

Serk-Bae Suh. *Treacherous Translation: Culture, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Korea and Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s.* Seoul-California Series in Korean Studies. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 252 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-938169-06-9.



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Published on H-Diplo (November, 2014)

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Serk-Bae Suh's *Treacherous Translation: Culture, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Korea and Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s* adds to the growing field of intra-East Asian literary studies by examining the role of translation—as both practice and philosophical problem—in shaping attitudes toward nationalism and colonialism in Korean and Japanese intellectual discourse from Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 to the passing of the colonial generation in the mid-1960s. Drawing on colonial and postcolonial critical essays and creative writing in both Japanese and Korean, *Treacherous Translation* analyzes how Japanese colonial and Korean nationalist discourse engaged with language, literature, and culture via the medium of translation.

Treacherous Translation is divided into five chapters, preceded by a prologue and introduction. Chapter 1, "Translation and the Community of Love: Hosoi Hajime and Translating Korea," examines the Japanese journalist Hosoi Hajime's 1920s and 1930s treatises on translation, culture, and Korea. A prolific translator of the Korean clas-

sical canon and "one of the most active Korea experts in Japan during the early years of Japanese colonial rule," Hosoi perceived translation as contributing to Japanese understanding of Korea, both the nation and its culture. Juxtaposing Hosoi's essays with those of the Korean intellectual An Hwak, which likewise "appropriated the grammar and vocabulary of Japanese colonial discourse," Suh reveals how both the colonizer and the colonized understood national literature as shaping national identity (p. 20). In chapter 2, "Treacherous Translation: The 1938 Japanese-Language Theatrical Version of the Korean Tale *Ch'unhyangjŏn*," Suh examines the Japanese theatrical company Shinkyō's controversial 1938 Japanese-language production of the popular Korean romance *Ch'unhyangjŏn* (The Tale of Spring Fragrance). While Korean critics deemed the production a grossly inaccurate translation of the original story, Japanese critics were uniformly enthusiastic. Even so, Suh notes, "the idea of translation as equal exchange was embedded both in the colonizers' affirmation of the play as an exem-

plary step toward cultural assimilation and the colonized's protests against it as an 'inaccurate' or 'unfaithful translation'" (p. xxvii). In this chapter, Suh also comments on the dilemma of Korean writers who published in the Japanese language: at the same time that their Japanese-language literature would not require translation into Japanese (and thus the "extermination of their difference from the colonizer" via such translation), it also would accelerate the "end of the Korean language" (p. 60).

Suh moves in chapter 3, "The Location of 'Korean' Culture: Ch'oe Chaesŏ and Korean Literature in a Time of Transition," to contextualize the discourse of the Korean intellectual Ch'oe Chaesŏ—a writer, translator of English literary criticism, and editor of the Japanese-language journal *Kokumin bungaku* (National literature) who at once justified Japanese colonization of Korea and defended the cultural autonomy of Koreans. This chapter focuses primarily on Ch'oe's Japanese-language *Tenkanki no Chōsen bungaku* (Korean literature in a time of transition, 1943), which subsumes Korean culture within Japanese culture and urges Korean writers to create a national Japanese-language literature for Korean imperial subjects, a literature that "would serve to raise national consciousness of the Japanese empire among Koreans" and "inculcate Koreans with the Japanese national consciousness" (pp. 73, 82). Suh rightly observes that Ch'oe's writing strives at once to make Korea a part of Japan and to preserve Korean autonomy.

For its part, chapter 4, "Translation and Its Postcolonial Discontents: The Postwar Controversy over Tōma Seita's Reading of Kim Soun's Japanese Translations of Korean Poetry," explores the postcolonial controversy surrounding the minor leftist Japanese historian Tōma Seita's essays, published in 1954, on the *Korean Poetry Anthology* (Chōsen shishū, 1953), a collection of Kim Soun's Korean poetry, which the latter had translated into Japanese during the colonial period. Counter-

ing Tōma's dismissal of the Korean poems as rustic and unsophisticated, particularly as compared with Japanese poetry, and reading of the poems as "allegories of the Korean people's plight under Japanese rule," Kim protested that Tōma "violently reduced the lyrical poems into easily understood reflections of Koreans' colonial experience" (p. 105). In addition, Kim "questioned why the history of colonial experience should be the ultimate hermeneutical horizon on which the interpretation of the Korean poetry is placed" and denounced "Tōma's inadequate knowledge about Korean culture and literature" (p. 126).

In the final chapter, "Toward a Monolingual Society: South Korean Linguistic Nationalism and Kim Suyŏng's Resistance to Monolingualism," Suh discusses language policy in South Korea in the decades following liberation, focusing on the poet and translator Kim Suyŏng, whose writings negotiated between Korean and Japanese and who argued against forced monolingualism. Suh outlines how Korean officials in the U.S. military government in South Korea initiated a Korean-language purification campaign, commenting that "for those who insisted on the inseparable relationship between nation and language, 'purifying' and 'standardizing' Korean was equated with eradicating Japanese colonial legacies and unifying a divided society into a modern nation state" (p. 148). Literature, not surprisingly, was the "most important medium through which the [postwar] generation learned how to read and write Korean" (p. 151). Chapter 5 concludes with Suh's observation that although colonial bilingualism was "disappearing from Korea along with the generation of Kim Suyŏng," Japanese "continued to haunt Korea like a ghost" (p. 159).

More English-language monographic scholarship on twentieth-century Korean literature is being published now than ever before, and increasing numbers of these studies are adopting a welcome intra-East Asian perspective, examining, among other trajectories, the especially deep in-

terplays among Japanese and Korean intellectuals, writers, literatures, and literary criticism, engagement frequently mediated by translation. *Treacherous Translation* introduces to the English-language reader key figures and writings in this dynamic, and Suh is to be commended for shining the spotlight on understudied materials.

But the monograph unfortunately falls short in several regards. Most notable of these is the book's discussion and theorization of translation, particularly its repeated positioning of itself as countering the "logic of translation as equal exchange." Suh is correct to declare colonial translation as having been "premised on the idea of exchange between the colonizers and the colonized as equal parties" (p. xvii). Yet he is hardly the first scholar to see translation as in fact constituting something other than "equivalencies between language" (p. xviii). It is puzzling that a book devoted to the dynamics of translation in the colonial and postcolonial contexts engages very little with the field of translation studies and cites nothing by Susan Bassnett, Lawrence Venuti, or the many other scholars who have written extensively on the treacherousness of translation and other forms of transculturation.

Secondly, *Treacherous Translation* relies too heavily on European philosophy, often at the expense of recent scholarship on intra-East Asian literary dynamics. Karl Marx and Emmanuel Levinas are discussed with surprising regularity. Take, for instance, the following sentence, from chapter 2: "To achieve this goal [critiquing the model of translation is an equal exchange between two languages], I employ the arguments of Karl Marx, who astutely critiqued symmetrical reciprocity in equal exchange, and those of Emmanuel Levinas, who stringently insisted on the asymmetry of the ethical relationship between the self and the other. I read Marx through Levinas to reveal the ethical aspect of Marx's political economy and Levinas through Marx to explicate the implications of Levinas's ethics for radical pol-

itics in order to criticize the idea of equal exchange based on reciprocity, which is not only inherent in the conventional view of translation but also prevalent in the colonizer's justification for colonial dominance" (p. 47). Certainly the frequently discussed writings of Marx and Levinas can provide numerous insights into intra-East Asian phenomena, but the repeated return to these figures distracts attention from the position of translation in twentieth-century East Asia.

Furthermore, it is puzzling why Suh does not engage with more scholarship on intra-East Asian literary and cultural exchange: he cites from Lydia Liu's edited volume *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations* (1999), but not from her *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China 1900-1937* (1995). There are no references to Theodore Hughes's *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (2012), to Theresa Hyun's *Writing Women in Korea: Translation and Feminism in the Colonial Period* (2003), to Shumei Shi's *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (2001), to my own *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (2009), or to many of the other recent monographs that deal extensively with translation in colonial East Asia. And there likewise are vast quantities of scholarship in East Asian languages on the topic of colonial translation that Suh should have consulted.

Despite these lacunae, Suh's *Treacherous Translation* is an important book that contributes to the growing field of intra-East Asian literary studies and promises to open pathways for future scholarship. Scholars in a variety of disciplines will benefit from the insights *Treacherous Translation* provides into Japanese colonial and Korean nationalist discourse on language, literature, and culture.

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Citation: Karen Thornber. Review of Suh, Serk-Bae. *Treacherous Translation: Culture, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Korea and Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. November, 2014.

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