

## Unrelenting Global Power Struggle and the Paradox of Colonial Modernity and Postcoloniality: *Writing in the Language of the "Other"*

*Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan*, by Nayoung Aimee Kwon. Duke University Press, 2015. 296 pages. ISBN: 9780822359258.

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What does it mean to “have to use” a foreign language as the mother tongue? Japan colonized Korea in a virtual sense in 1905 by stripping it of its autonomy in foreign affairs and making it what was called a “protection country” while executing the government by Japanese advisors. In 1910, the Korean Empire was annexed to Japan and colonized, being placed under a military rule. The Korean people, who had to submit to the power of Japan, launched the Independence Movement of March 1st in 1919, erupting their determination and will for national resistance and independence struggle domestically and internationally across the country. It resulted in a change in the Japanese policy of colonial domination to a “cultural rule.” Under the so-called cultural domination, Koreans came to have a space, though limited, for press, print, and assembly which had been completely banned after Japanese annexation. However, the execution of the “cultural rule” served as a measure to initiate the full-scale expedition to force Koreans to adopt and use Japanese as the mother tongue, by revising the Joseon Educational Ordinance (The Second Joseon Educational Ordinance, February 1922–February 1938).

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Japan's educational policy toward Koreans, which targeted only their "primary education" and no further advancement, aimed at the assimilation of the Korean people by eliminating the Korean way of life and implanting the Japanese one with a widespread use of Japanese (the 'national language'). The Second Joseon Educational Ordinance, which carried, on the surface, the banners of "coeducation of Japanese and Koreans" and "Japan and Korea are one" (*Naisenittai*, 內鮮一體), was to provide the same education in form to Koreans and Japanese. But in actuality, it operated to thoroughly differentiate the users and non-users (users of the Korean language) of Japanese (the national language) to discriminate against the latter and force its use on them publicly.

Later, in March 1937, under the intensifying totalitarianism after the invasion of Manchuria, Japan formally enforced Koreans to use Japanese in daily life (The Note on the Reinforcement of the Use of Japanese in Daily Life, 日本語no常用強化に關する通牒). Provoking the Second Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, it declared the Korean peninsula as a logistics base for its offensive on the continent and pursued to overhaul Koreans' mentality and Korea's production system in alignment with its wartime whole-scale mobilization system. With the Japanese Government General of Korea (*Josensoutokufu*, 朝鮮總督府) at the forefront, it—being an island country—attempted to build the Korean peninsula as a supply base of all sorts of resources needed for its expansion into the continent. The Japanese Government General of Korea strove to establish a powerful resource procurement system by relying solely on Korea, so that Japan could execute the war in China so that its war efforts in China could be made without support from the home country, regardless of the homeland's political changes. The wartime national mobilization system of the Korean peninsula was accompanied by modern industrial development policy focusing on the production of military materials, which led to the generation of the term, colonial modernization (theory). Simultaneously, the "policy of transforming Koreans into imperial subjects" was engineered by strengthening the mental ties of Korean human resources with Japan and pursuing ideological integration for perpetual subordination. Japan's wartime development expedition of Korea and extensive mobilization of its resources was not simply geared for colonial development or exploitation at a policy level, but actually it was the other side of

the “national annihilation” policy in the literal sense.

Japan’s drive for the national annihilation of Korea and ultimately making it a part of it was already clear when it “annexed” Korea without using the term “colony.” The scheme was deployed in the directive of making Koreans into “Japanese imperial subjects” during the wartime. In force was a series of measures under the claim of “Japan and Korea are one” and “Oneness of Korea and Japan,” which was based on so-called “equality of all under the emperor’s benevolent gaze” (*Itshidoujin*, 一視同仁). The stipulation in the Second Joseon Educational Ordinance that Koreans would be subjected to national discrimination in public unless they accept Japanese as the national language was enforced concretely. The Third Joseon Educational Ordinance (March 1938–April 1943) was announced, and various policies to support the oneness of Japan and Korea were implemented, such as forced attendance at Shinto shrine services for the diffusion of Japanese spirit, construction of Shinto shrines at every locale across the country, composition and memorization of the Oath of Imperial Subjects, adoption of Japanese names, promotion of marriage between Koreans and Japanese, etc. As the Second Sino-Japanese War was protracted over a long haul faced with strong national resistance of the Chinese which had hardly been expected at the time of the invasion, the national annihilation policies for intensive wartime mobilization were executed in conjunction with the survival of the Japanese empire. In November 1943, Japan issued a complete ban on the use of the Korean language, including its teaching.

The so-called oneness of Japan and Korea was an ideology devised to make Koreans imperial subjects for wartime mobilization. “Equality of all under the emperor’s benevolent gaze,” which was touted from the time of the annexation, was mere political rhetoric to conceal the true picture of Japanese imperialist policy of colonial domination which was fundamentally discriminatory against the Korean people. The reality of Japan’s deceitful assimilationist domination policy was already set up, when Korea was designated as an outlying region beyond the legal boundary of the Japanese Imperial Constitution at the inception of the annexation. At the time of the annexation, Japan claimed that Korea (the Korean Empire) became Joseon as a region of the nation of Japan and Joseon people were no longer Koreans but Japanese. Here the name

of the region, Joseon, had a meaning of disparaging the Joseon Dynasty of the House of Yi which was succeeded by the Korean Empire. And Joseon was defined as an “outland” (*Gaichi*, 外地) which lied out of the scope of the Japanese Constitution. Essentially, if the legal setting of “outlying Joseon” was not to change, Japan’s assimilationism was nothing but political rhetoric and a fancy play on words. Even if the people of the outland Joseon were to adopt Japanese as the mother tongue and use it in everyday life, it would not change the condition that they were out of the scope of the Japanese Constitution. Unless the Japanese Constitution was applied to the Korean peninsula and therefore, “Joseon people” were allowed the same rights as Japanese people, the claim of assimilation would be only a deceptive fabrication. Coercion to adopt and use Japanese as the native language was intended to justify and hide the discriminatory reality of assimilationism on the pretext of the “ambience of the times” (*Jisei*, 時世) and the “standards of people” (*Mindo*, 民度) and to effectively mandate duties on Joseon people as Japanese “people.”<sup>1</sup>

Most Koreans who could not risk their own lives to resist against Japanese colonial domination lost fertile farmlands passed down through generations to Japanese immigrants were pushed to leave for Manchuria under the Japanese migration policy, or subjected to mobilization for forced labor of various types. Such measures as prior inspection, removal of unappealing elements, and suspension of publication were stepped up in parallel with the intensification of the wartime arrangement by Japan. The reality of being forced to use the Japanese language was especially excruciating to intellectuals who relied on writing and speech employing specialized knowledge to shape their conditions of life and make a living. If they did not use Japanese as the mother tongue in writing and speech, they were not allowed the social space for survival.

Such colonial conditions imparted a formal symbolic character to the use of Japanese in the writing of Korean intellectuals. More than anything else, writing in Japanese was viewed as giving up anti-Japanese national consciousness and regarded as an act of treason against the nation. In direct linkage, it operated as a symbol of adopting Japan as the motherland and serving for it, which was

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1. See Jeon (2018, 111–129).

looked upon as pro-Japanese.

The greatest strength of this book is that it discusses various matters of point with a precise understanding of the colonial domination policy of Japanese imperialism in Korea. The author's quotation of Yamamuro in'ichis' writing (p. 162) clarifies that Japan had made strenuous efforts to make Korea a part of it while pushing forth with the policy of advancing to the north toward the continent after the First Sino-Japanese War. She also explicitly notes the fact that although Japan claimed for "the oneness of Asia" and "Pan-Asianism" in an antipodal viewpoint to the West, its "assimilationist policies" in Korea promoted incessant national discrimination under the rhetoric of "equality of all under the emperor's benevolent gaze." Those policies were a deceptive scheme hired for imperial expansion. Thereby, she lets us see through the structure of the deceitful domination ideology of "Japan and Korea are one" and the matter of survival of Korean intellectuals situated in the false reality.

Furthermore, the author implies that not much had changed in Japan's attitude toward Korea in the post-war period in the following sentence which succeeds the quotation of Yamamuro and an attached footnote:

"It was no coincidence that images of Korea began to appear in Japanese popular and official discourses around this time, lending credence to the view that the Korea Boom in Japan arose periodically at significant historical moments in the relations between Japan and Korea." (p. 162)

What is more important to note is the following point:

"Such was the backdrop of the predicament of Korean cultural producers who were being promoted and consumed; as part of the Korea Boom, their assimilated Japanese-language writings were simultaneously lauded for their exotic Koreanness and their provincial 'local color.'" (p. 163)

The author points out the fact that the Korea Boom in Japan during the pre-war and the colonial domination period of Korea obviously attempted "to display colonial culture in toto through assigning order and classification" (p. 168).

For that reason, she also reconfirms, it did not attend to the actual context of Korean culture or the conditions and environment of its generation; instead, it was modified, adapted, consumed, and colored to the Japanese taste. She does not fail to note the fact that Korean writers had to take on solely the burden of coping with the reality of having to publish Japanese-language writings, devoid of an arena to release in Korean, and the anguish for writing in Japanese instead of Korean. The author's ultimate message seems to be the following: only the images of Korea fallen under the hierarchical order of the Japanese empire and of colonized writers working in Japanese were presented to Japan and Japanese people, which were the images of the outland Joseon and Joseon people, lower-status Japanese tamed to the assimilationist policies.

The author brings to light the reality of colonized Korean intellectuals and the true picture of Japan's imperialist domination policy in an ambivalent manner without being emotionally swayed to any side and reilluminates Korean intellectuals' writing during the colonial era in the aspects of both the Subject and the Other. It makes us ask ourselves what is the meaning of the controversy on national literature which once arose in Korean literary circles over the issue of whether "national literature" should target only what is written in Korean or what is written by Koreans.

The author suggests that the Manchuria Boom emerged in certain parts of Korean society under Japan's drive for colonized Koreans' relocation to Manchuria after the Second Sino-Japanese War was not, in essence, different from the Korea Boom among Japanese. She notices here again the cleverness and tenacity of the imperialist ideological policy and structurally contrasts it with the desire for survival of colonized Koreans' pro- and anti-Japanese mindsets and attitudes under the influence. With the expansion of the empire, the annexed Korea, i.e., Joseon, which had become a part of Japan, was portrayed as an important region working out as a logistics base for the advance to the continent. The relocation of Joseon people of Japan to Manchuria led to the advent of the Manchuria Boom over time, and arose even the phenomenon of some Joseon people acting like colonizers in Manchuria just like Japanese in Korea. Piggybacking on the Manchuria Boom, Joseon people had little interest in the reality of the State of Manchuria and the local people, only wanting to

be compensated for their own yearning for survival. From the Manchurians' perspective, Koreans would have been no different from Japanese colonizers. Where would those acts of Koreans be placed in the binary distinction of pro-Japanese vs. anti-Japanese which present-day Koreans employ taking on the stance of the colonized?

Do modern-day Koreans have a proper, factual understanding of the true reality of Koreans of the colonial period? Do we recognize it? Are we Koreans conscious of our not knowing of the colonial period? How should we view the Koreans who behaved like colonizers in Manchuria with their status changed as Korea became a part of Japan due to the annexation under the Japanese imperialist expansion in the colonial era? Most of them were neither pro-Japanese collaborators nor anti-Japanese fighters, but ordinary Koreans. Driven out of the peninsula and relocated to Manchuria by the colonizers, they just groped for the possibility to manage a new life and a better place to live in.

Without mentioning the issue of "Korean nationalism" specifically, the author enables us to view within the socio-political structure the problem of the dichotomous judgment and labeling of pro-Japanese versus resistant acts, which were made in the name of "nation" in the historical context of the national liberation. With the awareness of the problem, she seems to urge the need to examine Korean nationalism longitudinally in the contexts of both the years immediately preceding and following the colonial period and those of the national division.

Her problem consciousness does not stop here. In addition to the socio-political structural problems of the colonized Korean literary community, she calls attention to the conditions of women writers who existed like desolate islands in the lower rungs of Korean premodern male-centered society. She takes the example of Kang Kyungae, a female writer from a farming family who emigrated to Manchuria during the colonial period. Kang, being a woman of the colony, did not afford to have an opportunity to learn how to write in Japanese or study in Japan. Paradoxically, however, such limitations made her exempt from the dichotomous division of pro-Japanese vs. resistant writers which swept through the post-liberation literary community due to the colonial practice of writers producing works in Japanese, the colonizer's language. Ultimately she

became one of the few writers of the colonial period who is recognized in the history of national literature in both South and North Korea.

Tracking down the process of the discovery of her works, the author lets us revisit from the standpoint of universal human rights the problems of the socio-political structure in which women, a social minority, are placed, even without mentioning the “gender” issue explicitly. She also discusses the effects of embellishment in the writings translated into the language of the Other and of inspection practiced under the political and ideological constraints institutionalized in North and South Korean societies after the national division. Thereby, she asks what constitutes the nationalist ideology of both Koreas in political and ideological confrontation since the liberation. Political conflicts between the two Koreas—which were divided after the liberation—had postcolonial nationalist demands. She asks whether it is different from the pro- and anti-Japanese duality of the colonial era. She raises those questions to stress the imperativeness for Korean literature and Korean society to properly recognize and examine the true reality of the colonial period.

On the other hand, the author’s assertion that Japan’s attitude toward Korea had not changed much between the pre- and the post-war period is connected with the ongoing competition among the global powers across the world continuing in the postcolonial period and with the post-imperial influence caused by it. It leads us to view the problems of “modernization” or “modernity” of countries with colonial experiences in conjunction with those of postcoloniality and postmodernity. A sequence of her arguments makes us ponder on various related issues, such as whether the “modernization” and “modernity” of former colonial societies—which has continued from the colonial to the postcolonial era—could be the same as those of colonizers and even Western societies, whether they could be postcolonized, and what is postcoloniality in a true sense and if it is possible.

This book allows us to trace longitudinally and cross-sectionally the multidimensionality of the contexts of the prewar and wartime periods of the imperialist Japan and the pre- and post-liberation periods of the colonized Korea. That is thanks to the author’s clear configuration of the ideological domination policy of Japanese imperialism and its reality. The author poses



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us questions. Were Koreans mere victims? Were they just the subjects of colonization in the colonial times? Her approach of delving into the problem of the dichotomy of pro-Japanese collaboration and anti-Japanese resistance through the medium of the language of the Other is quite persuasive, making us think about history and humankind. We need to listen carefully to her argument that the reality of the colonial era should be recognized properly and studied accordingly. Were “Joseon people” only victims and the colonized? Were there no perpetrators and colonizers among “Joseon people”? We must view the reality of the colonial period from various angles to move beyond the dualistic approach of pro-Japanese versus anti-Japanese. At the same time, it is necessary to address from a realistic stance how the problem of nation was formulated in the post-liberation Korean society. To what extent were Koreans influenced by inspection which was exercised in the name of nation and nationalism in liberated Korea? How does the Korea Boom or the competition of globalization affect Korean society? Has Korea been postcolonized?

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## REFERENCE

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