



Politics and Intellectuals of Colonial Korea

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POLITICS AND INTELLECTUALS OF COLONIAL KOREA

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to complicate our perspective on politics and intellectuals of colonial Korea (1910-1945). Accordingly, the task of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, it tries to revise the meaning of politics so as to reconsider the political indifference of certain intellectuals in the period. In addition, it broadens the range of politics so that it can refer not only to such prevalent interpretation of Japanese colonial politics as coercive and oppressive rule over Koreans, but also to such possible or secondary explanation as consensual politics, or the persuasion of the colonized to voluntarily accept the colonial order and system. Finally, the thesis rethinks the at-once opposing and collaborating relationship between Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism based on the establishment of the interstate economic structure between Japan and Korea, in order to see how it was maintained and what it purported.

Specifically, Chapter 2 discusses Gramsci's theory of intellectuals in *Prison Notebooks* to show how his theoretical work is pertinent to the study of intellectuals and politics. Chapter 3 discloses the Korean modern writer Yisang's unseen politicality in his writing of the essay "Ennui." Chapter 4 shows how Yanagi Muneyoshi, a Japanese folk-art critic and the leader of the *mingei* movement in prewar Japan, successfully produced Koreans as a modern nation under the so-called Cultural Rule of the Japanese colonial government in the early 1920s.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Myung Ho Hyun was born in Jeju Island, South Korea in 1982. He entered Yonsei University in Seoul in 2001 as an undergraduate and completed his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Diplomacy in 2005. In 2009, he became a graduate student in the Master of Arts in East Asian Studies program at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, and he will receive a Master of Arts degree in 2010. Following this, Hyun will be attending a doctoral program in the Department of East Asian Studies at New York University, New York, NY.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will attempt to complicate the perspectives according to which intellectuals and politics of colonial Korea have been understood. By complicate, I mean that I wish to challenge existing historical perspectives, such as the popular notion that colonial rule was the uniformly oppressive and coercive domination of Koreans throughout the colonial period, and the more recent scholarly perspective that holds that colonial rule had been conducive to the introduction of modernity to the Korean economy which developed to a great degree in the post-war era. However, in challenging them, I do not mean to dismiss these perspectives completely. In fact, I do not think that a historical perspective ever becomes completely useless. This is because a historical perspective can still be valid and relevant, insofar as it can help a historian to see things that have been buried in history. But I do acknowledge the limit of such previous perspectives. It is not so much that they can no longer contribute to a historian's excavation of voices from the past, but rather that they have been so effectively performing that function that historians can see only what has already been included in history and can hardly recognize what they have already excluded from history as a result of their assumptions. Given this, then, I repeat my previous statement more precisely: by complicating existing perspectives, I mean that I will try to discover how they have prevented unheard voices in the history of the Japanese empire and colonial Korea from coming to our attention.

Accordingly, my task of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, I will bring into focus the politicality of intellectuals in colonial Korea who have been so far considered politically irrelevant to colonialism. The purpose is to rethink what we commonly mean by colonial politics in Korea in relation to the intellectuals. In addition, I want to

broaden the range of the concept of politics so that it can refer not only to such prevalent interpretation of Japanese colonial politics as coercive and oppressive rule over Koreans, but also to such possible or secondary explanation as consensual politics, or the persuasion of the colonized to voluntarily accept the colonial order and system. Finally, I will investigate the relationship of Japanese as well as Korean intellectuals at the time played in the exercise of colonial politics in the broadened sense.

Specifically, this thesis consists of three parts. In the following chapter (Chapter Two), I will discuss Gramsci's theory of intellectuals in *Prison Notebooks*, suggesting that his theoretical work is pertinent to the study of colonial politics in three ways. First, by deconstructing the idea of intellectual independence, Gramsci discloses the politicality of an intellectual who appears to be indifferent to social affairs and politics. In Chapter Three, I will make use of this disclosure to expand our conception of politics, which will then include the activities and thoughts of intellectuals who distanced themselves from politics. Second, in the course of analyzing intellectuals' isolation from politics, Gramsci also expands the range of phenomena to which politics is applied. This means that the effect of a politics is not confined to a single society. With the aid of this insight, I will explain, in Chapter Four, how the Japanese colonial rule in Korea, which was exercised within the territorial boundaries of colonial Korean society, was conducive to the reproduction of the dominant order and system of not only colonial Korea but also of imperial Japan. Finally, Gramsci divides the concept of politics into coercive politics and consensual politics, and emphasizes intellectuals' role particularly in the latter. I intend to apply the concept of consensual politics to the case of Cultural Rule of the Japanese colonial government in Korea in Chapter four, to see how a Japanese intellectual became involved in the process of persuading Korean intellectuals to give their consent to the dominant colonial order and system.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the Korean modern writer Yisang's unseen politicality in his writing of the essay "Ennui." Since Yisang has been well known for his idiosyncrasy in terms of his writing style as well as his personal characteristics, previous studies on him have largely focused on explaining how to explicate his cryptic literary texts.¹ Accordingly, little attention has been paid to his relation to politics. In contrast, my purpose of studying Yisang and his essay is, firstly, to reveal the contemporaneity of his literary practices and production. Then, I will show how Yisang's politicality is concealed in the very apolitical appearance of his literary works.

In Chapter Four, I will describe how Yanagi Muneyoshi, a Japanese art critic and the leader of the folk-art (*mingei*) movement in prewar Japan, succeeded in producing Koreans as a modern nation under Cultural Rule of the Japanese colonial government in the early 1920s. Previously, Yanagi had been considered as one of the first critics in the history of Korean art criticism, whose description of the aesthetics of Korean art objects as the "beauty of sorrow" and "beauty of whiteness" is said to have greatly influenced on the modernization of the aesthetics of Korean art. However, recent researchers have found a connection between the Orientalist view concealed in Yanagi's aesthetics and the ideological justification of Japanese colonial rule over Korea. Nonetheless, since the researchers have not sufficiently concentrated on the consensual sense of the colonial politics, their representations of the colonial rule have rather confirmed the conventional perspective that the Japanese colonial rule was invariably oppositional to Korean nation. On the contrary, my intention is to depict the dynamics of the colonial rule, for which the perspective that identifies the colonial politics with a coercive domination can give only incomplete accounts. Therefore, in

¹ For recent research that advocates Yisang's idiosyncrasy, see Frankl John, "Marking Territory: Writing against Nation-based Identity in Yi Sang's "Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village"," *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature & Culture* 2 (2008): 331-345.

this chapter, I will attempt to show how Yanagi's intellectual role in the beginning of Cultural Rule was related to what Gramsci calls a "permanent persuader" in consensual politics.

CHAPTER 2

POLITICS AND INTELLECTUALS IN GRAMSCI'S *PRISON NOTEBOOKS*

I. Introduction: on Gramsci's Problem

In order to understand Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)'s *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935) as a political project, I assume that in the first place, one should rightly place the Gramsci's problematic of intellectuals, which is:

“Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialized category of intellectuals?”²

It is crucial to see the Gramsci's question above as a problematic. According to Louis Althusser, when an ideologue poses a “problematic,” as Gramsci does in his question above, it is already an “answer” to “real problems.” To treat the problematic as a question to be answered by what (the “interiority” of) his ideology teaches, no matter how much sophisticated it is, is to compound real problems by an added layer of falsity.³ Instead, Althusser says, what really matters is not so much the details and content of the ideology as the “social relation” of the ideology to the real problems. This theoretical position of Althusser is also found in Stuart Hall particularly in his exploration of “the problem of ideology.” Hall contends that his emphasis on the “problem,” not “theory,” of ideology is necessary to give an account to “how social ideas arise.”⁴ Gramsci expresses a similar view that no social task is advanced that

² Antonio Gramsci and Quintin Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers Co, 1971), 5.

³ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Verso, 2006), 67.

⁴ Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1996), 26.

does not have its solution contained in the social relations of the very task.⁵ Therefore, that Gramsci calls into question the independence of intellectuals should be seen as his statement of a real social problem, which is the problem of intellectual independence. This allows us to see why Gramsci's broaching of his project on intellectuals had to be followed by an investigation of the relationship between the real problem and the corresponding historical and social conditions.

In addition, it is also noted that Gramsci's exploration of the concept of intellectuals focuses on their function in a society, not on their universal intrinsic nature. For example, when he makes distinction between what he calls "traditional intellectuals" and "organic intellectual," he does so by describing the function of each: the former as confirming the way common people understand the world, and the latter as providing a new account of the world. Therefore, no matter how diversely Gramsci uses terms that refer to various intellectuals, from Roman imperial intellectuals through Catholic clergy to intellectuals of idealism in modern era, the intellectuals can be regrouped into "traditional intellectuals" or "organic intellectuals," in terms of their function in the society they belong to.

Bearing the two preliminary discussions in mind, in this chapter, I will show how in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci at once deconstructs the myth of intellectual independence, yet reconstructs the category and function of intellectuals by disclosing the relations of modern Italian intellectuals to their social and historical conditions.⁶ Accordingly, I will set two tasks for my main discussion: an analysis of the history and historicity of Gramsci's conception of "traditional intellectuals", and an explication of the political position of "organic intellectuals" in Gramsci's theory of

⁵ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 177.

⁶ The use of the terms "deconstruct/reconstruct" is inspired by Hall's analysis of Thatcherism by applying Gramsci's concept of hegemony. See Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 54.

Intellectuals. By way of conclusion, I will suggest that the theory of intellectuals in Gramsci's notebooks is relevant to the study of Japanese colonialism in Korea (1910-1945), where coercive politics and consensual (persuasive) politics were crisscrossed by the role of imperial intellectuals and colonial collaborators.

II. Gramsci's Political Activities before Imprisonment

Let me briefly introduce the historical background of *Prison Notebooks*, that is, the brief history of Gramsci's two-year leadership in the Italian Communist party (the P.C.I.) from 1924 to 1926. Gramsci's political position during these years is visible in his responses both to the fluctuation of the international communist movements, especially those of Russian and German communist parties, and to the domestic political reconfiguration triggered by the extensive and oppressive rule of the Italian fascist party (in power, 1922-1943). For example, Gramsci responded to the breakup and coalition of factions within the German communist party (the K.P.D.) in February 1924: specifically, the German party leader Heinrich Brandler (1881-1967) was accused of being a "Rightist" by Grigory Yevseevich Zinoviev (1883-1936), then head of the Soviet Communist party, and replaced by the "Leftist" leaders in 1924 after his failure in the attempted uprising in Germany in 1923. As for this incident, Gramsci made an analogy between the political question of "the Right or the Left" and what he calls "the Byzantine question" in the fifteenth century. In the latter case, he detected that what had really mattered was not whether the Possession of the Holy Spirit was proceeded from the Father alone, as the Roman Church had asserted, or from both the Father and the Son, as the Byzantium had contended, but the underlying historical

conditions that had brought about that religious “distinction and conflict.”⁷ Likewise, Gramsci knew that the practice of questioning whether the “banner” of the German communist leader was the Right or the Left was a historical product as such. Presumably, the analogy that he made to explain the case of the German communists was a proposal for turning attention from the factional dispute to the real social problems concealed in and by the very dispute.⁸

Gramsci’s critical approach to the debate on the German communist leader’s political affiliation was also manifested in his analysis of the domestic political situation in Italy in the mid-1920s, but in a less reductive way. He agreed with Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970), the Leftist leader in the P.C.I., in that although the Italian fascist party, led by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), and the social democrat party⁹ appeared mutually antagonistic, they were in fact merely “the right and left hands” of the dominant bourgeoisie class of Italian modern capitalism. On the other hand, however, Gramsci disagreed with Bordiga in that “specific forms”—fascism or social democracy—were not irrelevant. In this light, Gramsci predicted the weakening of the fascist party because it was being alienated from its social base, in particular, the urban petty bourgeois of Northern Italy. He reasoned that the oppositional social democrat party with its growing popular support, therefore, would overthrow the fascist party. For Gramsci, the collapse of the fascists facing the social democratic opposition meant the coming of the “unstable transitional phase” that had to be followed by a proletariat revolution, which would bring about the change of general social conditions.¹⁰

⁷ For more of the “Byzantine question,” see Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 409.

⁸ *Ibid.*, lxxl.

⁹ This party was led first by Giacomo Matteotti (1885-1924) and by the Aventine Secession after Matteotti had been murdered in 1924 by, allegedly, the members or supporters of the fascist party.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, lxxiii-lxxiv.

However, fascism did not fall as Gramsci had expected. Therefore, from the early days of 1925, acknowledging that the fascist regime would not see an immediate end, Gramsci began to analyze the success of fascism. According to him, it was because the fascists could successfully restore the “class consciousness and class organization” of Italian bourgeoisie class. On the other hand, he pointed out that the configuration of the Italian ruling class by the fascist party failed to include the middle class of Southern Italy. Therefore, he concluded that the general social transformation by a proletarian revolution was still possible.¹¹

In late 1925, Gramsci designed “a new strategic conception” for the Italian Communist party to prepare for its confrontation with the powerful fascist regime. Here, he argued for a “revolutionary alliance” between Northern Italian proletariat and Southern Italian peasantry. For him, the alliance was necessary and even inevitable in that the southern peasantry possessed the “elements of strength and stimuli” necessary for the northern workers to be a revolutionary agency. Accordingly, Gramsci proposed that the southern peasantry should organize an insurrection against the armed forces of the northern bourgeois class so as to increase the possibility of a revolutionary action by the northern proletariat class. Finally, he also urged that the P.C.I., before its necessary “liquidation,” should concentrate all efforts on organizing “unions” in the Northern factories as well as on creating “intensified work” among the southern peasantry.¹²

The last days of Gramsci’s political activity prior to his imprisonment began with the Lyons Congress arranged by the P.C.I in secret in April 1926. In the Congress, Gramsci, on the one hand, criticized not only the theses of the Leftist Bordiga as “fractionism” but also the conception of the Rightist Angelo Tasca (1892-1960) as

¹¹ Ibid., lxxviii-lxxx.

¹² Ibid., lxxx.

“reformism.” On the one hand, in his own theses co-authored with Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964), he reaffirmed the previous view that the proletariat class of Northern Italy was the only revolutionary force. In addition, he confirmed the importance of the alliance between the northern Italian workers and the southern farmers as a way of forming a unified and thus effective opposition to the “ruling bloc” of the northern industrialists and the southern landowners.¹³

In advancing this position, Gramsci was neither politically isolated nor taking an eclectic position within the P.C.I. On the contrary, Gramsci “made every effort” to include the different voices in the party: in fact, Bordiga was persuaded to attend the Central Committee of the party led by Gramsci, and Tasca joined the committee too. Moreover, Gramsci’s concern for the unity of party is demonstrated in the “two letters” which he sent to the Central Committee of the Russian communist party. In the first letter, Gramsci approved of “the dominant view” of the Russian party insofar as it criticized the political actions of the Joint Opposition. Gramsci thought that the “anti-peasant” “fractional activity” of the latter would jeopardize the possibility of the alliance between the peasants and the workers. On the other hand, Gramsci warned that the “unity” that the Russian party had attempted to regain through the inner-party struggle should not be of a “coercive and mechanical” kind, i.e., one that silenced the oppositional voice within the party as if it was “the voice of an enemy locked up in a prison.” In the second letter, in which he addressed himself to the reasons advanced by Togliatti for not delivering the first letter to the Russian communist leaders, Gramsci further explained that the unity in question should not be an external kind that comes from outside the party, but should engage the internal conflict of the two political lines inside the party.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., lxxxii.

¹⁴ Ibid., lxxxv.

If Gramsci's conception of unity in the letters is regarded as a mere conception, its meaning becomes ambiguous and its impact on the internal struggle of a political party seems unlikely. But one should not overlook that Gramsci's theory, including his conception of party unity, was not merely a theory but was always meant to be "informing political practice," as Stuart Hall rightly points out.¹⁵ Indeed, there were the cases where the unity as a conception had an influence on Gramsci's political actions. One of these cases can be seen from Gramsci's theory on the role of "captain" and his political act in accordance with it: in brief, it must be an "absolute rule" that a captain will and must be the last one who leaves his ship when it is sinking because otherwise no guarantee will be given for collective life, or for the unity of a group. That this was not merely a theory was proven by Gramsci himself when he refused to leave his party in Rome to flee from the intensive arrest of Italian communist leaders by the fascist regime beginning in late 1926.¹⁶ But it was not until he had been arrested and jailed in the prison of Turin to serve his sentence of twenty-year imprisonment that his conception of unity could become a more elaborated theory-cum-informing political practice in *Prison notebooks*. And, in my opinion, no other chapter shows this more visibly than "The Intellectuals."

III. Beyond the Myth of Intellectual Independence

Preliminarily, we should bear in mind that in *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci sees "the intellectuals" as a problem, a solution to which is thus contained in the complex relations of the very problem to both Italian intellectual history and the conditions of the contemporary Italian society. Accordingly, Gramsci's research goes back to the

¹⁵ Chen and Morley, *Stuart Hall*, 411.

¹⁶ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, lxxxvii.

age of Roman Empire to discover the origins of Italian intellectuals. He begins by noting that it was Caesar who allowed “doctors” and “masters of liberal arts” from all over the Roman Empire to be given the right of permanent residence in Rome. In this historical event, Gramsci sees the correspondence between the granting of the right of permanent residence for the Roman intellectuals and the production of “permanent category of intellectuals” in the history of Italian intellectuals. Gramsci also discovers that the “imperial” and “cosmopolitan” characteristic of the intellectuals of Roman Empire was inherited by “Catholic clergy,” the major Italian intellectuals from medieval times up to the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ According to him, the religious group monopolized the intellectual role to spread the universalism in the Catholic ideology, morality and philosophy, which was economically attached to the interest of feudal landlord class. However, the monopolization was incomplete. Gramsci explains that in the period of Absolute Monarchy in Italy, the religious intellectual group experienced a challenge to its monopoly of the intellectual tasks from the newly formed non-ecclesiastic intellectuals supported by monarchs. These new intellectuals, he continues, were quickly diversified in terms of their functions and categories and in accordance with the centralization of the power of monarch: they now occupied the positions of government officials as well as of academic professors.¹⁸

In sum, his brief research of the history of Italian intellectuals discloses the historical process in and by which the intellectual in Italy has been transformed into a category of “uninterrupted historical continuity.” It was then, according to Gramsci, that the mysterious relationship between real Italian intellectuals and the historical continuity of the abstract categories of intellectual began to be formed, the relationship based on which what he calls “traditional intellectuals” claim themselves as an

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

autonomous and independent social group irrelevant to the ruling class of their society. In this way, Gramsci shows that the idea of intellectual independence is a “myth.”¹⁹

However, there are at least two reasons for believing that Gramsci was not simply interested in proving the fictitiousness of the idea of the independence of intellectuals. Firstly, Gramsci discloses that the idea of independent intellectuals produced the actual intellectual practice of “detaching themselves from social grouping” in modern Italian society. Gramsci calls this practice “(an) act of incalculable historical significance,”²⁰ while not giving a specific account of it. But such a speculation seems to have a basis, if we begin with the fact that the same intellectual phenomenon can also be observed in contemporary societies such as prewar Japan. For example, according to Harry Harootunian, in the Taisho period (1912-1926) in Japan, a group of intellectuals, centered by such literati as Kitamura Tōkoku and Takayama Chogyū, developed the idea of an isolated social domain for art and culture, which lacked the feature of the intervention in politics. Harootunian also shows that these intellectuals in turn elaborated the conception of “unmediated individualism,” which, as we can see now, corresponds with the idea of intellectual independence in Italy in the early twentieth century.²¹ This similarity of the idea between modern Italian and Japanese societies is significant. It is not only because the two societies are commonly believed as fundamentally different, but also because that it can be an evidence to prove the existence of a global historicity that manifested on both modern Italian and Japanese societies. It is in this sense that we can understand

¹⁹ The English translators of his notebooks consider that Gramsci’s “central argument” in his chapter “The Intellectuals” is to show the “myth” of intellectual independence. See *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

²¹ For more details, See Harry Harootunian, “Between Politics and Culture: Authority and the Ambiguity of Intellectual Choice in Imperial Japan” in *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taisho Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

what Gramsci means by that the detached position of the Italian intellectuals was historically significant.

Secondly, Gramsci observed that the idea/practice of intellectual independence of Italian intellectuals was apt to be associated with “idealist philosophy.”²² His discussion of idealism in Italy is worth examining further, but at the moment it is enough to consider one formal aspect of idealism; that is, it is an ideology. In the notebooks, Gramsci defines ideology, quoting Marx, as the terrain in which “man acquires consciousness of social relations.”²³ In addition, according to Hall, ideology in Gramsci’s sense is “a set of different ideas that grip the mind of masses.”²⁴ These two definitions of ideology show that for Gramsci, an ideology is in no way a myth but is considered to have real social effects. In sum, the two discussions above—about the production of actual intellectual practice out of the idea of intellectual independence, and about intellectuals’ association with idealism—show that Gramsci saw that the idea of intellectual independence transcended its fictitious origin and produced real historical and ideological consequences.

Additionally, there is a different way to prove that Gramsci’s understanding of the idea in question is more than a myth; that is, to examine the formation of his conception of “traditional intellectuals.” Initially, in his notebooks, Gramsci creates the conception of “traditional intellectuals” who believe in the idea of intellectual independence. However, he did not do this in order to criticize them. Instead, Gramsci sees intellectuals, or what he calls “traditional intellectuals,” as those who have and make use of the idea so that it brings about the real effects that I have discussed above. This partly shows that Gramsci did not dismiss the idea of the independence of intellectuals as a myth because, if he had done so, he would not further consider how

²² Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴ Chen and Morley, *Stuart Hall*, 27.

the idea was manifested in the real Italian society; neither would he create such conception as “traditional intellectuals.” Therefore, it is now clear that by showing that the idea is a myth, Gramsci produces his conception of “traditional intellectuals.” This is partly what I mean by the simultaneity of deconstruction and reconstruction in Gramsci’s project on the intellectuals.

Then, what is it that Gramsci shows as the real consequence of the idea of intellectual independence through his conception of “traditional intellectuals?” The answer is, firstly, the tension between the concepts of universal intellectuality and “traditional intellectuals.”

Let me introduce how Gramsci explains the universal intellectuality in his notebooks before I discuss its relationship with “traditional intellectuals.” Firstly, he redefines intellectuals in modernity: namely, “all men are intellectuals” (though not everyone has the function of intellectuals).²⁵ This “considerable extension” of the conception of intellectuals by Gramsci is based on his contemplation that physical labor cannot be separated from mental working. In other words, he says that in every professional task, even the most “muscular-nervous” one, “intellectual-cerebral” elements always exist.²⁶ In addition, Gramsci gives a specific account of this in his discussion of American Taylorism in his notebooks. According to his explanation, Fredric Taylor’s phrase of “trained gorilla,” far from being a pejorative description of manual workers, suggests that it is an impossible goal to completely mechanize them. It is impossible, not because of its immoral consequence of “spiritual death” of manual workers, but because it requires the workers to completely “forget” about the

²⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

intellectual elements, such as technical instructions for their training, in and of their tasks.²⁷

But it is not only from the abstract contemplation that Gramsci articulates the concept of universal intellectuality; he also introduces how common men were produced as intellectuals in modern Italian social context because of the way “education” produced diversified functions and categories of intellectuals. Firstly, Gramsci posits that the process of educational specialization in modern Italy coincided with the process of specialization of intellectual categories. Then, he observed that as for educational institutions in modern Italian society, the increase in quantity could not be separated from the increase in quality. Based on this observation, Gramsci finds that “area” and “levels” of schools were “multiplied” so as to promote the quality of education in general in the society, which also brought about the improvement of the level of culture of the society. Finally, he concludes that the specialized categories of education generated new specialized categories of intellectual, in which individuals were transformed into the intellectuals in the universal sense.”²⁸

On the contrary, according to Gramsci, “traditional intellectuals” were those who tried to differentiate themselves from educated people in general; they were “philosophers,” “artists,” “men of letters,” and specifically “idealists.” More importantly, Gramsci discovers that the “traditional intellectuals” in the modern Italian context claimed themselves as “true intellectuals,” as distinct from the newly educated.”²⁹ This is also the one of the manifestations of the idea of intellectual independence in the real social context. But this time, Gramsci shows that the “traditional intellectuals” argue for their independence, not against the political

²⁷ Ibid., 308-10; Gramsci says that the consequence of the complete mechanization of manual workers, if possible, would be opposite: that is, it would bring about the “complete freedom of mind,” which no longer necessarily engages in “physical gesture.”

²⁸ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 10-12.

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

intervention from above, but against the universalization of intellectuality from below. As an example, I can give Harootunian's discussion of the liberal Japanese intellectuals in prewar Japan again. According to Harootunian, these intellectuals were afraid of the "secularization and democratization of cultural life" which was taking place in the Taisho period, so they developed the concept of "uncommon few" to emphasize that only a few artists, not all men, can perfect their cultural life because of their independence from politics. Here, we can see the correspondence between the concepts of "uncommon few" and "true intellectuality" (of "traditional intellectuals"): that is, both of them are used to differentiate a certain group of intellectuals from the masses.

But, at the same time, we should understand that the concepts of "uncommon few" and "true intellectuality" can also be used, not just to "limit" the range of the uncommon, true intellectuals, but also to "pressure" the common, universal intellectuals to be excluded from the production of culture.³⁰ Raymond Williams gives an evidence to prove this when he discusses Marx's notion of culture, which is "man making his own history." According to Williams, by subsuming all human beings under his notion of culture, Marx restored the "account and perspective that 'idealist historiography' excluded:" namely, "material history, the history of labor, and industry," in which "human faculties" could be found. In addition, Williams discloses that this expanded notion of culture (by Marx) was confined to the "realm of 'mere' ideas," so as to lose its "necessary connection with society and history," by the idealists.³¹ Here, again, Williams shows that how the idealists tried to differentiate themselves from common men who can also make their own culture through their

³⁰ For the use of the terms "limit and pressure" I am inspired by Raymond Williams' discussion on "determination." See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1978), 87.

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (Verso, 2010), 19.

labor, just as Gramsci's "traditional intellectuals" claim to be authentic intellectuals against the universal intellectuals. But in Williams' explanation the idealists set not just the limit of the acceptable perspectives of history, but also exclude the masses from the accepted perspectives of history by dismissing Marx's new notion of culture as a mere idea and making it alienated from social and historical conditions. If we import Williams' insight to our case, then we can say a similar thing: "traditional intellectuals" are those who at once claim their authenticity against the universal intellectuals (the masses) and exclude them from the realm of intellectuals.

In sum, Gramsci proves that the idea of intellectual independence is a myth, but at the same time it has undeniable real consequences in a society practically and ideologically. He then elaborates the conception of "traditional intellectuals" in order to show those consequences by demonstrating its relationship with the conception of universal intellectuality in the Italian society. In the process, however, he did not clearly define who the "traditional intellectuals" are. Although there is a strong affiliation between the idealists and "traditional intellectuals" in Gramsci's discussion, Gramsci does not explicitly confirm this identification.³² Nonetheless, the conception of "traditional intellectuals" can be more specified, especially when it is contrasted with its counter-conception, "organic intellectuals." It is a counter-conception not because there is a clear-cut opposition between them, but because the former is to be

³² There does exist a similarity between the idealists and Gramsci's "traditional intellectuals," but one should be careful to say that all idealists are "traditional intellectuals" in Gramsci's sense. Benedetto Croce is a good example here. Gramsci describes him as a representative of Italian idealist philosophers, so he is most likely a traditional intellectual for Gramsci since no intellectual category fits the definition of traditional intellectual more than the idealist philosopher. But, on the other hand, it is hard to say that Croce is a traditional intellectual because "he did not conceal his connection with politicians." This means he was different from such intellectuals who believe that the value of an intellectual came from his isolation from politics. Still, on the other hand, he is likely a traditional intellectual because Gramsci believed his philosophy had to be "conquered," just as "traditional intellectuals" should be assimilated and conquered by "organic intellectuals" in his discussion. See *Ibid.*, 8, 371, and "General Introduction" provided by translators.

“assimilated and conquered ideologically by the latter.³³ In this respect, now I turn to the discussion of Gramsci’s conception of “organic intellectuals,” to see how his deconstruction of the idea of the intellectual independence, which initially gives rise to the conception of “traditional intellectuals”, also brings about the reconstruction of a proper function of intellectuals, which he summarizes by the conception of “organic intellectuals.”

IV. “Organic intellectuals” Project

The problem that Gramsci poses with the conception of “organic intellectuals” seems to be the same one that he poses with the “traditional intellectuals:” that is, whether intellectuals are an autonomous and independent social group as such or they are strata of a social group. In the case of “organic intellectuals,” however, an emphasis is placed on the later part of the stated problem, that is, they are dependent and “organic” strata of a social group. Gramsci explains that the organic intellectuals function as “organizers” in and of their group. He continues that they are organizers in a sense that they work to give a sense of “economic, social and political” unity to their group. Therefore, it is the sense of attachment, or organic bind, to a social group that the distinctiveness of the conception of “organic intellectuals” is shown.³⁴

However, this does not mean that the sense of attachment is an intrinsic characteristic of “organic intellectuals,” which distinguishes them permanently from “traditional intellectuals.” Gramsci implies this in saying that the ecclesiastic intellectuals, his example of “traditional intellectuals,” were once “organically” attached to the landed aristocracy in the Middle Ages.³⁵ In addition, Gramsci denies

³³ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

that the modern day “traditional intellectuals,” such as non-ecclesiastic idealist philosophers, are not attached to any social group and have nothing to do with the interest of a social group.³⁶ Then, this is to say that each stratum of “traditional intellectuals” has in reality a social group to which they are, at least implicitly, attached. To put it another way, if the sense of attachment is taken as the intrinsic property of “organic intellectuals,” it is very difficult to distinguish them from “traditional intellectuals.” Consequently, the sense of attachment should be seen, not as a characteristic, but as a function, or as a task, of the strata of “organic intellectuals” in a social group.

The functional understanding of Gramsci’s “organic intellectuals” can be further articulated by examining what he says about the relationship between the peasantry and the intellectuals: he says that although most intellectuals are born in peasant households, none of them are elaborated as the organic intellectuals to the peasantry.³⁷ One possible reason why the peasantry does not elaborate its own “organic intellectuals” is that intellectuals with peasant origins lose their connection, or the sense of attachment, to the peasantry once they become intellectuals.³⁸ But I disagree with this reasoning because the sense of attachment, whether it is to the social group of birth or to any social group, is not a criterion to discern “organic intellectuals,” as I showed in the preceding paragraph. Instead, given that Gramsci regards the peasantry as not the production of modern capitalism, it can be assumed that the function of “organic intellectuals” is not for the social group of feudal type, such as peasantry, but for the social groups (class) produced by capitalism in modern world, such as bourgeois or proletariat.³⁹ In addition, given that the “traditional

³⁶ Refer to the note 30 above.

³⁷ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 6.

³⁸ For more of this interpretation, see the translator’s note on Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

intellectuals” in Gramsci’s sense originate from a certain social group but then they forget the origin and claim for their independence from it, it can be also assumed that Gramsci designs a task to reverse the process of detachment of the “traditional intellectuals” from their class origin when he builds up his conception of “organic intellectuals.” Based on the two assumptions above, I suggest that the notion of the sense of attachment can be effective in Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals when it is seen as a function or a task of “organic intellectuals” to restore the unity of their social group, which has been subject to the dismantling (specializing) process of capitalism.

A qualification should be made here. I intend to interpret the conception of “organic” in Gramsci’s “organic intellectuals,” not as a state of being organic to their social group, but as a motion, or a process, of (re)constructing the organicity of their group. Therefore, when Gramsci speaks of the measurability of “the organic quality of the various intellectual strata of a fundamental social group,”⁴⁰ it is unlikely that he meant to give a numeric description of a static characteristic of strata of intellectuals.

But, then, how are we to understand that the “organic quality of various intellectual strata” can be “measured?” Given the previous discussion on the reading of the Gramsci’s concept of organic as a function, the phrase “organic quality of various intellectual strata” can be translated into “the organizing function of the intellectuals.” In addition, as I have suggested, if Gramsci intends to see the function of “organic intellectuals” as a process or a motion, he should firstly mean by the notion of measure how effectively the intellectuals perform their organizing function to produce the unity of a social group. It is then, based on the effectiveness of the function, that Gramsci’s conception of “political party” can become at once a criterion to measure the organic quality of the intellectuals and the necessary process that should be taken by the intellectuals for their function.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

The conception of political party is important for Gramsci because he regards it as a “specific and only way” for a social group to produce its own strata of “organic intellectuals.”⁴¹ In other words, by emphasizing that only a political party can elaborate the organic intellectual strata of a social group, Gramsci indicates that the nature of the function of the organic intellectuals is essentially political since their task to “conquer and assimilate ideologically” “traditional intellectuals” to recover the unity of a social group cannot begin until they see through the historicity of the idea of intellectual independence, which has been, and is still being, maintained by the politics of the dominant group of their society.⁴²

However, two qualifications should be made before the conception of political party can be properly applied to a certain concrete situation. Firstly, according to Gramsci, the above is not to say that every political party in a social group (class), particularly one that is in the process of becoming a dominant group in a society, produces the organic intellectuals for their group. Nevertheless, he says that even the interests of the parties that do not produce the organic intellectuals for their group can be “represented” by the group. This is because the organic intellectuals that are produced by other political parties in the same social group can represent the interest of the parties that do not produce the organic intellectuals. Here, he emphasizes the organic function of the organic intellectuals that “balances and arbitrates” the interests of *all* parties in the social group.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

⁴³ Ibid., 148. The original sentence that includes the quoted phrases is: “Although every party is the *expression* of a social group, and of one social group only, nevertheless in *certain* given conditions *certain* parties *represent* a single social group precisely in so far as they exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups...” (emphasis added) This sentence is provided here to show Gramsci’s idea of the mutual implication in the relationship between social group (structure, base) and political party (superstructure). That is, the social group “expresses” the political parties, on the one hand, and the political parties, “in certain given conditions,” “represent” the social group. It is also observable that the correspondence between the structure and the superstructure is not fail-safe since only “certain” parties out of every party that is elaborated by a social

In addition, the conception of political party should be carefully defined if the relations between political parties, “organic intellectuals,” and a social group are to be analyzed. Gramsci singles out this problem of defining a political party by the following question: “is political action (in the strict sense) necessary, for one to be able to speak of a “political party?”⁴⁴ But this is actually less a question than a challenge to the tendency of certain parties that insist on their “apoliticality” based on the absence of direct political actions. On the contrary, Gramsci views that even the most apolitical one of them, say, the “sporting or the informational newspapers, or an anarchism,” is political in its function of mediating the interests of its social group.⁴⁵

Then he provides from the prewar Italian society two interesting examples of self-claimed and seemingly apolitical parties, the examples that are significant to understand his project set forth by the conception of political party. The first is the party of “an elite of men of culture,” which implies the categories of “traditional intellectuals” such as scholars and scientists who claim their autonomy as an independent social group based on the alleged historical continuity from the medieval time to the present in Italian history. That the men of culture also constitute a political party in its function is not only to say that a political party of “traditional intellectuals” can exist. But it is more to say that “all members” in a political party are intellectuals in the functional sense, and thus any party of intellectual membership can be political.⁴⁶ The consequence of this redefinition of political party is significant. Above

group “represents” the social group. Nonetheless, this should not be used as a case to testify that there is “necessarily no correspondence” between base and superstructure, for Gramsci is clearly aware of that even the interest of the non-correspondent parties can be represented by a social group. In this sense, this of Gramsci’s idea seems to approximate to Hall’s phrase of “no necessary correspondence” between base and superstructure. For more of Hall’s discussion on this problem, refer to Stuart Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates.,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (June 1985): 91.

⁴⁴ *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

all, it brings about a vast expansion of the conception of political party and thus of the applicability of his theory of politics to various political moments (even outside the Italian politics and history).

Secondly, Gramsci gives the example of the Italian fascist party as a mass-based social force.⁴⁷ Again, he correctly observed that the masses who supported fascism appeared apolitical not taking any direct political actions but showing “loyalty” to their country; thus, their apoliticality was also a politico-historical product. But Gramsci’s emphases in the discussion of the Italian fascist party, of which he himself was one of the worst victims, are placed not only on the functional politicality of the apparent apoliticality, but also on the totalitarian function of the party.⁴⁸ As for the totalitarian party and its domination of Italian society, he denies that the totalitarian function of the party was so prevalent as to terminate all the other party activities of political function. On the contrary, he discloses that although no other political party could legally act under the fascist rule, parties of political function did exist under the guise of a cultural façade, as in the cases of informational and sporting press above.⁴⁹ Significantly, by revealing the politicality of the apparent cultural (non-political) activities under the totalitarian regime, Gramsci broadens the extent of the conception of politics so as to embrace not only the conventional sense of coercive or resistant politics, but also the consensual politics that mediates the interests in and out of a social group.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148. It should be noted that the totalitarian function is not only of the Italian fascist party but also of a political party in general in Gramsci’s observation. Given that Gramsci’s use of the term ‘totalitarian’ lacks the wide-spread pejorative sense but is in the neutral sense of “all embracing,” the totalitarian function coincides with the function of organic intellectual in that the main concern of both is the interest of their social groups respectively. For more of Gramsci’s usage of the term “totalitarian,” see the translators’ note on *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that this insight of Gramsci on the relationship between politics and culture converge with Walter Benjamin’s warning against the German fascist tendency to “aestheticize politics,” as well as on Miki Kiyoshi’s disclosure of the problem of “politicization of culture” in

Based on the extended conception of politics, Gramsci introduces the politics of “consent” into his theory of intellectuals. Particularly, the role of intellectuals is crucial for the consensual politics because the consent should be “caused historically and spontaneously.”⁵¹ Generally speaking, what Gramsci means by “historical and spontaneous consent” is that the consent of the masses to the dominant social order and system of their society cannot be made without a “coherent” conception of the world, or a dominant ideology, which is constructed and organized by the intellectuals of the dominant social group. In other words, a dominant ideology is what produces and reproduces the dominant social order and system by giving “coherent account” of the world that should be organically attached to the order and system in question. In brief, it is the role of the intellectuals of the dominant group that should elaborate the coherent account and it is based on this account that the masses “spontaneously” consent to the dominant social order and system.

Now, further qualifications should be made for the deeper aspects of the politics of consent and the intellectuals’ role in it. Firstly, just as it is difficult to conceive of a homogenous dominant social order of a society, it is implausible that the dominant ideology that corresponds with the order is homogenous. As Hall correctly points out, “there is never any one, single, unified and coherent dominant ideology” that could explain everything about the dominant social order and system.⁵² Likewise, the masses’ conception of the world is in no way homogeneously constructed. According to Gramsci, the heterogeneous construction of popular ideology is most visible in the collective world-view, or in “common sense.” As Gramsci envisions and Hall confirms, common sense is incoherently and contradictorily consisted of “Stone

Japanese fascism. See Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2001), xv.

⁵¹ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12.

⁵² Chen and Morley, *Stuart Hall*, 433.

Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over.”⁵³ Thus, in order for the intellectuals of the dominant social group to effectively make the incoherent structure of common sense coherent, or to give a coherent and effective account to the all men’s incoherent understanding of the dominant social system, they cannot but begin with the most salient incoherence in the social system. Consequently, the production of the intellectuals’ work, i.e. ideology, can never achieve a scientific credibility or a universal authenticity, but it can at least make “good sense” out of the common sense, and, as Hall observes, this “is usually quite enough for ideology,”⁵⁴ to win the consent of the majority of masses.

Moreover, in Gramsci’s formulation, the effectiveness of the politics of consent, or ideological politics, cannot be made unless it is complimented by its uninterrupted relationship with the interest of the dominant social group and with the coercive politics. It is for sure that in Gramsci’s conception of consent, the collective will, or intentionality of the subordinate, can be expressed and to some degree applied to the policies of the rule. But this should not create an illusion that the domination of the ruling social group is in any sense attenuated while the so-called “grass-root” politics is strengthened. In other words, the immediate goal of the consensual politics, that is, to win the consent of masses, should not blur its fundamental function, which is to constantly stabilize the domination of a ruling group by (re)producing the dominant social order and system. In addition, the fact that Gramsci significantly expands the extent of politics by incorporating in it the politics of consent should not exclude the still important role of coercive politics in any real situation. Indeed,

⁵³ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 324. Also, Chen and Morley, *Stuart Hall*, 43.

⁵⁴ Nelson and Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 46.

Gramsci does not overlook this importance of coercive politics even though he is one of the most successful theorists who elaborated and promoted the conception of consent in politics; hence, his emphasis on the “dual perspective,” of consent and (coercive) force, of “hegemony and authority,” of “Church (civil society) and State,” and so forth.⁵⁵ Moreover, as Hall rightly sees, Gramsci revises the political function of State so that it transcends from being simply coercive to being also “educative and formative,” and thus to being a “point of condensation,” “from which the consensual politics, or hegemony, is ultimately exercised.”⁵⁶

Then, lastly, what are the relations between the counter-conceptions of “traditional intellectuals” and “organic intellectuals”? I suggest that this is closely related to Gramsci’s project of deconstruction and reconstruction of the function and category of intellectuals. As for the deconstruction, he deconstructs the idea of intellectual independence, the claim of true intellectuality, the claims of apoliticality, and the concept of unilaterally coercive politics, which are to be constantly reconstructed by the function of traditional intellectual for their social isolation and political indifference. As for the reconstruction, he reconstructs the function of the organic intellectual to deconstruct the reconstructed function of “traditional intellectuals” by creating the simultaneous and historical consent of the masses. In conclusion, within this process of deconstruction/reconstruction, Gramsci’s theory dialectically becomes the political project on the organic practice of intellectuals.

⁵⁵ Gramsci and Hoare, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 170.

⁵⁶ Chen and Morley, *Stuart Hall*, 428.

IV. Conclusion

Finally, let me suggest five guidelines for the study of Japanese colonialism in Korea based on Gramsci's discussion of politics and intellectuals. Firstly, the so-called Cultural Rule exercised by the Japanese colonial government in 1920s and the cultural assimilation policies afterward should be reexamined to reveal its politicality concealed in its explicit apoliticality. In other words, it is important to see how the cultural policies in the period helped to reproduce the colonial order and system in Korea. Secondly, likewise, the alleged apoliticality of the cultural activities of Korean intellectuals should not be accepted as such, but it should be reconsidered to disclose how their cultural activities mediated the interests of different social groups. Thirdly, the relationship between the colonialism and Korean nationalism throughout the colonial period should not be seen as a clear-cut opposition as if they served different purposes all the time. Instead, it should be kept in mind that there would have been an agreement between the two, though not explicitly, in order to reproduce the capitalist system that dominated the productive relations across the Japanese and Korean societies. Fourthly, accordingly, it should be noted that the colonial politics could not be unilaterally coercive or oppressive to Korean nation. To put it another way, there also was the consensual politics to persuade, not force, Korean nation to follow the colonial rule. But this should not be used to confirm the conventional view that some Korean nationalists collaborated with the Japanese colonial government to perpetuate only the colonial rule, as if the only aim of both of them was to maintain the colonial order and system, while the aim could also be to reproduce the dominant order and system that encompassed both Japan and Korea. Lastly, Japanese and Korean intellectuals' activities should be also considered in relation to the reproduction of not only the colonial order and system, but also the dominant order and system.

CHAPTER 3

“ENNUI” AND YISANG’S POLITICALITY OF APOLITICALITY

I. Introduction

“Ennui”⁵⁷ was written by the modern Korean writer Yisang (1910-1937)⁵⁸ in 1936 during his sojourn in Tokyo, which he had strongly wished to visit.⁵⁹ This literary work is set in Sungcheon, a remote countryside in colonial Korea, where Yisang had travelled in 1935, a year before he went to the metropole. In fact, Yisang also wrote several other essays about his experience in this rustic village. But while the other “Sungcheon essays” were all written before his visit to Tokyo—either during his stay in Sungcheon, or in his residence in Gyeongsung (then Seoul)—, “Ennui” alone was composed while Yisang was in Tokyo, and has a far more critical tone than its sister-essays. Indeed, in “Ennui,” Yisang complains about the insufferable monotony of the entire landscape and of every creature in Sungcheon, in the same way that he exposes his unconcealed disappointment in Tokyo in the essay “Tokyo,” written earlier in the same year and in the same place.

We might ask, then, how Yisang’s experience of Tokyo was related to his decision to write another essay about the Korean rural village. In this chapter, I will consider two interpretations that have been advanced about “Ennui:” first, that “Ennui” is a reflection of Yisang’s marginal status as a colonized traveler during his stay in Tokyo; and secondly, that the essay is a literary response to his disappointment

⁵⁷ This work was posthumously published in 1937 in the colonial Korean newspaper, *Chōsen Ilbo*. For the chronology of publishing Yisang’s works, refer to Yisang and Juhyun Kim, *Chōngbon Yisang munhak chōnjip* = *The complete works of Lee Sang*, 1st ed. (Seoul-si: Somyōng Chulpan, 2005), 331-45.

⁵⁸ Yisang is the pen name of Kim Hae-gyeong. Refer to the backside of the cover page. Yi Sang and Kim, *Chōngbon Yi Sang munhak chōnjip* = *The complete works of Lee Sang*.

⁵⁹ For Yisang’s desire to visit Tokyo, see *Yisang ribyu* = *YiSang review*. (Seoul: Yuknak, 2005), 251-2.

in Tokyo's modernity. However, my intention will be to show not so much how to read "Ennui" in relation to Yisang's experience of Tokyo as to reveal the politicality concealed in and by that relationship. Therefore, I will qualify the first interpretation above by suggesting that the feeling of ennui should be understood, not as an inherent human emotion evoked in certain situations, but as a literary production of Yisang, and the second interpretation by applying Harry Harootunian's thesis that modernity could be overcome only by modernity in interwar Japan.⁶⁰ Based on this discussion of "Ennui," finally, I will suggest another way of reading the essay in and by which Yisang's otherwise unseen politicality is revealed.

II. "Ennui" as Expression of Yisang's Experience

To begin with, let us consider the interpretation of "Ennui" as a reflection of Yisang's lived experiences of Tokyo, as shown in Jina Kim's analysis of the essay. Firstly, Kim finds that Yisang was a "colonized traveler" in Tokyo. Kim then conceptualizes the social place of Yisang in Tokyo as "the marginality of man in his relationship to his material environs." Thus, she explains, it makes sense that Yisang as a marginal traveler in Tokyo imagined the rural village, which was also the politically and economically marginal place in colonial Korea, and to which he had visited also as a traveler.⁶¹ Then, we begin to see the otherness, or the marginality, of the narrators in both "Tokyo" and "Ennui." For example, in "Tokyo," although both the narrator and "a modern girl" are taking a walk in the street of Ginza, the modern girl is "digesting her most beautiful hours in the day" while the narrator's "promenade" is simply for "dull rumination."⁶² Similarly, in "Ennui," although the narrator and "Mr. Choi's

⁶⁰ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 33.

⁶¹ *Yisang ribyu = YiSang review.*, 265, 270.

⁶² Yisang and Kim, *Chôngbon Yisang munhak chônjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 138.

nephew” are playing Korean chess together, it is time for Mr. Choi’s nephew to “take a nap” while it is time for the narrator to “find something” to do.⁶³ In addition, although both the narrator and the “farmers” in the village are leading unhappy lives, the narrator’s unhappiness comes from his consciousness of the “evil ennui” while the farmers’ is due to their unconsciousness of it.⁶⁴ Finally, although a “cow” endlessly regurgitating “the sour tasting half-digested grass” is an “ennui-ist” like the narrator, its ennui is “as enormous and sad as its huge build” while the narrator’s is “as trivial as a microbe.”⁶⁵ In sum, Kim shows that it was Yisang’s marginality as a colonized traveler in Tokyo that made him recollect the memory from the marginal Korean countryside of Sungcheon, and he still remains marginal in his representation of the rural village just as he is in Tokyo.

In addition, Kim also finds that Yisang was an ardent “observer” while traveling in Tokyo. In fact, while the narrator of “Tokyo” complains about the “stink of gasoline” in Tokyo, he is also busy visiting the ‘Marubiru (Marunouchi Building)’ in ‘Marunouchi,’ then to the ‘Tsukiji small theater’ in ‘Shinjuku,’ and finally the street of “flashing lights” in ‘Ginza.’ Likewise, as Kim rightly points out, in “Ennui,” the narrator constantly moves around in the village while he is at the same time constantly complaining about the boring scenes of a “non-barking dogs,” a “crowing rooster,” the “regurgitating cow” and a primitive plays of rural “children.” For Kim, however, these are not contradictory behaviors. She explains that the ardent observers (the narrators) of Yisang’s essays are initially attracted by the “indifference” which is “pervasive” in the “ordinary” lives of Tokyo as well as of Sungcheon.⁶⁶ But they soon find it dull and

⁶³ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁶ According to Kim, it is Raymond Williams who has observed the “randomness of movement and the negative system of indifference” as most salient characteristic of a city. *Yisang ribyu = YiSang review.*, 268.

boring since their observation of the indifference is so repetitive as to lose their interest in the attractions.⁶⁷ By indifference, Kim means, for instance, the indifference of the villagers of Sungcheon towards the strangeness of non-barking dog, the crowing rooster, and the neighborhood children who have no toys to play with.⁶⁸ These are, for the narrator of “Ennui,” the objects not only of the repetitive observation and thus of boredom in the end, but also of otherness that marginalizes him.

I want to add that this identification of the others with the feeling of ennui in “Ennui” can also be seen indirectly in the scene of the school of minnows at the middle of the essay. This scene implies, not so much the identification of the others in the village with the feeling of ennui, but the identification of the narrator himself with the minnows. In this sense, it is only scene in which the object of description does not provide a feeling of ennui. In fact, the minnows have two characteristics that make them similar to the narrator, not to the others. First, the minnows are unlike the regurgitating cow whose build is as big as its enormous ennui, and like the narrator whose ennui which is as trivial as a microbe. That is, the minnows that live on bugs are “as small as a bug,” and thus comparable in size to the “hideous pale and gaunt” body of the narrator. In addition, the minnows are not associated with height, like the stars “over the narrator’s head.” Like the narrator who “lies down” before the cow and in his dark room, the school of minnows keeps swimming downstream.⁶⁹ In sum, since the school of minnows does not marginalize the narrator, they are not the object of his ennui. Instead, insofar as the minnows are surrounded by all the objects of otherness and ennui in the small village, they represent Yisang’s marginality in the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 269.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 270.

⁶⁹ Yisang and Kim, *Chôngbon Yisang munhak chônjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 114.

metropole, who stayed alone in the foreign country without even a “bad fella” to talk with.⁷⁰

III. “Ennui” as Imaginary Solution to Yisang’s Real Contradiction

Fredric Jameson suggests that “an individual narrative” can be interpreted as “the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction.”⁷¹ To put this interpretive principle into practice in reading “Ennui,” we can render the essay as a literary resolution of Yisang’s disappointment in Tokyo caused by the city’s “superficial westernization.”⁷² As a matter of fact, it is said that Yisang was unhappy during his stay in Tokyo because of personal economic hardship, poor physical health, and psychological instability. Therefore, if “Ennui” can be read as a literary resolution to Yisang’s misery in the city of Tokyo, we could propose that he imagined Sungcheon as its conceptual counterpart. (He had visited Sungcheon for recuperatory vacation before going to Tokyo.)⁷³

However, the way Yisang imagines the rural village is not the way “good old days” are used as a “stick to beat the present,” as Raymond Williams describes it.⁷⁴ This is probably because, as we have seen, the feeling of alienation that Yisang had in Tokyo corresponded with the same feeling he had had during his visit to Sungcheon; so, he had to feel nothing but ennui when he imagined the country. Instead, given that what caused his disappointment in the “vulgar commodity (=Tokyo)” was “unpleasant,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 255.

⁷¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, New edition. (Routledge, 2002), 77.

⁷² Yisang and Kim, *Chôngbon Yisang munhak chônjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 250.

⁷³ *Yisang ribyu = YiSang review.*, 265.

⁷⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, First Print This Edition. (Oxford University Press, USA, 1975), 12.

superficial, stinky westernization,⁷⁵ it is reasonable to conclude that his literary resolution ended up being the de-westernization (de-modernization) of his essay.

In fact, “Ennui,” when read together with its sister-essay “Mountain Village and Lingering Emotion (hereafter, “Mountain Village”)”⁷⁶ has a distinctive formal construction that supports the reading of this essay as an exclusion of anything western or modern. To start with, for example, Choi Jin-seok finds out that “Mountain Village” has two scenes of modernization that “Ennui” does not have.⁷⁷ The first scene is that of “*hakgyo* (school)” where little students learn “*gul* (written language);” the second is the scene of the film showing in the school playground featuring overall Korean peninsula—from “a bridge in Busan” (a city located in the southern part of Korean peninsula) through “Mokdan Hill in Pyeongyang” (a city in the middle of the peninsula) to “the railway bridge across Amnok River (at the northern most). Moreover, the screening of the film is followed by an announcement by the director of a “guild,” which has to be translated by the assisting interpreter.⁷⁸ Yet such modern images are eliminated from “Ennui.” Instead, Yisang incorporates into his essay such pre-modern and natural scenes as of “Jang-gi” (traditional Korean chess which the narrator plays with Mr. Choi’s nephew), of the non-barking dog, of the crowing rooster, of the ruminating cow, of the school of minnows swimming downstream, and so forth.

⁷⁵ Yisang and Kim, *Chôngbon Yisang munhak chônjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 250.

⁷⁶ For the English translation of this work, refer to John Frankl, “Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village: —A Few Paragraphs from a Journal of Travels to Sungcheonn, *Azalea : journal of korean literature & culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Korea Inst, 2008), 331-45. And for literary analysis of it, refer to John Frankl, “Marking Territory: Writing against Nation-based Identity in Yisang's “Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village.” *Ibid.*, 331-58.

⁷⁷ Sang Yi and Jin-seok Choi, *I san sakuhin shūsei*. (Tōkyō: Sakuhinsha, 2006), 384.

⁷⁸ Yisang and Kim, *Chôngbon Yisang munhak chônjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 52. There is no reason to conceive of the space of a colonial Korean countryside in 1930s as homogeneously premodern, since few of them was exempt from the political and economic management, often directed by Japanese entrepreneurs and officials, of the Japanese colonial government.

Secondly, “Ennui” does not have a single use of “imported words,” that is, western or Japanese words whose pronunciations alone have been converted into Korean script. By contrast, such “imported words” appear very often not only in his other Sungcheon essays, but also throughout his literary works. In “Mount Village,” for example, the grass and flowers in the small road of the rural village evoke the colorful illustration in a “gravure book;” the color of the honey bee is as golden as that in the “films of Cecil Blount De Mille;” the vegetable in the “*sarada*(salad)” bowl that looks like the foreign vegetable “asparagus” is in imagination associated with an urban *kisaeng*(courtesan) putting on “josette;” the ripe pumpkin resembles “rugby football” and so forth.⁷⁹ In “Ennui,” on the other hand, the natural landscape is just “choroksaek (grassy green)” and nothing but green.

Finally, the image of a “church” that appears in “Mountain Village” is absent in “Ennui.” As a result, the narrator in the latter essay has no such pious desire as that of the narrator in “Mountain Village,” to “approach the sound of hymns” and to “go to church to repent before God.”⁸⁰ On the contrary, he complains about the “tastelessness and poor sensibility” of God that renders nature all too green and thus so boring.⁸¹

IV. A Qualification

However, I suggest that the perspective of seeing “Ennui” as a reflection of Yisang’s experience can be problematic when the relationship between the reflection and the experience is uncritically accepted as such. Let me explain this by the examples from Yisang’s essays that we have discussed. In the beginning of “Ennui,” the narrator complains about the monotonous color and shape of Sungcheon’s landscape:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 44-5.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁸¹ Ibid., 108.

“I look to the east—Mount Palbong; why can’t its contours be curvy instead of simply being flat and dull? I look around; on the west there is a plain, on the south there also is a plain, and on the north is plain again. Why on earth should the plains spread out like that? Why should they all be so green?”⁸²

It is dubious that the narrator is actually seeing the landscape of the rural village in this passage. In fact, without the word “Mount Palbong,” which is the real name of the mountain located in the rural village, it is not even readily knowable that the place being described is Sungcheon. Instead, the passage gives such impression that what is being described is not so much the actual landscape of the countryside as the narrator’s own feeling of boredom projected in the landscape. This impression is supported when the passage is compared to Yisang’s description of the very same Sungcheon landscape in “Mountain Village”:

“Over there, in Mount Palbong, there are deer and wild boars. And someone even witnessed a “bear” coming down to the ditch where the ceremonial prayer for rain is held, and eating a crawfish. I am under the illusion that the animals that cannot be seen except in a zoo were not caught in the mountain to be brought to the zoo, but were brought from the zoo to the mountain.”⁸³

In this passage, again, the narrator does not seem to describe the actual sight of Mount Palbong, but he conceptualizes the scene of the mountain as an illusionary home to wild animals, an abstraction similar to the monotony in “Ennui.”

⁸² Ibid., 106. All translations of Yisang’s work hereafter are mine.

⁸³ Ibid., 42.

In the two passages, we can observe that what Yisang really saw in the rural village did not, as such, become the objects that he describes in his essays. This, then, makes it necessary to reconsider the relationship between his experience of the village and his expression of it. Firstly, it is conceivable that Yisang's experience of the landscape of Sungcheon is an ideal type of experience which his literary expression tries to reflect. This is plausible not only because it is certain that he actually went to and saw the village but also because many still believe that he adopts for the representation of his experience the genre of *supil* (essay), which was, and still is, believed to have a frank voice of an author.⁸⁴ However, as we have observed, there is a distance between the experience and the expression in Yisang's essays to such a degree that what he describes seems to be irrelevant to what he saw. Thus, for Yisang's case, the expression is not a reflection of his actual experience. But this is not to say that the experience of Sungcheon is in every way irrelevant. On the contrary, it is relevant insofar as it provides material (i.e. linguistic) forms, such as "Mount Palbong," "a bear and a deer," and "plain," for themes such as "monotony" and "home to wild animals. Of course, we can also think of a reverse case, whereby an experience can provide a theme that accords to the forms of an expression instead, which I will discuss shortly. In either case, it is significant that the initiative is taken by the forms of expression, not by experience. Accordingly, Yisang's case inverts the idealist understanding of the relationship between an experience and an expression: that is, it is not an experience that determines forms and themes of an expression, but it is an expression that "first gives experience its form and the specificity of direction," as V.N. Volosinov says.⁸⁵ In this sense, while Volosinov admits that the expression is

⁸⁴ There is controversy to classify "Ennui" as an essay. However, I emphasize on the fact that it has been believed and thus classified as an essay in almost all anthologies of Yisang's works. See Mi-sook Min, "Yisang's Cognitive World Seen through Sungcheon-Essays and the Meanings of "Record of a Lifetime," "Ennui," "Lost Flowers.,"" *Bangyoumunyongu* 28 (2009): 413-4.

⁸⁵ V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Harvard University Press, 1986), 85.

“something which, having in some way takes shape and definition in the psyche of an individual, is outwardly objectified for others with the help of external signs of some kind,” he stresses that the internal “something” and the “outward objectification” are produced “out of one and the same material.”⁸⁶ Therefore, in Yisang’s case, since his expression elaborates on his experience, which is otherwise a nameless sensation in his mind, the expression equals the production of his elaborated experience in material (linguistic) forms. Here, it is important to distinguish two senses of experience, that is, one that is not yet elaborated by an expression and the other that is elaborated by an expression. Moreover, it is not until the nameless sensation (the unelaborated experience) embodies linguistic forms in writing (expression) and thus becomes the elaborated experience that it becomes an *idée-force* that can “reflect and refract” the real world.⁸⁷

With the redefined relationship between expression and experience, now we should consider our current issue: that is, how Yisang’s elaborated and unelaborated experiences of Tokyo is related to “Ennui.” Admittedly, in “Ennui,” there is not an explicit sign of anything that is related to Tokyo and his experience of it. In other words, Yisang’s experience of Tokyo does not seem to be related to the material forms in “Ennui.”⁸⁸ However, we can find a thematic similarity between “Ennui” and the experience of Tokyo elaborated in the essay “Tokyo.” For example, in the opening lines of “Tokyo,” the narrator also complains about the landscape of Tokyo, as the narrator in “Ennui” does:

⁸⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 9-11.

⁸⁸ This also can be seen from syntactic analyses of both essays “Tokyo” and “Ennui.” For instance, Jina Kim points out that “whereas fragmented sentences in “Tokyo” convey the accelerated speed of the city, a series of short but complete sentences slows and lengthens time, thus producing the effect of ennui” in “Ennui.” See *Yisang ribyu = YiSang review.*, 266.

“The Marunouchi building—so called *marubiru*—should have been bigger at least four times than this, as I imagined. Now I wonder if I went to Broadway, New York, I would have a similar sense of disillusionment. Anyhow, this city terribly stinks gasoline!—this is my first impression of Tokyo.”⁸⁹

In a private letter to his friend, Yisang wrote that his first impression of Tokyo was disappointment.⁹⁰ It is the same feeling of disappointment that determined the theme (disappointment in Tokyo) and form (the landscape of Tokyo) of the above passage about the Marunouchi building. In addition, it seems plausible that the feeling of disappointment led Yisang to express the monotony of the Sungcheon’s landscape in “Ennui,” since he had admitted his disappointment in the “countryside” saying that it was not his “hospital” as he had expected in a private letter written before his visit to Tokyo.⁹¹ Therefore, if we wish to analyze the relationship between Yisang’s Tokyo experiences and the writing of “Ennui,” I propose that the relationship between Yisang’s expressed disappointment in Tokyo and the *formal* constituents of “Ennui” should be given primary attention.

Next, experiences of Yisang in Tokyo that were not elaborated in writing by him but can be speculated on the basis of his writings and their social circumstances should be also considered in relation to the narrator’s expressed disappointment and to the material (linguistic) forms of “Ennui.” It is only then that we can see what constituted the “immediate social situation” of Yisang’s writing “Ennui,” that is, what determined the theme and form of the essay.⁹² Finally, however, it is crucial that all the analytical steps above should not be conducted in such a way as to conceal that the

⁸⁹ Yisang and Kim, *Chǒngbon Yisang munhak chǒnjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 135.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁹² Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 85.

origin of the essay is not experience, but production of the feeling of ennui. In other words, it should be always remembered that it is an expression that organizes an experience.

When illuminated from this light, Kim's interpretation of "Ennui" gives a cogent account of how Yisang's Tokyo experience of disappointment determines the theme and the form of "Ennui:" she first asserts that Yisang's disappointment resulted from his repetitive observation of the lives of Tokyo as a marginalized traveler, and then discloses the structural similarity between the disappointment and the feeling of ennui projected onto the narrator and the objects of Sungcheon in "Ennui," and concludes that it is this connection that made Yisang wrote about the rural village with the theme of ennui. On the other hand, however, Kim's interpretation can give the illusion that the social circumstances she describes evoke the feeling of ennui, while the reverse is true: it is the expression of ennui that uses the circumstances for its manifestation. This is because she fails to show that it is Yisang's expression that organized and produced the feeling of ennui in his essay by historicizing the feeling of ennui. To put it another way, she fails to see Yisang's social position as a (modern) author before and at the same time he was a traveler.

In order to see the feeling of ennui as a literary production, it is worth considering Reinhard Kuhn's suggestions of the "four main attributions of ennui" derived from his study on "ennui in Western literature": ennui is a "state that affects both the soul and the body;" its evocation is "independent of any external circumstances, that is, it is endogenous;" its evocation is also independent of our will; finally, it accompanies the "phenomenon of estrangement" by which "the world becomes emptied of its significance."⁹³ Interestingly, all these four attributes

⁹³ Reinhard Kuhn, *The demon of noontide : ennui in Western literature* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 12-3.

corresponds with the characteristics of ennui appeared in Yisang's "Ennui": the narrator expresses that he does not want to "move and even think;" the regurgitating cow is an ennui-ist precisely because his inherent "instinct of the regurgitation;" "ennui comes back in ten minutes;" finally, "tomorrow" will be no different from "today."

However, I do not intend to argue for the universality of the feeling of ennui by showing that it has appeared in both western and eastern literature. Rather, given that the ennui is a literary production, what we can see is a trace of the standardization of the production of ennui in the market of western as well as eastern literature in the early twentieth century. In other words, like (to name a few from Kuhn's examples) Andre Gide's *Isabella* (1911), Marcel Prost's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27), Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), and Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), Yisang's "Ennui" was a literary production whose appearance is characterized by the standardized expression of ennui. If this contemporaneity of the production of ennui is taken into account, it becomes impossible for us to forget that the origin of the feeling of ennui is as a literary production.

V. Politicality Concealed in Apoliticality

As we have seen, Yisang attempts to eliminate the modern words and scenes from his representation of Sungcheon in "Ennui." In this context, Choi argues that Yisang's textual de-modernization in the essay reflects his sheer disappointment in not just Tokyo's modernity (*Gundaesung*, 近代性) but also modernity as such. This leads Choi to conclude that Yisang's literature was his "methodology" to confront modernity.⁹⁴ But does Yisang succeed in completely eliminating the trace of

⁹⁴ Yi and Choi, *I san sakuhin shūsei*, 385.

modernity in his essay? There are, at least, two ready counter-evidences for this. Firstly, Yisang's adoption of "first person narration" in "Ennui" coincides with the prevalent literary practice among contemporary Japanese "I-novel" authors to compensate for "the rejection of individualism" in modern Japanese society.⁹⁵ In brief, his use of first person narration is already modern in that it was a modern literary practice. Secondly, that he wrote in native Korean language with frequent uses of "-*da*" ending to convey the narrator's inner voice in "Ennui" is also a sign of modern literary practice. As Karatani Kōjin says, "discovery of interiority" in literature, or the literary form in which a narrator speaks of the words in his mind, had not emerged until *genbun itchi* (the agreement between spoken language and written language) was institutionally established in Meiji Japan.⁹⁶ In addition, Kang Nae-hui finds that this new literary practice was imported to colonial Korea in 1920s, which resulted in the frequent use of "-*da*" ending in Korean literature.⁹⁷ In sum, despite its lack of imported words and modern scenes, "Ennui" is still a work of modern literature.

However, I would not see this as a failure of Yisang's literary de-modernization. Instead, I am arguing that Yisang's politicality is concealed in and by the very literary practice of de-modernization. To prove this, I now turn to the historical analysis of Yisang's understanding of literature that should begin with the formation of the dichotomy between two concepts, culture and politics, in modern Japan.

According to Harootunian, it was not until the late Meiji (1868-1912) and early Taisho period (1912-1926) that the concept of "culture (*bunka*)" became widely used by Japanese intellectuals. He points out that the use of the concept of culture was

⁹⁵ Masao Miyoshi, "Against the Native Grain: The Japanese Novel and the Post-modern West," *SAQ: the South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 537.

⁹⁶ Kōjin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (Duke University Press, 1993), 61.

⁹⁷ Thomas Lamarre and Kang Nae-Hui, *Impacts of Modernities* (University of Washington Press, 2004), 141.

firstly to contrast the dominant intellectual atmosphere of the new era with that of the previous era, which was summarized as “civilization (*bunmei*).”⁹⁸ For example, what was regarded as an ideal personality was “the commitment to self-sacrificing service” for the state in the Meiji period while it was transmuted into “personal self-cultivation and refinement” in the Taisho period. In this way, he says, the Japanese intellectuals began to conceive the concept of culture as associated with men’s activities in the “private sphere.”⁹⁹

It was after that, according to Harootunian, that the Japanese intellectuals began to venerate the concept of culture by rejecting its association with the politics in two ways.¹⁰⁰ Firstly, the Japanese intellectuals rejected the role of politics as a way to “balance the interest” between public and private, as promised by the Meiji government. This was because, as Harootunian explains, they sought to prevent politics from intervening in the private realm of culture, in which an individual could freely, at least in their belief, cultivate and refine himself by seeking a purely “aesthetic life.”¹⁰¹ But it is also important to understand that the state was complicit in the promotion of the concept of culture as an independent realm for an individual since in that way the state could exclude an individual’s criticism of politics.¹⁰² In addition, Harootunian also suggests that since intellectuals were afraid of the “threatening claims of mass culture,” by which culture was being “secularized and democratized,” they tried to promote the concept of “creative personality” that was supposed to be attributed to only a few qualified artistic intellectuals.¹⁰³ He further points out that by the concept of creative personality the intellectuals limited the

⁹⁸ Harry Harootunian, *Japan in Crisis*, 15

⁹⁹ Bernard Silberman and Conference on Taishō Japan., *Japan in crisis essays on Taishō democracy*. (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19.

association of the concept of culture only with the private spheres of the “uncommon few” so that they could separate their interest from that of the masses. In other words, he concludes, the insistence on the apoliticality of the cultural intellectuals was in fact political in that by that way they could not only enjoy their personal freedom independent of the politics of the state, but also seek their own interest independently of the “rest of society.”¹⁰⁴

The phenomenon of the formation of the dichotomy between the concepts of culture and politics was not confined to Japanese intellectual society in the Taisho period. According to Michael D. Shin, when Yi Gwangsu (1892-1950), a modern Korean writer, a literary critic and a journalist who had studied in Tokyo from 1905 to 1910, first introduced modern literature to colonial Korea in early 1910s, he consciously differentiated the concepts of culture from that the concept of civilization. However, Shin also finds that there was no clear-cut binary between the concepts of civilization and culture: for instance, whereas the concepts of literature and art, industry, commerce and politics were referred to by the term “civilization,” the term “culture” referred to the concepts of literature, philosophy, religion and art. Shin adds that among the four concepts in the referential range of “culture,” Yi privileged “literature” as the center of his “new culture” movement.¹⁰⁵ Theoretically, what can be found from this issue of conceptual categorization is threefold. Firstly, such concepts as politics and economy, or political economy as they are often put together, were in no way referred to by the term “culture.” In addition, in Yi’s categorization, the concept of “civilization” seems to lose to large degree its sense as the opposite of “culture,” not only because civilization subsumes culture, but also because Yi’s emphasis was heavily placed on the concept of “culture,” and specifically, on

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁵ Daqing Yang and Kyeong-Hee Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 254.

“literature.” Finally, Shin points out, it was the category of political economy that was in fact opposed to the concept of culture in the course of Yi’s importation of modern literature into colonial Korea. That the introduction of the conceptual dichotomy between political economy and culture (literature) had an influence on the consciousness of colonial Korean intellectuals is also demonstrated, but not without modification, by Yisang himself in his two short essays, “Culture Cannot Be Imagined without Literature” and “Literature and Politics,” written about fifteen years after the Yi’s introduction of the conceptual categories, and in the same year that he wrote “Ennui.” In these essays, Yisang clearly reveals his recognition of the relations of the concepts:

“Culture—that is, *society*—cannot be imagined without *Literature*; there is no reason for a literary writer to be ashamed of commodifying his literature; the weight of *literature* and *politics* cannot be measured by the same balance (emphasis added).”¹⁰⁶

Here, we can see that Yisang modifies the conceptual separation of economy and literature by admitting the inevitability of the commodification of literature. Nonetheless, the dichotomy between politics and literature (culture) is not only being maintained here but also, I think, reinforced precisely because of his acknowledgement of the commodification of literary works, which could give a ground for writers to seek their own interest through their literature, without becoming political writers. In this way, Yisang managed to conceive of writers’ (intellectuals’) autonomy independent of the intervention of and commitment to politics, and it is in this capacity of an autonomous and independent writer that he could not “give up”

¹⁰⁶ Yisang and Kim, *Chǒngbon Yisang munhak chǒnjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*, 212, 227.

distancing himself from “dokja (readers)” by “ridiculing” them.¹⁰⁷ It is in this context, i.e., Yisang as a producer of literary commodities whose interest is distinct from that of the rest of society, that what I call Yisang’s unseen politicality in his writing of “Ennui” should be examined.

Then, lastly, I suggest three ways re-reading Yisang’s “Ennui” focusing on the revelation of his concealed politicality. Firstly, “Ennui” was a fashionable literary commodity since it adopted in its production such literary trends of the time as the first person narrative, introspective narration, and the standardized production of the feeling of ennui. Secondly, “Ennui” was a formal attempt for the de-modernization, although such attempt could be made only by adopting the modern literary practices. In this light, the essay could only in any real sense be gestural as an exit from the disappointment in Tokyo’s superficial modernization.¹⁰⁸ In fact, I argue, “Ennui” could not help but become an attempt at de-modernization by modernity, since, as Harootunian rightly points out, overcoming modernity was the “impossible imperative” for the intellectuals who worried about the negative effects of westernization at the time.¹⁰⁹ Finally, “Ennui” was an affirmation of Yisang’s at once political and apolitical position. Specifically, that Yisang eliminated anything modern from the forms of his essay, while ridiculing such a romantic representations of a rural village through the very theme of ennui confirms his belief that the autonomy of literature could alone deal with the real contradiction in everyday life—superficial westernization—without the aid of politics. In this way, his essay helped maintain the dichotomy between literature and politics, by which writers could secure their place and their interest in the social division of labor. The same dichotomy ensured that the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 228.

¹⁰⁸ The theme of the exit of “Ennui” can be found in, for example, Komori Youichi, “jiishiki kajou kara no deguchi (Exit from Excessive Self-consciousness),” an article contained as a separate print in Yi and Choi, *I san sakuhin shūsei*.

¹⁰⁹ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, preface x.

colonial politics could prevent literary authors from criticizing colonialism, so that the modern capitalist mode of production that was established across Japan and Korea could be constantly reproduced.

CHAPTER 4

YANAGI MUNEYOSHI'S POLITICS OF PERSUASION

I. Introduction

It was 1914 when Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961), a Japanese art critic who is also famously known for his leading role in the *mingei* (folk art) movement in prewar Japan, first saw a *Chōsen*-period ceramic jar, which was presented to him by Asakawa Noritaka, a Japanese school teacher in colonial Korea then. It is said that from the moment he saw it, he loved it. Thus, he began to travel to Korea to collect Korean ceramics and art objects. Particularly, his trips to Korea from 1920 to 1924 were devoted for his plan to found “*Chōsen minzoku bijutsukan* (The Korean Art Museum)” based on the belief that art, as opposed to politics, was a key to ameliorate the relationship between Japan and Korea. For this purpose, he made efforts in two ways: firstly, he arranged music concerts of his wife Yanagi Kaneko, an alto singer, and Korean art exhibitions along with giving lectures on the aesthetics of Korean art works, in order to raise fund as well as educate Korean audience; secondly, he earned supports from then Governor-General Saito Makoto for his plan. In addition, his effort was also made in Japan by writing about Korean ceramics in the Japanese domestic art and literature magazine *Shirakaba*. At last, his plan was accomplished and the Korean Art Museum opened in April 1924. In sum, although it can hardly be said that Yanagi alone founded the museum, his role was undeniably central.¹¹⁰

Kim Brandt, however, interprets Yanagi's apolitical promotion of Korean ceramics and other art objects in terms of Japanese colonial politics in Korea. Firstly,

¹¹⁰ Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Duke University Press, 2007), 7, 23.

Brandt finds that the way Yanagi opposed art to politics resembled the way the eighteenth century British Romanticists and the early twentieth century Japanese Romanticists had identified themselves with pure artists without a political affiliation. Then, relying on Raymond Williams' finding that the seemingly un-political British Romanticists were in fact political in that they wished for social reform by the Romantic art movement, Brandt argues that Yanagi's innocuous promotion of art for the friendship of Korea and Japan was political too, in terms of the "instrumentality" of his argument in the "reproduction of Japanese colonialism" in Korea and in the confirmation of "large body of colonial knowledge of Korea."¹¹¹ She supports her argument with three examples. Firstly, Yanagi's "cultural activism" was associated with the new cultural policy initiated by Saito government in the early 1920s.¹¹² Secondly, Yanagi's characterization of the aesthetics of Korean art as the "beauty of sorrow" was linked to the perspective of the contemporary Japanese historians who saw Korean history as "sorrowful." This was because Korea had been continuously invaded by and subservient to China due both to the geographical condition of the Korean peninsula adjacent to it and to the fabricated (by the historians) incapacity of Korean people to progress independently. It is in these historical perspectives that Japanese rule of Korea was also justified, since the history of Korea was said to be inherently dependent on the neighboring countries for its development.¹¹³ In this respect, Yanagi's identification of "beauty of sorrow" with Korean people could help to "naturalize" the Japanese colonial rule of Korea.¹¹⁴ Thirdly, Yanagi supported for the contemporary idea that a Japanese art critic was superior to a Korean potter

¹¹¹ Ibid., 10, 22.

¹¹² Ibid., 25.

¹¹³ For more about the Japanese colonial historiography on the impossibility of Korean independence, See Henry H. Em. "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Chaeho's Historiography." Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 345-6.

¹¹⁴ Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty*, 32.

because without the former the aesthetic value of the works of the latter could not be discovered. In other words, there was the collective attempt to establish the “Japanese aesthetic discernment” of Korean art objects. Reasonably, this could in turn corroborate the assertion of Japan’s “curatorial” role to promote and protect the cultural legacy of Asian civilization.¹¹⁵ In sum, Brandt gives cogent accounts of how Yanagi’s attempt to aestheticize Korean art and people was “instrumentalized” to justify the Japanese colonialism in Korea.¹¹⁶

However, it seems that Brandt fails to explain what the Japanese colonialism meant to the Korean nationalism in the case of Yanagi’s cultural activism. For example, she does not take into concern how Yanagi’s activities in Korea were related to the rise of “cultural nationalism” in the Korean nationalist movements in the 1920s. Admittedly, she does give a brief explanation about the relationship between Saito’s cultural policies and Korean cultural nationalism. For example, Brandt says that the rise of cultural nationalism represents “a split in the Korean nationalist movements” resulting from Saito’s cultural policies which had two faces: on the one hand, Saito’s government allowed extended political and cultural freedom to Korean people, but, on the other hand, his cultural politics aimed at alleviating the international criticism of the Japanese brutal colonial rule of 1910s, and even the newly extended freedom was in fact limited by the increased police control.¹¹⁷ In this way, she seems to confirm the conventional view that sees the Japanese “Cultural Rule” in 1920s as a disguised continuation of the oppressive political dominance of the Japanese colonial government in Korea (the *Chōsen sōtokufu*) in the preceding decade.¹¹⁸ However, this

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁶ Here, I am inspired by Raymond Williams for the use of term “instrumentality” of the aesthetic. See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 151.

¹¹⁷ Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty*, 25.

¹¹⁸ For instance, Michael A. Schneider introduces that “for most Korean and later historians Cultural Rule denoted an expeditious, even cynical, set of policies to deflect opposition to Japan’s domination.” See Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 98.

explanation can be also problematic in that Yanagi's association with Cultural Rule forms a strict opposition to the contemporary Korean cultural nationalism in the absence of the analysis of the latter. Then, it is not surprising that Brandt describes Yanagi's insistence on using the term "(Korean) *minzoku*" for the name of the art museum as "his *flirting* with Korean nationalism (emphasis added)."¹¹⁹

On the contrary, Henry H. Em suggests that Japanese colonial state shared a common concern with Korean cultural nationalists: that is, both needed to "nationalize" Korean people, or produce "Koreans as subjects." However, this should not confirm another conventional view that Korean cultural nationalists aligned with the colonial government because they were the selfish betrayers of the Korean nation or because the colonial government deceived them to do so. Instead, as Em rightly points out by citing Immanuel Wallenstein's view, it is important to distinguish that this complicit relationship was induced, not by the political manipulations of the colonial government, but by the "development of the global nation-state system," which emerged as the "political superstructure of a capitalist world-economy."¹²⁰ With the aid of this view, then, we can see now in our case that the colonial government and Korean cultural nationalists shared a common interest to produce Korean people as a modern nation, in order to maintain the interdependent yet uneven economic (labor) structure between Japan and Korea that had been built by the cadastral survey carried out from 1920 to 1918.

For the rest of the chapter, I will attempt to prove the complicit relationship between the Japanese colonial government in the early 1920s and the newly risen Korean cultural nationalism by exploring Yanagi's dual position of being a representative not only of the former but also of the latter. In the beginning, I will

¹¹⁹ Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty*, 230.

¹²⁰ Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 152.

introduce Ken Kawashima's discussion of "the production of a surplus population" in Korea in the 1910s to see both how Korea was incorporated into the Japan-led modern capitalist system and how in the process a negative image of Korean nation was emerged. Next, by contrast, I will show how Yanagi produced an acceptable form of Korean people in his article "Thinking about Koreans" ("*Chōsenjin o omou*") written in May 1919, both for the colonial state and for the Korean cultural nationalists. In order to understand the inducement for the cultural nationalists to make Korean people a modern nation, finally, I will discuss the historical implication of Yanagi's art criticism and its reception among the cultural nationalists in colonial Korea.

II. The Formation of *Futei Senjin*

Kawashima proposes that the so-called "Korean problem" raised and worried by the Japanese intellectuals in the early 1920s originated from the land survey carried out by the Japanese colonial government in Korea throughout 1910s. Kawashima explains that the main purpose of the survey was to measure and register the colonial Korean land, and to implement a new cash-based tax system based on the land registration. He also shows that although the colonial government kept the tax rate low to increase the investment from both Japanese and Korea entrepreneurs and landlords, many Korean peasants nevertheless could not pay the newly imposed tax. In addition, Kawashima points out that by the time the survey was completed in 1928, the price of rice produced by Korean peasants sharply decreased due to the ongoing government program to increase rice production in Korean rural land in order to supply cheaper rice for the consumers in Japan. As a result, many Korean peasants, especially in the southern Korean provinces where economic production had been traditionally relied on rice cultivation, could hardly continue to live on growing rice, so they had to

become wage-laborers instead since the “capacity to work” was their “only remaining, sellable commodity.”¹²¹

Then, it seems fortunate for the new Korean laborers that Japanese economy expanded to a great degree during the First World War period (1914-1917).

Specifically, the cotton factories in Osaka, Okayama and Hyogo prefectures and coal mines in Fukuoka and Hokkaido needed more, preferably cheaper, workers like the Korean laborers who had been recently displaced from their land in Korea.¹²²

However, the poor working condition of Korean workers in the Japanese factories and mines tells that the employment in Japan was the beginning of their hardship. For example, Kawashima shows that most of Korean workers were “temporal and supplementary workers,” whose length of employment did not usually last longer than three years.¹²³ Thus, he calls these Korean workers a “surplus population in Japan,” who became the reserved labor force to be employed when the primary labor force, i.e., Japanese workers, was unavailable. Also, he posits that since periodical firing of workers was necessary to make the wage laborer a commodity in the system of capitalist production, the production of a surplus population, which made possible of such periodic firing in the first place, was indispensable. In this sense, it should be noted that Korean workers were born, as the production of the colonial politics, to be exploited by the interstate capitalist system that was being established between Japan and Korea in the 1910s.

Consequently, it is not surprising that when the Japanese economy crashed in the late 1910s, Korean workers were among the first who lost their jobs. After that, Kawashima finds, they suffered from poverty without money to go back to Korea, so

¹²¹ Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Duke University Press, 2009), 26-7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 32.

they were considered by many Japanese as “vagabond” roaming around without jobs. This was one of the crucial reasons that they began to organize labor unions and attend communist and anarchist groups. In this way, according to Kawashima, employing Korean workers was no longer considered to be “the employer’s advantage,” the unemployment of Korean workers became a social problem, and finally they became the “burden” of Japanese police.¹²⁴

One can now picture the negative image of Korean workers that was initially formed in the Japanese labor market but expanded to be concerned by Japanese police authorities. Moreover, it is noticeable that this negative image of Korean workers coincided with the term “*futei senjin* (不逞鮮人, unruly or malcontent Korean),” which was firstly used by the colonial police to describe the radical Korean independent activists who took part in the March First movement. Kawashima explains that the term soon expanded to characterize all Korean people because it was difficult to distinguish “*senjin*” from “non-*senjin*” as well as “*futei senjin*” from “non-*futei senjin*” by appearance. Accordingly, the difficulty of distinction resulted in making all Korean people, whether in Korea or in Japan, potential *futei senjins*,¹²⁵ who were widely regarded as the ones to blame for the rise of the Korean Problem.¹²⁶ In this way, Kawashima concludes, Korean workers, begun as a surplus population, became the “uncontrollable colonial surplus” for the colonial government that had originally produced them and controlled them. At the same time, I assert, the first discursive formation of Korean people—namely, *futei senjin*—was too problematic to

¹²⁴ Ibid., 37-41.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹²⁶ The extensive range of the term *futei senjin* can also be seen in the case of Yisang’s arrest in the name of *futei senjin* in Tokyo in 1936. It is worth noting that he was neither an active nationalist nor a Korean worker in Japan, and the year he was arrested was over fifteen years later than the first time the term had been used. See Yisang and Kim, *Chōngbon Yisang munhak chōnjip = The complete works of Lee Sang*.

be accepted both by the colonial state and the Korean nationalists, both of whom then believed that properly nationalizing Korean people is their urgent task.

III. Modernizing Korean Nation

If modernizing Koreans in order to effectively manage the capitalist mode of production in Korea was the problem shared by the colonial state and the Korean cultural nationalists, the question that both had to address was how to produce an acceptable form of Korean nation for both of them. Then, I argue, it was Yanagi's production of Koreans as a sorrowful people in his article "Thinking about Koreans" that fitted such criterion.

Firstly, in the beginning of the article, Yanagi expresses his concern with the recent "*dekigoto* (event)," i.e., the March First movement¹²⁷ and with the contemporary Japanese intellectuals' "unwise, depthless thoughts" on Koreans, which can be summarized by the term *futei senjin*.¹²⁸ Given that this article was translated and published in a colonial Korean newspaper in April 1920,¹²⁹ it can be safely assumed that this opposition of his understanding of Korean nation to the widely held image of Koreans was what firstly impressed Korean readers, making his article worth reading.

Then, as a necessary precondition to the attribution of the beauty of sorrow to Korean nation in his article, Yanagi had to represent Koreans as a unified,

¹²⁷ In Korean, *Samil-undong*; an extensive anti-colonial nationalist demonstration of Korean nationalists and masses on March 1 in 1919

¹²⁸ Kim shows that many identified the cause of the movement with the unruly Korean, or *futei senjin*. Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty*, 21.

¹²⁹ The original Japanese text was published about a year before the Korean translation was published in *Yomiuri Shinbun*. See Hee-jung Kim, "Chōsen eseoui Yanagi Muneyoshi *suyong yangsang* (Japanese Literature, Japanology : The Reception of Yanagi Muneyoshi in Korea)," *Iluilmunhak Yeongu (Study of Japanese Language and Literature)* 51, no. 2 (2004): 222.

homogenous people: hence, the use of the term “*Chōsenjin*,” which ignored various “gender, regional origins, and class backgrounds of Koreans.”¹³⁰ In addition, Yanagi corroborates the homogeneity of Korean people by disclosing the common aspect—“continuous external invasions and internal disturbance”—of the various stages in the history of Korea.¹³¹ Moreover, that he juxtaposes the Korean identity with that of neighboring nations such as China and Japan also strengthens the sense of one-ness of Korean people in his representation. It seems that this use of the homogenous Korean people has two ideological effects: firstly, as Kawashima points out, it eliminates from the unified Korean people “the class consciousness,” which was being arisen in Korean workers in Japan, as I have shown above. Secondly, at the same time, Yanagi’s adoption of the term *Chōsenjin* for the one Korean people predicated the later use of the same word but in a derogatory sense, as Em argues. This is because the colonial government needed to elaborate inferior identities of Korean people such as “sorrowful,” “feminine,” “childlike,” or “unruly” in order to justify their rule over Koreans ideologically.¹³² For this purpose, the abstraction of the collective identities encompassing all Koreans was a necessary precondition.

Lastly, Yanagi renders “*Chōsenjin*” in sorrowful but beautiful nation as opposed to the unruly and malcontent *futei senjin*, making it acceptable not only to the colonial state but also to the Korean cultural nationalists. On the one hand, the origin of the concept of “the beauty of sorrow” can be traced back in the thoughts of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), particularly in his literary theory of “*mono no aware* (ものの哀れ; the pathos of things) by which Motoori interpreted *The Tale of Genji*, the earliest novel in Japan dated back to seventh century. Interestingly, the way Yanagi

¹³⁰ Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 353.

¹³¹ Muneyoshi Yanagi and Nihon Mingei Kyōkai., *Chōsen to sono geijutsu*, Shinsōhan. (Tōkyō: Shunjūsha, 1972), 4.

¹³² Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 353.

utilizes the concept of the beauty of sorrow resembles the mechanism that the theory of *mono no aware* works: just as, as Peter Nosco explains, Motoori sees that it is not moral and political rightness or wrongness but the affectivity of “human experience” that evokes the sorrowful emotion in the minds of characters of *The Tale of Genji*,¹³³ Yanagi rejects “the political and scientific understanding of Koreans” but embraces “the religious and artistic understanding of them,” thereby finding the “beauty of *sen* (line; 線),” which identified with the beauty of sorrow, from such Korean art object as a *Chōsen* ceramic.¹³⁴ This similarity between the concept of the beauty of sorrow and the *mono no aware* then explains why they made sense for general readers of Japanese literature, whether the Japanese bureaucrats in the colonial government or the common Japanese readers, particularly those who might not believe the theory of the sorrowful history of Korea.

On the other hand, to understand Korean intellectuals’ reception of the concept of sorrowful people, it is important to distinguish sorrow as emotion from sorrow as modern emotion. Yi’s project of introducing modern literature to colonial Korea is a good example to show this difference. As Shin finds, in Yi’s article “What is Literature” written in 1916, Yi’s point was to make distinction between pre-modern and modern literature by “emotion (*chong*),” since he saw modern literature as a means of “transmitting individual’s emotion,” not as of lecturing others as shown in pre-modern Korean literature. For Yi, “emotion was a general term” that included “love, rage, evil, hope, courage and *sorrow* (emphasis added).”¹³⁵ Then, it is observable that sorrow as an individual emotion in Yi’s project corresponds with the beauty of sorrow as an “interiority” of Korean people in Yanagi’s representation. In

¹³³ William Theodore De Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese tradition* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 485.

¹³⁴ Yanagi and Nihon Mingei Kyōkai., *Chōsen to sono geijutsu*, 4. 8.

¹³⁵ Yang and Choi, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 255-6.

this light, we can now understand why Yanagi's idea of sorrowful Korean people was acceptable to the cultural nationalists who wanted to make Korean people a modern nation: that is, it not only challenged such negative image of Korean people as *futei senjin*, but more significantly it transformed Korean people into a modern nation that could have and express its essential, inherent emotion such as sorrow.

IV. Art Criticism and Cultural Nationalism

But we should be careful not to see the Korean cultural nationalists' desire to produce a modern Korean nation as their patriotism alone. Instead, what is at stake here is to find an inducement of their nationalist activities in relation to the "capitalist world-economy," as Wallenstein suggests.

Our previous discussion has shown that by the late 1910s, there was the formation of exploitative economic structure between Japan and Korea by the colonial rule. This partly explains what caused the March First Movement. For example, "the Declaration of Independence on February 8th," declared by a group of Korean student in Tokyo on February 8 in 1919, which directly inspired and encouraged the Movement, shows that the colonial rule which caused the emigrant Korean workers in Japan was so threatening as to make Koreans seek for "the right of survival," and "national independence."¹³⁶ After the Movement was brutally quelled and for that reason the then Governor-General of Korea Hasegawa Yoshimichi (1850-1924) was replaced by Saito Makoto, Cultural Rule of the new colonial state loosened the severe economic and political control of Korean people carried by the previous colonial government in the preceding years. Consequently, in the early 1920s, Korean

¹³⁶ "Chōsen Cheongnyun Dokripdan Seonun (The Declaration of Korean Youth Independence Group)" (Hankuk Nondan, Vol. 233, 2009), 59.

intellectuals “were relatively free to discuss social, cultural, and with limits, political issues,” and for that purpose they now had a new vernacular newspaper *Donga Ilbo* (East Asian Daily).¹³⁷

Donga Ilbo was founded by Kim Sung-soo (1891-1955) in April 1920, a rich Korean nationalist entrepreneur who advocated the importance of education for the national independence. The importance of *Donga Ilbo* to our discussion is that it played an indispensable role in Yanagi’s project of the *Chōsen* Art Museum. For example, according to Kim Hee-jung, *Donga Ilbo* published more articles and advertisements about Yanagi’s activities in Korea than any other newspapers or magazines both in 1920 and in 1921. Firstly, it published the Korean translations of Yanagi’s articles “Thinking about Koreans,” and “Contribution to My Korean Friend” in the April 1920 introducing his plan of cultural activities, such as the music concerts of his wife and the project of the museum, in Korea. Subsequently, it reported on the details of Yanagi’s stay in Korea and of a series of his wife’s music concerts. Finally, in contrast to the articles of *Kyeongsung Ilbo*, the official press of the colonial government, that emphasized on the intention of *naisen ittai* (Korea and Japan is a single body) of Yanagi’s cultural activities, for which Yanagi requested a correction, *Donga Ilbo*’s articles concentrated on depicting Yanagi as “a friend of Korean art” who would help to bring cultural modernity to Korean people while removing any political intention of him.¹³⁸

The best way to describe the activity of *Donga Ilbo* is by the term “cultural movement,” or “cultural nationalism,” since they radically separated politics from

¹³⁷ Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925* (University of Washington Press, 1989), 5. But the conventional view of Cultural Rule that it was a disguised continuation of the previous suppressive colonial rule with its increased police controls should not be dismissed as such. See *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Kim, “*Chōsen eseoui* Yanagi Muneyoshi *Suyong Yangsang* (Japanese Literature, Japanology : The Reception of Yanagi Muneyoshi in Korea),” 224-232.

culture within the realm of Korean nationalism.¹³⁹ But just as Yanagi's apparent apoliticality is not apolitical, neither is *Donga Ilbo*'s cultural movement, precisely because of its blind promotion of the national culture emptied of the colonial politics. This means not only that, as Kim says, the digression of the Korean masses' attention from the colonial politics was its political scheme.¹⁴⁰ But also, the newspaper was political in a sense that it reproduced and naturalized the classification of politics and culture in the context of colonial Korean nationalism, which was a necessary condition for them to have an authority to discern true national culture in the newly emerged market of cultural criticism. Let me finally explain this point with the example of Yanagi's art criticism and the reception of it by the Korean Cultural movement.¹⁴¹

It is said that there had been no modern sense of art criticism by the time Yanagi introduced his critical commentary on *Chōsen*-period ceramics in early 1920s.¹⁴² But this is not to confirm such essentialist argument as the lack of artistic discernment of Koreans, as Yanagi himself implies.¹⁴³ Instead, this should be seen as the lack of necessity of art criticism in colonial Korea before 1920. What I mean by lack of the necessity of art criticism is that in Korea under the oppressive colonial rule during 1910s there was no need to discern what the authentic form of Korean art was in accordance to a true Korean national identity. It is because the then politics did not allowed so, the category of art criticism was not yet introduced, and thus the corresponding market was not yet established. Then, why did art criticism of *Chōsen*

¹³⁹ Robinson introduces that the main character of Korean cultural movement in the early 1920s was to put the cultural and economical modernization first than the political independence. See Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Kim, "Chōsen eseoui Yanagi Muneyoshi *Suyong Yangsang* (Japanese Literature, Japanology : The Reception of Yanagi Muneyoshi in Korea)," 233.

¹⁴¹ The discussion on art criticism for the rest of this chapter is relied on William's insight on "criticism." See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 48-52.

¹⁴² Kim, "Chōsen eseoui Yanagi Muneyoshi *Suyong Yangsang* (Japanese Literature, Japanology : The Reception of Yanagi Muneyoshi in Korea)," 220.

¹⁴³ Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty*, 35.

ceramics begin in the early 1920 for the first time in Korea? One possible answer is that there was the gap between the artistic value and the market value (price) of *Chōsen*-period ceramics, the gap experienced by such Japanese settler collector as Asakawa Noritaka, one of Yanagi's important Japanese companions in Korea during his project of The Korean Art Museum. For instance, Kim shows that in 1910s, while the ceramics of Goryo-period (918-1392), a dynasty in the history of Korea before *Chōsen* dynasty (1392-1897), were traded among Japanese collectors by high market price, *Chōsen*-period ceramics were still "relatively cheap and plentiful." But for Yanagi and his Japanese companions in Korea, who had "taste" but could not afford the expensive Goryo-period ceramics, *Chōsen*-period ceramics were both an economically realistic and an artistically valid choice.¹⁴⁴ Thus, now, they "needed" to discern, or fabricate, the authenticity of *Chōsen*-period ceramics as opposed to that of Goryo-period ceramics, by producing the former's organicity with the essence of Korean people.

Then, we can see the important coincidence between Yanagi's cultural project of the Korean Art Museum, Cultural Rule of the colonial government that needed to produce controllable, inferior, homogenous Korean identities, and the rise of Korean cultural nationalism in the early 1920. In and by the relationship between Yanagi and Cultural Rule, his criticism of *Chōsen*-period ceramics was transformed into the criticism of the aesthetics and identity of Korean people (*Chōsenjin*). In other words, he now needed to discern what was authentic among descriptions of Korean people, particularly in contrast to the authentic one of Japanese people. Furthermore, the meeting of Yanagi's new cultural criticism with the Korean cultural nationalism meant the opening of the new market, which can be called as the market of criticism of the Korean national culture. *Donga Ilbo*'s enthusiastic reception of Yanagi's cultural

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

activities and discourse was the one of the first showcases of the potentiality of this new market. What followed were “the expansion of vernacular Korean press”¹⁴⁵ and the emergence of vernacular magazines, such as ‘Ruins (*Pyeho*)’ and ‘Creation (*Kaebyeok*),’¹⁴⁶ whose mottoes were the “modernization of Korean art and literature.”¹⁴⁷ In this way, they inherited Yanagi’s politicality of apoliticality and became the critics who could decide what to include in and exclude from the Korean national culture and the circulation of the colonial cultural market.

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, 51.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79, 55-7.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, “*Chōsen eseoui Yanagi Muneyoshi Suyong Yangsang* (Japanese Literature, Japanology : The Reception of Yanagi Muneyoshi in Korea),” 224.

APPENDIX

ENNUI¹⁴⁸

By Yisang

I wish, at least, that it would get dark quickly. Summer is lingering on in this remote country village and I am bored to death.

I look to the east—Mount Palbong; why can't its contours be curvy instead of simply being flat and dull?

I look around; on the west there is a plain, on the south there also is a plain, and on the north is and then plain. Why on earth should the plains spread out like that? Why should they all be so green?

Some ten farm households stand on the right and the left along the street. The decrepit pine tree pillars, the clay-plastered walls, the cornstalk fences, and the pumpkin vines over them—all alike and indistinguishable from one home to the next.

Yesterday I saw the kochia bush, today I should encounter Mr. Kim, and I will have to come upon that white puppy and the black one tomorrow.

A blistering heat radiates from the sun onto the roofs, the plains, the mulberry trees, and the tails of chickens. This unbearably hot weather continues day and night.

I have eaten breakfast. Now I have nothing to do. But *today* unfolds its unlimited blank paper in front of me and forces me to fill in with any article. I should find something. I should think of something. Well then, why don't I go to Mr. Choi's house and play Jang-gi¹⁴⁹ in the verandah? Good idea.

¹⁴⁸ Original Korean title is *Gwon-tae*. This work was posthumously published in 1937 in *Chōsen Ilbo*. For translation, I refer to the original text contained in Yisang and Kim, *Chōngbon Yisang munhak chōnjip* = *The complete works of Lee Sang*, 106-19.

¹⁴⁹ Korean chess

Mr. Choi is out in a field. It seems nobody is here in his house. Mr. Choi's nephew is taking a nap. That's it—it was already past ten o'clock when I had finished my breakfast, so for Mr. Choi's nephew, now is time for a nap.

I wake up Mr. Choi's nephew and ask him to play Jang-gi. I can beat him, let's say, ten times out of ten games. Therefore, for him, to play Jang-gi with me is the very essence of ennui. There is no point in playing when you know you are going to be beaten. On the other hand, what else does he have to do other than playing Jang-gi? He is destined to play.

Being beaten is ennui, and then why not is beating ennui? Beating ten times out of ten games is not less tedious than being beaten ten times. It's very tedious and I can't stand it.

I will let him win once at least. Pretending to be serious, I deliberately make a bad move with a chessman. Yawning, however, Mr. Choi's nephew misses the chance in his next move. He must have thought that since a defeat is without question, why bother himself to take pains to come up with a good move. He must have thought that if he just plays clumsily, make a move whenever it occurs to him, and letting me win as much as I please, then this unbeatable fellow will give up on playing another game and go home. He then could go back to his nap.

I unavoidably win again. He wants to play no more. I cannot but give up.

To lose on purpose is, after all, very hard. Why can't I become permanently absent-minded for good like Mr. Choi's nephew? Why am I, in the middle of this suffocating ennui, still bothering myself about the outcome of the game?

There is nothing more hateful for me than this shameful ambition that I still have. I should renounce this last residue of emotion. In order to be impeccably apathetic, I should even get rid of my consciousness of ennui.

I go to the creek. The creek flows feebly due to a drought, and makes no sound. I wonder why this bone-dry creek does not make a single sound.

It is very hot; so hot that the leaves have are drooping and languishing. When it is hot like this, even the stream can no longer make a cooling sound.

I sit by the creek. And I begin meditating—on which subject should I meditate? However, no subject occurs to me.

Then, I decide to meditate on nothing. Instead, I just look at the endless and extensive green plain, the horizon, and a cloud that can transform itself into a palace of clumsy acrobats, at best.

This frightening color of green covers ninety nine percent of the earth's surface; how monotonous the color of the earth is! Cities have little verdure. When I first arrived here, I was surprised by and loved this fresh greenness. It did not take even five days, however, for me to be surprised again; because I had realized that this boundless greenness is the earth's dullest part due to the tastelessness and poor sensibility of God.

How can a Landscape be nothing but green? That greenness does nothing all day long. Like an idiot, the greenness is just satisfied with being green.

Soon, when the night comes, it loses its greenness and falls into sleep quietly like a huge snake. What a huge modesty.

Winter will come shortly, and the green will discolor. But then the color is changed into an ugly hue of a shabby rag that has been torn into pieces. Although Farmers have to see the vast and ugly plain during whole winter, they do not faint in agony. Of course they are poor, but at the same time, they are huge idiots.

I bet their whole life is all painted by monotonous and boring colors, just as this plain. When they work, they are boring as the hot and sweltering green plain, and when they do not work, they are tedious as if the desolate winter field.

They do not get excited. Even if a lightning strikes a plain, for them it is just another usual event that naturally comes after a thunder. Even if a village child is attacked by a tiger, for them it is just another case of divine retribution that can happen from time to time in a remote village town. What on the earth can they be possibly excited about living in this empty plain with not a single telegraph pole?

Over Mount Palbong are lined up a series of iron electric poles. But the copper cable stays still and does not deliver a single postcard to this village town. Through the copper cable must flow electricity. But since their rooms are illuminated still by the faint light of burning pine needles, those electric poles are not at all different from the poplar trees that stand in a row at the entrance of this village.

Do they have any wish? Wish for harvest in the autumn? But that is not a wish; it is an instinct.

Tomorrow, tomorrow, the same work as today will be continued. Why does the endlessly boring tomorrow have to come endlessly? They cannot come up with this kind of question. Even if they are suddenly struck by such questions occasionally, then they simply fall asleep because of daily hard labor. Therefore, farmers are unfortunate. Then—how happy I am, who is aware of the wicked ennui.

The kochia bush has drooped. The creek flows and rots when it encounters a pool.

By where I sit is the puddle. In front of me, the creek rots quietly.

The crow of a rooster in the daytime sounds just flat. There is nothing to draw my interest except the same rooster that had crowed yesterday crowed again today. Listen or not listen—no difference. I listened to it because I heard it, and that is all.

The roosters cry dawn and day at least. The dogs in this village, however, do not bark. Are they all dumb? No, they are not. As a proof, they run almost a couple of miles away and turn to bark at me when I throw a stone at them.

Nonetheless, if I only pass by and do not make such dangerous threat on them, they do not bark at me, who has come from more than a hundred miles away, has such peculiar appearance as a pale face and tangled hair like a robin's nest. That is weird. How can the dogs here not bark at me? What rare and humble dogs they are. At what on earth they bark when they do not bark at me the most peculiar?

The truth is that they have nothing at which to bark. No traveler comes here. Not just do no travelers come here, but also they do not pass by this village since no highway runs nearby. Mr. Kim does come from a neighbor village sometimes. But since he has the same skin color, speaks the same dialect and wears the same clothes as Mr. Choi here, he does not give any reason for the dogs to bark at him. Nor are there thieves in this poor village. Thieves, if they have a little bit of sympathy at least, would rather leave the hairpins and rings that they have stolen for the impoverished girls here. This village steals the desire to steal; in this sense, this is a dangerous place for thieves.

The dogs, therefore, have nothing to bark at indeed. They have long given up—perhaps from the very moment they were born—the habit of barking. For several generations they have not been barking, so they have in the end lost their instinct to bark. Now, they barely bark only when they are beaten by a stone or a piece of wood and suffer from an unbearable pain. This instinctive reaction, however, is also common to human beings; thus, one cannot say that it is distinctive characteristic only for dogs.

The dogs usually take a nap during the daytime and sleep at night, lying next to the gate of their houses. Why? It is because they do not have anything to protect.

The dog of Mr. Choi comes here. The dog of Mr. Kim sees him coming and stands up to greet him. However, the greeting does not mean they have something to do afterward. Sometime later, the two are parted.

I take a stroll on a road—the road that I take day and night. Not a single food-waste is seen on the road. The village people cook seeds of barley and millet in the mid-summer. They eat them with nothing but plain soybean paste and young green peppers. They have no food leftover in their kitchen, let alone on the road.

I gain nothing from strolling, then, let me take a nap instead—this is how the dogs have forgotten their inborn ability of guarding and gone depraved enough to indulge themselves only in taking a nap.

How sad. These stupid dogs—the dumb and lazy dogs that cannot bark and cannot guard—are only to be sacrificed for a bowl of broth for the villagers on Dog days.¹⁵⁰ However, the poor dogs do not even know how to read lunar calendar, not to mention how many days left until Dog days. No newspaper is delivered in this village. Nor does the so-called bus run through this village. How are they supposed to hear news from cities?

It is as if their five sensory organs are deprived. The sky, the horizon, the scenery, and the manners and mores here are just narrow and closed, and I cannot but lead this so frustrating life as to throw a tantrum.

Is there any other moment more tormenting than the moment you can think of nothing? A man thinks even when he is sick—no, he thinks more when he is sick. When an endless ennui is suddenly casted over him, the pupils of his eyes will open to look inside of him. Then, he can reflect on himself far more than when he is very busy.

The excessive self-consciousness, a characteristic as well as a disease of contemporary people, is caused by the complete ennui of the ennui class, in which people are born to be bored. People in this class are inevitably at leisure physically and bored psychologically—they are the top-notch of the excessive self-consciousness.

¹⁵⁰ In Korean, Bok-nal, meaning three hottest days, not in sequence, in midsummer.

Nonetheless, for me, sitting by the creek at the moment, even the excessive self-consciousness is blocked.

Although I am totally in my free time and I am in the state of extreme ennui, the pupils of my eyes hesitate to open to look inside of me.

I do not want to think of anything. Until yesterday, nothing but thinking of dying alone made me happy. Today, however, I do not want to do that either. Then, why don't I think of nothing and fall asleep with my eyes open?

What about taking a bath since it is very hot? But the water of the pool is stale, and I do not want to bother myself to move to a pool that is not stale.

Even if a clean pool were here, I would not take a bath. It is not so much because I am too lazy to take off my clothes, as because I cannot stand the shamelessness of drying my pale, gaunt body under the sunshine.

What if my clothes are drenched in sweat? Let then be drenched.

What a sweltering heat it is, though. I decide to go back home and wash my face. I stand up and walk back home—on the way, I encounter a pair of copulating dogs. Yet this animal copulation with no artificiality is ennui as such, like a landscape is ennui as such. This copulation of the dogs draws neither the interest of the village children and young women, nor mine.

A zinc washbasin has already lost its original color. Now it is the same dark-red as the skin color of the villagers. The washbasin, I guess, was brought by the landlady when she had been married and came to this house.

I wash my face. Even the water is lukewarm. The water must have failed to resist the sweltering heat. Nevertheless, I finish washing my face in accordance to the custom of washing face.

Pumpkin vines had wilted over the fence: I look for the root and water, hoping revitalization.

I wipe my face with a towel that stinks of sweat. Sitting in the verandah, I look at the landlord's four boys who were standing by me when I washed my face, and who are now, following my example, washing their face in the washbasin.

'It must be hot for them, too,' I thought, but I thought wrong. They have not decided what to do, and so are just fretting, like me. They have decided to wash their faces only because they saw me washing mine.

I hate when I see a monkey imitating a human being. Why do the children here imitate me? One should not let these cute village children be monkeys.

I go to the pool again. There is nothing but the stale water and the drooping kochia tree. Nonetheless, I sit down and take a look inside the stale water.

Then, I witness a strange scene: countless stains are moving and changing their direction in good order. They must be living creatures. They must be minnows.

I did not even dream that this charming little fish could live in this rotten swamp.

They are crowding here and there, of course, in order to find food. What do they live on? Of course, they eat little bugs. Are there, however, any smaller bugs than minnows?

The minnows never stay still. They move until late. I guess all of them have roughly the same motivation and the same movement: there seems to be an urgent purpose also in the world of minnow.

Gradually, the mass of minnows travels downstream. They just travel downstream, only downstream with no plan—no, they might turn back midway and go upstream again. But, right now they are surely going downstream, downstream, nowhere but downstream.

Five minutes has past and they are too far away downstream to be seen. The pool returns to its quiet, stale state.

I decide to leave here and go to a grass field. In the grass field is a cow.

It was incredible for the mere pool to hide such a clever phenomenon—I was quite excited. But the phenomenon disappeared as quickly as a rain shower does, so I cannot but forget about it.

The horn of the cow is no longer his weapon. The horn of the cow is only a material for the frames of a pair of spectacles. They do not need a weapon because they consider it best to be beaten by humans. The horn of the cow is just an evidence for a zoologist: “in the wild cow era, cows assaulted their enemies with this.” How sad is this nostalgic statement, just like a medal pinned on the chest of a broken soldier.

The horn of the cow is more humble than that of a bull. Since I have no reason to be gored by the horn of sadness, I can lie down on the grass field without anxiety. I lie down and look up the cow before everything.

The cow stops ruminating and gives me a stare.

‘Why does he have to look so pale? He must be sick. I have to be careful about whether he is planning to do harm on me or not.’

This must be the way the cow has put me on trial in his mind. However, it did not take more than five minutes for him to resume his rumination. I feel more at ease now than the cow.

A cow is the best ennui-ist in the world, since they can neglect even the pleasure of eating. How much should one be bored to bring up food that has once slipped into stomach and pretend to enjoy the sour taste of the half-digested? What a paradox.

The bigger the build of a cow, the more and sadder his ennui is. I lie before the cow, and I, being humble on my loneliness that is as trivial as a microbe, think secretly of the possibility for me to ruminate on thinking.

Six or seven children are playing in the street. All of them have close-cropped hair, tanned skin, and are in half clothes. It is next to impossible to tell whether each of them is a boy or a girl when they all have unfocused eyes, are sniveling, are swaddled with flax-clothes only for below the waist, but for above the waist.

But, each of them is for sure either a boy or a girl, either a girl or a boy: they after all are five or six, or seven or eight, *children*. These children have chosen to come here the middle of the street to amuse themselves.

They pick up small stones. There is not a broken piece of pottery or brick. People here do not discard chipped pots and dishes.

They then pluck some grass. Grass—is there anything more common than it? For them, anything green could not be, no matter what it is, more dull. But, it can't be helped. They are not allowed to pluck grain, but grass.

They pound the grass with the small stones. Greenish juice dyes the stones. Now, they put aside the grass and the stones, and then bring another grass and small stones and repeat the same thing. For almost ten minutes, they play like this without a word.

Ennui visits in ten minutes. Grass is dull and stones are boring. Do they have something else? No, they do not.

They stand up simultaneously. There is neither order nor motivation for this impulse; they stood up just because they had been fed up with sitting down.

They put their hands up high in the air. Then, they start screaming out loud. Then, they begin to jump up and down in the same spot. Then they combine the screaming with the jumping.

I was in tears looking at this scene. They cannot but do this. They do not even know how to play. Their parents are too poor to buy toys to their cute children.

I do not see any amusement in their entertainment of raising hands up high, screaming and jumping up and down. Isn't it rather a scream of curse against God: "Good lord, how come the sky was just blue yesterday, so it is today, and so it will be tomorrow? How come the plain was just green yesterday, so it is today, and so it will be tomorrow?"

The children cannot play with the dogs that cannot bark. Neither can they play with the hens that have no interest in anything other than feed. Both their fathers and mothers are simply too busy. Their old sisters and brothers are just too busy, too. After all, the children have to play by themselves. But then, how on the earth can they play, with what? They, the children who do not have a single toy, cannot even try to think about it; so, they are unfortunate.

The play lasts five minutes, at best. If they play any longer, they will be exhausted. Why do the innocent children have to be exhausted? They give up the play because, in the first place, it is boring.

They sit again next to each other. They sit and fall silent. Why are they doing this? I am sure what they are doing is a certain kind of entertainment or amusement—these bored dwarf-humans have invented an unconventional and novel play, but what is it?

After five minutes, they move back and stand up one by one; the truth is that each of them has done a pile of excrement. That is it—this is their play, too. This creative play is the last resort for them running out of ideas. But then, one child alone does not stand up for quite some time.

He cannot relieve himself, which makes him a failure in this performance. I can clearly see the belittling look of the other children. Oh God my lord, please bestow them landscapes and toys.

It gets dark. Night, as dark as the seabed, is coming. I feel fairly strange.

I assume that I might be hungry. If this is true, why am I hungry? How can I be hungry having done nothing?

In the pool that decays of itself were, indeed, a current of minnows. Similarly, in my internal organs might wiggle a school of minnows of which I cannot be aware. Anyhow, I cannot skip a meal.

On my dinner table, garlic Jang-a-chi¹⁵¹, plain soy bean paste, and boiled green hot pepper have been placed as always, as if they seem to be subject to the law of inertia. The taste is, however, different to my lips, to my tongue, whenever I eat the food. I cannot explain the reason, though.

When I eat in the front yard, I can see the countless stars over my head, which trouble me. What should I have to do with them? Stars cannot be a subject of astronomy for me. Neither are they a subject of my poetry. They are nothing but a state of absolute ennui, which has no scent, no sense of touch; the other side of the River Lethe, which is eternally unreachable. Stars are, too, boring like this.

I finish my dinner and go out to find that every houses are making smoke to keep mosquitoes away.

The villagers lay out a straw mat and sleep on it in their front yard, looking up at the stars. But they do not in fact see the stars. The proof is as followed: when they lay down on a straw mat, they close their eyes right away. As soon as they close their eyes, they fall asleep. They have nothing to do with the stars.

I walk around in the street to facilitate digestion. Whenever I turn around, more people are laid down on a straw mat.

How are they different from corpses? Corpses that know how to eat and sleep—I have to cease thinking of this rude idea, and go back home to sleep.

¹⁵¹ A dish of dried slices of garlic seasoned with soy bean sauce

I return to my room and think of myself. My life is isolated from everything at the moment, and I cannot even find reason to suicide out of my current life—it is extreme ennui and as such ennui.

Moreover, I still have what is called tomorrow. One of tomorrows persists to wait, like a cruel policeman, behind the night that does not seem to allow dawning.

I cannot avoid the policeman. By all means, tomorrow will become today and I will be so bored as to be suffocating, will feel so suppressed as to be breathless.

Therefore, I do not need to think of how today was. Let me just sleep. It does not matter if I wake up again unluckily, or luckily, because then I can always enjoy the endless ennui, playing Jang-gi with Mr. Choi's nephew, going to the pool to see the minnows, or ruminating, like the cow, my limited memories.

A moth flies into the light and turns it off. The moth might be either dead or burnt. However, the moth truly knows how to live a life, not only because it flew into the light when it saw the light, but also because it is a creature of enthusiasm that anxiously searches for fire all the time.

On the other hand, where is my fire and where is my enthusiasm to search for the fire? I have nothing and I, who have nothing, can see nothing.

The darkness filled in this small room and the darkness packed in the universe is not different in terms of their quantity since they are all darkness. Lying down in this darkness that is neither big nor small, I do not have to breathe, and I have nothing to stroke and to desire: simply, I have nothing. I am just shivering with fear, feeling that tomorrow, the end of which is unknown, is waiting outside the window.

Written at dawn, December nineteenth, in Tokyo.

(Translated by Myung Ho Hyun)

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