

Book Reviews

From Domestic Women to Sensitive Young Men: Translating the Individual in Early Colonial Korea. By Yoon Sun Yang. Harvard East Asian Monographs 405. Harvard University Asia Center: Cambridge, MA and London, 2017. 211 pp. (ISBN 9780674976979)

From Domestic Women to Sensitive Young Men: Translating the Individual in Early Colonial Korea is a path-breaking monograph in English scholarship on *sinsosöl* (“new novel”), an early form of modern fiction that predated *Heartless* (1917), written by Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950) and widely recognized as Korea’s first modern novel. In contemporary Korean literary scholarship, *sinsosöl* is defined—not completely correctly, as this book shows—as a short-lived genre with transitional characteristics of form and content, which then gave way to a more fully “modernized” form of fiction heralded by a new generation of writers that included Yi Kwangsu. This is a notoriously difficult genre and period to work on due to the layered complexities involved. *Sinsosöl* was an evolving genre advanced by a diverse group of semi-professional and professional writers with different ambitions ranging from edification to sheer entertainment. It was also an exploratory genre that subsumed certain traditional storytelling strategies, included hybridized foreign works (some of them were translations), and encouraged experiments in style, form, topic and characters, often through a new serialized format. *Sinsosöl*’s heyday coincided with an especially turbulent time, stretching from the early twentieth century into the Japanese colonial period. Yoon Sun Yang’s book successfully bridges a gap between premodern and modern literary scholarship by meticulously observing how dynamics of “traditional” and “new” played out in her chosen works, by offering a revisionary perspective on the genre through the use of “translation” and “individuality” as lenses, and by placing the genre in the global context of domestic and family fiction in the European tradition. The book also properly situates the genre amidst non-*sinsosöl* work that coexisted in the same cultural milieu, an approach that helps reveal complexities surrounding the genre rather than isolating it and limiting the scope of discussion. As a result, this book is not just a study of *sinsosöl* as a genre, but also establishes it as a locus for observing how modern Korean literature and modernity were conceived, challenged, and established.

Scholars of Korean literature have long considered the concept of individuality (*kaein-sŏng*) a hallmark of modern literature. The usual type specimen of the concept is the male protagonist Yi Hyŏngsik—one of the titular “sensitive young men”—in Yi Kwangsu’s

novel *Heartless*. In Yang's study, this example bookends the monograph and underwrites its central chapters as implied comparison. While *From Domestic Women* does not refute *Heartless*' status as the first modern work, it complicates this designation by arguing that female characters in selected *sinsosŏl* works could and should be discussed in relation to the notion of modern selfhood. In doing so, *From Domestic Women* weaves together different strands of discussion on gender, selfhood, and modernity through chosen works of *sinsosŏl* that she identifies as "domestic novels"—works that concern family life and romantic relationships. In Coda, the last section of the book, Yang also offers her own reading of Hyŏngsik. The individuality of Hyŏngsik, she argues, does not reside in his success at turning himself into a (Western) modern person, into an educated elite. Instead, she explains that Korean modern individuality that is inseparable from the (Korean ethnic) collective emergence from the reality of colonial and modernizing Korea, and it is in that struggle through which Hyŏngsik arrives at a modern selfhood. Exemplars of this view of modern selfhood include male protagonists in *Heartless* and other "modern" fictional works discussed in Chapter 5, but also female characters in *sinsosŏl*, in both their traditional aspects (married woman, concubine, daughter in a patriarchal system) and subversive ones (femme fatale, vengeful ghost, educated New Women). As Yang puts it, "(I)he question of individuality is inevitably one of gender; both questions are intertwined at the core of literary modernity in Korea" (179). The gender of modernity in Korea, in other words, is not male by definition.

One of the book's primary merits is its detailed introduction to each literary work: plot summaries and historical and cultural information related to each work are given in detail using both contemporaneous journalistic material, and literary and historical context drawn from preceding works. The book opens with a substantial introduction in which author positions her approach through Lydia Liu's concept of translation, and sets up an examination of a body of works Yang defines as "domestic fiction" in light of scholarship on European traditions, including that of Nancy Armstrong. Five chapters follow, the first four of which explore specific works of *sinsosŏl*: *Tears of Blood* (1907) by Yi Injik (1862-1916); *Mount Ch'iak* (1908, 1910) also by Yi Injik; *Peony Hill* (1913), a sequel to *Tears of Blood* by Yi Injik; *A Coldhearted Flower* (1910) by Yi Haejo (1869-1927); and *Flowers in the Mirror* (1923) by Kim Kyoje (dates unknown). The underlying argument about the gender of modernity that Chapters 1 to 4 substantiate depends on Yang's focus on woman characters. This focus contrasts with Chapter 5, which discusses non-*sinsosŏl* works including "Persecution" (1917) by Hyŏn Sang'yun (1893-1950), "Sad Contradictions" by Yang Kŏnsik (1889-1944) and "Confession under the Moon" (1907) by Chang Ŭngjin (1880-1950). The implied gender contrast between earlier chapters, which focus on woman characters, and works in chapter 5, which do not, may come across as arbitrary and could use further explanation. *Heartless*, for example, is as much a story of Yŏngch'ae, a female protagonist, as it is a story of Hyŏngsik. But the book's basic challenge to assumptions about the gender of Korea's literary modernity is astute, timely, and grounded in detailed explorations of works that, with the lone exception of *Tears of Blood*, English-only readers will encounter here for the first time. They do so through rich introductions of each work that place them within literary and socio-historical context, and are further guided by

discussion surrounding each chapter's specific thematic focus. Consequently, this book will appeal to readers from diverse fields (Korean and East Asian literature and history, Women and Gender Studies, Comparative literature) at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

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Homing: An Affective Topography of Ethnic Korean Return Migration. By Ji-Yeon O. Jo. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018. 248 pp. (ISBN: 9780824867751)

Ji-Yeon O. Jo's new book *Homing* is a timely account of ethnic return migration among descendants of the Korean diaspora. The book captures an important turning point in changing notions of Korean ethnic identity and nationhood following the decline of the Cold War and the ensuing liberalization of commerce and migration. Whereas massive numbers of Koreans left the Korean peninsula in the years leading up to and following Japanese annexation in 1910, the tides of migration have abruptly shifted from emigration to transnational migration since the 1990s, as members of the Korean diaspora—a group of people who Jo refers to as *legacy migrants*—have started to “return” to South Korea. For many of these legacy migrants, the country of their ancestral heritage represents a land of promise and opportunity. On the one hand, legacy migrants find themselves drawn to the illusive promise of finally finding a sense of psychological rest and fulfilment in a country where they are part of the ethnic majority after decades of institutional and social marginalization as minorities. But as Jo points out, their decision to “return” is never purely emotional. They are also pulled by tempting economic opportunities that abound for multi-lingual, culturally hybrid people in South Korea's rapidly globalizing labor market.

It is the disentanglement of this duality—or in her words, an analysis of “the interactions between affective conditions and global contexts [that] necessitate a reimagining of the nationalist definition of Korean peoplehood”—that serves as the core objective of her book (15). Jo's analysis is primarily based on 63 interviews with Korean return migrants who live and work in South Korea, including 33 Korean Chinese minorities, 10 Korean Americans, and 20 Koreans from the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS Koreans).

The book is divided into 2 parts. The first part sets the stage by providing an overview of the historical contexts that characterize the initial departure, the nature of host societal settlement, and the various barriers and opportunities in ethnic identity and linguistic retention overseas for each of the groups. The theoretical thrust of the book can be found in the second part, entitled, *The Odyssey of Homing*, which compares the three groups of Korean return migrants across a set of key themes, including in analysis of the ways in which they have constructed communities amongst themselves within South Korea (chapter 4); their