamlet or Macbeth fretted and strutted on the stage.29 Personally, I am not sure why they found tragedies so comforting when they themselves were in the midst of a terrible tragedy. But, Shakespeare indeed seems to have been a comfort for many Koreans living in that difficult time, including Ch’oe Chae-sŏ, a prolific writer and distinguished professor of English at Yonsei University. His is an instructive case for one who wishes to understand what Shakespeare had become in Korea in 1950s and beyond.

Staying in Taegu during the war years, Ch’oe started a serious study of Shakespeare. The preface to his book on Shakespeare contains an extraordinary story: a few days before the war broke out, he told his students that if he had to leave home to take refuge, he would carry with him a copy of complete works of Shakespeare and the Concise Oxford English Dictionary.30 That was exactly what he did a few days later except that he had one more book with him, Onion’s A Shakespeare Glossary. He said that he found in Shakespeare the real refuge from the horrors of the war: he became attracted to the idea of order expressed in the plays. A decade later, he published a book on Shakespeare’s idea of order. But, he published a translation of Hamlet first — in 1956. It is an intelligent, scholarly translation, and compares favorably with Sŏl’s. It provides a lengthy introduction, detailed notes, and the English original to boot. The introduction affords another view of Ch’oe’s Shakespeare. Ch’oe characterizes Hamlet as a tragedy of a perfectionist intellectual, who by nature cannot but think too precisely on events.31

Shakespearean drama seems to have lost much of its value as an instrument for civilizing and modernizing the Korean people. He seems to have become an object of serious study rather than of cultural desire. For each reader he became a projection of the reader’s own self, a mirror that reflected not only one’s face but also one’s anti-images.

29 Yu, Autobiography, 219-20
31 Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (Seoul: Haml Publishinh Co, 1956), xxx-xxxii
In retrospect, it is difficult to tell whether it was the West that dominated and colonized Korea through the Japanese or whether it was Japan that dominated and colonized Korea through the Western means. Whichever was the true master, western culture functioned as the empire’s most effective army of soldiers and missionaries. The colonial period was a strange time indeed, when western literature was enthusiastically welcomed as a depository of wisdom, as a guidebook for the discovery of utopia, or of the regaining of political independence, when English majors could become instant prophets and leaders, and when *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* could be popular newspaper novels.

**GLOSSARY**

*Ch’angjo* 創造  
Kim U-jin  金師鎬
*Ch’anghaegōsa* 滄海居士  
*Maeul Sinbo* 每日申報
*Chang Tōk-su* 張德秀  
*Mokdan-Sanin* 牧丹山人
*Ch’oe Chae-sō* 崔載瑞  
*O Ch’ön-won* 吳天園
*Ch’oe Nam-sŏn* 崔南善  
*Pak Sang-Yŏp* 朴祥煇
*Chŏn Yong-t’aek* 田應澤  
*Pak Yong-ch’ŏl* 朴龍喆
*Chŏng In-sŏp* 鄭寅燮  
*Pyŏn Yong-ro* 卞榮魯
*Ch’ŏngnyŏn* 青年  
*Shim Hun* 沈薰
*Chŏng Sun-gyu* 鄭淳奎  
*Shin Bul-ch’ul* 申不出
*Chŏng Yong-t’aek* 鄭永澤  
*Sidae Ilbo* 時代日報
*Chosŏn munban* 朝鮮文壇  
*Simgyŏng-Sanin* 心卿山人
*Choyang-bo* 朝陽報  
*Simp’a* 新派
*Kiho-Hŭnghakhoe Wolbo* 佛教興學會 月報
*Sinyŏsŏng* 新女性

Kūk’ung 極態  
*So’nyŏn* 少年
*Kūkyesul-hyŏphoe* 劇藝術協會  
*Sŏl Ch’ŏng-shik* 薛貞植
*Kŏn Ch’un* 僧春  
*Taegŭk-hakbo* 太極學報
*Haeoe-munhak* 海外文學  
*Tonggwang* 東光
*Hakchigwang* 學之光  
*Yang Ha-Yŏp* 楊夏葉
*Haksanngye* 學生界  
*Yi Ch’ae-u* 李埈雨
*Hong Hae-sŏng* 洪海星  
*Yi Hŏn-gu* 李軒求
*Hyŏn Ch’ae* 玄采  
*Yi Kwang-su* 李光洙
*Hyŏn Ch’ŏl* 玄哲  
*Yi Sang-su* 李相壽
*Kaebŏk* 開廓  
*Yu Ch’i-jin* 柳致真
*Kim Kwang-sŏp* 金煚燮