

Confessors in Im Sun-dŭk's Short Stories: Interiority of Korean Women under the End of Japanese Colonial Rule

Authors : Min Koo Choi

Abstract : The paper will examine Im Sun-dŭk's two short stories, 'Iryoil' (Sunday, 1937) and 'Nazuoya' (A Godmother, 1942), which illuminate the subjects of Korean intellectuals going through the later period of a harsh and oppressive Japanese colonial rule. When Japan went to war against China in 1937, Korea, a colony of Japan since 1910, became an outpost for Japanese expansionism into China, and the Korean people were mobilized into the war effort. Nationalist movements and radical ideas that posed a threat and opposition to Japanese colonial rule in Korea and its colonial expansionism were ruthlessly suppressed, and Koreans were forcibly assimilated into becoming Japanese citizens without political rights. Racial discrimination between Koreans and Japanese was prevalent. Im Sun-dŭk, who participated in the Socialist movement in the 1930s, had his debut as a literary writer and a critic in the late 1930s, when Korean literary society was reincorporated in order to collaborate with the Japanese war effort through writing and public speech. Sun-duk's writing illuminates the unique internal landscape of a female subject who strives to live on while preserving her commitment and dignity under the circumstances that force Korean intellectuals either to collaborate with or acquiesce to Japanese colonial rule. 'Iryoil' (Sunday, 1937) foregrounds an educated intellectual, Hyeyŏng, who supplies her fiancé in prison for political involvement in resistance against Japan. On Sundays, she turns down her friends' suggestion for enjoying holidays outside, due to her indebtedness to her fiancé. Her fiancé's imprisonment indicates the social conscience that still remains, and she seeks to share the commitment and suffering with her fiancé. The short story 'Nazuoya' (A Godmother, 1942), written in Japanese due to the suppression of Korean language publications at the time, also problematizes Japanese policy that forces Koreans to change their names into Japanese. Through the narrator I, who struggles to find a meaningful name for her cousin brother's baby, she highlights how meaningful one's name is for one's life and identity. What makes her two stories unique is that her writing draws other people's confessions into its own narrative through fragmentary forms, such as part of letter or reflection. The voices of others are intersected with the main character in 'Iryoil' (Sunday, 1937) and a narrator in 'Nazuoya' (A Godmother, 1942). In many ways, the narrator and main character provide the confessional voices who display the characters' gloomy interiorities. Even though these confessional voices do not share the commitment and values, both the main character and I in the stories reveal a more open set of viewpoints to them. In this way, they seek to form bonds and encouragement and acquire a more resilient sensibility that embraces those who strive to survive and endure in the gloomy days of the later period of Japanese colonial rule.

Keywords : Im Sun-dŭk, Japanese colonial rule, Korean literature, socialist movement

Conference Title : ICKS 2016 : International Conference on Korean Studies

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : July 04-05, 2016