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Di Cotofan Wu

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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Park Young-hee, 'A Ward Woven with Moonlight' (1923):
A Translation with an Overview of Korean Decadence

Di Cotofan Wu

University of Kurdistan Hewlêr

월광(月光)으로 짠 병실(病室) – 박영희

밤은 깊이도 모르는 어둠 속으로
끊임없이 구르고 또 빠져서 갈 때
어둠 속에 낮을 가린 미풍(微風)의 한숨은
갈 바를 몰라서 애꿎은 사람의 마음만
부질없이도 미치게 흔들어 놓도다.

가장 아름답던 달님의 마음이
이 때이면 남몰래 앓고 서 있다.

근심스럽게도 한발 한발 걸어 오르는 달님의
정맥혈(靜脈血)로 짠 면사(面絲) 속으로 나오는
병(病)든 얼굴에 말 못하는 근심의 빛이 흐를 때,
갈 바를 모르는 나의 헤매는 마음은
부질없이도 그를 사모(思慕)하도다.

가장 아름답던 나의 쓸쓸한 마음은
이 때로부터 병들기 비롯한 때이다.

달빛이 가장 거리낌 없이 흐르는
넓은 바닷가 모래 위에다
나는 내 아픈 마음을 쉬게 하려고
조그만 병실(病室)을 만들려 하여
달빛으로 쉬지 않고 쌓고 있도다.

가장 어린애같이 빈 나의 마음은
이 때에 처음으로 무서움을 알았다.

한숨과 눈물과 후회와 분노로
얕는 내 마음의 임종(臨終)이 끝나려 할 때
내 병시로는 어여쁜 세 처녀가 들어오면서
당신의 얕는 가슴 위에 우리의 손을 대라고 달님이
우리를 보냈나이다.
이 때로부터 나의 마음에 감추어 두었던
회고 흰 사랑에 피가 묻음을 알았도다.

나는 고마워서 그 처녀들의 이름을 물을 때
나는 '슬픔'이라 하나이다.
나는 '두려움'이라 하나이다.

나는 ‘안일(安逸)’이라고 부르나이다 -.
그들의 손은 아픈 내 가슴 위에 고요히 닿도다.

이 때로부터 내 마음이 미치게 된 것이
끝없이 고치지 못하는 병이 되었도다.

-[백조] 3 호(1923년 9월호)-

A Ward Woven with Moonlight

Deep within the abyss of night, darkness takes its hold,
Ceaselessly rolling, falling, ever so bold.
The sigh of the veiled Zephyr shrouded in the dark,
Knowing not where to go, lost is my aimless heart,
Madly it shakes, sways, swings, without any cause.

The heart in the once-beautiful moon's splendour,
Now suffers silently in the night's tender.

With weariness, step by step, the moon ascends,
Through threads of venous blood, anguish descends,
Upon its sickly visage, silent worries are found,
My wandering heart, uncertain where it's bound,
Yearns without reason, in silent throes profound.

From this moment, my once radiant heart,
Begins its affliction, its joy starts to depart.

Upon the vast sandy shore,
Where moonlight most freely flows,
Resting my aching heart, a solace grows.
To craft a small ward, working without rest,
With the strands of moon, a shelter I sew.

My heart, empty, like that of a child unaware,
Realizes, for the first time, the depth of its despair.

With sighs, tears, regret, and anger,
As the death throes of my heart hover,
Into my sickroom, three maidens wander,
Sent by the moon, with a purpose so clear,
'Upon your sickened heart let us lay our hands, dear.'

From this moment, my heart understood,
Pure love hidden within was stained in blood.

Gratefully, I asked for their names in the quiet,
One speaks, 'I am Sadness', another, 'I am Fear',

The last whispers, 'Call me Comfort, my dear',
Their hands gently rest on my aching chest,

From this moment, my heart fell into unrest,
Becoming an incurable illness, an eternal quest.

White Tide, No. 3, September 1923

Overview of Korean Decadence

Although decadence was predominantly focused on Western Europe, particularly France and Britain, its influence reached as far as the Korean peninsula, during the early twentieth century when the nation was under Japanese rule. Regrettably, this facet of global decadence has been somewhat neglected within the realm of academia until now.

During the mid-Victorian period and onwards, the exchange of cultures facilitated a significant influence of Japanese art on European artists, who developed a strong affinity for the opulence of 'Oriental' aesthetics, commonly known as Japonisme. Simultaneously, Japan actively pursued westernization throughout the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) eras, embracing and emulating various aspects of Western culture. Unsurprisingly, academic discussion in the English language on decadence in East Asia, or 'Oriental' motifs in decadence, has predominantly examined Japan's literature and art, resulting in a substantial body of academic work in this field since the 1960s.¹

Contrastingly, research in English exploring the influence and reception of the decadent tradition in Korea has been notably scarce. Limited studies have been conducted on Korean writers who advocated for *sunsu munhak* (순수문학) [pure literature] that championed Western decadence and Aestheticism through their studies in Japan.² Even within Korean domestic academia, little attention has been given to Park Young-hee 박영희 (朴英熙) (1901-1950?), the poet in question.³ Despite his famous decadent poem, '월광 (月光) 으로 짠 병실 (病室)' ['A Ward Woven with Moonlight'], being a Korean classic included in middle school literary textbooks, it remains

relatively unknown outside of the Korean-speaking community. My translation aims to introduce this renowned poem to a broader international audience, as well to better our understanding of decadence outside of its immediate cultural and geo-political sphere.

To fully understand and analyse the poem, it is crucial to consider its historical and ideological context. It was composed in the 1920s, a period when the Korean peninsula was subjected to Japanese occupation. Against this backdrop, decadent literature emerged as a distinct voice for Korean intellectuals, offering them a channel to explore themes of sexuality, melancholy, and rebellious individualism and cosmopolitanism. This artistic tradition became particularly significant as it challenged and rejected the traditional Confucian literature and the Enlightenment literature developed in the 1910s, led by figures like Yi Gwang-su 李光洙 (1892-1950) and Choe Nam-seon 崔南善 (1890-1957). These writers' literary form was proven ineffective in the face of the oppressive actions carried out by the Japanese colonial government.⁴

It is intriguing to note that the exploration and admiration of British decadence and Aestheticism, particularly the literary works of Oscar Wilde, did not start in Korea until the country was annexed by Japan in 1910. Wilde's works, especially *Salomé* (1894) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), were initially introduced to a Korean audience by the colonial government. This introduction served as a stratagem for assimilating Koreans into Japan's imperial vision of modernity, which was heavily influenced by Western culture.⁵ For example, the premier performance of *Salomé* in Korea was carried out by a renowned Japanese magic theatrical troupe, Tenkatsu Ichiza, inside the deteriorating Gyeongbokgung Palace of the Joseon dynasty in 1915 as part of the Joseon Industrial Exposition in Commemoration of the Fifth Anniversary of Japanese Colonial Rule.⁶ The exposition featured various sectors, including agriculture, forestry, mining, fisheries, industry, education, art, and archaeological material with the aim to showcase Japan's colonial achievements and the development of Korea under Japanese rule. The *Salomé* magic show, then, is not only a blatant propaganda of 'Japan's dominance over Korea',⁷ but, more importantly, it sought to establish cultural uniformity through an alluring display of Western magic tricks,

seductive dances, and modern stage techniques. These elements were perceived as effective in convincing Koreans of the cultural superiority of Western civilization, with Japan positioning itself as the self-proclaimed spokesperson for Asia in this regard. In its pursuit of modernization, Japan internalized this colonial narrative to justify its own imperial expansion.⁸ While they painstakingly promoted Western art and lifestyle on the one hand, on the other, the government-general issued an ordinance in 1911, restricting Korean folk-art performances to specific holidays with the prerequisite approval of the local authorities.⁹

Clearly, it can be observed that the Japanese regime strategically utilized Western art and literature in Korea as a tool for cultural assimilation. It attempted to devalue Korean indigenous culture, casting it as primitive and obsolete. This is evident in the Enlightenment literature of the early colonial era (1910-1919), which completely dismissed traditional Korean literary works. This strategy deeply affected Korean intellectuals, primarily educated in Japan, causing them to oscillate between a desire for Western modernity and national sovereignty. Facing discrimination both in Japan and their annexed homeland, their anguish is evident in colonial literature, marked by themes of tormented artists resorting to suicide and violence.¹⁰

In 1919, the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I failed to address Korea's sovereignty issue.¹¹ This prompted thousands of Koreans from various walks of life, including students, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens, to take to the streets to demand Korea's independence on 1 March 1919. This movement lasted for a few months and Japanese authorities responded with brutal suppression with about 7500 killed, 16000 wounded, and approximately 46000 arrested.¹² The movement marked a significant turning point in Korea's struggle for independence, as it drew international attention to their cause and defined a new era of colonial literature. However, Korea did not regain its sovereignty until 1945.

The failure of the March 1st Movement left many young scholars disillusioned and bewildered. Literary critic Paek Chöl 백철(白鐵) states in 'The Impact of the March 1st Movement' (1948):

The March 1st Independence Movement is the last stronghold of hope for our nation. Therefore, the failure of this movement resulted in the loss of prospects for our entire nation, and a despairing precipice loomed before us.¹³

Following the movement, Korea faced challenges on multiple fronts. Politically, its sovereignty was already compromised. Economically, Japanese industrial dominance led to the decline of local industries, pushing the nation towards bankruptcy. However, the movement's impact led the Japanese colonial government to ease censorship, permitting limited private publications. This fostered an environment for the emerging literati to share their modern experiences through coterie journals.

One of the most notable among these, the *Baekjo* 白潮 [*White Tide*] literary magazine (1922-1923), led by Park Young-hee, stands out as a significant proponent of decadence in Korea. It marked a departure from the didactic literature of the early colonial era. Apart from *Baekjo*, there were other significant journals like *Changjo* 创造 [*Creation*] (1919-1921), co-initiated by Kim Dong-in 金东仁 (1900-1951) and his Tokyo-based peers, and *Pyebo* 废墟 [*Ruins*] (1920-1921), directed by Kim Eok 金億 (1896-?). These three influential coterie journals championed Aestheticism and decadence, offering a platform for writers to delve into avant-garde themes and styles, thereby enriching Korean literature of the time.

According to literary critic Han Hyo 韓曉, the literati of that time found the prevailing bleak situation unbearable, prompting them to 'transcend the boundaries of reality' with a decadent attitude. They pursued 'conceptual liberation', and achieved 'the sublimation of the subjective world, forming a kind of Romantic literature' just like the construction of the 'beautiful third world'.¹⁴ They translated, introduced, and emulated the works of influential figures of the Aesthetic and decadent traditions, including Wilde, Charles Baudelaire, Aubrey Beardsley, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and even lesser-known Russian decadent writers like Boris Konstantinovich Zaytsev.¹⁵ This literary movement offered them a sense of catharsis and empowerment, serving as a tool to confront their psychological trauma.

Moreover, while they identified with the fin de siècle melancholy and frustration with the world found in decadence, they also sought to appropriate its rebellious and provocative aspects. They held the hope that the infusion of Western decadence, with its vitality and fresh perspectives, could invigorate their own literary scene, which had grown weary of didactic and politically oriented works. As Park stated in the inaugural issue of *White Tide*,

to rejuvenate the outdated literary world and bring about a 'White Tide' literary trend, I, as a comrade writer, bear a significant responsibility. Additionally, I aim to introduce foreign literature and arts as a pioneer. I have translated the works of the famous writer of British aestheticism (英國의唯美主義),¹⁶ Mr. Oscar Wilde.¹⁷

The aspiration to diversify Korean literature prompted them to zealously write manifestos to defend literature's autonomy. They also used these manifestos as a means to articulate their perplexity and confusion regarding the modernity enforced by Japanese colonial rule.

Park Young-hee, better known by his pen name Hoe-wol 회월(懷月), was a prominent figure in the Korean decadent movement. Born and educated in Seoul, South Korea, Park attended Gonggok Elementary School and Baejae High School. Notably, unlike many of his peers, Park did not undergo the traditional Chinese Confucian education.¹⁸ Dong-ha Lee suggests that Park's early education fostered a strong affinity for modernity, leading him to be more receptive to Western literature.¹⁹ On 5 March 1919, Park was actively involved in the March 1st movement and was arrested but subsequently released with a warning. After completing his education at Baejae High School, he pursued further studies in Japan at the Tokyo Seisoku English School. By 1921, he had returned to Korea and began contributing to various coterie publications.

Park lived during a period characterized by cultural suppression and political turmoil. This context deeply influenced his writings, which often reflected themes of despair, disillusionment, and a longing for freedom. Infused with the aesthetics of decadence, his works served as more than artistic expressions; they also represented a subtle form of resistance against the oppressive regime. The artistic expression of fin de siècle decadence, with its obsession with the declining Roman Empire, also resonated deeply with Korean students like Park who were witnessing the

decline and demise of the Joseon Kingdom (1392-1897) and the short-lived Korean Empire (1897-1910) during their own lifetime.²⁰ Park's literary orientation was significantly influenced by his exposure to decadent literature with the works of Wilde exerting a particularly profound impact. In the inaugural issue of *White Tide* (1923), Park published his unfinished translation of *Salomé*, marking its first appearance in Korean literary scene.

While Wilde penned *Salomé* in French, Park's fluency in the language is uncertain. It is also unclear whether Park translated from English or used Japanese or Russian versions.²¹ By the 1920s, Mori Ogai's Japanese translation, based on the German adaptation for Richard Strauss's 1907 opera, was widely available.²² Given this context, it is probable that Park engaged primarily with a Japanese adaptation. His stint at an elite English school in Tokyo implies a degree of English proficiency; however, the brevity of his time there suggests he predominantly used a Japanese version, occasionally cross-referencing with English texts.

The exploration of beauty, indulgence, perversity, and individualism in Wilde's writing strongly resonated with Park, inspiring him to incorporate these elements into his own literary works. One notable example is the poem, 'A Ward Woven with Moonlight', published in the third issue of *White Tide* (1923). The poem is significant in Korean literary history as it trailblazes the new literary trend of decadence, which was known as 'morbid romanticism' in the 1920s.²³ Through this piece, Park captures the bleak reality of his motherland in a sentimental manner, reflecting not only his own profound melancholy and the yearning to escape from the harshness of reality, but also the deep-seated collective despair and sorrow of the Korean people, in the aftermath of the failed March 1st movement.

The opening lines of the poem immediately plunge the reader in an emotional landscape where the narrator is depicted as tormented even by the gentlest breezes. This vivid imagery emphasizes the heightened sensitivity and fragile mental state of the narrator, likely symbolizing the psychological distress faced by the Korean literati amidst the political unrest of that time.

The speaker then describes gathering moonlight on a sandy seashore, creating a ‘ward’ or sanctuary for his ailing heart. However, despite this attempt to find solace, the speaker’s heart, portrayed as empty as a child, is now filled with fear for the first time upon facing reality. As previously discussed, before the March 1st movement, the intellectuals still held hope for Korean independence and progress. However, the failure of the movement shattered their illusions and made them realize their disempowerment and the brutal strength of the imperial force. These idealists were confronted with genuine terror for the first time.

The translation of Park’s poem, a quintessential example of *byeondae-si* (현대시) or modern Korean poetry, is a delicate balance between linguistic fidelity and poetic resonance. Written predominantly in Hangeul,²⁴ the poem’s themes of deep emotion, and existential introspection break away from the Korean poetic tradition. Yet, its occasional use of Hanja (Chinese characters), as seen in words like ‘정맥혈(靜脈血)’ and ‘면사(面絲),’ introduces a classical depth, a nod to a bygone era in a predominantly modern linguistic landscape. This classical resonance was mirrored in my English translation. For instance, the term ‘Zephyr’ was chosen over the more commonplace ‘breeze’ to translate ‘미풍(微風)’. This choice seeks to parallel the profound Greco-Roman influence on English literature, akin to the Chinese cultural influences on pre-modern Korean literature.

Another salient feature of the original poem is its strategic use of repetition and parallel structures. The recurring motif, ‘이 때로부터’ (‘From this moment’), acts as a rhythmic anchor, accentuating pivotal emotional junctures for the speaker. This repetition, mirrored in the English rendition with lines like ‘From this moment, my once radiant heart,’ serves not only to emphasize these emotional crescendos but also to maintain the original’s tempo.

In the endeavour to achieve poetic resonance in English, certain creative liberties were necessitated. For instance, the phrase ‘Sent by the moon, with a purpose so clear | Upon your sickened heart let us lay our hands, dear.’ The addition of ‘with a purpose so clear’ is not present

in the original line ‘우리를 보냈나이다’, which, when translated verbatim, reads ‘we have been sent (by the [달님이 moon])’. Yet, for the sake of maintaining rhyme with both the preceding and succeeding lines, I added this phrase. Moreover, the original sentence reads, ‘당신의 앓는 가슴 위에 우리의 손을대라고 달님이 | 우리를 보냈나이다’, which when translated literally, means ‘Upon your ailing heart, our hands we lay, the moon has sent us.’ Such a direct translation, however, risks sounding jarring to English ears, compromising both rhythm and rhyme. Notably, the phrase ‘우리를 보냈나이다’ (ulileul bonaessnaida) consists of many more syllables than the English counterpart ‘us sent (by the moon)’. A literal translation would disrupt the poem’s balance and render it somewhat ungainly in English expression. Consequently, I decided to restructure the sentences, first clarifying the speaker’s identity, thus moving the ‘sent by the moon’ first, and subsequently elucidating their intent to soothe the poet’s tormented heart. To enhance the poem’s fluidity and ensure it resonates authentically within the English poetic tradition, I also added phrases like ‘a purpose so clear’ and ‘dear’. While these adaptations might diverge from a rigidly literal translation, they are instrumental in retaining the poem’s intrinsic musicality.

The introduction of the symbolic maidens – ‘Sorrow’, ‘Fear’, and ‘Comfort’ – offers a poignant exploration of human emotions. The translation of ‘나는 ‘안일(安逸)’이라고 부르나이다’ as ‘The last whispers, “Call me Comfort, my dear”’ not only adds a layer of personification but also retains the original’s emotional essence. These personified emotions, when contrasted with the traditionally positive attributes of the Greek goddesses, the Charites, known for their association with beauty, creativity, and fertility, create a striking dichotomy to highlight the poet’s sense of despair and impotence. This contrast also likely reflects Park’s familiarity with Hellenic myth and culture, influenced by Wilde.

Furthermore, the moon, beyond its celestial connotation, emerges as a symbol of beauty, sorrow, and enigma. The line ‘가장 아름답던 달님의 마음이’ is rendered as ‘The heart in the once-beautiful moon’s splendour,’ encapsulating the moon’s personification and emotional depth.

This moon motif, especially considering Park Young-hee's penname 'Hoe-wol' (literally 'yearning for the moon'), resonates with his 1922 translation of *Salomé*, highlighting the profound influence of Wilde on his literary oeuvre. Beardsley's 1894 illustration for Wilde's play 'The Woman in the Moon' further accentuates the moon's imagery as emblematic of both insanity and tragic beauty, a sentiment echoed in Park's poem.

Wilde's *Salomé* is replete with Orientalist characteristics, from its dreamlike atmosphere and abundance of exotic objects to its portrayal of characters steeped in sensuality, despotism, and irrationality. The Jewish royal family, particularly Salomé herself, embodies this Orientalised sensuality, 'with Herod's kingdom depicted as a treasure trove of perfumes, jewels, and other exotica.'²⁵ However, it is crucial to note that Wilde's Orientalist depiction of this Jewish tale operates on what Edward Said describes as 'latent Orientalism', namely shared, often unconscious, ideas about the Orient as Europe's Other.²⁶

Surprisingly, this latent Orientalism did not deter East Asian audiences. Both Japanese and Korean interpretations mirrored European aesthetics. In fact, during its colonial period, many Koreans, influenced by Western cultural dominance, identified with white protagonists in Victorian literature,²⁷ momentarily sidelining their racial identities. This mirrors bell hooks' insights in *Black Looks* (2015), where racial identity is momentarily set aside to connect with characters.²⁸ Especially in Japanese renditions, *Salomé* consistently present the protagonist as an exotic symbol of desire. Actresses always don Arabian belly dancer costumes,²⁹ a stark contrast to the Hellenic costumed Chinese adaptation influenced by the New Cultural Movement's ethos against objectification of women.³⁰ The Japanese portrayal aligns more with European views of Salomé as an exotic Jewish princess due to the problematic internalization outlined by hooks.

While *Salomé* cannot avoid its Orientalist limitations, Wilde's unique position as a queer Irish playwright in late-Victorian British society complicated the matter. Scholars have extensively highlighted how his personal marginality subverts the prevailing discourse.³¹ The play's rebellious undertones, evident in Salomé's fervent passion, her unconventional courting behaviour, and her

necrophiliac tendencies, serve as allegorical reflections of Wilde's 'misidentification' with the Orientalist protagonist.³² Korean audiences, while not fully cognizant of the play's Orientalist tendency at that time, resonated strongly with its spirit of defiance.

Indeed, Park's adaptation of Wilde's moon imagery in his poetry is an example of 'cultural hybridity' as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha.³³ While colonized societies often meld elements of the colonizer's culture with their own, it is crucial to recognize that Korea's exposure to Western influences primarily came via Japan, rather than direct Western colonization. By the time Japan began its colonization of Korea, it had already assimilated elements of Western cultural hegemony. The colonial government astutely utilized Western decadent literature, exemplified by the Japanese magic show version of *Salomé*, as a means to both attract and regulate Koreans. This strategy showcased the allure of Western modernity through performances featuring magic tricks, sensual dances, and sexualized foreign women's bodies. Coupled with the introduction of modern infrastructure like railways, trams, and electric lighting, the intent was clear: to present an enticing vision of progress and modernization, thereby encouraging Koreans to actively contribute to the vision of a Greater Japanese colonial empire.

Bhabha's concept of 'Mimicry' provides a nuanced framework through which we can further explore the cultural dynamics of Korean decadence. According to Bhabha, the mimicry of the colonized is never a perfect replication; it is always 'almost the same but not quite'.³⁴ In the case of Korean intellectuals during the colonial period, they did not simply passively absorb these Western influences. Instead, they engaged in a process of imitation that served as a form of resistance against the narrative of Japanese colonial rule. Park's works identify with the subversive spirit in Wilde's play while appropriating its Orientalist form to mock the imperialist intention behind it. He recontextualizes the moon imagery from *Salomé*, infusing it with a uniquely Korean sentiment of despair tied to the loss of political sovereignty. This weary and melancholic symbol contrasts sharply with the eroticized Salomé prevalent in Japanese imperial narratives. Through this deliberate but subtle counter-narrative, Park emphasizes his unique resistance by challenging

the industrious spirit promoted by the colonial regime, crafting a symbol that resonates deeply with the experiences of Koreans under Japanese rule.

Therefore, the decadent tradition in Korean literature, as exemplified by Park and his contemporaries, is best described as 'Lyo-colonial Decadence'. The term 'lyo-colonial' was introduced by Xiaoli Liu in her studies of writers from Manchukuo, another region under Japanese colonial rule.³⁵ Unlike traditional anti-colonial or de-colonial literature that directly opposes colonial forces or counter colonial propaganda retrospectively, lyo-colonial writings subtly challenge and undermine the colonial narrative at present. Through their introspective and melancholic poems, Park and his peers drew inspiration from the wandering Western flaneurs and the deliberate, languid lifestyles of dandies. This was a subtle act of defiance against the colonial government's promotion of hard work and societal productivity. By blending Western decadent influences with their own cultural nuances, these intellectuals forged a unique path of cultural resistance. They not only expressed their individuality but also redefined and reshaped the broader Korean identity within the confines of colonial rule.

Despite the resistance evident in their decadent works, these writers had a complicated relationship with the colonial government. Their stance towards the authorities was ambivalent, marked by periods of criticism and cooperation. This duality reflects the intricate responses shaped by colonial pressures, internalization, and survival tactics. Park's early decadent writings, initially resistant, evolved over time. Facing criticism from progressive peers for perceived escapism, Park transitioned from decadence, co-founding the left-leaning Korean Artists Proletarian Federation (KAPF). Yet, the oppressive colonial environment and mounting critiques influenced further changes in his position. Eventually, Park joined the imperial army's writers' corps, even adopting a Japanese name, Yoshimura Kodo 芳村乡道, and supporting pro-Japanese initiatives. Park's fluctuating stance mirrored that of another decadent figure, Kim Dong-in, who also transitioned from opposing to endorsing the Japanese colonial regime. Park Young-hee, Kim Dong-in, Yi Gwang-su, Choe Nam-seon, and intellectuals who shared such transition were denounced as

Chinilpa 친일파 (親日派) [pro-Japanese faction], a derogatory term for pro-Japanese collaborators,³⁶ and faced intense criticism later in their lives. Such shifts, emblematic of the challenges under colonial rule, have been points of contention in discussions on Korean decadence.

The Korean decadent movement, despite its controversies, indelibly influenced the trajectory of modernist literature in Korea. This movement was birthed amidst the complex interplay of dual colonialism: Japan's direct military domination and the West's indirect cultural hegemony. This triangular relationship presented a captivating power dynamic. Japan appropriated the imperialistic and Orientalist undertones of Western decadence to subjugate Korea. In contrast, Korean writers, resonating with decadence's rebellious spirit, repurposed decadent writings into lyo-colonial writings, subtly challenging imperial propaganda. The movement's engagement with themes such as melancholic beauty, tragic and grotesque love, artists seeking vengeance through their art, and unconventional artistic expressions significantly augmented the richness of Korean modern literature. This added a unique dimension to the Korean literary landscape, which would later be dominated by proletariat writings that emerged in the 1920s.

The Korean decadent movement also added a distinct dimension to the global understanding of decadence. It is intriguing how this fin de siècle literary and artistic tradition could manifest in such varied, even diametrically opposed interpretations. Much like Wilde, the quintessential 'prince of paradox', the movement embodies a paradox in its very essence, oscillating between progressiveness and conservatism. This duality offers a nuanced lens through which we can appreciate the multifaceted nature of decadence across different cultural contexts.

¹ Such as Imura Kimie, '日本におけるオスカー・ワイルド--移入期-1-' ['Nippon Ni Okeru Oscar Wilde: Pnyuki (Dai Ichibu)'], *Tsurumi Joshidaigaku Kijyo* 鶴見女子大学紀要, 7 (1969), 39-60). Qi Chen, 'The Circulation of Oscar Wilde's Prose and Poems in Japan (1868-1926)', *Literature Compass*, 10.3 (2013), 288-99. Yoko Hirata, 'Oscar Wilde and Honma Hisao, the First Translator of "De Profundis" into Japanese', *Japan Review*, 21 (2009), 241-66. Joseph Lavery, 'Remote Proximities: Aesthetics, Orientalism, and the Intimate Life of Japanese Objects', *ELH*, 83.4 (2016), 1159-83.

² See Jin-kyung Lee, 'Art as Freedom and Power: Kim Tongin and the Political Legacy of Pure Literature in Modern Korea', in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean Literature*, ed. by Yoon Sun Yang (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 15-26. For articles written in Korean about Korean Decadence see Jae-bok Lee, 'Korean Modern Poetry and

Decadence’, *Cross-Cultural Studies*, 12.2 (2008), 163-88. Soo-Young Im, ‘The Decadence Of 1930’s 1930s’ ?Korean Poetry’, *Daedong Munhwa Yeon’gu*, 83 (2013), 309-46.

³ See Paek Chol’s *Korean Decadence* cited in Cho Yoon-je, *The Literary History of Korea* [韩国文学史] (Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Press (社会科学文献出版社), 1998), pp. 520-37. Nomdal2018 낫달 2018, ‘Park Young-hee, A Writer whose Literature and Ideology have been both Forgotten [박영희, 문학도 이데올로기도 모두 잊힌 문인]’, *In this Turbulent World* [이 풍진 세상에], *Story of Pro-Japanese Literature*, 2021 <<https://qq9447.tistory.com/1851>> [accessed 16 July 2023].

⁴ The Enlightenment era (1894-1910) of Korean literary history was initiated by Yi Gwangsu. Known as the ‘Father of Modern Korean literature’, he advocated that personal emotional writing in Western literature had the power to reshape the Korean mentality. His works showcased an awakening of individual consciousness, although they later received criticism for being excessively didactic.

⁵ Yasumi Higuchi, ‘見世物興行年表:松旭齋天勝興行年表 大正 4 年 (1915 年) 10 月~12 月 [‘Chronology of Shokyokusai Tenkatsu’s performances, October to December 1915 (Taisho 4)’, in *Blog.Livedoor.jp* <<http://blog.livedoor.jp/misemono/archives/52303075.html>> [accessed 22 April 2023].

⁶ Seon-yeong Hong, ‘제국의 文化領有와 外地巡行 - 天勝一座의 <살로메> 景福宮 공연을 중심으로 -’ [‘The cultural domination and oversea land tour performance of Japanese empire – Salome performance in Kyngbokkung of Tenkachuichiza’], *일본근대학연구* [*Japanese Modern Studies*], 33 (2011), 333-46. Lois Cucullu, ‘Wilde and Wilder Salomés: Modernizing the Nubile Princess from Sarah Bernhardt to Norma Desmond’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 18.3 (2011), 495-524.

⁷ Seon-yeong Hong, pp. 345-46.

⁸ See comments on Japan’s internalized colonialism in Ayu Majima, 肌色」の憂鬱 : 近代日本の人種体験 [The Melancholy of ‘Skin Colour’: The Racial Experience of Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2014).

⁹ Kyung-wook Jeon, 한국가면극: 그역사와원 [*Korean Mask Drama: History and Structural Principles*] (Korea: Yŏrhwadang 열화당, 1998), pp. 1-48.

¹⁰ Theodore Jun Yoo, *It’s Madness: The Politics of Mental Health in Colonial Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

¹¹ Seung-young Kim, *American Diplomacy and Strategy toward Korea and Northeast Asia, 1882–1950 and After* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 64-65.

¹² ‘March First Movement | Samil Independence Movement, Korea, 1919 Demonstrations | Britannica’, 2023 <<https://www.britannica.com/event/March-First-Movement>> [accessed 26 September 2023].

¹³ Cited in Cho, pp. 522-23.

¹⁴ Hyo Han, ‘朝鮮的浪漫主義論’ [‘Romanticism in Korea’], *New Literature* 『신세대』, 8 (1946), cited in Cho, pp. 524-25. The original text is not available.

¹⁵ Boris Konstantinovich Zaytsev, ‘“Silent Dawn” by Zaytsev, Translated by Pumdal [고요한새벽빛 사이쓰에 푸 작, 품달譯], *New Youth* [밝혀진/新青年], 6, trans. by Young-hee Park (Gyeongseong (Seoul): Adanmungo, 1921), p. 29. <<http://archive.adanmungo.org/ebook/1463453467.1935/1590963216.0708/mobile/index.html#p=33>> [accessed 25 September 2023].

¹⁶ The term ‘aestheticism’ (唯美主義) here, while written in Hanja (한자)–Chinese characters used in the Korean script–actually originates from Japan, not China. These characters, 唯美主義, sometimes also written as 耽美主義 (pronounced as ‘tanbism’ in Japanese), are Kanji (Chinese characters used in the Japanese script), meaning ‘addicted-to-beauty’-ism. This Japanese term is expressed using Chinese characters, reflecting the significant influence of Chinese culture on both Korea and Japan during East Asia’s pre-modern era. However, in the 1890s, Japan, having embraced aestheticism and the works of Oscar Wilde, emerged as a cultural epicentre, attracting Chinese and Korean students, including members of the Bakjo group, to study in Tokyo. This facilitated the spread of ‘aestheticism’ and its cultural movement to China and Korea.

¹⁷ White Tide Coterie, ‘六號雜記’ [‘Miscellany No. 6’], *Baekjo* 白潮_第壹號, 1, 5 February 1922, p.142, in *Hyundam Mungo Collection* <<http://www.adanmungo.org>> [accessed 5 December 2022].

¹⁸ Dong-ha Lee, ‘동인지 <백조>의 문학사적 성격’ [‘The Literary Historical Character of the Coterie Magazine “Baekcho”’], *한국문화* [*Korean Culture*], 4 (1983), 107-18 (p. 116).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Despite Joseon Korea renaming itself as the Korean Empire in 1897 to assert independence from the Qing Empire’s tributary system, its sovereignty remained deeply compromised. Emperor Gojong sought asylum in the Russian embassy (1896–1897) and later faced intense Japanese surveillance and had to abdicate. This external pressure eventually forced his abdication, underscoring the complex interplay of regional power dynamics and national sovereignty in early 20th-century East Asia.

²¹ There have been speculations on whether Park also has a command of the Russian language. He is credited with the translation and publication of an obscure decadent short story, ‘Тихие зори’ [‘Quiet Dawn’], by Russian author Boris Konstantinovich Zaytsev (1881-1972). This work appeared in the literary magazine 밝혀진/新青年 [*New Youth*] in its July 1921 issue (vol. 6, pp. 29-41). However, upon examining the original Korean text, I noted an

intriguing detail: the English word ‘curtain’ was used in brackets to explain the Korean term ‘커튼’, instead of the Russian word, ‘портрер’. This suggests that Park’s translation might not have been sourced directly from the Russian original but rather from an English version or a Japanese version. (Zaytsev, p. 29.) Further comparative translation study made by Yonghui Ahn claims that it is highly likely that Park translated this work from the Japanese version by Shomu Nobori. See Yonghui Ahn, ‘Park, Young-Hee and Nobori, Shomu’, *The Society for Korean Language & Literary Research*, 46.4 (2018), 257-83 (pp. 273-75).

²² Kimie Imura Lawlor, ‘Salome in East and West’, *Oscar Wilde Study*, 4 (2001), 60. Paper presented at *Iconographic: Changes of Images in East and West*, 2001 Japan-Britain Cultural Festival.

²³ Cho, p. 524.

²⁴ The Korean writing system historically combined Hangul and Hanja. Hangul (한글) is the native Korean alphabet, introduced in 1443 by King Sejong the Great. It is a unique phonetic system where each letter represents a sound. Hanja, on the other hand, are Chinese characters that were incorporated into Korean writing roughly between the 1st and 7th centuries AD. Hanja were used in Korea for centuries, especially in formal, scholarly, and official documents. Following the Korean War (1950-1953), the South Korean government began actively promoting Hangul for education and official documentation in the latter half of the 20th century. This initiative, especially pronounced starting in the 1960s, significantly reduced the use of Hanja.

²⁵ Yeeyon Im, ‘Oscar Wilde’s Salomé: Disorienting Orientalism’, *Comparative Drama*, 45.4 (2011), 361-80 (p. 361).

²⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 206. Italics in original.

²⁷ Ji Eun Lee, ‘Victorian Humanity in Colonial Korea, Where Asians Did Not See Themselves as the Other’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 51.1 (2023), 101-13.

²⁸ bell hooks, ‘Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance’, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992; New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 37-61.

²⁹ Lawlor, p. 60.

³⁰ Jing Jiang, ‘Chinese Salomés on the Modern Stage’, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 23.2 (2011), 175-209.

Xiuyun Hong, ‘邪恶之花——试论莎乐美与潘金莲’ [‘Flower of Evil: On Salome and Pan Jinlian’, *江西教育学院学报(社会科学)* [Journal of Jiangxi Institute of Education (Social Science)], 2 (2006) 103-05.

³¹ See Xiaoyi Zhou, ‘Oscar Wilde’s Orientalism and Late Nineteenth-Century European Consumer Culture’, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 28.4 (1997), 49-71. Yeeyon Im, pp. 361-80; Kristin Mahoney, ‘Taking Wilde to Sri Lanka and Beardsley to Harlem: Decadent Practice, Race, and Orientalism’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 49.4 (2021), 583-606. Qi Chen, ‘Mirror of Self-Consciousness: The “Chinaman” in Oscar Wilde’s Identity Politics’, *Irish Studies Review*, 19.2 (2011), 171-84. Colin Cavendish-Jones, ‘Oscar Wilde’s Radically Revised View of China’, *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 54.4 (2014), 923-41. Eleonora Sasso, *Late Victorian Orientalism: Representations of the East in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Art and Culture from the Pre-Raphaelites to John La Farge* (London: Anthem Press, 2020).

³² Yeeyon Im, p. 362.

³³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³⁵ Xiaoli Liu, ‘解殖性内在于殖民地文学’ [‘Lyo-colonization is Inherent in Colonial Literature’], *探索与争鸣* [Exploration and Free Views], 1.1 (2017), 111-16 (p. 111).

³⁶ The term ‘chinilpa’ can be literally translated as ‘pro-Japanese faction’ from Korean. Although the word itself is neutral, it carries a deeply derogatory connotation, referencing those who collaborated with Japan during its colonial rule over Korea. Similarly, in Chinese, the term ‘Japanese’ is also used pejoratively. In both cases, these terms are charged with negative meanings tied to the painful history of Japanese aggression in these countries.