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Nayoung Aimee Kwon

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# Japanophone Literature? A Transpacific Query on Absence

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Nayoung Aimee Kwon

Franz Kafka, in a 1921 letter to Max Brod, his close confidant and literary executor, writes on the linguistic impossibilities for minor writers in relation to a major or metropolitan language: “[t]he impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing German, the impossibility of writing differently. One might also add a fourth impossibility, the impossibility of writing” (qtd. in Casanova 254). As someone researching a distant imperial context, what strikes me about Kafka’s oft-cited dilemma is how uncannily similar it is to the relatively little-known struggles of colonized authors writing from the periphery of the Japanese empire. Noting such parallels among far-flung yet similar power dynamics, this essay begins with a question: what might we learn from paying attention to these similarities between a Jewish Czech author writing from the periphery of Germany, itself a minor empire vis-à-vis the dominant European empires, and the language struggles of minor authors writing in the periphery of Japan, another minor empire? How might comparing the uncanny similarities between these experiences of unhomeliness help us to clarify the little-understood but far-reaching entanglements of shifting border formations among major and minor imperial competitions and collusions?<sup>1</sup>

Joining recent scholarly endeavors, this essay calls for new methodologies for conceiving global histories in order to better understand their broader entanglements. Specifically, my aim is to ask how a transpacific framework (as part of a *longue durée*, inter-imperial, trans-hemispheric methodology) might offer new perspectives for understanding the persistent impact of imperialisms past and present. As proposed in this special issue, an inter-imperial methodology that considers comparable yet geopolitically distinct imperial relationalities and their legacies may shed light on dynamics beyond commonly assumed binaries of the colonizer and the colonized, West and East, past and present, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Decades after the end of formal colonial dominance around the globe, those who study the links between imperial relations in the Asia-Pacific and the global workings of coloniality more broadly still struggle to piece together a sufficiently multidimensional understanding of complex colonial experiences and their tenacious legacies in our world today. These postcolonial epistemic challenges emerge partly from the censorship and distortions of all colonial archives and the knowledges formed through their dusty repositories, which are then further fragmented, distorted, and mediated through subsequently politicized historical and popular mass-media representations.

To parse the overlapping dynamics of particular and universal perspectives, this essay offers a preliminary inquiry into Japan as a minor empire vis-à-vis dominant European empires in imperial historiographies. I begin by examining the significance of what I call the absent category of Japanophone literature in light of recent discourse on Sinophone literature and other postcolonial critical genealogies. This discussion of broader postcolonial taxonomies sets the stage for a detailed investigation of Korean writers, particularly Kim Saryang, a prominent bilingual writer from colonial Korea during and after the peak of Japanese imperial power.

Similar to Kafka's well-known predicament quoted above, and as delineated in Deleuze and Guattari's controversial formulation of minor literature in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Kim's lesser-known linguistic unhomeliness as a bilingual author writing in-between the colony and the metropole manifests in his precarious relationships with both what Deleuze and Guattari term the "paper language" of imperial Japanese and the language world of his mother tongue, Korean, the demoted language of the colonized (16).<sup>3</sup> As I examine in the last part of this essay, Kim's fraught position between languages continues to reverberate beyond the literary text via the scattering of his authorial reputation in and between variously divided literary

fields formed in the region based on postcolonial and Cold War ideologies. These fields are hotly contested by successive waves of transpacific geopolitics: from the defeat of Japan by Western powers, through the subsequent Cold War rivalry over and partition of Korea, and finally to contemporary efforts to reposition the literary legacies of the Japanese empire (and other such literatures) on the global stage of so-called postcolonial or world literature.

The layered transpacific temporalities of the postcolonial and the post-Cold War periods in these shifting geopolitical configurations have further obscured the overlapping legacies of postcolonial writers from Asia and elsewhere. I suggest that a fuller study of writers such as Kim, encompassing the multiple national and ethnic literary fields across which their writings have been scattered, can clarify broader postcolonial and post-Cold War entanglements, estrangements, and aporias in the region and beyond. My analysis builds on recent scholarly works about the Asia-Pacific region by both local and foreign scholars that put the experiences of the Japanese empire in dialogue with other, better-known struggles under Euro-American empires. These efforts have begun to enrich the study of how empires work more broadly, though unfortunately much of the insightful scholarship from within the region remains untranslated for global audiences.<sup>4</sup> These difficulties, which arose from the challenges of understanding the postcolonial and post-Cold War eras together as well as from a limited understanding based on a lack of translations, reveal lasting reverberations of inter-imperial and transpacific legacies long after the apparent collapse of formal imperial relations.

### **Minor Empire and Minor Literature**

Labeling Japan a “minor empire” is in no way meant to imply that Japan has played an insignificant role in global imperial histories. In fact, there were vast territories and populations under Japan’s control at the height of its expansion (1894–1945), when it went head-to-head competing for territories and influence with some of the most powerful contemporary imperial powers around the world.<sup>5</sup> Geographically, Japan’s occupied territories expanded across an enormous area, reaching from the Russian maritime provinces to northern China and all the way to the South Pacific Islands. Further, the massive scale of population migration and displacement both into and out of metropolitan centers throughout wartime Japan had few precedents in other imperial contexts.

The impact of cultural imperialism on far-flung colonized populations was also extensive. Language policies varied from region to region, but in the case of proximate possessions such as Taiwan and Korea, mandatory assimilation policies created highly unequal systems of colonial education that included the demotion of the local language to second-class status (and, sometimes, the language's outright prohibition). Many colonial-era memoirs and literary works from Korea, for example, depict traumatic moments of surveillance and discipline during the harsh implementation of assimilatory language policies, colonial name-change policies, and publication prohibitions. In this context, many ambitious youths made the requisite "voyage-in" to Japan for educational and other opportunities (Said 295). The aftereffects of transformation and trauma can be detected in the news today, as communities formerly colonized by Japan vociferously demand historical reckoning.

Even this short introduction makes evident that territorially, economically, geopolitically, and culturally, the Japanese empire had dramatic impact on regional histories as well as global imperial histories. Why, then, do I refer to Japan as a minor empire? The term "minor" signifies the devalued status to which the Japanese empire is relegated in official, scholarly, and popular discourses produced from both inside and outside the region despite its historical significance as an imperial power.

Such minoritizing discourses arose even during the height of the Japanese empire's expansion, as I have argued in *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan*. From its beginnings, Japan was repeatedly marked as an anomaly because it was the only non-Western imperial power. The perception of Japan as a minor and atypical imperial power may also be reflected in the aggressive methods used to defeat it in World War II.<sup>6</sup> The country's status as an emphatically defeated empire only exacerbated the erasure of Japan's past, both within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region, which undercut efforts to come to terms with Japan's imperial legacies. This scenario was certainly not unique to Japan, for it appears in varying degrees in other postimperial and postcolonial contexts. A competition to forget unsavory histories, on local and global scales, compounded the difficulties within the region. In the case of literature, which became a politicized terrain in the colony in the absence of equal representation in the realm of realpolitik, these effects have multiplied the challenges of reckoning with the entangled literary pasts of the colonizer and the colonized; this was further complicated by Cold War dynamics, as I discuss below. Reframed thus, it becomes clear

that the status of the minor is not limited to a particular case study within the periphery of global concerns but rather has an important place in an inter-imperial heuristic. As such, the study of Japan and its colonies can illuminate what has been marginalized or considered anomalous in standard global and local historiographies: a darker yet constitutive side of imperial and inter-imperial power dynamics and their ongoing global legacies.

### **Postcolonial Japanophone versus Global Japanophone**

In the aftermath of the collapse of Europe's empires, Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, and other such postcolonial literatures emerged as bona fide cultural legacies and fields of inquiry. Robust national and transnational cultural industries of production, from publishing to academia, and increasing consumption of such writings gave recognition to writers and literary works that were subsequently debated throughout the disciplines of world literature at large and postcolonial literature in particular. Postcolonial literatures garnered recognition through such canon-forming venues as literary awards, publications, translations, academic discourses, and so forth. Set beside the abundance of postcolonial literatures from Europe's former empires and the recent rise of Sinophone literature, the glaring yet significant absence of a so-called Japanophone literature in the aftermath of the Japanese empire comes into stark relief. A comparative study of the varying degrees of absence or presence when it comes to such postcolonial revenants can clarify the different degrees of, to borrow Mignolo's terms, "coloniality" (xxi) and "postcoloniality" (xxvii) in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

What might the insignificance, precarity, or outright absence of this discourse tell us about broader blind spots that emerge from the entanglements of postcolonial and post-Cold War dynamics, and of their still little-understood transpacific and inter-imperial legacies? It is vital to highlight the imperial power dynamics at the center of these literary debates. After all, one does not usually attain the privilege of acquiring a presumably affiliated marginal discourse, such as the Sinophone, Anglophone, or Francophone, without an empire or its (too often nostalgic) specter. All of these labels implicitly presume an untainted center located elsewhere, such as Chinese literature, Spanish literature, English literature, and French literature.

Japanophone literature as a category sounds strange and unfamiliar, though it is not difficult to say what it might signify. Like the terms "Anglophone literature" and "Francophone literature," the

term “Japanophone literature” presumes an intimate relationship to the Japanese language, although in some marginal way. Discourses on Anglophone and Francophone literatures have located their colonial and postcolonial linkage at the very center of these language categories, despite still embodying inherent biases and often without fully interrogating race-based assumptions and implicit marginalizations. In Japanophone and, arguably, Sinophone literatures, in contrast, there is a notable marginalization or disavowal of colonial and postcolonial experiences. For example, broader efforts toward reckoning with the colonial past and postcolonial legacies remain incomplete or are made marginal in history books and in public memory. Yet this demotion of the colonial past and its ongoing postcolonial legacies to discursive marginalia in fact offers clues to the largely unacknowledged nature of (post) coloniality, especially in relation to recent global conceptions of culture that tend to delink the past from the present.

In the case of the discourse on Sinophone literature, its belated emergence in the global arena, especially within the US academy, and its speedy reverse-importation from outside China’s borders into China has made it one of the most vibrant areas of literary inquiry in studies on so-called Greater China.<sup>8</sup> This development overlaps suggestively with the rise of China after its century of humiliation (1839–1949) vis-à-vis Western and Japanese imperial powers. Rather than taking at face value Sinophone literature’s self-proclamation as an unequivocally marginal or counter-hegemonic discourse from below that naturally debunks the rising centrality of China, it behooves us to scrutinize the complex, often unrecognized, and unwitting confluences within such categories, including an imperial or universalist will to power. At the very least, the possibility of being co-opted for such unintended purposes is worth discussing. Such an awareness of the Sinophone’s contested uses does not, of course, simply exclude Sinophone literature’s simultaneous capacity to inspire critical aspirations in kinship with decolonial projects from other global contexts that seek to critique ongoing imperial power dynamics or the local struggles for recognition of those now situated at China’s margins. Yet it is worth noting how and why this strange alignment of the struggles of the metropole and its margins does not adhere to dominant ways of mapping such relations in globally recognized empires like France and England.<sup>9</sup> Here I hope to foster dialogue on the uneasy challenges of disentangling these seemingly contradictory yet coexisting dynamics by putting them into inter-imperial or transpacific relief.

In the case of Japan, the absence of a broader global discourse on Japanophone literature in relation to empires past and present indicates the self-contradiction and self-division inherent in Japan's identity as an empire. The term "Japanophone" is admittedly an awkward Anglophone translation of a much older (but no less awkward) Japanese-language literature (*Nihongo bungaku*) and its variations, which emerged at the height of Japan's imperial expansion and assimilation policies and continues through deeply rooted postcolonial legacies. Such categories included imperial subject literature (*kōmin bungaku*); national subject literature (*kokumin bungaku*); literature of the hinterlands (*gaichi bungaku*); and regional or peripheral literature (*chihō bungaku*), to name several. These variants on colonial-era Japanophone discourse were prevalent throughout Japan's vast imperial landscape and carried different connotations that changed over time. For example, the concept of *kokumin bungaku*, translated literally as "national subject literature," can also be translated as "national literature"; however, its emergence during the height of Japan's imperial expansions into colonial territories implied a decidedly imperial dynamic that went hand in hand with imperial assimilationist language policies mandating that the colonized be educated to speak and write in Japanese. This is also true of the categories that were territorially inflected, such as *chihō bungaku* and *gaichi bungaku*. These names made explicit the peripheral, marginal relationship of these categories of Japanophone literature in colonial territories to a presumed Japanese literature, which was squarely positioned within the metropolitan center of the Japanese archipelago.

However, there is another connotation of Japanophone literature today, what I am calling global Japanophone literature in contrast, which has taken on a much more cosmopolitan flair severed from such colonial traces. The fraught legacies of postcolonial literature (in Japan, Taiwan, China, and the divided Koreas, for example) have become further marginalized in this contemporary climate with the emergence of new linguistic experimentations of bilingual cosmopolitan writers who are either ethnically Japanese or Euro-American. Authors such as Hideo Levy, Minae Mizumura, and Yōko Tawada not only work predominately in the languages and territories of both Japan and Euro-America, but also produce works that are seen as examples of Japanese literature's cosmopolitanism and globalization.<sup>10</sup> The discursive divide that appears in both global and domestic attention to such writers, despite the difficulty of uniting them under one neat category, is significant because it means critics tend to prioritize Japan's relationship to the world (or the



world defined largely as Euro-America) at the expense of its inter-Asian relations. This artificial division creates an illusion that these worlds are somehow separate. As a result, the success or recognition of global Japanophone literature's cosmopolitanism rests on the ongoing failure of critical discourses on globalization to engage with the question of the postcolonial.

The fascinating case of the writer Yokoyama Yūta may be a telling example of an exception that proves the rule about this division. Yokoyama does bring an inter-Asian focus through his consideration of traditional and contemporary cultural ties, especially Japan's linguistic connections with China and the contemporary critical discussions about the globalization of Japanese literature. However, he still largely bypasses the (post)colonial question of uncomfortable past legacies. For example, as Takushi Odagiri and Faye Yuan Kleeman discuss, Yokoyama's *I Become a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko ni naru*, 2014), the much-celebrated winner of both the Akutagawa and the Gunzō literary prizes, is a humorous contemporary play on Natsume Sōseki's canonical satire *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko de aru*, 1905–06). Told from the perspective of Kakeru, a Japanese-Chinese *daburu* (mixed blood) youth, Yokoyama's novel follows Kakeru's travels between Shanghai and Tokyo. In doing so, it cleverly recalls the long legacies of Japanese literary and linguistic ties to China by setting them in contemporary cultural exchanges.<sup>11</sup> However, the connections Yokoyama traces between Sōseki's ruminations on his early travels in England and the contemporary backdrop of contemporary Chinese and Japanese cultural exchanges creates the appearance of an uninterrupted line between the turn of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century. In this way, the era of Japan's entry into modernity is linked with the contemporary moment of globalization by seemingly bypassing the (post)colonial and Cold War triangulations in between.

My goal in writing this essay is not to burden any individual author with the impossible feat of comprehensive coverage but rather to recognize and understand the significance of a broader discursive division and hierarchy formed between the global and the (post)colonial. For scholars writing in what may be categorized as the discourse on global Japanophone literature, the central concern is often whether such writers might bring global recognition to Japanese literature (that is, as being on par with the standards of the West), or whether the Japanese language is conducive to non-Japanese writers writing in Japanese. Meanwhile, the region's historically long-extant colonial and postcolonial literatures in the Japanese language—that

is, (post)colonial Japanophone literature—are separated into a different category, a sort of ethnic ghettoization of the minor within in precarious relation to the glittery global reality of a new Japanophone literature as so-called world or global literature facing outward.

The presence of a colonial past and postcolonial present within Japanophone literature represents a broader social issue, a deeply traumatic kernel buried within postcolonial (or post-imperial) and Cold War Japan. It has been actively disavowed since the collapse of the Japanese empire and its subsequent rise, seemingly overnight, as a global power under the American security umbrella.<sup>12</sup> This dizzying turn from enemies to global partners has been discussed by historians elsewhere, although it is still downplayed and little understood in global contexts. In such a climate, the two separated discourses—those of postcolonial and global Japanophone literature—rarely meet in a genuine manner. In fact, I would argue that they are positioned as almost mutually exclusive when it comes to Japan's newly projected self-image to the world and to itself in the postwar period. While a global Japanophone discourse projects Japan's image as global and cosmopolitan, in turn allowing the voyage-in of foreign writers via its language, the postcolonial, or Other, Japanophone literature meanwhile conjures uncomfortable memories of contradictory wartime policies that prescribed both identifications with and differentiations from Asian neighbors as so-called brothers. The erasure of the past in which those neighbors who had been reduced to colonized, imperial subjects were then suddenly cast out as *persona non grata* after the collapse of the Japanese empire created controversial legacies that the nation has not worked through—domestically, regionally, or globally.

Although they share a linguistic sphere and a past, these incommensurable Japanophone discourses speak to a range of different interests (constituencies, marketing strategies, political affiliations, and so forth). They express quite distinct, perhaps mutually exclusive, imaginaries about Japan's place in the world, in terms of the images they project onto themselves and to outsiders. For example, a recently published book titled *Bilingual Japanophone Literature: Between Multilingualism and Multiculturalism (Bailingararu na Nihongo Bungaku: Tagengo tabunka no aida)*, organizes each chapter around individuals who I have categorized as global Japanophone writers. Yet the author curates only samplings of colonial and postcolonial Japanophone writers in what are reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's allegorical collections (in his oft-critiqued provincialization of so-called Third World literature), in which authors are organized by national origin. This example evidences an internal division within discourse on Japano-

phone literature. It also gestures to Japanese literature's ambiguous position between the West (former imperial powers) and the East (former colonies), which mirrors Japan's own ambivalent place in the imperial hierarchy of nations past and present—an ambivalence well documented by many scholars within and outside of Japan. In the present moment, this uneasy transpacific triangulation (of Japan situated between the West and the East) has been muddied further by the region's rapid globalization, which quickly and conveniently enabled the region to forget both its postcolonial and post-Cold War legacies in the name of expediency. The division between the (post)colonial and (post)Cold War periods in the Asia-Pacific may be at the heart of the region's collective failure to recognize commonalities and linkages (or entanglements) in the present order of things and their continued spectral hauntings from the past to the present.

As we will see in the case of the writer Kim Saryang, inter-imperial and transpacific research methods help to reconnect the thread that runs through colonial, postcolonial, Cold War, and global divisions of the region's histories. These new perspectives may allow a better understanding of the complex relations between the dominant and that which is relegated to the status of the minor, a relationality that is not fixed but rather prone to fluctuations. Although it is beyond the limited objectives of this essay to explore other regions, I hope these methodological insights will shed light on parallel phenomena elsewhere as well as on contemporary discussions of internal others emerging within today's Global South.

### **The Vanishing Case of Kim Saryang**

The precarious fate of Kim Saryang (1914–50), a remarkable bilingual writer from Korea, clarifies the significance of (post)colonial Japanophone literature's absence from inter-Asian regional and transpacific global relationships with postcoloniality. Similar to the practices of other imperial powers such as Britain and France, cultural policies of assimilation were integral to the imperial expansion of the Japanese empire into other territories. In the case of colonial Korea, which was first annexed as a protectorate of Japan in 1905 and then became an official colony in 1910, the most notorious aspects of such policies included the name-change ordinances and imperial language policies. In a Confucian culture where passing on one's name had special significance, the name-change policy represented a particularly egregious prohibition on the right to pass along legacies to later generations. Language policies conducted an assault on the Korean

language that began with the demotion of Korean as an optional curriculum and later became a formal ban even within the private home. Literature in the Korean language was heavily censored, many journals and newspapers were forced to cease publication, and unequal education opportunities in the colony motivated students and others with ambitions for making social or political impact either to go abroad to Japan or to study in local imperial schools. In such a climate of cultural imperialism, an entire generation of intellectuals came of age through a tiered educational and linguistic system. It is no surprise, then, that a significant body of literature emerged from linguistic comings and goings across imperial borderlines during the years of Japan's imperial expansion throughout a wide span of territories. What may be surprising is the inordinate effort undertaken by multiple sides in the postcolonial era to forget and erase this massive body of work.

When Japan was defeated in 1945, it was forced to give up all of its former colonial territories, including Korea, which was immediately occupied by the United States and the USSR, latecomers to the war who insisted on laying a territorial claim in the region while other imperial powers were still reeling from the long war's devastation. At the behest of the US and with a complicit nod from the Soviets, Korea was infamously divided in haste (in a span of about thirty minutes, with a crude map and a pen) by military officers lacking prior knowledge of the country's political or geographic terrain. Imperial measures backed by their own extremist supporters then inflicted deeper cuts into the already devastated social fabric. This set the stage for a brutal war in 1950 that took millions of lives, most of them civilian, and continues over half a century later. Although subsequently framed as a war of liberation, this war's actual ideological underpinnings were imperial, a fact that has been erased in dominant global remembrances even today. In the postcolonial aftermath, subsequent generations were effectively banned from using Japanese, which was violently stigmatized while the national education system helped consolidate the rise of Korean as the national language. This gave rise to a new generation of Koreans who no longer recalled the linguistic complexities of the past, even within their own families.<sup>13</sup>

These are the troubled historical conditions in which I analyze the buried entanglements of Kim Saryang, stigmatized under a new postwar taxonomy of *wôlbuk chakka* (authors who went North) after the division of the Koreas and who died in his mid-thirties as an embedded war correspondent during the Korean War. Kim's highly active, tumultuous literary life in and across contested territories

along wartime and Cold War divides offers us important insights into the formation or repression of postcolonial memories and, specifically, into the ways that literary citizenship can subsequently become fragmented and lost in the partitions and buried archives of colonized communities. Study of his life may generate methods that help us to link hitherto divided histories and legacies during a formative moment in global history, as the world was transitioning from the older colonial order to a newer one split apart by three competing interests: the First World of Capitalist Euro-America and their allies; the Second World of the Socialist Soviet Union and its allies; and the Third World of former colonies in Asia, Africa, or the unaligned others.

In an advanced stage of globalization partly superimposed on the post-Cold War era, it is commonplace to assume that literary nationalism may be the quaint historical problem of a bygone past, or at least one headed toward welcome extinction. However, as Hannah Arendt and others have instructed us based on what should have been sobering lessons from the terrors of the long twentieth century, it is the experiences of those inhabiting the most precarious relationship to any one nation-state that most often exposes the actual horrors and contradictions confronted by bare lives left unprotected. The freedom of peregrination permitted to those privileged as so-called global citizens among us, whose well-traveled and well-stamped passports apparently permit effortless global entry across multiple borderlines, stands in stark contrast to those who are not only refused privileged membership to such a global citizenship, but also lack any guarantee of a local citizenship within the borders of nation-states. For the latter, the constant threat of being flagged and then outed (or ousted) becomes more pronounced in certain political climes (like our present). For the colonized and the disenfranchised, the checkpoints—geopolitical, linguistic, territorial, ethnic, religious, and so on—persistently reinstate into the present those precarities born of colonial deracination. Kim's oeuvre thus offers lessons to today's readers who might otherwise overlook not only these hidden historical encounters of the past but also the lingering legacies of those who have been rendered silent and invisible yet again through subsequent forgettings and rememberings.

Kim Saryang was among those who, like many of his counterparts from other colonized lands, voyaged into the heart of empire. Traveling to Tokyo for what was valued as colonial tutelage and so-called enlightenment, Kim received imperial recognition, even garnering the coveted nomination for the prestigious metropolitan

Akutagawa Literary Prize, inspiring the envy and admiration of many other writers in Japan's vast empire.<sup>14</sup> Despite his meteoric rise and recognition throughout the expanding empire, he insisted on the inordinate labor of writing in both Korean and Japanese in order simultaneously to address each literary field and its separate readership.

Rather than focusing on monopolizing the adoring limelight shone on him by the metropolitan literary establishment for his own personal aggrandizement, Kim took advantage of this limelight to work ceaselessly as a translator. He wrote several theoretical pieces on the politics and theories of translation, constantly honing his skills as a translator and mediator between colony and metropole.<sup>15</sup> Kim made a point of writing many of his works in both Japanese and Korean, tediously putting pen to paper for two different linguistic readerships and meticulously inscribing two copies, each one marked in varying signs of linguistic difference.<sup>16</sup> His choice to undertake this double duty is remarkable given that, at the time, the Korean language (along with other colonized languages) was actively being suppressed and devalued within the colony and the metropole alike.<sup>17</sup> The significance of a writer recognized for his imperial or paper-language writings stubbornly insisting on continuing to write in the devalued language of the colonized is simply staggering. It becomes yet more striking when we consider that imperial policies had drastically reduced the number of publication venues in the colony and the fact that Kim was educated primarily in the Japanese colonial education system. As a result, Kim battled against both the public devaluation of the Korean language as well as a lifetime of anxieties he had internalized about his literary capability of writing his mother tongue by the time he debuted as a colonized Japanophone writer in Japan.

### **Divided Inter-imperial Legacies and Kim Saryang**

Tracing the ways Kim Saryang's once-prominent literary reputation was marginalized subsequently in the region offers us valuable insights into the processes by which national and imperial histories are recognized and repressed more broadly. In general, readers and the public may take for granted that literary canons are formed through a trusted process that for the most part recognizes those who deserve it and relegates to obscurity those unworthy of recognition. However, some cases show us an aspect of border-formation much more capricious and geopolitically charged. Which works receive recognition and, conversely, which works are forgotten sometimes exposes troubling aspects of the logic of inclusion and exclusion that necessarily

plagues all such boundary formations. The fascinating case of Kim Saryang shows a rare glimpse into such processes at the moment of the dissolving of former imperial boundaries and the emergence of newly formed national and imperial boundaries in the Asia-Pacific.

At the turn of the twentieth century, East Asia—as elsewhere—saw the waning of older empires of brute territorial aggrandizement and the waxing of newer empires of Cold War realignments. During these violent times of transition, significant traces of Kim Saryang can be detected inside and outside of literary fields that were at times distinct and at other times overlapping: imperial Japanese literature, colonial Korean literature, ethnic Korean minority literature, emerging North Korean literature, emerging South Korean literature, postwar Japanese literature, diasporic or ethnic Korean literature (known as *Zainichi* literature in Japan and *Chaoxianzu* literature in China), and colonial and postwar Taiwanese literature. In each of these fields, Kim occupied a precarious position just off-center. For example, in imperial Japan the metropolitan literary field chose to see Kim primarily as an exceptional representative among those they deemed as inferior colonial subjects with inherent problems underlying such assumptions; Japanese critics rarely addressed Kim as an individual or singular author or audience, but instrumentally as a translator and native informant mediating colonial culture in toto for metropolitan consumers. In colonial Korea, Korean critics saw Kim either as resisting against, or later, as collaborating with imperial power, for writing in Japanese, but rarely recognized the complex position he occupied in between the colony and the metropole. The irony is that even Kim's own contemporaries who themselves wrote in Japanese accused Kim of being a traitor for his Japanese language writings.

After the collapse of the Japanese empire, within the newly formed postcolonial ethnic Korean minority or *Zainichi* literary community in Japan, Kim was called on as an ethnic representative, a paternal figure anticipating a minor canonical genealogy of fellow ethics at its inauguration. However, much of these assessments focused on the perceived ideology of anticolonial resistance and devalued the ambivalence embodied in Kim's writings. Later generations of critics even corrected Kim's Japanese mistakes when editing his works to produce an aura of perfection, while omitting any traces of Kim's linguistic anxieties, ambiguities, or ambivalence in the name of constructing a strong, unequivocal, and fluent ethno-national literary hero. Likewise, in postwar North Korea, publications also excised the hybridity inherent in Kim's works. For example, the character Haruo,

born of a Korean and Japanese inter-marriage in Kim's most famous story "Into the Light," caused extreme discomfort for North Korean critics. Similarly, the very fact that Kim wrote in Japanese-language was erased in earlier critical assessments by translating them into Korean without attribution to the labor of translation. Even more recent critics lament this fact of Kim's Japanese-language (Japano-phone) writings, although they reluctantly acknowledge their impact on earlier, colonial literary fields.<sup>18</sup>

In post-imperial or postwar Japan, the famous critic Takeuchi Yoshimi wrote that the glaring absence of mainstream discussions on colonial literature, especially of writers like Kim Saryang, reveals a significant blind spot in postcolonial and Cold War-era Japanese discursive spaces. In the context of postcolonial or postwar South Korea, Kim was excised from South Korean literary histories until 1989, when the national ban on those categorized as *wôlbuk chakka*, or writers who went North, was finally lifted. Since then, South Korean scholars attempting to recuperate Kim's reputation have predominantly seen Kim as having resisted imperial power, in contrast to the vilification of writers such as Chang Hyôkchu.<sup>19</sup> Critic Kim Yunsik later compared Kim to Lu Xun (1881–1936), arguably one of modern China's most prominent writers, in an effort to recuperate posthumously Kim's status in the national literary canon; nonetheless, Kim is still little-known outside of critical circles.

Kim was never fully at home in any one of these literary fields, as evidenced by the fact that he ended up vanishing from each (albeit to various degrees of obscurity). In other words, despite Kim's own ongoing efforts as a translator, his divided literary afterlives register his untranslatability across the multiple ethnonational borderlines formed and reformed during the long twentieth century. With remarkable speed, in the early to mid-twentieth century, literary and corresponding national boundaries were established, destroyed, and reestablished, thus reflecting the broader conditions of political and social turmoil and imperial divisions beginning in the late nineteenth century. While many of these fields overlapped during the first half of the twentieth century, the divisions installed within and between them in the second half of the century became prominent and then at times absolute and irreversible. For example, the appearance or prominence of an author in one location was enough reason to oust or exile him or her from another. In South Korea, because Kim went north after 1945, any mention of him was censored in subsequent literary collections until as late as 1989. A no-return policy was imposed where impossible choices about affiliations were demanded



of writers as new Cold War literary territories were being carved out. In the geopolitical tumult of the times, Kim apparently disappeared into obscurity, remaining virtually unknown in discourses on global literature until recently.

Yet, beyond the exclusions of censorship and the no-return policy, how might we understand the significance of Kim's precariousness (and the ultimate minoritization of his writings) across the divided literary worlds in the region, from the colonial to the postcolonial and Cold War orders? Of course, it is not unheard of for writers to experience sudden rises or falls in their reputations over the course of their lifetimes. It is also common for writers to be discovered belatedly or posthumously after an entire lifetime of living and writing in relative obscurity. As I suggested at the opening, the contested history of Franz Kafka's global reputation may offer one prominent example of the latter case.<sup>20</sup> Yet Kim's situation is remarkable given that he worked marginally or centrally in at least five or six distinct and overlapping literary fields; his work circulated prominently in some of these even during his short but intense writing career.

Kim's homelessness within numerous literary abodes (even though he planted feet in each of them) may be understood best as a microcosm of universal mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, or the all-too-human defensive strategy of building borders. Both textually and metatextually, his work mirrors the traumas inflicted by geopolitical ruptures, divisions, exclusions, and silencings. Textually, it seems likely that across shifting geopolitical conditions Kim's tragicomic exposures would discomfit readers on all sides, who therefore might hesitate to claim his writing as their own. His texts bring into focus those violating exclusions usually visible only to those situated at the borderlines. In this way, Kim's works illustrate the way that authors positioned outside or in between are often the ones who interrogate and dare to push the envelope of otherwise invisible social boundaries that the rest of us either cannot or will not see. In other words, Kim's rapid rise and fall into and out of one literary field after another (in sometimes overlapping and other times mutually exclusive or oppositional and antagonistic fields) may in fact stem from his exposures of these blind spots. Perhaps it was precisely because Kim wrestled with and questioned externally imposed territorial and ideological divisions from the frontlines that he had to be excised from literary canons in the Asia-Pacific during the postcolonial and post-Cold War periods in order for their violent and arbitrary border formations to be naturalized, then forgotten.

At the same time, Kim's disappearance and dispersed afterlives offer an analogy for the disappearance of the postcolonial Japonophone within the long twentieth century of East Asia. As such, his legacy also offers a methodological point of entry for postcolonial or decolonial scholars today. The exceptionally dramatic paths treaded by Kim as he stumbled in and out of literary fields and languages leave a valuable trail for literary historians, especially offering insight into the moments when impossible choices are being imposed at the margins that are formative for the empire and the nation. Uncovering logics of inclusion and exclusion that may no longer be visible amid other more gradually formed borderlines, Kim's case allows us to see such dynamics as a much broader and persistent problem. Rather than being understood as an exceptional case study, from a minor empire, of a bygone past and an obscure place, Kim's experiences beckon us to reconsider the slippery logic behind the mutually reproducing categories of nation and its others, and empire and its others. Following Kim's peregrinations may shed light on aspects of our own persistent blind spots as we attempt to remember categorical borderlines that are taken for granted today as timeless, natural, and fixed. A fuller study of writers such as Kim who similarly embody the fragments of multiple national and ethnic literary fields across which their writings have been scattered can clarify the region's broader postcolonial and post-Cold War estrangements, entanglements, and aporias. In the face of such fragmented and divided legacies within an ongoing coloniality, new methodologies such as transpacific or inter-imperial frameworks may help us navigate inherited borders in order to suture histories that have been torn apart in the tumult of the long twentieth century.

## Notes

1. Freud's original concept of the uncanny or unhomeliness refers to a psychic discomfort arising from an encounter with that which appears to be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time (a sense of *déjà vu*, for example). Homi K. Bhabha famously expands this concept to a broader colonial and postcolonial sense of displacement in the world, encompassing realms beyond the personal to the political.
2. See also Laura Doyle's essay titled "Inter-imperiality and Literary Studies in the Longer *Durée*," published in *PMLA*'s March 2015 *Theories and Methodologies* cluster on "Reframing Postcolonial and Global Studies in the Longer *Durée*" for more on broadening disciplinary and methodological perspectives.

3. Numerous scholars have made important responses to the problems underlying Deleuze and Guattari's limited formulation of a minor literature. Their argument, unfortunately, was based on a partial understanding of Kafka's complex historical and linguistic circumstances of writing between the newly emerging state of Czechoslovakia in the periphery of Germany and the waning Austro-Hungarian empire. For cogent critiques of Deleuze and Guattari's formulations from various perspectives, see Pawel, especially the introduction, for an updated and historically contextualized biography of Kafka; Corngold for one of the earliest critiques of the limited perspectives in Deleuze and Guattari's work; Spector, especially chapter 3, for an elaboration on multiethnic language politics for the Prague Jewish communities in which Kafka dwelled; and Bahun 111–53 for insight into the question of language and identity in Kafka's writings. For the purposes of this article, I transpose Deleuze and Guattari's concept and use it as a productive heuristic to initiate a dialogue about vexed linguistic hierarchies variously negotiated by writers from vastly different but resonant contexts. Despite my own misgivings about their argument, which I have elaborated elsewhere (see Kwon chapter 3), I find the concept of minor literature and its ubiquitous global notoriety to be a useful entrée toward forging deeper and broader connections. I would like to thank Sanja Bahun, a fellow collaborator in this special issue, for generously sharing her extensive insights on Kafka scholarship.
4. Important scholarship from within the region that still need to be translated for global readership include writings by scholars such as Kim Chul, Yonetani Masufumi, Baek Moonim, Naoki Watanabe, Lee Hwajin, Cha Seung-ki, and many others. Only one of Kim's numerous books, *Reading Colonial Korea Through Fiction*, has been translated into English, for example.
5. Alexis Dudden examines the discourse of mission *législatrice* involved in how Meiji statesmen used norms of international law to build a case for imperial legitimacy among other imperial powers for the purposes of territorial aggrandizement. See especially chapter 2.
6. The military justification for the necessity of America's nuclear attacks against Japan has been debunked by various historians. See, for example, Hasegawa, especially the introduction.
7. In my use of the term "coloniality," I am borrowing from Mignolo's work to emphasize the ongoing nature of colonial inequalities in the contemporary world order beyond the historical pastness of officially recognized colonialism. According to Mignolo, there exists a subconscious misrecognition that continues to challenge our ability to recognize the existence of the dynamics of coloniality in the present. While Mignolo points to the problem of the concept of "postcoloniality" within these conditions, I choose to engage with the important strides made within

postcolonial studies scholarship as a kindred discourse in tension with and competing against Mignolo's important decolonial project.

8. The slippery concept of Greater China refers not just to the People's Republic but also Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Taiwan, as well as diasporic Chinese communities. See for example in Shih's introduction to *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* for more on the emergence of this discourse in US academia and Shih's introduction to *Visuality and Identity* for important case studies of the production and consumption of Sinophone cultural productions including visual media across the Pacific.
9. This seemingly particular predicament of alignment between the metropole and its peripheries, or the colonizers and the colonized, also coexisted in the Japanese empire. More inter-imperial studies of comparable cases in Lusophone, Russophone, and Germanophone literatures are needed.
10. What I categorize as global Japanophone authors are those writers who write to both Japanese and Euro-American audiences. We might also add Haruki Murakami's Anglophonic Japanese-language writings and their flexible translatability for the global literary market here. It is widely known that Murakami's writings conjure his admiration for American novelists as well as a writing style easily translatable to English. The specter of the colonial and wartime pasts hovering marginally (almost invisibly) in his writings also need to be closely examined.
11. I would like to thank Takushi Odagiri, whose invited talk at Duke University in November 2014 (titled "Contemporary Writers of the Japanophone") first introduced me to Yokoyama's works. Odagiri discusses the issue of untranslatability in Yokoyama's works and its relationship to Japanese literature's location in the contemporary era of global English. Kleeman's discussion of the complex hybridity of languages in multiple texts from Japanese literature during a presentation for the Association for Asian Studies in March 2018 situates Yokoyama's works in relation to other Japanophone writings.
12. See Oguma, especially the introduction, for more on this reverse course, which of course is not unrelated to the United States' own reverse course on foreign policies toward Japan and East Asia during the Cold War.
13. See Yi's chapter titled "Linguistic Institutionalization and Nationalism," which discusses complex linguistic negotiations in the aftermath of the colonial period; Suh chapter 5, which examines the imposition of monolingualism in post-liberation South Korea and the poetic linguistic struggles of Kim Suyŏng; and Han 220–62, which excavates traces of the Japanese language in literary texts of postwar/postcolonial authors whose bilingualism were actively repressed. These scholars represent a new generation of critics who have begun to document and critique the violence that continued long after liberation from official colonialism.

14. See Kleeman's *Under the Imperial Sun*, especially the introduction, and Thornber's introduction for examples of inter-Asian correspondence and recognition among colonized writers during this era.
15. For Kim's reflections on world literature, see for example "Chōsen bunka no tūshin."
16. See Takahashi for a cogent comparative analysis of some of these works, including meticulous documentations on how Kim negotiated censorship between two languages.
17. For a grounded historical analysis of this era and the contradictions between assimilation policies of inclusion and actual practices of exclusion of colonial subjects, see Caprio 81–110.
18. For more on North Korean critics' ambivalence toward Kim's colonial-era Japanese language writings, see Sōk's introduction to *Kim Saryang Chakp'umjip*.
19. See Kim Chul, especially chapter 12, for a cogent critique of this persistent binary opposition in the literary criticism.
20. Kafka's case with which we began the essay offers interesting parallel and contrasting examples that shed light on the comparative fate of Kim oeuvre. There are many resonances here to explore further on the formation and circulation of minor literature at the time the world was divided into three, along with the rise of new cold war imperial formations. See Worsley 1–60 for the origins of the third world's underdevelopment in imperial exploitation and subsequent Cold War divides.

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