

Book & Film Notes

The Trial of Pak Tal and Other Stories by Kim Tal-su. Translated by Christopher D. Scott. Irvine: Seoul Selection U.S.A., 2022. 333 pp.

Christopher Scott's engaging translation of five works by first-generation Zainichi Korean author Kim Tal-su (1920–1997) is one of the six recent translations published by Seoul Selection in their Korean Diasporic Literature series. Supported by the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, the series currently consists of two works by ethnic Korean authors in China and four by Zainichi Koreans in Japan. *The Trial of Pak Tal and Other Stories* is of the latter group, which includes Kim Sok-pom's *Death of a Crow*, Lee Yangji's *Nabi T'aryŏng and Other Stories*, and Yang Seok-il's *Blood and Bones*. Four of the stories by Kim Tal-su in this volume are representative of his early literary output in the 1940s and 1950s, with the fifth, his travelogue "All the Way to Tsushima," dating to 1975. Sometimes deeply personal and moving and at other times political or comedic, Scott's selection of stories likely offers something of interest to many. While not the first stories by Kim translated into English, the volume more than doubles the number of works available to English language audiences.¹ As Scott reminds us in his introduction, Kim Tal-su was a literary giant and one of the most prolific Zainichi authors and public intellectuals of his generation, with over sixty books published in Japanese and over fifty works

1. Previously translated works include "In the Shadow of Mt. Fuji" (1951), trans. Sharalyn Orbaugh, in *Into the Light: An Anthology of Literature by Koreans in Japan*, ed. Melissa L. Wender (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 39–65; and "Trash" (1942, republished 1947), trans. Christina Yi, in *Zainichi Literature: Japanese Writings by Ethnic Koreans*, ed. John Lie (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2018), 35–53.

of fiction. His works varied in style and scope across his lengthy career—from comedy to satire and tragedy and fiction to autobiography—which this collection aptly captures.

“Kindred Spirits” (1948), set during the colonial period, follows a Korean newspaper reporter and a Korean member of the Special Higher Police investigating local bootlegging. Kim portrays the lives of Koreans living on the very edges of society, strong community bonds, and their relationships with Japanese. The style and humor at the end of the story, where the reporter and police officer drink bootleg *t’akchu* (rice wine) and eat offal together, underscore the challenges and potential dangers of both assimilation and resistance. This is followed by “The Trial of Pak Tal,” published a decade later and nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. Set during the Korean War, the plot follows farmhand Pak Tal, who learns to read and write in prison—and repeatedly attempts (and often succeeds) to get arrested again to further his education. Picking up the basics of revolutionary thought in prison, he goes on to organize a labor strike at an American military base, gets arrested yet again, and is eventually put on trial. The incomplete and unreliable narrator often leaves the reader trying to fill in gaps and details of Pak’s life and exploits.

Kim considers Koreans’ ethnic identity and feelings of displacement in the last two stories and the one travelogue. “Memories of my Grandmother” is a memorial originally published in 1944 and republished in 1946. The short but emotional narrative recounts his father’s death, the return of his remains to their village in Korea, and his departure with his uncle to join his mother in Japan. Running away from his uncle the next morning, Kim follows the train tracks back to his village to rejoin his grandmother. Of course Koreans in Japan found themselves under immense pressure to assimilate; we may perhaps read into this the difficulty of finding one’s way home in either context. By contrast, “One’s Place” (1940, republished in 1946) is loosely based on Kim’s own experiences during university and lays bare the all-too-pervasive Japanese racism of the period. Kim questions and critiques *Naisen ittai* (Japan and Korea as one) rhetoric through interactions with his roommate, effectively showing that lofty colonial ideology and assimilatory practices are at odds with the basic lived experiences of Koreans in Japan. Lastly, the travelogue “All the Way to Tsushima” is based off two trips with friends to the island in 1973 and 1974. Unable to see Korea from the top of Mt. Senbyōmaki on the first trip owing to the weather, the group returned the following year. The unvarnished conversations between Kim and his friends, interwoven with their travels to historical sites around the island, are soulful and compelling. The emotional experience of finally laying eyes on Korea is a powerful one for the group: None imagined Korea being so

close; its seeming remoteness for a Zainichi in Japan, however, goes unsaid.

The introduction to the book is amply sourced with major works in English and Japanese and situates the stories in the context of Kim's broader oeuvre. The contextual and explanatory footnotes scattered throughout the volume are helpful for those less familiar with Korean terminology, Japanese kanji, or, in the case of "All the Way to Tsushima," the relevant Japanese, Korean, and Zainichi history, politics, and culture. Taken on its own, the volume significantly expands Kim's available works in English. Along with prior translations, readers have more than a few texts of various lengths and topics to enjoy which will hopefully encourage future translations of his substantial nonfiction works. Accessible and affordable, *The Trial of Pak Tal and Other Stories* will be of interest to many.

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Still Hear the Wound: Toward an Asia, Politics, and Art to Come

edited by Lee Chonghwa. Translation edited by Rebecca Jennison and Brett de Bary. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016. 222 pp.

The essays, artwork, and moving images that comprise *Still Hear the Wound: Toward an Asia, Politics and Art to Come* express the legacies and shadows of colonial violence in East Asia through aesthetics, bodily images, and a decolonial vision depicting "an Asia yet to come." The "wound" in the title stands for the trans-generational ruptures experienced by women, laborers, and islanders under the Japanese empire. These wounds have yet to heal in the wake of colonial violence and a postwar discursive history that seeks to erase these transgressions and relations formed as a result of these wounds. As one of the editors of the volume, renowned scholar of Asian studies Brett de Bary puts it, the wound expresses past violences, but it also expresses a form of bodily experience and vulnerability. In this volume, the wound is portrayed through a range of material including prose, poetry, photographs, and moving images (attached to the inside cover is a DVD). The essays and artist interviews in particular illustrate how art forms, with their manifold images of bodily experience, can disrupt discursive histories produced by the nation-state. The volume's contributors confront Japan's "fraught contestation over its twentieth-