
Wars tend to be remembered by their origins, their significant battles, their heroes, and their technological innovations. Their conclusions, however, do not receive nearly as much attention in commercial or academic circles. In this sense, 8/15 ü kiök is unique in its focus on one particular day in World War II history: August 15, 1945, the day that the Japanese emperor broadcasted his announcement of Japan’s acceptance of the Allied forces’ surrender terms throughout the empire. A common thread running through this compilation is the diverse meanings that this day holds in different East Asian states, specifically North and South Korea, China, Taiwan, and Japan, as well as how its significance has changed over the course of their postwar/post-liberation histories.

The chapters of this volume join a growing body of literature dedicated to examining how the Second World War is remembered. Two volumes in English, T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., Perilous Memories (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001) and Marc Gallicchio, ed., The Unpredictability of the Past (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), and one in Korean, the Pigyo yöksa munhwa yŏn’guso, ed., Kiök kwa chŏnjaeng (War and Memory) (Seoul: Hyumŏnisūr’ù, 2009), consider the topic on a broad scale. This particular volume shares with the above compilations the wide temporal and spatial scope in which the authors frame their topics, but diverges in its more directed focus on one specific date, rather than the array of issues that the above three volumes consider.

The central question addressed in this volume is whether August 15, 1945 deserves its recognition as the historically significant day of East Asia’s
liberation. The situations considered within 8/15 ū kiŏk have all commemorated this day in one way or another, be it through the solemn war’s end ceremony (as in Japan), or as the day of national liberation (as in South Korea). China and Taiwan have commemorated the day with less consistency. Are there not days, such as September 3 (1945), when the surrender papers were signed aboard the USS Missouri, or September 8 (1951), when the peace treaty was signed in San Francisco, that better serve this purpose?

A number of chapters in this volume consider the immediate effect of the radio announcement. Sin Chubaek reflects on the not-so-suddenness of this “sudden” announcement. The Japanese had tapped independence movement leader Yŏ Unhyŏng days in advance to establish a transitory administration to maintain public order in preparation for Japan’s surrender. Indeed, pictures of Yŏ taken on that day show a rather solemn-looking individual resisting engulfment by the manse cheers that surround him (p. 30). His expression reveals his prior knowledge of Japan’s decision to surrender, and perhaps also his understanding of the arduous road that Korea faced. The emperor’s declaration also did not suddenly end the fighting, which, as shown by Ronald H. Spector (In the Ruins of Empire, New York: Random House, 2007), continued on many fronts across the Pacific theater. Ki Kwangsŏ’s contribution describes the fighting that took place between Soviet and Japanese forces between August 9 and 24, a period during which the Soviet army sustained just under 10,000 deaths while battling Japanese forces in China and in northern Korea (pp. 194-95).

A second problem addressed within is the significance of August 15, 1945 as Korea’s day of liberation (baebang). Just who did the emperor’s announcement liberate? As Chŏng Kŭnsik notes, August 15 is not the liberation day for all Koreans, even though they celebrate the day as such (p. 19). Political prisoners gained their release from the notorious Sŏdaemun Prison on this day (p. 29). But the prison remained in operation after the Japanese left: first it was managed by the United States Military Government and after 1948 by South Korean administrations. This history is hidden by Korea’s strong emphasis on the symbolic value of August 15—Korean liberation from Japanese oppression (p. 34). For Japan-based Koreans, notes Chŏng Yŏnghwan, August 15 is significant as the day they were “forgotten,” the day that prolonged their colonial existence (p. 245). The same could be said for the tens of thousands of Korean laborers left behind on the island of Sakhalin (known as Karafuto in Jap.).

The significance of August 15, 1945 changed over the following six decades. Koreans in the north began to formally commemorate this day from
1946; Koreans in the south from 1949. The North initially used the day to celebrate the Soviet Union’s role in achieving Japan’s defeat. This outward emphasis gradually shifted inward to the role that Korean rebels played in liberating Korea (pp. 204-06). South Korea commemorates two events on this day: Korea’s liberation from the Japanese, as well as South Korea’s “glorious restoration” (kwangbok) the day that the state was founded in 1948. South Korean presidents have used the commemorative addresses to emphasize the prevalent themes of the times, from war and the North Korean threat in the 1950s, to economic recovery movements of the 1960s, to reconciliation with North Korea in the 2000s, as traced by Chŏn Chaeho (Chapter 4). The same can be said for Taiwan and China where the emphasis on the day in which liberation is celebrated has likewise followed the rhythm of political developments. The Taiwanese hold no universal agreement on a day of liberation or restoration, due in part to the arrival of Mainland Chinese in the late 1940s (p. 296). War commemoration ceremonies in Mainland China ignored August 15 during the 1960s; it first appeared in their war history in 1986; and was replaced from the mid-1990s by September 3 (pp. 307-10). For Japan, as Matsuda Toshihiko explains, August 15 initially signified the shame of defeat, at least until Japan’s economic recovery had begun and the Vietnam War had escalated. From this time Japanese used the date to commemorate their liberation from the wartime culture (p. 228).

What the authors of this compilation demonstrate is that August 15, 1945 is a day of significant historical meaning in Korea and Japan, as well as in other parts of East Asia. Indeed, it is a day of global importance. However, the states that it affected directly, and particularly those that were either under Japanese colonial rule or whose people battled the Japanese, remember this day in rather different ways. Like wars’ origins, the spatial and temporal resolutions of wars’ conclusions often remain as elusive as they are necessary. August 15, while imperfect in this regard, serves as a day for communal observation among peoples on many fronts whose lives were influenced by Japan’s colonial and wartime histories.

Mark E. Caprio
Professor, College of Intercultural Communication
Rikkyo University
Saegusa Toshikatsu, in a speech previous to his retirement from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, stated that when viewing three East Asian nations (China Korea and Japan) from the perspective of literary tradition, there are three areas in which Korean literature is most lacking: drama, comedy, and fantasy. When a foreign researcher regarded as “the only scholar in Japan capable of writing a history of Korean literature” makes this sort of statement, it is worth considering his understanding of the historical character of Korean literature. One might conjecture that from an outsider’s perspective, the influence of Neo-Confucian literary values might be largely to blame for Korean literature feeling characteristically deficient in drama, comedy, and fantasy. This sort of allusion may also be one key in explaining the reality of the very frail base regarding the study of drama in Korean literature at the systematic level of academism, despite the explosive increase in public interest of mass media drama, TV drama, movies, etc. The fact is that in comparison to foreign universities and quite differently than novels and poetry, the Korean drama related curriculum remains meager and there are few professors.

Many drama researchers, however, often comment that circumstances would be different had Nojŏng Kim Chaech’ŏl (金在喆 1907-1933), who died prematurely at the young age of twenty-seven, lived past Korean liberation and had the following generations of scholars continued his research. The Nojŏng Literary Award established by the Learned Society of Korean Drama and Theatre aspires to assist scholars who are attempting to set the roots of drama research into academia by the restitution of this historical void. Last February, Yang Seung Gook, who was the first scholar after Nojŏng to be employed as a professor of drama (in the Korean Literature department of Seoul National University), received the Ninth Annual Nojŏng Literary Award for the present work. The book is the result of some twenty years of research on modern Korean drama by the author. It addresses the theoretical examination of the “extant forms” and “thought structure” of Korean modern drama and plays spanning the post-enlightenment period through the late Japanese colonial period. Part One discusses the genre features of Korean modern dramas such as historical drama, popular theatre, and comedy. Part Two treats the problems of themes such as masculinity and femininity, and madness and suicide in Korean modern drama. Part Three deals with the
relatively new research on 1940s popular theatre, or “national drama” (kungmin yón’gük). Additionally, a bibliography of articles about movies and plays printed in the colonial period newspaper Maeil sinbo is included as an appendix.

Notable in the Part One discussion analyzing the genres of Korean modern drama is the attempt to establish the notion of popular theatre and historical drama and the illumination of the aesthetic of these genres through the analysis of major texts. Considering that popular theatre and historical drama are the two most vigorous areas of research among the current studies of drama—thus revealing also the popularity of cultural studies—the keen pioneering insight of the original papers written some decades earlier is clearly evident. Also, according to the analysis of modern Korean comedy in Part One, although the techniques for producing laughter have developed, the social-critical function contained in that laughter has grown weaker. Part Two mainly deals with modern Korean drama from the perspective of gender, focusing on the analysis of various motifs, such as “madness and suicide” and “daughter selling.” According to the author, the frequent occurrence of these motifs was the result of popular theatre’s dependence on box office hits, and like the weakening of reality criticism in historical drama and comedy was unavoidable due to the external circumstances of oppression and censorship in colonial Korea. Part Three’s discussion of so-called “national drama” offers an interesting post-colonial analysis regarding propaganda dramas made in the context of late colonial period diglossia. Although national dramas, criticized as “failed dramas,” were failures in terms of propaganda, not only was the existence of dramas made for the purpose of propaganda in the colony’s language meaningful, but the assessment that these dramas were received as popular theatre rather than as pro-Japanese theater in the eyes of the general public, is intriguing. Particularly in the instance of Im Sŏngyu’s “Ice flower” (Pyŏnghua 永花), which proved to be very popular when competing in a national drama competition, the assertion that not only did the pro-Japanese message appearing on the surface clash with the underlying message of resistance, but that Chosŏn-era music and sounds frequently employed onstage evoked a Chosŏn sentiment, overturns the established argument about late colonial period national drama.

As stated by the author in the introduction, the aim of this book is to “ultimately arrive at a ‘methodology for drama studies’” (p. 6). In fact, among the greatest virtues of this text is that it is faithful to the inherent study of drama where performance is primary. Research on the established history of modern Korean drama has for the most part been trapped in a literary research
framework of printed texts, and going beyond the analysis of these extant texts has been difficult; this book, however, establishes itself by its strong aim toward publicly performed drama and meticulous analysis of publicly performed texts. Beginning from a state in which resources on the actual seen and heard performance content were nearly absent, the author’s superior analysis, which through dramatic works, mass media articles, and performance reviews, arrives at the elements of performing arts, is remarkable.

Of course there are a few points that could have been better addressed in this work. Perhaps the most regrettable of these is the lack of further explanation in regard to the non-standard terms “extant form” and “thought structure” in the title. In traditional literary research these ideas would be expressed by the terms genre theory, or typology, and ideology, or thought, respectively. The author furnishes no explanation on why standard academic terminology was eschewed for these non-standard terms. Additionally, one cannot erase the feeling that the work is slanted towards the treatment of stage theater text research. However, the book does provide an opportunity to escape the limited “sender” oriented stance of traditional literary studies, and understand Korean modern drama in the contextually broader “receiver” oriented stance of cultural studies. The expansive and multi-leveled modern Korean drama texts that began to garner the attention of professional researchers with this book will be awaiting the attention of many more young scholars.

Seo Jaekil
HK Research Professor, Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies
Seoul National University


This book evaluates comparative linguistic studies of Korean and Japanese. Korean and Japanese have long been objects of comparative linguistic studies due to the similarities in their grammatical structure. The author views these studies as beginning with Aston, moving through the essential research of Kanazawa and Hattori, to the noteworthy works of Martin and Whitman. The conclusion reached by the majority of scholars is that Korean and Japanese
belong to the same language family. Among these studies Kanazawa’s work is notable for having been written as a means to justify Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula.

Vovin rejects the theory that Korean and Japanese are of the same language family. He cites two types of resources in his refutation: studies on Korean and Japanese morphology and Whitman’s most recent research of comparative lexicology (1985). The conclusion reached on the basis of an analysis of Whitman’s work is significant: among 347 lexical items compared from each language, eleven are possible cognates, seventy-five are clear instances of borrowing from Korean to Japanese, and the remaining 261 are not identifiable as possible cognates by comparative linguistic study. Additionally, these eleven cognates (also appearing as “twelve words” on the same page) may be further condensed to six and rather than asserting that these words share a common genealogy, it is better to consider them as merely having been borrowed at an earlier time than the other seventy-five borrowed lexical items. The book concludes that the relationship between Korean and Japanese is not genetic, but rather areal. That is, there is no genetic relationship between the two, only borrowing due to geographic contiguity, but at the surface level this borrowing appears to be genetic.

We should view this work from a wider comparative linguistic viewpoint, from the scope of Altaic comparative linguistics. There are two opposing stances in Altaic comparative linguistics concerning the affinity of Turkic, Mongolian, and Manchu-Tungus, including or excluding Korean. These are called the Altaic family hypothesis and the anti-Altaic family hypothesis, with the former supported by Ramstedt, Poppe and others, and the later aggressively asserted by Doerfer, Clauson and others. Both hypotheses admit the similarity of Altaic languages, but the former sees this similarity as stemming from a common proto-language, while the latter sees it as stemming from generations of borrowing. Both hypotheses admit that historical linguistic resources for Altaic languages are much younger than Indo-European language resources, and that as the morphemes have simply combining agglutinative grammatical structures, these are languages for which it is difficult to find comparative linguistic corroborations. Obviously, as those linguists familiar with the successes of comparative linguistics in the Indo-European language family hold a very negative opinion of the mutual relationships of Altaic languages, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that most interested scholars either assert or believe the anti-Altaic hypothesis. The major reasons for this are the lack of phonetic correspondences between Altaic languages and the lack of agreement in base vocabulary such as numerals etc.
Vovin had previously supported the Altaic family hypothesis, but has changed his view to support the anti-Altaic family hypothesis since 2005. The decisive point seems rooted in his disappointment over the work of Starostin et al. (2003). Vovin (2005) is a review of this enormous dictionary of Altaic language word origins, but at the same time it confronts those scholars who also support the Nostratic hypothesis and criticizes their universal comparativism based on a lack of academic strictness, and prompted a change in the direction of his own research. In this reviewer’s opinion, as pointed out above, much of the field of comparative Altaic linguistics relies on structures that are not favorable towards comparative linguistics, and since many academically immature articles are thus published, other studies build on them without sufficient verification of their reliability.

Whitman 1985 was his ambitious dissertation conducted while at Harvard, when Altaic linguistics was dominated by the view that Korean is not genetically related to Japanese, and the anti-Altaic hypothesis was rather ubiquitous; nevertheless, he concluded that he thought it was possible to prove a genetic relationship between the two languages based on their grammatical similarity (In Vovin’s words, if you replace the words of one language, they can be changed into sentences understandable in another language). Vovin’s critique of Whitman’s comparison may be accepted or dismissed by individual scholars. Yet, quite clearly, it is far easier to criticize extant research in a given arena than it is to actually produce original research. In the field of architecture, for instance, it is difficult to construct a building, while comparatively easy to destroy it. Of course, a properly constructed building will be difficult to tear down.

Through his treatment of Korean resources, Vovin has presented a number of important issues concerning the study of the Korean language. And he furnishes his opinion on the origin of aspirated consonants, intervocalic lenition, the origin of tonality in Korean, and the origin of Korean vowel harmony through his treatment of the latest research on these topics. At times, such as when reconstructing the accusative case particle *-pî-tV (p. 55), or when analyzing the word origin of “eight” (어덟) to be “two from ten” (열에서 둘, p. 25), the work contains fresh but unrefined opinions deserving of a serious look by all scholars of the Korean language.

References


Research by Korean scholars on the origins and genealogy of the Korean language has been stagnant since 1990. And previous to that date, this research was mainly conducted in relation to Altaic languages. In the West, however, research on whether there is a genetic relationship between Korean and Japanese continues vigorously. For example, in Beckwith’s Koguryo published in 2004, he asserts that Korean and the language spoken in Koguryŏ were unrelated, while the Koguryo language and Japanese are related. Unger, on the contrary, in his work published just last year, asserts that Korean and Japanese are related. Let us now introduce Unger’s work and consider some additional points.

The first chapter, “Contact Hypotheses and Their Consequences,” points out the problems in refutations of the view that there is a genetic relationship between Korean and Japanese. It explains the difficulty in proving the genetic relationship etymologically as being due to the very early division of pre-Korean and pre-Japanese, and the contact of pre-Japanese to a third language. That is, it points out that the Koreanization of the peninsula was completed through the rise of Silla, Paekche, and Koguryo. The lexical correspondence problem occurring in the reconstruction of proto-Korean-Japanese (pKJ), it continues, may be resolved by considering that at that time Korean loanwords became part of the Japanese lexicon, and the original Japanese words then underwent reduction in their meaning and/or usage. Problems with assertions regarding the increased similarity of Korean and Japanese lexical items and grammar due to the contiguity of the two languages are fundamentally treated in Chapter Three, “Convergence Theories.”
In Chapter Two, “Critical Assessment of the pKJ Reconstruction,” the five hundred or so etymologies from the studies by Martin and Whitman are used to support the pKJ hypothesis. The results and problems of previous studies regarding the phonological correspondences are presented, and the assertion is made that pKJ may have had a seven-vowel system, and etymologies of the existing thirty-five cognates are newly expounded according to this system. A short mention of the grammatical morphemes and grammatical structures follows. First, according to Martin’s research forty-eight percent of Korean and Japanese grammatical morphemes are matched. Second, nine syntactic features common to Korean and Japanese cannot in the end be analyzed as metatypic convergence, but may only be satisfactorily explained by the pKJ hypothesis.

In Chapter Four, “Japanese Borrowings from Old Korean,” words borrowed from Old Korean into Japanese are divided according to meaning into the following four types: (1) synonymous relation between OJ words and para-Japanese cognates, (2) synonymous relation between OJ words and Korean cognates, (3) synonymous relation between OJ words and words of unknown origin, (4) borrowed words not in competition with native Japanese words. Chapter Five, “Syncretism in Japanese Mythology,” attempts to integrate the deities of the Korean peninsula with the existing deities of the Yayoi period from three volcano myths recorded in Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, in an effort to demonstrate that the majority of those Korean loan words came into Japan with tumulus culture, after the Yayoi period.

Chapter Six, “The Korean Role in the Rise of Kofun Culture,” draws on extra-linguistic facts to make deductions regarding the development process of Korean and Japanese at an early period. First, the results of archeological research are used to show how pre-Korean speakers from the north moved south and pushed out pre-Japanese speakers, settling on Kyūshū around 300 B.C.E. And considering the usage of written and spoken language of the Aya and Hata peoples who introduced horseback warfare techniques to Japan during the Kofun period, it is conjectured that these people were para-Japanese speakers. An interesting re-analysis is offered of Kōno’s assumption regarding the linguistic situation on the Korean peninsula through the Unified Silla period, where pre-Japanese diverged from proto-Korean-Japanese, para-Japanese followed pre-Japanese, and proto-Japanese was formed through the influence of contact with para-Japanese and “Mumun.” Kōno’s 1945 A Korean Dialectology (Chōsen hōgengaku shikō) is omitted from the cited literature. In Chapter Seven, “Languages in Contact with Early Japanese,” the transmission of rice cultivation and bronze instruments is mentioned in suggesting the possible contact of para-Japanese with various southern
languages.

Without a doubt, this book is a welcome academic achievement in regard to research on the genealogy of the Korean language. It can be expected to act as a catalyst for even more active future research on the genealogy of the Korean language. A few last thoughts on the text. First, regardless of the primary importance of phonological correspondence based on basic vocabulary in order to establish genetic relationships, grammatical similarity should be considered more significant. Second, we should try to find Saussure’s third witness to avoid the potential pitfalls arising from comparing only two languages. Thirdly, it is necessary to consider whether it is valid to employ resources from other fields such as archeology when conducting linguistic research.

References


Ko Dongho  
Professor, Department of Korean Language and Literature  
Chonbuk National University

Questioning Minds: Short Stories by Modern Korean Women Writers  

Questioning Minds is a collection of short stories, in English translation, by ten Korean women writers of the twentieth century. The works are drawn from nearly every decade of the century, beginning with Kim Myōngsun’s “A Girl of
Mystery” (1917), widely considered to be the first work of modern Korean fiction by a woman writer despite Yi Kwangsu’s later charge of plagiarism, to Pak Wansŏ’s “Dried Flowers” (1995), a particularly fine example of social commentary and sharp character sketch, the combination of which has made Pak the most celebrated woman writer living in Korea today. Leading off the collection is a substantial introduction intended to give a historical overview of modern Korean fiction by women. Organized by decades, the introduction is helpful but schematic. Individual stories are then bracketed at each end by a short introduction of the author and a brief analysis.

Arranged chronologically and united by the main theme of women’s self-discovery against the backdrop of hostile gender and kinship politics, the stories in this volume reveal both the continuities and breaks in the experiences of Korean women over the long century that witnessed the violence of wars, imperialism, industrialization, and authoritarianism. The profound sociopolitical changes wrought by these events sometimes leave visible imprints on women’s lives, as in Na Hyesŏk’s “Kyŏnghŭi” (1918), where Japanese colonialism provides the context for a modern girl’s desire for education in defiance of her family’s more traditional prescriptions. Similarly, the chaos and restlessness of the intellectual scene in postliberation Korea becomes the stage for the unfolding of tense domestic drama in Kang Sinjae’s “The Mist” (1950), the ideological strife of the Korean War leaves an entire family dead in Ch’oe Yun’s “Stone in Your Heart” (1992), and Yi Sun’s “A Dish of Sliced Raw Fish” (1979) alludes to the widening gap between the upper and lower classes under South Korea’s industrial development in the 1970s. By and large, however, these are stories about women’s inner lives. The characters struggle not only to attain fulfillment and meaning, but to claim the right to define that fulfillment in their own terms. As the title suggests, such a struggle is fraught with questions and painful self-doubt, and more often than not, what stands in the way of these women’s fulfillment is an unhappy marriage. Whether marred by a betrayal of trust, as in Kim Wŏnju’s “Awakening” (1926) and Han Musuk’s “Hydrangeas” (1949), or by failed communication, as in Song Wŏnhŭi’s “When Autumn Leaves Fall” (1961) and Yi Sŏkpong’s “The Light at Dawn” (1985), marriage is depicted as a deliverer of hopes that are false and disappointments that are all too real. Sadly, however, marriage for these women is a fetter from which it is impossible to break free. The thematic unity allows the stories to pile up on top of one another; the overall effect is powerful.

The collection is a welcome one for several additional reasons. Autobiographical elements in the stories written by the scandal-ridden first generation of modern Korean women like Na Hyesŏk, Kim Myŏnsun, and Kim Wŏnju
allow us to glimpse the agony behind their fame. Stories by Han Musuk, Kang Sinjae, Ch’oe Yun, and Pak Wansŏ, all established figures whose writings have been translated into English and anthologized, give a taste of works that are now considered canonical in the history of modern Korean women’s fiction. But to my mind, the more important contribution that the current volume makes is that in trying to locate a work to include from every decade which would meet, in the translator’s own words, “the anthology’s topical parameters” (xi), the translator has selected works of lesser known writers like Yi Sun and Yi Sŏkpong. Somewhat forgotten figures even in Korea, these writers’ works are almost completely unknown outside of Korea.

The quality of translation is uniformly high. The care and thoughtfulness with which the translator has sought to combine accuracy with readability commands respect even when one might disagree with specific choices that were made in the process of translation, such as the decision to replace “silver pomfret” (pyŏng’ŏ) with “fish” in the title of Yi Sun’s story, or to render muljebi, literally stone skipping across water, simply as “stone” in Ch’oe Yun’s work.

Otherwise, my only complaint is with the brief analyses that accompany the short stories in the volume. Meant to provide helpful comments that would make the stories more accessible to a wider readership, these analyses end up imposing authoritative interpretations rather than leaving that freedom to the readers. Even though the interpretations found in these analytical sections can be quite insightful at times, they can nonetheless constrain the reading. What’s worse, they can also serve as a kind of Cliff Notes. This poses a problem especially because the translator identifies the target readership as “college-level audiences and readers” (ix) and has put together a volume that could well be assigned as a part of the college curriculum on modern Korean literature or women’s studies in Korea. One hopes for students who would not seek any shortcuts in their course of study, but it would still be wise not to tempt them in the first place.

Ryu Youngju
Professor, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures
University of Michigan