

The Power to Know

Kim Saryang and the World as Addressee

Kim Saryang's "Haha e no tegami" ("Letter to Mother"), published in the April 1940 issue of *Bungei shuto*, is an enigmatic piece of writing.¹ It takes the public form of an open letter—at least, public enough to be published in a coterie journal. Yet it does not address a public figure. Rather, Kim writes to his unnamed mother, repeating the refrain "Dear Mother" (Ai suru hahaue-sama) as he recounts in an intimate, confessional mode his experience of being nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. The nomination of Kim's short story "Hikari no naka ni" ("Into the Light," 1939) for the prize—and its publication in *Bungei shunjū* as a result—marks Kim's entry into the elite literary circles of the Japanese (language) bundan, and, arguably, the inauguration of Zainichi Korean literature as a subgenre thereof. Despite the piece's epistolary form, then, it is clearly written for the bundan itself as much as it is for Kim's mother.

I will return to the question of the audience for Kim's letter in a moment. But beyond the undecidability of its addressee, the content of the piece is also less than straightforward. In it, Kim recounts the by turns awkward and exhilarating experience of receiving word of his nomination at his mother's home in Pyongyang, traveling from there to Tokyo, and ultimately attending the awards banquet as runner-up for the prize. Among the most frequently cited passages of the letter is Kim's initial reaction to the advertising copy for the publication of "Hikari no naka ni," a blurb in which author Satō Haruo calls the story "a work that thoroughly weaves the tragic fate of a nation [*minzoku*] into an I-novel."² In response, Kim says in the letter, "I asked myself, 'Is this right? Is this right?'"³ He goes on:

Dear Mother, I wondered. Had I really written the kind of thing Satō Haruo said I had? I felt a sort of tightness in my chest, as if I had been thrust into an enormous commotion,

something much bigger than writing a simple story. At least in that moment, I made too much of it. Even though it's my own story, I've always felt that there's something not quite right (*sukkiri dekinai*) about 'Hikari no naka ni.' It's a lie, you're still writing lies, I said to myself, even as I was writing it. Since then I've received many comments from friends and mentors about this issue. But all I could do was remain silent.⁴

Critics have wrestled with the meaning of this "lie" that Kim alludes to here, offering any number of interpretations of the something "not quite right" that Kim mentions but refuses to identify.⁵ One wonders whether contemporary readers of *Bungei shuto*, or the "friends and mentors" to whom Kim refers, or indeed, Kim's mother herself, knew what Kim meant here when he spoke of this "lie," of his feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction. The presentation of the letter as intimate communication between close relations suggests that if the referent of the "lie" is not spelled out, it may have been clear with the proper extratextual context. If the reader of the letter fails to grasp the meaning of this "lie," is it due to Kim's circumspection, or simply because this was not the reader he intended to address?

This returns us to the question of which reader(s) Kim *was* intending to address. If the staging of Kim's letter to his mother in a magazine already invites skepticism of its authenticity as personal correspondence, then the final lines of the letter essentially remove all doubt. "I believe my younger sister should be home from Keijō [Seoul] on spring break. Please have her translate this letter from *naichigo* [Japanese] and read it to you," the letter ends.⁶ This final reminder that Kim's writing here is ostensibly addressed to his mother throws into relief the fact that he is writing in Japanese, which his mother cannot understand.

The first question this raises, of course, is why Kim would write to his mother in a language she could not read. One possibility, as I have already suggested, is that the letter was never actually intended for her eyes, but rather for those of the Japanese (*naichi*) *bundan*. But if the intended audience is the readers of the magazine, then why present a piece of writing that is otherwise indistinguishable from an essay as a letter, repeatedly inserting "Dear Mother" as a conspicuous reminder that the addressee is not, in fact, the addressee? And how is this question of addressee mediated by the practice of translation, to which Kim alludes at the end of his "letter," and in which he was deeply invested throughout his career?

This chapter takes up these questions in order to shed light on the ways that audience is situated and implicated within the politics of representation. These questions take on particular urgency in the context of a body of work such as that of Kim Saryang, whose texts have been read through lenses of minor literature, post-colonial and subaltern studies, the Japanophone, and of course, Zainichi literature. What I want to argue here is that each of these potential frameworks through which Kim's texts are read are fairly explicitly concerned with questions of who, how, and in what language Kim is *speaking for*, without necessarily interrogating the implicit audience *to whom* he is speaking. Through an exploration of Kim's critical and

fictional texts, I aim to unpack the multifarious impacts of the addressee on the act of speech—particularly its textual forms or representations in text.

Specifically, I read Kim's "Kusa fukashi" ("Deep in the Grass," 1940) alongside the discourse on World Literature—both in the historical moment in which Kim was writing, and in its contemporary iteration. In both cases, the viability of World Literature hinges on the politics of translatability, placing a burden on the marginal writer to produce legible representation for consumption by the always implicit audience demanding such "windows on the world": the Euro-American hegemonic center.⁷ Kim's position as a colonial subject of a non-Western empire complicates his relationship to this implicit audience, which required a second layer of translation to reach. Even if Kim is optimistic with regard to the possibility of translation across these multiple layers of power and hegemony, his fiction betrays a lack of confidence in even intralingual communication. In "Kusa fukashi," Kim attempts to translate the lived experience of the least worldly Korean subjects—those furthest removed from the "civilizing" influence of the imperial center—for a metropolitan audience. The failure of this attempt is suggestive of the possibilities engendered by miscommunication and illegibility, as well as an alternative ethics of translation and representation.

ZAINICHI LITERATURE AS READERSHIP: KIM SARYANG'S CANONIZATION

Kim Saryang's biography is a story of traversal, not only of the metropolitan and peripheral spaces of the Japanese empire, but also across languages and literary audiences.⁸ He was born Kim Sich'ang in 1914 to a wealthy family in Pyongyang. Though little is known about his parents, the scant evidence available suggests his father held traditional Confucian views—Kim writes that his father objected to sending his older sister to school—whereas his mother was a Western-educated Christian.⁹ He first came to Japan in 1931, attending Saga High School near Fukuoka, then Tokyo Imperial University (now University of Tokyo), where he studied German literature and wrote a thesis on Heinrich Heine. It was during his university days that Kim began to publish stories and essays.

The year he graduated, 1939, was a breakthrough in his career. He was involved in editing a special issue on Korea for the magazine *Modan Nippon*, to which he contributed a translation of Yi Kwangsu's latest short story, "Mumyŏng." At the same time, he was publishing criticism in both Korean and Japanese. But perhaps most impactful was his introduction by Chang Hyŏkju, a Korean writer who had already achieved success in the Japanese bundan, to Yasutaka Tokuzō, the publisher of *Bungei shuto*. Yasutaka became a fast friend and a champion of Kim's work, and the publication of "Hikari no naka ni" in *Bungei shuto* led to its nomination for the Akutagawa Prize.

Kim continued to travel back and forth between the Korean peninsula and metropolitan Japan, writing for both Japanese and Korean publications, until the

Pacific War broke out in late 1941. The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kim was arrested and detained for six weeks upon his refusal to serve as propagandist for the war effort. He was released in January 1942 and returned immediately to Korea. There he continued to publish in the few Korean-language venues that remained in the early 1940s, in addition to the Japanese-language journal *Kokumin bungaku*. Japan's August 1945 defeat found Kim in Korea's government-in-exile in China, and he spent the postwar years writing mostly plays and reportage, eventually as an embedded writer with the North Korean army following the outbreak of the Korean War. He fell ill in 1950 shortly after the Incheon Landing, and is presumed to have died sometime that year.

Despite Kim's colonial-period success in both Japanese- and Korean-language publishing, he quickly fell into obscurity in both postwar Japan and the Koreas. The one space in which Kim's work was read and celebrated in the aftermath of the empire was within the nascent Zainichi literary establishment. At least according to standard narratives, Zainichi literature as a genre was emerging, if not yet fully formed, in the late 1940s and 1950s, primarily in the pages of *Minshu Chōsen* under the editorship of Kim Talsu, the so-called "father" of Zainichi literature. Kim Talsu and Kim Saryang were personally acquainted in the early 1940s when the two moved in the same publishing circles, and Kim Talsu himself translated Kim Saryang's postwar writings from North Korea that appeared in *Minshu Chōsen* in the 1950s. Kim Talsu also headed the editorial board that anthologized Kim Saryang's complete works, which were released in 1973 and included many Korean-language works presented for the first time in Japanese translation.¹⁰ It would not be an exaggeration to say the editorial team that published Kim Saryang's complete works comprised the very founders of Zainichi Korean literature and criticism: Kim Talsu, Kim Sōkpōm, Ri Kaisei, An Usik, and Im Chōnhye.

Within the context of Kim Saryang's broad disavowal in Korean and Japanese national literary spheres, it is worth pausing over the question of why he became so canonical to the emerging genre of Zainichi literature, precisely at the moment of its emergence *as* a genre. Shortly before Kim's complete works were published, one of the editors of the collection, Ri Kaisei, was awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 1972. Another of the editors, Kim Sōkpōm, had been nominated for the prize in 1970. Kim Talsu had been a favorite of the Japanese bundan since the late 1940s, but the attention of the Akutagawa Prize committee in this moment signaled the indisputable entry of Zainichi writers into the Japanese-language literary mainstream. Ironically, in a way that mirrors the mutual anxieties of colonial Korean writers like Kim Saryang and the metropolitan Japanese bundan of his time, this moment of acceptance brought about a greater need to codify and distinguish Zainichi from Japanese literature.¹¹

Possibly due to these anxieties, the incipient Zainichi bundan sought for itself a grounding in colonial (literary) history, a goal fulfilled by identifying Kim Saryang as a forebear—better yet, a patriarch. Why Kim Saryang? One could point to his

personal and professional connections to the editors themselves, or to his literary and critical success in the Japanese-language milieu, or to his stated mission of representing Korea to a Japanese audience. Of course, all the above could also be said of Chang Hyŏkju, Kim Saryang's contemporary. And yet it was not until much later that Chang received any serious attention.¹² As Kim Sŏkpŏm spells out quite explicitly, it was Chang's collaboration with the imperial regime and eventual decision to "cease to be Korean" that disqualified him from canonization.¹³ In other words, Zainichi literature as coherent genre was constructed via disavowal.¹⁴

Precisely because of these disavowals—including disavowals of collaboration, Korean-language writing, and intersectional difference that echo the exclusionary logics that marginalized these writers from national literatures in the first place—Zainichi literature in the early 1970s was as tightly-knit and coherent as the genre would ever be.¹⁵ It was produced by an elite, male-dominated cohort of writers ideologically committed to a narrow and exclusive Zainichi canon, several of whom coincided with the editors of Kim Saryang's complete works. I invoke this history not to argue that Kim Saryang or anyone else rightly belongs within the boundaries of Zainichi literature. Rather, I wish to reiterate that those boundaries themselves, insofar as they have any semblance of coherence, are the result of the active suppression of internal heterogeneity. Kim Saryang's position vis-à-vis Zainichi literature is emblematic of the political nature of literary frameworks and their formation.

Yet Kim's case also points to the actual impact such frameworks have, regardless of their instability and incoherence. Kim Saryang's works found a material audience of Japanese-language readers via their reprinting (and in some cases translation) under the auspices of the Zainichi bundan. I would also like to suggest that insofar as these works were presented in connection with Zainichi literature, they also found an *imagined* audience: the audience for Zainichi literature, an audience that overlaps with, but could not possibly be equivalent to, the audience Kim imagined for himself. Moreover, both the material circulation and the conceptual grouping of Kim Saryang with Zainichi literature achieved through the publication of his collected works are direct causes of my own encounter with these texts.¹⁶ In the end, this is what literary frameworks do. They cause encounters between texts and their imagined and eventually material audiences.

THE WORLD AS READING SUBJECT

Kim Saryang, perhaps more than his Zainichi interlocutors in the 1970s, understood his own work and its audience in this sense. He wrote self-consciously on how the possibility or impossibility of reaching certain audiences shaped the direction of his own career. For Kim, the key factor in thinking through the question of audience was language. As outlined above, Kim was a bilingual writer who navigated the challenges of writing for multiple readerships distinguished by language. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, he published with near equal frequency

in Korean and Japanese. Kim's commitment to bilingualism is particularly notable given that he debuted at a moment of palpable "crisis" in the Korean language.¹⁷

As Christina Yi details, by the late 1930s, a generation of educated Koreans had come through the colonial school system, many pursuing higher education in metropolitan Japan.¹⁸ Particularly after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the Japanese colonial government in Korea ramped up its efforts toward imperialization (*kōminka*), which Yi argues convincingly were centered around language policy. This meant that the late 1930s and early 1940s saw the "suppression of Korean, through educational measures restricting and then finally abolishing the teaching of the Korean language in public schools in 1938 and 1941, respectively, and the forced shutdown of a number of Korean-language presses starting in the late 1930s."¹⁹ This curtailing of the Korean-language media landscape occurred on top of heightened censorship during wartime that affected both Korean- and Japanese-language publications.

Given these limitations on what could be published at the time, Kim criticized imperial suppression of the Korean language surprisingly directly in his 1939 essay "Chōsen bungaku fūgetsuroku" ("Record of Second-Hand Knowledge of Korean Literature"). This was the first of several essays Kim would write that situate him specifically as an intermediary, there to transmit—perhaps even translate—knowledge of the Korean *mundan* to the Japanese *bundan*. Kim begins the essay by noting the widespread sense of crisis in Korean-language literary circles: "Based on the language problem, it is said that now is a moment of crisis for Korean literature."²⁰ The most direct cause of the "language problem," according to Kim, is in fact a crisis of readership. He states that the Korean public is even now largely illiterate (citing a figure of 80 percent illiteracy) and points out the shortsightedness of Japanese education policy that attempts to jump straight from the current situation to literacy in Japanese rather than first educating the population in more approachable *hangŭl*. If it is necessary to prohibit the Korean language from schools, Kim wonders, "shouldn't we just move all schools to the Tokyo area?"²¹

Kim's sarcasm is hard to miss here, as is his denunciation of colonial policy. However, he couches his critique in terms that demonstrate his internalization of many of the tenets of *kōminka* ideology. First, his ironic proposal to send all schoolchildren to Tokyo, presumably because the standard Tokyo dialect (*hyōjungo*) is the only acceptable form of the national language, would seem to place Korea in the same category as other regions of imperial Japan, both *naichi* and *gaichi*, with non-standard dialects. Korea as one "region" (*chihō*) of the Japanese imperial nation-state (rather than having its own national identity) and Korean literature as "regional literature" (*chihō bungaku*) were both crucial for the articulation of Korean subjects' simultaneous difference from and oneness with the metropole under *kōminka*.²² Second, in focusing on the Korean reading public—more specifically, the lack thereof—as the central cause of the crisis in Korean literature, Kim perhaps inadvertently lends credence to the notion of Korean deficiency. Ironically,

Kim points to widespread Korean illiteracy as the key to maintaining a particular language and culture through “centuries under the yoke of Chinese learning.”²³ As he explains, because only the most elite fraction of the population could read and write, the rest of Korea was never exposed to this hegemonic foreign influence. Similarly, Kim remarks on the failure of Narodnik-style literacy programs in Korea in class-based terms: “[These movements] had their heyday, but how many illiterates were they really able to enlighten? The people [*minshū*] always desire that which can fill their most immediate needs.”²⁴ Much as the Japanese empire placed the burden to assimilate on Korean and other colonial subjects, Kim seems to place the burden to “desire” literacy—and by extension, Korean literature—on the uneducated masses.

Both the problem of the internal heterogeneity of the purportedly unified Japanese empire and the yawning gulf of class inequality in colonial Korea demand intersectional analysis of Kim Saryang’s career. Fundamentally, these intersecting power differentials have less to do with who is represented, and more to do with who can listen, read, or interpret that which is represented—in other words, who has the power to *know*. Indeed, the issue of knowledge privilege is woven through Kim’s critical and fictional work. Knowledge privilege also provides a lens through which to read the contemporary discourse on World Literature as well as the ways that Kim himself participated in a much earlier discourse on the same. Kim’s own academic work on German literature from the era of Goethe and the coining of *Weltliteratur*, combined with his status as the darling of English-language critics (myself included) who comprise the implicit audience for World Literature, makes him a valuable case study on the development of the concept across historical contexts and readerships.

Within this context, I would like to draw attention to the shakiness of the ground on which Kim is standing as a purported communicator of knowledge about the Korean peninsula to the Japanese audience. His own elite position prevents him from knowing or even communicating with the Korean people, a limitation to be explored further in the context of “Kusa fukashi.” I raise this issue here because questions of knowledge transmission and communication are, to my mind, at the center of debates on World Literature today, which are often framed in terms of the theoretical and practical problems of translation (yet another discourse in which Kim Saryang took an active part).

Perhaps the most direct and forceful takedown to date of the proposals of World Literature is Emily Apter’s *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, framed explicitly as an argument on translation. Apter articulates a skepticism toward the assumptions of commensurability that underlie World Literature and comparative studies more broadly. In her words, the reemergence of World Literature in conjunction with a revitalized translation studies in the early twenty-first century “ignored problems more internal to their theoretical premises. With translation assumed to be a good thing *en soi*—under the assumption that it is a

critical praxis enabling communication across languages, cultures, time periods and disciplines—the right to the Untranslatable was blindsided.”²⁵ Following Apter, I would like to explore the possibility of translation as something more ethically complex than an inherent “good,” precisely by calling into question the inherent goodness of “communication across languages, cultures, time periods and disciplines.”

However, what Apter shares with the proponents of World Literature is a positive evaluation of the field’s “deprovincialization of the canon and the way in which, at its best, it draws on translation to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes hailing from inaccessible linguistic folds.”²⁶ Her reference to a deprovincialized canon here refers to interventions toward a less Eurocentric curriculum in comparative literary studies, and yet the cited ability of translation to bring the previously “inaccessible” into greater visibility raises the question, inaccessible to whom? The implicit audience for World Literature—whether in translation or marked as untranslatable—is the same Western reader. Apter refers to untranslatability as a “right” and describes it in religious terms throughout the book, yet seems to view representation in the canon as its own ethical imperative, a contradiction that proves difficult to resolve. To frame the question of who owns a discourse, literary or otherwise, as a problem of whose speech or writing is represented within is to elide the material and imaginary pathways by which literatures are commodified and consumed—in other words, who has the power to *read*.

Kim Saryang and the postwar founders of Zainichi Korean literature responsible for canonizing him were well aware of the transnational politics of readership. Kim frequently pointed to the necessity of representing Korea to the *world*. In fact, this imperative constituted his contemporary and retrospective justification for writing in Japanese despite the Korean-language “crisis” that informed his career. In the same essay in which he laments the lack of Korean-language readers and publication venues, Kim offers such a justification:

Should we write in Japanese? Of course, it is fine for those who are able to write in Japanese to write in Japanese. However, in the case of making all kinds of sacrifices to go out of one’s way to write in Japanese, I think one must have a powerful affirmative motivation for doing so. Such as the motivation to convey the culture, everyday life, and humanity of Koreans to the larger Japanese readership. Or to say it in a more humble sense, the motivation to take on the role of an intermediary in order to spread Korean culture *to the East or the world*.²⁷

Here I would like to highlight once again Kim’s self-perception as an intermediary between the Korean people and “the world,” a position enabled by his fluency in the Japanese language. This statement comes within the broader argument Kim is making that Korean writers should in fact write for a Korean audience, situating himself and his Japanese bundan predecessor Chang Hyökyu as exceptional cases. Chang himself described his role as a Japanese-language writer in very similar terms:

There are few nations (*minzoku*) in the world as tragic as Korea. I desperately want to convey this reality to the world. For that purpose the scope of the Korean language is too limited. On this point, I thought I needed to enter the Japanese *bundan* somehow, since it would also provide more opportunities for translation into foreign languages.²⁸

Chang, much more explicitly than Kim, sees his intercessory role as one of expanding the audience—particularly the foreign-language audience via translation—for representations of the Korean *minzoku*.²⁹

Yet even as Kim Saryang advocated for continued writing in Korean in order to serve the developing Korean-language reading public (outside exceptional cases like Chang and himself), he also pushed for systematic translation of classical and contemporary Korean literature into Japanese as a means of transmitting it to the world at large. Kim's championing of translation as a means to broader representation comes back to the ethical issues at play in contemporary debates on World Literature and translatability, but it also makes Kim's own interest in German literature noteworthy. In addition to writing a graduate thesis on Heinrich Heine and critiquing the ethnocentrism of Nazi literature in essays published in Korean, Kim frequently invoked Goethe in his essays on the state of literature in the Korean language.

Kim studied German literature in Japan at a time when the latter already considered itself culturally synchronous with, rather than "behind," Western Europe, including Germany. Fascist intellectuals in both spaces were simultaneously trying to reconcile a nationalist emphasis on "blood and soil" with the project of imperial expansion, albeit in very different ways.³⁰ But in Kim's essays on Korean literature in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Germany becomes a point of comparison as a *peripheral* literature with respect to the Francocentrism of European literature and culture around the turn of the nineteenth century.³¹ The marginal position of German-language literature with respect to "the world" during Goethe's career takes on a particular valence when invoked in comparison to colonial Korea. Kim had no choice but to understand his position with respect to *multiple* hegemonic centers. From this perspective, studying German literature for him could never be reduced to understanding a monolithic West against which a monolithic East was defined, but rather as a set of interconnected center-periphery relations.³²

As Chang Munsök points out, when Kim analogized contemporary Korean literature to German literature in the time of Goethe, it was not a matter of the European representing the "universal" and the Korean the "particular," but rather about the potential for radical creative leaps forward in literary language from the precise moment that language is under greatest threat.³³ This is how Kim was able to summon optimism about Korean literature while acknowledging the crisis that threatened its very future. Perhaps Kim drew this sense of optimism in part from Goethe's notion that "national literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its

approach.”³⁴ World Literature promised the possibility of literature without nation to writers who had lost their nation. Much of what Kim argues in his critical essays boils down to the notion that a literature’s worldliness is *found in translation*.

By the same token, the problems with contemporary World Literature and Goetheian *Weltliteratur* apply to Kim’s optimistic outlook on translation, foreign influence, and worldliness. All three rest on an elite, patriarchal, Eurocentric definition of the world—not the world as that to which World Literature might provide a “window,” but rather the world as the reading subject looking *through* this proverbial window.³⁵ Indeed, Kim’s proposal for unidirectional translation, from Korean to Japanese as vehicular language and ultimately *to the world* (i.e., the West) is evidence of his conception of the worldly reading subject.³⁶ The same is true of his view of himself as intermediary, representing Korean culture and everyday life to the world—a view shared by his Zainichi literary progeny. Ethical problems arise not only at the site of the native informant’s packaging of Korea for Japanese or worldly consumption, but also at the moment we ask how the native informant obtained his information in the first place. Communication among colonized Koreans, with enormous differences in class, gender, lifestyle, education, and even language, can hardly be assumed to be smooth and transparent. Thus, what appears unilateral and unimpeded in Kim’s notion of translation as the path out of the nation and to the world, is in fact built on layers of multidirectional translation, misrepresentation, and misinterpretation.

“KUSA FUKASHI”: FAILED ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE FAILURE OF ETHNOGRAPHY

If the internal incoherence of colonial Korea is somewhat elided in Kim’s critical work, his fiction brings it to the fore. I turn now to “Kusa fukashi,” a short story penned in 1940, and loosely based on Kim’s trip the same year to the Hongchŏn region of Kangwŏn Province, an almost ethnographic mission to observe the slash-and-burn farmers who resided in the area’s mountain ranges.³⁷ Like many others in Kim’s oeuvre, the story is the product of a process of translation and adaptation across not only languages but also genres, as it incorporates elements of travelogues Kim wrote in both Korean and Japanese around the same time he published “Kusa fukashi.”³⁸ Thus, Kim’s fictional and non-fictional work on rural slash-and-burn farmers positioned him as a reporter, mediator, and sometimes literally a translator. While “Kusa fukashi” is not necessarily autobiographical, it does explore these questions of positionality and representation through the figure of the Korean intellectual speaking *to the metropole for the periphery*.

The protagonist of the story, Pak Insik, is a *naichi*-educated medical student who has come to a mountainous region in Korea as part of a Narodnik program sending educated young people to remote areas of the peninsula to offer literacy training, medical care, and other services. There he encounters his

former Korean teacher, nicknamed “Hanakami-sensei” (Mr. Noseblower) due to his constant nervous nose-blowing. His teacher is serving as an interpreter for Insik’s uncle, the local magistrate. Insik recalls his school days, when he and his fellow students demanded Hanakami-sensei’s ouster due to his obsequious behavior toward the ethnically Japanese teachers who outranked him despite his seniority. In the story’s present day, Hanakami-sensei is providing Korean-language interpretation for a speech Insik’s uncle is giving in Japanese. The speech urges the local people to comply with the Japanese imperial policy encouraging Korean subjects to wear dyed clothing rather than their traditional white. Later, Insik sees Hanakami-sensei painting symbols in ink on people’s clothing in order to mark (and simultaneously carry out) their compliance with the policy. Insik witnesses this scene after his uncle’s initial speech, then later at the local market, and even at Hanakami-sensei’s home, where the latter’s wife is enraged because he has soiled her white clothing with ink.

In the second half of the story, Insik travels from the village into the mountains, where the indigenous people still practice slash-and-burn agriculture. He has trouble finding anyone to whom to offer his services, though he does come across some abandoned huts with strange incantations posted on their walls. He also encounters two small children who fear him too much to take the gifts he offers. Finally, he arrives at an abandoned temple. After arranging to spend the night there, Insik learns that the two men there have attracted many of the local people to their religious sect, one of whose tenets is that the Korean people must continue to wear white clothing as a sign of their faith. Awakened from a fitful sleep, Insik overhears the mountain dwellers gathered at the temple chanting the strange incantations he found in the huts. He flees the temple, at which point the narrative jumps forward several years to Insik’s reflection on this experience. He wonders whether Hanakami-sensei, who disappeared shortly after the events of the story, fell victim to this religious sect—which has now been revealed to have committed hundreds of murders—while attempting to promote dyed clothing in the mountains. Here the story refers to an actual cult-like religious organization, the Paekbaekkyo (White-White sect). The leaders of the group made headlines in 1937 for the mass murder of over three hundred people, most of them in rural areas of Korea.³⁹ Thus, in many ways, “Kusa fukashi,” with its references to peninsular current events and Kim’s own ethnographic travel writing, carries out precisely the kind of mission Kim, Chang, and their postwar Zainichi successors described as motivation for their writing: raising awareness of the plight of Korea, particularly its poor and rural populations.

However, the story also questions the possibility of such seamless communication across not only the Japan-Korea divide, but also class, gender, educational, and regional lines. The opening scene of “Kusa fukashi” explores the multifaceted forms of translation that occur—or, more precisely, fail to occur—across all such boundaries. In fact, this scene poses a situation not unlike that in

“Haha e no tegami.” A message is being delivered in a language its audience cannot understand (Japanese), by a speaker who could just as easily have delivered the message in a language the audience could understand (Korean). And the whole strange configuration of speaker and listener is enabled by the presence of a translator, who can bridge the linguistic gap that is intentionally opened up, creating the possibility of communication where it was purposely foreclosed. Both “Haha e no tegami” and the opening scene of “Kusa fukashi” draw attention to the importance of the Japanese language in its mundane material form, not as vehicular language enabling a broader (imagined) audience, but in this case as a language that deliberately excludes. Japanese becomes a mechanism for demonstrating a gap in power between those who use it and those who cannot.

In the case of “Kusa fukashi,” this gap in power, created via language, is central to the overall setup of the story. In the scene in question, Insik’s uncle, the regional magistrate, has gathered the local people together to hear his speech on the merits of dyed rather than bleached clothing. Despite the complete lack of Japanese fluency among the audience, Insik’s uncle delivers his speech in *naichigo* (the language of Japan-proper—the term Kim uses to refer to the Japanese language throughout the story). The narrative wastes no time expositing the language politics in play here, particularly that Insik’s uncle believes that it is “beneath his station to use Korean.”⁴⁰ The text goes on to explain that he makes a habit of maintaining this sense of station through exactly the kind of non-communicative language use happening here:

Since coming to the village, Insik had seen his uncle drone on and on so proudly in atrocious Japanese [*naichigo*] many times, even to his young mistress who didn’t know a word of Japanese. So he was not particularly surprised at the fact that his uncle had gone out of his way to bring an interpreter along so he could give a speech in his pathetically awkward Japanese to a group of mountain dwellers, not one of whom could have understood Japanese (169).

Of particular note here is the way Insik’s uncle’s practice moves from the domestic to the public sphere. At home the dominance is specifically gendered, with the use of Japanese confirming the magistrate’s place within the hierarchy of the house, just as it will confirm his dominance in public before his subjects. In both cases, the presence of the audience is important, even if their comprehension is not. It is important that the speech come via the medium of Japanese, albeit not for the purpose of transmitting the content to the ostensibly primary audience. Instead, that primary audience hears a different, though equally important message: those with power use Japanese, and those without do not.

However, much like Kim’s “Haha e no tegami,” the opening of “Kusa fukashi” raises the possibility of secondary and tertiary audiences for the content. At one level, of course, the audience for the magistrate’s speech is the mountain dwellers gathered at the meeting hall, those physically present and literally hearing his

awkward Japanese. Moreover, due to the presence of an interpreter, it is also clear that the speech is not purely performative: it is delivered with the actual intention of influencing the behavior of the local people. And yet, because the message is delivered in a medium that makes it completely inaccessible to this intended audience, there is an implicit second audience for the speech: those who are in a position to assign and respond to the prestige afforded by facility with the Japanese language.

Whereas Kim's secondary (though in all likelihood primary) audience is the readers of *Bungei shuto*, for the magistrate in "Kusa fukashi" that role is filled in part by Insik himself. However, in this case the performance does not have its intended effect. Instead Insik, whose *naichi* education affords him an even higher position in the status hierarchy his uncle is trying to climb, finds his Japanese fluency wanting. But beyond Insik's reaction within the confines of the story, Kim seems to induce a similar reaction among his Japanese-language readers by emphasizing the imperfections in the Japanese speech.

「ええと、ちゅまり吾人は白い着物を廃止して、色を染めだ着物を^{つあぐ}着用せねばならんのである」と叔父は胸を張って泰然と後手をし御自慢の弁舌をふるっている。「朝鮮人が^{びん}貧乏になったのは白い着物を着用したがらである。^{げえ}経済的にも^{がん}時間的にも不経済なのである。即ち白い着物は^す早く汚れるから金が要り、洗うのに時間^{がが}ががるのである」

'Err, zat is to say, we must quit using white clozing and use dyed clozing,' said his uncle, puffing out his chest and clasping his hands firmly behind his back. His arrogant speech continued: 'It is white clozing zat has made Koreans poor. It is unecconomical in terms of bos money and time. Zat is, white clozing is quick to get dirty and costs money to replace, and takes time to wash' (169).

Each of the underlined words above contains a stereotyped mispronunciation of the Japanese. The Korean-language rules governing the use of voiced and unvoiced consonants make certain Japanese words difficult for Korean speakers to pronounce, and not two decades before the publication of "Kusa fukashi," Koreans had been outed by pronunciation tests given by vigilantes in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. Failure of such language tests had lethal consequences, with thousands of Koreans massacred as rumors swirled blaming them for the chaos in the wake of the disaster.⁴¹ The magistrate's imperfect Japanese here is perhaps not a direct reference to this history, but much like the language tests given in the violent fallout from the earthquake, these marked mispronunciations serve as proof of his failure to perfect the process of assimilation, his failure to become a consummate Japanese imperial subject. Even if he has risen above the Korean-speaking masses he is addressing, his imperfect Japanese nevertheless relegates him to the middle rungs of the social ladder.

Moreover, particularly in the instances where the error is represented in ruby characters attached to sinographs (typically used to clarify the reading, an example of which is present here in the case of ^{早ぐ}早ぐ), it becomes conspicuous beyond the

level necessary to establish the imperfection of the magistrate's Japanese language skills. Without these pronunciation (mis)guides, the reader would still be aware of the magistrate's identity and position from the second word of the quote from the speech, ちゅまり (chumari) rather than つまり (tsumari). The rubies serve only to exaggerate, to the tertiary audience of the short story's readers, the degree of inaccuracy in the speaker's pronunciation. The sheer number of pronunciation errors represented in the text is perhaps meant to bolster the narrator's description of the magistrate's Japanese as "pathetically awkward," but it also seems to suggest that Insik is painfully aware of each and every mistake, emphasizing his knowledge privilege with regard to the Japanese language.

In many ways, the notion of knowledge privilege is a central thread running through "Kusa fukashi." The story is essentially structured around a series of moments in which Insik is in a position to know more than the people he is observing. He is often positioned as an eavesdropping figure, observing locals who do not know that they are being observed. In some cases, he is literally looking out through a window. Insik first witnesses the marking of the villagers' clothing through a window from inside his uncle's house, then sees the same scene repeated at the local market, this time through the window of the car that will take him into the mountains. He inadvertently sees and overhears Hanakami-sensei's wife's furious reaction to his marking of her white clothing. Later, during his journey in the mountains, he observes the homes of the mountain villages in their absence, including the inscrutable incantations posted on their walls. Throughout the narrative, he hears and knows, but rarely communicates or interacts. Ironically, it is precisely this knowledge privilege, compounding Insik's overall social privilege, that makes communication impossible in many of these cases.

This dynamic is particularly clear in the moment of translation within the story's opening scene. As Serk-Bae Suh has detailed, in the context of colonial Korea, an irony emerged at the site of translation, wherein Japanese settlers and government officials in power tended to be monolingual and therefore reliant on translation, whereas the colonized, who inevitably performed the labor of translation, were often bilingual. This created moments in which the power politics of the empire were inverted, even if the mutual belief in translation as an equal and equivalent exchange performed an assimilating function.⁴² But here I wish to highlight the audience for the speech, in this case also monolingual, and marginalized to a point where even translation cannot bridge the gap.

More specifically, at least in Insik's judgment, in terms of the practical goal of promoting dyed clothing, the Korean translation of the speech is just as useless as the inscrutable Japanese. He notes the material realities that prevent the speech from having any meaning for the villagers:

Insik was repulsed, thinking how stupid the whole thing was—did the people gathered here really care one way or the other if their clothes were white or black?

Of course, from an economic perspective, and from the standpoint of hygiene as well, it wasn't that he necessarily disagreed with the promotion of dyed clothing. But at a glance, he couldn't see a single person clad in white clothing. Weren't all their clothes just the ashen color of prisoners' garments, as if they had been wearing the same shabby clothing for years on end? As a matter of fact, the only conspicuously white clothing to speak of in the meeting hall was the white linen suit of the internal affairs official seated primly next to the dais (170).

Here there is a palpable sense of Kim's attempt to turn a critical eye toward Japanese colonial policy while writing around the constraints of censorship. His critique is not rooted in a nationalist defense of the tradition of white clothing, of the sort that is commonly articulated in retrospective denunciations of Japanese colonial suppression of Korean culture. Rather, it attends to the problem of class, which was certainly no less salient at the time. As Insik points out here, the rhetoric around the economy of dyed rather than white clothing rings hollow for an audience whose poverty does not allow for any meaningful choice in what they wear. The contrast of the worn, dingy clothing of the mountain dwellers with the white Western clothing of the *naichi* government official serves to underscore the hypocrisy of the decree.

However, as Piao Yinji has argued, the problem with Insik's exclusively class-based analysis of the problems with promoting dyed clothing is that it denies the poor the agency to care about ethnic or cultural tradition.⁴³ Kim may have been reacting to a tendency among colonial intellectuals to elide questions of class in favor of the ethnonation, as defined and represented by its cultural elites. However, even within Kim's story, working-class Koreans are no less likely to cling to markers of ethnic identity than their more privileged counterparts. As is clear in the case of Hanakami-sensei's wife, a lack of resources or social standing can make the symbolic value of an article of white clothing that much more precious. The doubly or multiply marginalized positions of Hanakami-sensei's wife and the other rural villagers do not relegate them to the passivity of victimhood that Insik subtly ascribes to them. Ironically, it is Insik's membership in the relatively elite strata of colonized intellectuals that causes him to miss the possibility for agency here. To him, ethnic and class marginalization may seem to be opposing forces, but for those subject to both at once, they cannot be disentangled. The intersectional nature of their position makes it difficult to articulate in the language available to someone like Insik or, indeed, Kim Saryang.

The intersectional language politics in play here are further shaded in as Insik flashes back to his participation in a student strike at the middle school where Hanakami-sensei was employed as the Korean-language instructor. He recalls the overt discrimination Hanakami-sensei experienced, paid less than his Japanese peers and denied promotion. He is even reduced to the demeaning role of taking his colleagues' lunch orders and cleaning up after them. We should note here that within the all-male space of the school, it is this feminized domestic labor

that marks Hanakami-sensei as lower status than his Japanese colleagues. This feminization is also interpreted as subservience by his students, who come to view him as an ethnic traitor. Moreover, given his position as a Korean-language instructor, in the context of increased emphasis on the Japanese language (as *kokugo*, national language) and devaluation of the Korean language in colonial education policy, a large part of what the students at the school learn from Hanakami-sensei is an internalization of the notion that Korean itself is inferior to Japanese. As we have already seen, Insik's uncle has learned this lesson well, and gained some measure of power within the colonial state as a result.

In Insik's recollection of his school days, however, he notes his and his fellow students' resistance to the language hierarchy presented to them. Here "Kusa fukashi" once again explores the affective capacities of opaque language outside the function of transparent communication. The question of addressee can be helpful in unpacking these alternative functions of language, which become particularly salient in a passage describing Hanakami-sensei's reaction to a statement scrawled on the chalkboard in his classroom:

One time a certain student wrote 'We are not ××' in Korean on the blackboard. Hanakami-sensei spotted it as he entered the classroom, and his arms and legs were shaking when he finally managed to climb atop the dais, where he just stood there looking embarrassed and mopping up sweat for a while. Eventually he regained his composure and opened the textbook. He took the chalk in his hand and turned to face the blackboard, his raised hand trembling as if he were trying with all his might to remember a certain character. But for some reason, he ended up writing those same characters, ××, from the graffiti (172–73).

Perhaps the first question to ask is to whom the graffiti is addressed. Given the subservient teacher's panicked reaction to the message, it is likely safe to assume that it is subversive, perhaps a declaration that "we are not [Japanese]," in direct opposition to official rhetoric. But if the writer meant to deliver this message primarily to those insisting that the students become Japanese (or otherwise submit to colonial authority), then the Japanese language might have been the better medium for making the sentiment understood. Instead, the use of the Korean language itself is the source of the subversiveness; in this case, the medium is literally the message.

At the same time, the (Korean-language) medium suggests alternative addressees. The author of the graffiti may have intended it for his fellow students' eyes, as a rallying cry to resistance, rather than as a direct message to the powers that be. Perhaps more suggestively, the story also leaves open the possibility that the message is intended for Hanakami-sensei himself, who is positioned awkwardly between the students and their mostly Japanese instructors (just as he occupies this mediating position in the translation scene with which the story opens). His nervous response further suggests that regardless of intention, he himself reads

the text as a sort of threat, perhaps because of his ambiguous position potentially within but more likely outside the “we” (*wareware*) of the declaration.

But the censorship of the statement, its core content presented as ×× rather than the “original” taboo phrasing, constitutes an even more striking level of opacity. Kim Saryang may have placed these × characters here himself, anticipating that an actual censor might object to the content, exposing the text to more heavy-handed censorship than the excision of a single word. In this way, the text also draws attention to the censorship apparatus as an inevitable component of its audience. In fact, much like the use of Korean in the graffiti itself, the use of the censor’s mark, despite acting as an obstacle to transparent communication, is perhaps more effective than an overt statement at conveying the subversive quality of the unintelligible content. The ××, repeated twice in the passage above and soon after, may draw even greater attention to itself than the “original” characters might have done.

In fact, this censored or pseudo-censored content is only one of many instances in “Kusa fukashi” in which non-meaning text, whether as an opaque representation of a concealed semantic message or simply in its raw material form, drives the events of the story. The flashback sequence in which the ×× first appears concludes with a demonstration carried out by the students, in which they are chanting, “Down with ××” (173). In such close proximity to their previous appearance, one wonders if the ×× here refers to the same antecedent as the ×× Hanakami-sensei trembled to see on the blackboard. In either case, the unseen characters translate directly to the action of the student strike.

Similarly, the story soon introduces the non-meaning characters ×, ○, and △ in its description of the forcible act of marking the villagers’ white clothing. While it is never explained precisely why a villager might receive the character × versus ○ or △, regardless of the meaning, the painting of the character itself renders the clothing “dyed” rather than white in the eyes of the bureaucracy carrying out the policy. The writing itself has a material and symbolic impact, even stripped of any underlying meaning. Moreover, the question of audience lends further clarity to the violence being enacted on the bodies of the villagers. That is, the audience for these symbols is certainly not the villagers themselves, who bear the marks upon their backs. As it turns out, Insik’s uncle states quite clearly whose eyes the symbols are meant for. Just before Insik first witnesses the writing on the clothes, his uncle explains:

They were really impressed with my speech just now. So the number of people switching to dyed clothing went up again, see? And actually that means my rating goes up too. If I don’t get the numbers up, I won’t be a magistrate for long, will I? A college boy like you wouldn’t understand, but in government, it’s all about numbers, numbers! And my county’s rating will get even higher. ‘Cause tomorrow’s market day, so we’re going out to the market to bring the campaign straight to the people (177).

At this point the magistrate starts laughing maniacally, and drags Insik to the window, where he sees that bringing the campaign for dyed clothing “straight to the people” means painting directly on their clothing. In one sense, Insik is once again the audience for this spectacle, with readers of the text experiencing it through his mediation. But within the Japanese colonial bureaucracy, the primary audience is the magistrate’s superiors, who will rate his performance based on the number of residents wearing dyed clothing. In other words, the violence being done to the villagers here is not simply a textual recapitulation of the magistrate’s speech, which they can neither comprehend nor counter. Rather, they become a text to be read by others.

Thus, the first half of the story highlights the complicity of Insik’s uncle and Hanakami-sensei as mediators (and translators) of colonial policy, both delivering the colonizer’s message to the masses and rendering the masses themselves a text for imperial consumption. The farcical opening scene featuring a completely superfluous translation, followed by the linguistic and material violence done to the local people through the marking of their clothing, suggests that the violence of the imperial state lies in the unidirectional flow of speech and text. Translation here facilitates this unilateral dictation, rather than acting as means of communication and equal exchange. Insik himself serves as a mediating figure for the readers of the text, his sense of indignation at this violence making it impossible to miss. However, as the story moves in the second half to Insik’s own failures to communicate with the mountain-dwelling masses, it becomes clear that even his attempts to become the audience for rather than the dictator of knowledge, or to communicate for the purpose of empathy and mutual understanding rather than dominance, are doomed to fail nonetheless.

The first problem he encounters is the difficulty of locating the people he is looking for. In the first half of the story, Insik’s uncle brings up bureaucratic statistics multiple times—not only his county’s ratings for the adoption of dyed clothing, but also the relative number of slash-and-burn farmers still present in his jurisdiction. Just as he is boasting that he has made them all into “proper farmers,” a fire breaks out on a nearby ridge (185). As Insik and his uncle gaze at the fire out the window, the magistrate is concerned less with the potential damage than with whether it is occurring across county lines, bolstering his claims to successful assimilation of the slash-and-burn farmers within his jurisdiction. Though it is already clear in this scene, it becomes all the more obvious as Insik ventures into the mountains that the county boundaries have no meaning there. The farmers move around frequently, and have no permanent settlements. The people who live in these spaces are a problem for the colonial bureaucracy precisely because they are so difficult to locate, survey, observe, and control. Insik himself recognizes the intractability of this problem, albeit through a shared sense of the superiority of “civilized” ways of life: “If the magistrate tried to stop them again from living within his jurisdiction, he could chase the slash-and-burn farmers around from every which way, but they would inevitably

flee to still more uncharted depths of the mountains, just like savages [*banzoku*] under aboriginal assimilation policies" (195).

Nevertheless, Insik's explicit goal in traveling to the region is to empathize with the indigenous people, acting as a savior figure by offering food, medicine, and basic education. Everywhere he looks, then, he sees a problem in need of solving. When Insik finally reaches the slopes where the slash-and-burn farmers live, he comes upon a single small hut hidden among the trees and surrounded by verdant fields. Despite the evident success of the absent farmers who work the surrounding land, the description of their living space itself focuses on its impoverished and dilapidated state. His initial encounter with the dwelling is described as follows:

The hut, which looked like it could be blown away at any moment, was deserted. Insik tried calling out but there was no answer. Peering through at the dirt floor, he could see broken pottery and a few dirty-looking bowls strewn around, and there was an a-frame pack [*chige*] propped up next to a small hearth. Upon examining the dimly lit room, he could find no further trace of household belongings. There were flies buzzing around in the fetid air, and the earthen walls were plastered with eerie-looking paper amulets [*jufu*] lettered in ink (193).

This is also the reader's first introduction to the cult-like religious practices that have taken hold among the mountain dwellers.

In this first encounter, the space is overwhelmed by a sense of absence and silence. Insik finds no one to answer his calls, and nothing in the house that will tell him anything about its absent residents. Ironically, the only thing here for him to "read" is a physical text, the *jufu*, strips of paper bearing stylized characters, used to ward off calamity. But the actual words on the *jufu* are excised from the text of "Kusa fukashi." In contrast to the distinct visibility of non-meaning characters in the first half of the story, the characters Insik sees here are not reproduced, merely described as *bokuji* (characters written in ink). This may also imply that the incantations are calligraphed, important more for their visual impact and physical presence rather than as a medium for linguistic content. After all, not all texts are supposed to be legible.

The silence of the scene does not last long, however, as Insik suddenly hears the sobs of two small children hiding in the corner of the hut. His immediate instinct is to try to speak to them.

'Oh, I didn't see you kids there,' Insik broke the silence, choking on the words. 'No need to be scared. Where have your mommy and daddy gone?' Far from coaxing them out of hiding, this just made the children cry all the more desperately. . . . As he started to take the bundle of sweets from his pack, he may have just imagined it, but his hands seemed to be shaking violently. 'There you go, I'll give you something tasty,' he thought, but the words wouldn't come out. He had suddenly remembered hearing that if you gave these mountain children toys, they wouldn't even know that they were for playing, and if you gave them treats, they wouldn't even know they were food (193-94).

Here Insik is forced to reckon with the high unbridgeable gulf between the mountain-dwelling children and himself. It is unclear if the language he uses is even intelligible to them. But even assuming they can understand each other's Korean despite their significant regional and educational differences, Insik's message is clearly not getting through. He appears and likely sounds so similar to the colonial operatives destroying their way of life that the content of his speech no longer matters—all the children can glean from their interactions with him is a sense of fear. Notably, this problem seems to have plagued Insik's peers who have traveled to the mountains before him. They have already warned him that even the basic act of gift-giving results in failure to communicate. Faced with the impossibility of mutual understanding, Insik himself begins to tremble, possibly in fear of the radical otherness of the children to whom he cannot speak.

Eventually the children also flee, leaving Insik alone to continue his journey in search of someone to save. Instead, he finds a different kind of "savior." When Insik reaches the secluded temple, he finds that the elderly priest ostensibly in charge has ceded the ground to a younger man whom he regards as a sage with supernatural powers. When Insik asks this younger man what he hopes to do here, he responds that he is here "to save the wretched masses" (198). He relies on the *Chōnggamnok*, a cryptic prophetic text from the Chosŏn period that predicts the downfall of the current dynasty and the subsequent establishment of a new utopian order, to argue that the Korean people must continue to wear white in order to be saved.⁴⁴

'We Koreans, who wear white clothing, must follow the *Chōnggamnok* in order to be saved. The fate of the white-wearing race and the path they must follow are all revealed within its pages.'

'The *Chōnggamnok*?' Insik asked.

'Heh heh heh . . . it's nothing difficult. It is written in the *Chōnggamnok*, that if we wear white clothes and chant ×××××××× we will be saved. Heh heh heh. . .' (199).

As with the earlier × marks, it is hard to be sure whether there was text censored here, or whether Kim himself chose not to reproduce the content of the chant. With the story's overt references to the Korean news media's reporting on the Paekbaek-kyo murders in 1940, it is possible the author or the censors did not wish to print the violent sect's mantra. Another possibility is that the chant's actual words are so cryptic that the ×s represent the meaning, such as it is, just as well as the "original" characters could. In either case, the text once again opens up a radical gap between the reader and the subject matter, which cannot or will not be bridged by Insik (or indeed, Kim Saryang).

The story's climax coincides with the height of this refusal to communicate. Insik awakens in the temple in the middle of the night to the sound of chanting coming from the courtyard. Once again, he peers out through a gap in the sliding doors of the temple. He sees that the local people have gathered in the courtyard of the temple, and have brought gifts of food for the religious leader. One of the key

ironies of the story is that Insik—bilingual, knowledgeable, and approaching in a spirit of empathy and charity—is unable to reach the mountain people, whereas the guru figure, with his cryptic text and material demands, is the “savior” they accept. In the end, as readers aware of contemporary current events would know, their trust will be violently betrayed.

But in addition to the abject position of the slash-and-burn farmers, condemned whether they assimilate or resist, this scene highlights once again the failure of communication. As the chants continue, still left unrepresented in the text, a sudden gust of wind blows open the sliding door, exposing Insik to the gaze of those outside. At the moment Insik becomes vulnerable to bilateral knowledge rather than eavesdropping from a position of knowledge privilege, he runs. The final image before the story flashes forward in time is another fire in the mountains. Having earlier described the sight of the mountain fire as “cursed” (呪われた) (189), the imagery of the fire is linked through a common character to the unrepresentable incantations of the sect, present on the paper amulets in the hut (呪符) and in the sound of the chants (呪文). In the final moments of the story, even Insik himself is carried away by the non-meaning power of these overlapping symbols: “Burn! Turn everything to ash. . . . Yes, turn everything to smoke,” he exclaims as he flees the temple (202). Even devoid of representable meaning, the material presence of the language of the incantation—much like that of the fire, the Japanese language in the opening scene of the story, the non-meaning characters scrawled on the backs of the villagers, the marks of the censor—wields enormous power.

. . .

The power of the non-meaning and the unrepresentable highlighted at the end of “Kusa fukashi” stands in stark contrast to the various failures of translation, communication, and mediation that occur throughout the text. The ultimate example of this comes in the final retrospective passage in the story, which finds Insik safely reintegrated into the colonial order, serving as a doctor in a rural village. His uncle has lost his job in a bribery scandal and is now working as a land broker. But the fate of Hanakami-sensei is left ambiguous. He is known to have gone into the mountains to promote dyed clothing shortly after the events of the story, and was never heard from again. Connecting his own experience in the mountains with reports of the Paekbaekkyo’s grisly murders, Insik surmises that his former teacher may have been murdered by the very man he met at the temple. This final act of bureaucratic mediation leads to his death.

Hanakami-sensei, like Insik himself, acts as an ambivalent intermediary or translator of colonial policy to the hinterlands. Insik is charged with performing a kind of ethnography on the mountain people and communicating the knowledge he finds to the authorities. Hanakami-sensei, on the other hand, brings the message of the authorities in the other direction. In both cases, the demand for

a mediating translator figure rests on the assumption that communication is possible in the first place. But even among the Korean characters in the story, the differences often prove unbridgeable. As soon as intersectional differences—particularly differences of class and indigeneity, in this case—are introduced, it becomes clear that the translators fail not simply because Korea is incommensurable to the Japanese audience, but because the translators themselves are radically alienated from portions of the ostensibly monolithic population they are supposed to “represent.”

This is how I read the “lie,” the feeling of something “not quite right” (*sukkiri dekinai*) Kim Saryang identifies in “Hikari no naka ni,” which lends itself to interpretation by metropolitan critics as representative of the struggles of the colonized Korean subject. The fundamental untruth here is the very notion that this subject can be known in the first place, whether by the Japanese readers of Kim’s fiction, or even by Kim himself. For a reader like myself, approaching these texts decades after they were written and from an English-language background, the possibility of such representation is even more obviously foreclosed.

And yet, Kim is read as representative within a variety of frameworks. As noted earlier in the chapter, for decades Kim’s only significant audience was the canonical writers and critics of Zainichi literature. Thus, Zainichi literature was the only framework through which he was read. More recently, Kim has become the subject of anglophonic scholarship on the literature of the Japanese empire, opening his work up to readings through a much wider range of critical lenses. However, neither postcolonial theory nor minor literature nor the emerging framework of the Japanophone can produce a reading of Kim’s work that is anything other than *sukkiri dekinai*—they all leave us with a feeling of something “not quite right.” This, I would argue, is precisely because Kim was writing about those figures who resist the domesticating and assimilating functions of translation and hermeneutics. And as long as our scholarship sets out to perform these same functions, we fall into the same traps that Kim himself could never quite escape. Perhaps we tell the same “lie” as well.