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The Genealogy of Korean Modernism in Poetry: Focus on Translations of W. B. Yeats

KIM HANSUNG and CHOI JUNG A

This article describes the generational perspectives revealed in the views of three Korean poets, representing three generations of poetic circles, through their appropriations of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, who experienced colonial rule as they did. Within the history of modern Korean poetry, Kim Ŏk (b. 1896) stands as a representative of the 1920s, Kim Kirim (b. 1908) of the 1930s, and Kim Suyŏng (1921–1968) of the postcolonial years, especially the 1960s. Though different in their styles and perspectives, they shared the roles of poet, literary critic, and translator and were flagship figures in their respective eras. Looking into the works and poetics of these three poets is tantamount to exploring the history of modern Korean poetry spanning the period between the 1920s and 1960s. Drawing on the fact that all three poets were interested in translating and interpreting Yeats, this article aims to trace the genealogy of Korean modernist poetry by exploring the generational differences in their views on poetry through their mediation of Yeats.

Keywords: modernist Korean poetry, poetic genealogy, Kim Kirim, Kim Suyŏng, W. B. Yeats

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I. Genealogy of Korean Modernist Poetic Circles and Generational Dispute

In and after the colonial period in Korea, modernist poetic circles established their genealogy in their own context, largely intertextualizing Western and Japanese modernist poetry. Within only three decades in the early 20th century, colonial Korea was exposed to literary currents similar to those that simultaneously rushed over imperial Japan. An array of historical and contemporary artistic and intellectual movements, such as Enlightenment rationalism, romanticism, Marxism, imagism, Anglo-American modernism, and futurism, arrived in Korea all at once instead of being introduced in turn as had happened in the Western world.

Song Uk, a Korean literary critic and historian from a new-critical background, systemized the artistic currents reflected in modern Korean poetry during the colonial period in his *Sihak p'yŏngjŏn* (Critical review of poetics) in 1963. He evaluated these currents as hasty, disoriented, and “incomplete”; for instance, he characterized Kim Kirim (b. 1908), a representative theorist of Korean modernist poetics, as a “poet devoid of internality and traditional awareness.”¹ Specifically, he argued that Kim’s long modernist poem *Kisangdo* (The weather map) (1936), inspired by T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), failed to convey the allusions used by Eliot in the manner established in the Western tradition. However, this assessment interprets the literary tradition of colonial Korea on the basis of criteria appropriate to the allusion-mediated Western tradition, demonstrating the Eurocentric blind spot that once characterized comparative literature.

Some literary historians and comparatists in East Asian studies attempt to overcome the pitfalls of this Eurocentric comparative approach. Karen Thornber, in *Empire of Texts in Motion*, has presented the concept of “literary contact nebulae” to characterize the intertextual contact zones that emerged among East Asian societies and nation-states starting in the early 20th century to the end of World War II. Applying the idea of “contact zone,”² coined by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, to East Asian colonial and semicolonial circumstances, Thornber attempts to avoid taking a Eurocentric approach to comparative literature study and constructing a dichotomy of power between the West and the rest.³ She instead adopts an objective, neutral view on the transnational, translingual interface among East Asian countries in their competition for hegemony, incorporating the perspectives of translation, transculturation, and intertextuality. This approach was meant to offset the Eurocentrism to which Song Uk succumbed and help pave the way for more

¹ Song Uk, *Sihak p'yŏngjŏn* (Critical review of poetics) (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1964), 188.

² “I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.” Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 8.

³ Karen Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 1–27.

inter-relatively formulated world literature studies.⁴ However, as pointed out by Leo Ching,⁵ Thornber de-emphasizes the role of national history in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese literature. Her focus on intertextual and transcultural readings does not pay much attention to the concern of Korean poetic circles, represented here by Kim Ōk, Kim Kirim, and Kim Suyōng and their internal genealogy. Research on generational affinities and conflicts between them can be a cornerstone for Thornber's transnational and transcultural approach because studies of national literature are required for studies of comparative and world literature.

To understand modernism in colonial Korea, it helps to first understand not only the Western modernism of the period but also the transcultural frames of Japanese and Chinese modernist texts from colonial Taiwan, colonial Korea, and semicolonial China. Simultaneously, examining the internal dynamics generated by intra-Korean rivalries is also important, given the nature of modern Korean literature, which is characterized by intergenerational relationships to some extent.

The intergenerational relations in Korean modernist poetic circles were shaped by the drive to trace the history of a national literature. This article shows how Kim Ōk, Kim Kirim, and Kim Suyōng translated the poems of W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) and appropriated and critiqued his *ars poetica*. Kim Ōk, a supporter of romanticism and critic of classicism,⁶ had begun to translate and critically review Yeats's romantic poems into Korean in the early 1920s.⁷ Kim Kirim and Kim Suyōng later followed their predecessor's path. Ireland, Yeats's home country, was part of the British Empire during his lifetime and had only recently gained independence by the 1940s. The country may have appealed to these colonial and postcolonial Korean poets due to similar political circumstances, transcending "West" and "East."⁸ Kim Ōk, Kim Kirim, and Kim Suyōng were deeply engaged with Yeats's works and poetics. All three were interested in Yeats's vision of world literature, not just the Irish national movement.

Kim Ōk and Kim Kirim often met in various literary roundtables and talks held by major newspapers and magazines in the 1920s and 30s, but were not that close. Indeed, Kim Kirim

⁴ Regarding the concept of "world literature studies" in this article, please see David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵ "In this regard, while we learn much about how colonial and semi-colonial writers interacted with Japanese literature, there is little discussion of how a literary work, for instance, intertexted or transculturated within its own 'tradition,'" in Leo Ching, "Book Review: *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* by Karen Laura Thornber," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 2 (May 2011): 602.

⁶ Kim Ōk, "Kūndae munye" (Modern literature), *Kaehyōk* 12 (July 1921): 118.

⁷ Kim Ōk, "Yeich'ū ūi yōnaesi" (Yeats's love poems), *Chosŏn mundan* 10 (July 1925): 322–5.

⁸ On the eager reception of Yeats in colonial Korea based on a perceived affinity of the colonized, see Kevin O'Rourke, *Han'guk kūndaesi ūi yōngsi yōnghyang yōn'gu* (A study on the influence of English poetry on Korean modern poems) (Seoul: Saemunsa, 1984), 20–23; Kim Jingyu, "Aillaendū munhak suyong ūl t'onghan Chosŏn kūndae munhak ūi kihoek yangsang yōn'gu (A Study on the acceptance of Irish literature in the formation of modern Korean literature)" (Master's thesis, Seoul National University, 2010), 1–151; Han Sejöng, "Han'guk kūndaesi e nat'anan Yeich'ū ūi suyong yangsang yōn'gu: Kim Ōk, Kim Sowŏl, Kim Yōngnang, Paeksŏk si rŭl chungsim ūro" (The acceptance of Yeats in modern Korean poetry: focusing on the poems of Kim Ōk, Kim Sowŏl, Kim Yōngnang and Paek Sŏk) (Ph.D. diss., Korea University, 2016), 1–158.

criticized Kim Ōk and his poetry's symbolism as outdated in his essays during the 1930s.⁹ Japanese colonial rule had put much pressure on the autonomy of Korean literary circles and their vernacular writings from 1920 to 1937. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the subsequent tsunami-like encroachment of the Japanese imperial system, which hit colonial Korea in the form of the *Sōshi-kaimei* [imposition of Japanese names on Koreans] and abolition of the Korean language, Korean literature faced a great crisis. Kim Kirim, who led the literature and art department of the *Chosŏn ilbo* as it faced imminent shutdown, tried to generate a genealogy of Korean modernist poetic circles, quoting Yeats to support him in his goal. In this dark period of imminent extinction of Korean literature, with no apparent prospect for reviving it, he attempted to generate a new tradition of Korean modernist poetry and poetics.¹⁰ Although most of the poets upon whom he conferred the identity of "Korean modernist" have disappeared into the "backyard" of literary history, Kim Kirim's modernist genealogy certainly contributed to awareness of Korean modernism in poetry such as Yi Sang. After surviving Japanese fascism and returning to the literary circle in 1945, he published *Yisang sŏnjip* (The Selected Works of Yi Sang) in 1950, thus laying the cornerstone for the canonization of that poet. Kim Kirim's efforts ended in the wake of the Korean War in 1950 and his subsequent disappearance. However, there is no denying his contribution to promoting Korean modernism in poetry.

Like Kim Kirim, Kim Suyŏng expressed similar thoughts later on symbolism and criticized that the theme of sadness in Kim Ōk's poetry is far from being artistic and creative.¹¹ Kim Kirim and Kim Suyŏng used to meet and chat in Mari sŏsa, a bookstore-salon run by their modernist colleague Pak Inhwan from 1945 to 1948 before the Korean War. Kim Suyŏng became aware of Kim Kirim's expertise in English literature during that period and came to view Kim Kirim as an English literature connoisseur as knowledgeable as any Korean poet of that time.¹² Kim Kirim had published a number of poems, critical works, and other writings in Korean journals and newspapers in the 1930s. This period was bookended by the return of the first generation of Korean literary elites who studied English, French, and German literature in Japanese universities and the outlawing of writing in Korean in the early 1940s.¹³ This was also the period during which the young literary aspirant Kim Suyŏng, born in 1921,

⁹ Kim Kirim, "Sinch'un ŭi Chosŏn sidan" (Korean poetry circle in new spring), *Chosŏn ilbo*, January 1, 1935; Kim Kirim, "30-nyŏndae tomi ŭi sidan tongt'ae" (The trend of poetry circle in late 1930s), *Inmun p'yŏngnon* (December 1939): 39.

¹⁰ For the struggles and compromises of Korean fiction writers and critics under Japanese fascism in 1940s, refer to Janet Poole, *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Kim Suyŏng, "Muje" (No title), *Kimsuyŏng chŏnjip* (Complete works of Kim Suyŏng) 2 (hereinafter *Complete works* 2); *Prose* (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 2010), 30; Kim Suyŏng, "Yesulchakp'umesŏui Han'guginŭi aesu (Korean sadness in artwork)," *Complete works* 2: 346, 349.

¹² Kim Suyŏng, "Chaeju" (Knack), *Complete works* 2: 85.

¹³ For an overview of the sociocultural context in which Kim Kirim and his literary coterie, the Kuinhoe (Group of nine), wrote, see Christopher P. Hanscom, Walter K. Lew, and Youngju Ryu, editors, *Imperatives of Culture: Selected Essays on Korean History, Literature, and Society from the Japanese Colonial Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 154–7; Christopher P. Hanscom, *The Real Modern: Literary Modernism and the Crisis of Representation in Late Colonial Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 7–10.

was avidly studying literature and theater, traveling between colonial Korea and Japan.

Among the Korean modernist poets, Kim Kirim and Kim Suyŏng share a common salient feature: each of them expressed the values of his generation by translating W. B. Yeats. Kim Kirim translated many poems, novels, and critical works without any genre preference, although he separated himself from a professional translator like his generational “descendant,” Kim Suyŏng. Kim Kirim was more of a poetic theorist of modernism whose translations of foreign poems and criticism were selected in relation to and placed within the scope of his own theories. At the Spring Roundtable held in January 1940 by *Munjang*, Kim Kirim, along with other discussants, was skeptical of the translator-writers starting to gain a foothold in Korean literary circles: “In Japanese literary circles, too, translator-writers have gained power and keep raising problems by throwing comments here and there about their translations.”¹⁴ His worries were unfounded, though, because most of the translated texts circulating in colonial Korea were indirect translations from Japanese; there were only a handful of direct translations,¹⁵ and translation was not a rewarding profession in colonial Korea’s literary circles.

Thirteen years younger than Kim Kirim, Kim Suyŏng studied theater in Japan at Mizushina Haruki’s drama school between 1941 and 1944. Kim Suyŏng gave up stage acting and began to write poetry in 1946, so he belongs to the postcolonial generation of poets; many of his most representative poems were published in the 1960s.¹⁶ Thus, both the colonial influence and his time as a prisoner of war during the Korean War (June 1950–July 1953) were reflected in his poetic work, and he struggled to shape the tradition of Korean literature in the postcolonial and postwar era.

During his productive phase in the 1960s, Kim Suyŏng’s target readership was generally younger, born in the 1930s or later (35 years old or younger), who had had less of their education in Japanese than older generations. As Kim condemned in his 1964 essay “Hip’üresü munhangnon (Hipless literature),”¹⁷ “...the threats to [the Korean literary publishing industry] are *Gunzō*, *Bungakukai*, and *Shōsetsu shinbō* [leading contemporary Japanese literary magazines]. Readers aged 35 years or older no longer read Korean writers’ novels and poems.”¹⁸ He cautioned against the older generations’ negative attitude towards contemporary Korean literature and their lionization of the literary value of reading the Japanese literary texts they had read since their youth. Moreover, he worried that Korean literature was retrogressing because older readers tended to devalue and avoid Korean literary texts.

It is worth noting as well Kim Suyŏng’s attitude towards the post-1930s younger generation,

¹⁴ “Sinch’un chwadamhoe: munhak ūi chemunje” (Spring roundtable: literary issues). *Munjang* 13 (January 1940): 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁶ On the broader social and cultural context of Kim Suyŏng and 1960s Korea, see Lee Young-Jun, “Grand Affirmation: Kim Suyŏng’s Poetic Vision” (Ph.D. diss, Harvard University, 2006), 1–222; “Sovereignty in the Silence of Language: The Political Vision of Kim Suyŏng’s poetry,” *Acta Koreana* 18, no. 1 (June 2015): 233–63.

¹⁷ Lee persuasively associates the term “hipless” here with the lack of basic education in the younger generation. See Lee Young-Jun, “Flower Poetics: Flower Images and the Sovereignty of Language in Kim Su-Young’s Poetry,” *International Association of Language and Literature* 64 (March 2015): 157.

¹⁸ Kim Suyŏng, “Hip’üresü munhangnon (Hipless literature),” *Complete works* 2: 379.

who had never or hardly experienced Japanese rule and generally could not understand writing in Japanese. He was concerned about the literary knowledge and sensitivity of these youth in their postcolonial circumstances: “What about those under 35? Their sources of literary nourishment are even shakier than those of their elders. In Seoul, for example, where bookshops for Western works by far outnumber those for Japanese works, only a few are sold. Young writers enter literary circles with a meager reading background compared with the older generations’ reading performance while pursuing literature studies.”¹⁹ He worried about the younger generation because they could not avail themselves of the richness of Japanese and English sources because of their relative illiteracy in foreign languages.

Kim Suyŏng advocated for the indispensability of English and Japanese literature for the newly established Korean literary tradition, given that 20th-century Korea underwent Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, and, in the south, American influence during the Cold War. In this context, Kim attempted to shape Korean literature, intertextualizing these historical and external influences through this translation. He diligently translated Japanese and English texts into Korean; his extensive translation activities targeted the younger generations, not the older generations who could enjoy these foreign texts without translation.

Whereas Kim Suyŏng’s concern related to forming a Korean readership and a national literature in the postcolonial and post-Korean War circumstances, Kim Kirim tended to focus more on contemporary literary circles in the 1930s under Japanese imperial rule and on the Korean literary modernism emerging from the late 1920s to the late 1930s. He attempted to contrast the latter period with the previous symbolic, romantic era of the 1920s, led by Kim Ōk as a theorist and his disciple the poet Kim Sowŏl.²⁰ Kim Kirim’s essay, “Modŏnjŭm ŭi yŏksajŏk wich’i (The historical position of modernism)” (1939), directly touched on this generational gap. Kim Kirim was an ardent reader and receiver of Western literary modernism, and his representative long poem, *Kisangdo* (The weather map), was extensively inspired by Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, as noted above.²¹ Kim Kirim attempted to liken the literary position of Kim Ōk and Kim Sowŏl to that of W. B. Yeats, largely understood to be the last romantic poet within the history of modern English poetry.²²

This intergenerational sensibility Kim Kirim took issue with is examined in section II by analyzing excerpts of Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928) translated and employed in “The historical position of modernism.” Then, section III explores the younger-generation poet Kim Suyŏng’s approach to tackling his generation’s problems through Yeats by considering

¹⁹ Kim Suyŏng, *Complete works* 2: 279–80.

²⁰ For comprehensive treatment of Kim Ōk and Kim Sowŏl, see Peter Wayne de Fremery, “How Poetry Mattered in 1920s Korea,” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2011), 1–359.

²¹ Kim Kirim referred to T. S. Eliot or *The Waste Land* in several articles, such as *Ojŏn ŭi siron* (Poetics of morning) (1935, 4), *Hyŏndaesi ŭi nanhaesŏng* (Difficulty in modern poems) (1935, 5), and *Siin ŭrosŏ hyŏnsil eŭi chŏkkeŭk kwansim* (Societal interest in reality as a poet) (1936, 1) before publishing *Kisangdo* (The weather map) in July 1936.

²² W.B. Yeats declared himself a “last romantic” in his poem “Coole and Ballylee” (1931): “We were the last romantics—chose for theme/Traditional sanctity and loveliness” W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, Volume 1 (New York: Scribner, 1997), 249.

examples of his translations of and critical writing on Yeats's works. By analyzing these poems of Yeats's, among the most frequently translated into Korean of his works, this article provides a new perspective on these theorists of modernist literature during the colonial and postcolonial periods. This new perspective extends to the genealogy of Korean modernist poetry and poetics, a tradition that sprouted from Kim Ōk in the 1920s and was relayed to Kim Kirim in the 1930s and then reshaped by Kim Suyŏng in the 1960s.

II. Kim Kirim's Appropriation of W. B. Yeats to Criticize Kim Ōk

W. B. Yeats was frequently translated in colonial Korea as a result of his 1923 Nobel Prize; in the 1920s, as many as 17 collections of Yeats's poems were translated.²³ Yeats's poem "The Falling of the Leaves," translated by Kim Ōk, was included in the initial issue (July 1920) of the literary magazine *P'yebŏ* (Wasteland), while Kim Ōk's translation of his poem "A Drinking Song" was included in the July 1920 issue of *Ch'angjo* (Creation). In 1922, *Kaeb'yŏk* (Revolution) presented Yeats's "Down by the Salley Gardens," again translated by Kim Ōk. In 1923, six poems translated by Pyŏn Yŏngman, Chŏn Yŏngtaek, and others were featured in different literary magazines.

One of Yeats's representative early poems, "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" (1899), was translated and published in various forms in Korean literary magazines and newspapers in the 1920s, including by Kim Ōk (1921), Pyŏn Yŏngman (1923), and Pak Yongch'ŏl (1930).

[Back-translation from Kim Ōk's translation]

Dreams (1921)

Had I shining
Heaven's embroidered clothes,
Woven with gold and platinum,
Clothes stained
In blue and dusk, then dark,
By day and night, or evening
I would spread the clothes under your feet.
But, alas, I am poor, possess only my dreams.
I spread my dreams under your feet,
If you tread on my dreams,
Please tread them gracefully and gently.²⁴

[Back-translation from Pyŏn Yŏngman's translation]

²³ See Kim Pyŏngch'ŏl, *Han'guk kŭndae pŏnyŏk munhaksŏ yŏn'gu* (A Study on the history of modern Korean translation literature) (Seoul: Ŭryu munhwasa, 1988), 714.

²⁴ Kim Ōk, *Onoe ŭi mudo* (Dance in agony) (Seoul: Chosŏn tosŏ chusik hoesa, 1921), 145.

Heaven's Fabrics (1923)

Had I the heaven's embroidered fabrics
 Woven with golden and silver combs
 Had I blue, gray, and dark fabrics
 Of night, daylight, and dusk—
 I would spread them cheerily
 Under your feet.
 But, I am poor, all I possess
 Is my dreams.
 I cannot but spread my dreams
 Under your feet,
 Please tread gently and quietly, because you tread on dreams.²⁵

[Back-translation from Pak Yongch'öl's translation]
 Heaven's Cloths (1930)

Had I heaven's cloths
 Woven with the bright lights of gold and silver,
 Had I blue, dim, and black cloths
 Of night, light, and dusk,
 I would spread them under your feet
 But, poor as I am, I have only dreams,
 I spread these dreams under your feet,
 Please tread them lightly and go, because you tread on dreams.²⁶

[Original]
 He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven²⁷ (1899)

Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths,
 Enwrought with golden and silver light,
 The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
 Of night and light and the half-light,
 I would spread the cloths under your feet:
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.²⁸

²⁵ Pyŏn Yŏngman, *Tongmyŏng* (Daybreak), vol. 2, no. 23 (1923): 18.

²⁶ Pak Yongch'öl, *Simunhak* (Poetry), vol. 2 (May 1930): 34–5.

²⁷ The initial title (1899) was “Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.”

²⁸ Yeats, *Collected Poems*, 73.

The original poem is an octet with two quatrains using an abab-baba rhyme scheme. However, it is syntactically impossible to maintain such a rhyme scheme when translating a poem from English into Korean. Therefore, when analyzing a Korean translator's approach, focus is inevitably placed on the content, not the form.

First, each of the three translations uses a different title. Kim Ōk was more of a traditionalist, an expert in classical Chinese poetry; nonetheless, his keen interest in English romanticism and French symbolism is also shown in his translations of certain poems in *Onoe ūi mudo* (Dance in agony) (1921).²⁹ In the current piece, he focuses more on "wishes" than on "cloths," and translates the title very freely as "Dreams," whereas Pyōn Yōngman and Pak Yongchōl are more faithful to the material and translate the title into what has been rendered above as "Heaven's Fabrics" and "Heaven's Cloths," respectively. They use different words for "cloths"—synonyms, but respectively of Chinese and Korean origins. The main theme of this poem converges in the last line: "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams." The three translators also show different approaches to translating the word "softly": "gracefully and gently," "gently and quietly," and "lightly." They appear to vary within an acceptable range, except that Pak's "lightly" requires particular attention. Pak translated the poem in 1930, after the publication of Kim Sowōl's poem "*Chindallaekekot* (Azaleas)" (1925), which has been observed to interact intertextually with "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven."³⁰

In the third stanza, the poetic narrator tells his beloved, who is about to leave him, to go away treading "lightly" (*sappuni*) the azaleas scattered on the road for her.³¹ The source word, *sappuni*, conveys the image of light, agile foot movements; Pak's choice of it for "softly," which has many closer semantic equivalents in Korean, allows the assumption that he was inspired by "Azalea Flowers." In translating "tread," while Kim and Pyōn do not deviate from the original wording, Pak changes it to "please tread [...] and go." This translation has a strong resemblance to line 9 with "Tread softly, deeply, and go" in "Azalea Flowers."³²

Kim Ōk, who led the early Korean "free-verse" movement beginning in the 1920s as a poet, critic, and translator, made a substantial contribution to Yeats translation in Korea. Of the 34 Yeats's poems translated during the colonial period, he alone produced 13,³³ of which six were from *The Wind Among the Reeds*: "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven,"

²⁹ Regarding the influence on Kim Ōk of English romanticism and the French symbolism and his relationship with those traditions through his translations of them, see Kim Uktong, *Kāndae ūi se pōnyōkka* (Three translators in the early modern Korea) (Seoul: Somyōng, 2010), 165–264. For Kim Ōk's interest in classical Chinese poetry, see Chōng Kiin, "Han'guk kundaesi hyōngsōnggwa hanmunmaek" (The Formation of Modern Korean Poetry and the Context in Chinese Letters) (Ph.D. diss., Seoul National University, 2017), 135–93.

³⁰ Yi Yangha, "Sowōl ūi chindallae wa Yeich'ū ūi kku" (Sowōl's azaleas and Yeats's dreams)," in *Yi Yangha Kyosu ch'unyōm munjip* (Collected writings and remembrances of Professor Yi Yangha), ed. Chōng Pyōngjo (Seoul: Minjung Sō'gwan, 1964), 62–63.

³¹ Kim Sowōl, *Chindallae kekot* (Azaleas) (Seoul: Maemunsa, 1925), 190.

³² *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Poetry*, translated and edited by David R. McCann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.

³³ Two translations of *Crossways* (1889), one translation of *The Rose* (1893), six translations from *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), one translation of *In the Seven Woods* (1904), two translations of *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), and one translation of *The Wild Swans at Cool* (1919).

“The Moods,” “The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart,” “Into the Twilight,” “The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love,” and “The Lover Pleads with His Friend for Old Friends.” These translations were published in the Korean-language (translated) collection *Onoe ūi mudo* (Dance in agony) (1921) and the literary coterie magazine *Yŏngdae* (1924).

With two exceptions, namely, “The Moods,” which intones the feelings provoking poetic creation, and “Into the Twilight,” expressing Irish nationalist sentiments, all the poems translated by Kim Ōk from *The Wind Among the Reeds* were “love songs” or romantic poems about Yeats’s longing for his beloved, Maud Gonne—a choice deeply related to the “free love fever” that emerged in reaction to the legacy of the patriarchal Confucian marriage system called early marriage (*chobon*).³⁴

Kim Kirim’s critical essay titled “The historical position of modernism” appeared against the background of this Yeats fever. Quoting and translating from Yeats’s relatively recent (at that time) poem “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928), Kim describes the genealogy of modern Korean poetry beginning in the 1920s. When Kim published this essay in 1939, use of the Korean language was beginning to be prohibited by the Japanese colonial government, and the Chosŏn ilbo, where Kim worked as a director of the arts and sciences department, was facing imminent closure in 1940. At this juncture, Kim Kirim traced the romanticism of the 1920s and advocated the modernist literary current that hit Korean poetic circles in the 1930s. He provocatively opens the essay with a citation of the first three lines of “Sailing to Byzantium,” with his own domesticated translation:

[Back-translation]

This is no country of the old.

The young are arm in arm

Birds in the woods—

The retreating generation intoxicated by their songs—

[Original]

That is no country for old men. The young.

In one another’s arms, birds in the trees,

—Those dying generations—at their song,

“Sailing to Byzantium” was first published in *The Tower* (1928), a collection of poems from Yeats’s later period. Kim Kirim begins his essay by setting his translation of the first three lines of the poem as an epigraph.

Kim Kirim permits himself the freedom of boldly interpreting Yeats’s poem. In the fourth line of his translation, he replaces “dying” with “retreating,” making a request to the older poets to retreat and give way to the new generation. Moreover, he replaces “That” with

³⁴ Regarding the “free love syndrome” during the 1920s, see Kwon Bodurae, “The World in a Love Letter,” in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, eds. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 19–33.

“This” in the first line, losing the psychological distance between the current position of the poetic narrator and the place about which he is singing. The original poetic narrator has left the land of “the young” (Ireland) and is on board a ship sailing to Byzantium (now Istanbul), the ancient capital city of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. For the poetic narrator, “here” implies Byzantium and “there” means today’s Ireland at that time. From this, it can be easily inferred that the poetic narrator is Yeats himself in his later years.

In “Sailing to Byzantium,” the “aged” Yeats does not hide his jealousy or envy towards the “young” in Ireland. With the allusion that they are a “dying generation,” he makes it clear that the youth they are proud of now are not eternal and that they are also headed to death. His gaze is fixed on the ancient city of Byzantium, an eternal place where time has been fossilized. This voyage is for him an effort to stop physical time in pursuit of eternity. “That” is not only the physical distance between Ireland and himself but also the psychological distance between him as he ages and the young in the newly independent Ireland.

Why did Kim Kirim take this poem as an epigraph to “The historical position of modernism”? And what caused him to mistranslate “dying” as “retreating” and “that” as “this”? These conspicuous mistranslations cannot but be intentional, considering Kim Kirim’s educational background—he graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature of the Tohoku Imperial University Law and Literature Faculty in April 1936 under supervising professor Doi Kōchi, with a thesis on the poetics of I. A. Richards. What did he then intend to achieve with these mistranslations?

Kim Kirim mentions “*The Wind Among the Reeds*” (1899), collected poems of Yeats’s early period, in “The historical position of modernism,” criticizing its sentimentality and pointing out its negative, enervating impact on Korean poetic circles in the 1920s. By citing “Sailing to Byzantium” in the epigraph, Kim may well have intended to trigger a generational debate.

Asians tend to be secluded, retrospective, and sentimental. Even waiting for a new civilization to bloom, they were cherishing a nostalgia for their old collapsing world deep in their heart. As the attraction of Yeats’s *The Wind among the Reeds* was generated at the intersection of the dusk of Ireland and the dusk of the 19th century, the dawn of our modern poetry learned the song of dusk at the moment of birth.³⁵

Kim Kirim criticized Korean poetic circles in the 1920s, the “dawn of our modern poetry,” caught up in romanticism and symbolism. His criticism of “secluded, retrospective, and sentimental” Asians was directed at the Korean poetic circles representing romanticism, with their flagship poets Kim Ōk and Kim Sowŏl. Kim Kirim pointed out that what Korean romantic poets learned from Yeats’s early poetry was “the song of dusk” born from the crossing of “the dusk of Ireland and the dusk of the 19th century.” He dismissed the “song of dusk” as sentimental romanticism that should be overcome and argued that its place should be ceded to the poetics of morning, the physiology of dawn. For Kim Kirim, anguish

³⁵ Kim Kirim, “Modŏnijŭm ūi yŏksajŏk wich’i” (The historical position of modernism), *Inmun p’yŏngnon* 1 (October 1939): 82.

and nostalgia for things fading in our memory were emotions to be suppressed. He held the view that Korean poetic circles in the 1930s should be driven by a forward-looking cheerful mind, steering clear of the sentimentalism of the 1920s.

Kim Kirim shows his disapproval of Yeats's love songs and criticizes the sentimental mood pervading Korean poetic circles with the following words: "Entering the 1920s, these pioneers and their residual currents already stopped dashing towards the ambitious goal of constructing the New Literature and were caught in an indolence of indulging themselves in the mood of sunset."³⁶ Kim Kirim refused to provide sentimental or romantic images; for him, sentiment was a form of emotional waste that should be held in check in art. This attitude is evidenced by his own poems "Ch'össarang (First love)" and "Yönae ŭi tanmyön (Cross-section of romance)," both of which dream of a constructive man–woman relationship completely devoid of such emotions. He regarded the futureless, futile love in the sunset years of life as a sort of sentimental romanticism.

Kim Kirim's intention to distinguish his position from that of the older-generation poets is evident in his criticisms of Yeats's early poems and his choice of Yeats's late-period "Sailing to Byzantium" as the epigraph to his critical essay. He points to Yeats's epochal limitations with this statement: "Even though Yeats's late-period poem collections such as *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* are motivated by a certain social interest, he is a poet rooted in the 1890s, and his views are fastened to the prototypes of the 1890s."³⁷ This evaluation of Yeats as a man of the previous century shows Kim Kirim's generational outlook. His essay shows some awareness of the shift in Yeats's poetic interest towards social developments in Ireland with the publication of the late-period poem collection *The Tower* (1928). Nevertheless, Kim Kirim tried to fix Yeats's position in literary history in the 1890s. This may be interpreted as the self-assertion of a younger-generation poet wishing to be distinguished from older-generation poets. Speaking in terms of Harold Bloom's discourse *The Anxiety of Influence*, Kim Kirim contradicted himself by drawing a line between himself and Kim Ōk through his translation of Yeats's late-period poems while also labeling Yeats, as a poet of the past century. In this way, he degraded both Yeats and Kim Ōk as old-generation poets and upgraded the significance of the 1930s modernist poetic circles to the highest position in Korea's literary history.³⁸

In this light, Kim Kirim's switch of "that" to "this" in his translation of "Sailing to Byzantium" reflects his awareness that the object of criticism in the essay was not "that" Ireland, but "this" Korea. Furthermore, the translation of "dying generation" as "retreating generation" was intended to highlight the generational limitation of the 1920s poetic circles that produced the free translations from *The Wind among the Reeds* in their contemporary context rather than discussing the theme of the original text, the contrast between ephemeral life and eternal art. For Kim Kirim, Kim Ōk was a "retreating" poet, disappearing into the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kim Kirim, "Siin ŭi sedaejök han'gye" (A poet's generational limitation), *Chosön ilbo*, April 23, 1940.

³⁸ The 17 Yeats poems Kim Ōk translated in the 1930s are also mostly early-period poems, with translations after *The Tower* limited to Kim Kirim's snippet "Sailing to Byzantium" and Chöng Insöp's posthumous translation of "Man and the Echo" published in *Dong-a ilbo*, March 23, 1939.

backyard of history to represent the 1920s. In contrast, the poets he presents positively in “The historical position of modernism,” namely, Chŏng Chiyong, Sin Sŏkjŏng, Kim Kwanggyun, Chang Manyŏng, Pak Jaeryun, Cho Yŏngchul, and Yi Sang, were younger poets who contributed to the modernist character of 1930s poetic circles.

Kim Kirim’s translation explains his strategies used to criticize Kim Ōk, who was the flagship figure in Korea in the reception and translation of Yeats’s poems in the 1920s. He distances himself and the 1930s’s modernist poets from the 1920s’s “retreating generation” intoxicated by Yeats’s love songs by quoting Yeats’s late-period poem as his epigraph in his critical essay.³⁹ Kim Kirim’s criticism of romanticism is echoed by his descendant Kim Suyŏng through the poem, “Sailing to Byzantium.”

III. W. B. Yeats Portrayed in Kim Suyŏng’s Translation and Criticism

For Kim Kirim as for his Korean contemporaries, the later Yeats wrote in a distinguished “modernist” style, as exemplified in “Sailing to Byzantium,” leaving his earlier symbolism behind. Yet, Kim Kirim continued to portray Yeats as he was during the late romantic period characteristic of the 1890s. In contrast, Yeats was regarded as a great poet of literary modernism by Kim Suyŏng (1921–1968). Both Korean modernist poets acclaimed Yeats’s late poems, such as “Sailing to Byzantium” and “Byzantium” from *The Tower*; nonetheless, their respective ways of positioning Yeats within the history of world literature were contradictory.

Kim Suyŏng and his Korean literary colleagues kept a keen eye out for the literary works by Nobel Prize winners to stay current with world literature trends. They were convinced that readers could broaden their perspective and become educated by reading great literary texts. Yeats was featured in *Nobelsang munhak chŏnjip* (The complete works of literature: Nobel Prize Laureates), a project of Sin’gu Publishing House, which published a world literature series in postcolonial Korea. Kim Suyŏng was entrusted with the translation of Yeats for this project thanks to his friendship with Sin Tongmun from Sin’gu Publishing House. He translated Yeats’s play *Deirdre* (1907), poems “Down by the Salley Gardens” and “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” and essay “The Wisdom of the King.”⁴⁰ These were published with his critical essay “Sinbijuŭi wa minjokchuŭi ŭi siin Yeich’ŭ (Yeats, a poet of mysticism and nationalism)” (1964), which presented Yeats’s position in the history of world literature. Kim Suyŏng provided the same excerpt from “Sailing to Byzantium” in the essay that Kim Kirim had used as an epigraph, but he conveyed the original poem’s meaning more faithfully, with a far

³⁹ Kim Kirim also criticizes the Indian romantic poet Rabindranath Tagore and, implicitly, Tagore’s translator Kim Ōk, in his representative long poem, *Kisangdo* (The weather map), in the following lines: “Tagore’s ear, surely as happy as a conch-shell, could be intoxicated by the song of the waves on the last day of the moon—“intoxicated” here is a fairly severe criticism of Tagore’s romanticism. See Wonsook Ku, “Aspects of Modernism in Korean Poetry: Western Influence on Poetics and Poems of Kim Kirim” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1990), 250.

⁴⁰ On the analysis of these works by Yeats, see Han Sejŏng, “Kimsuyŏng ŭi Yeich’ŭ munhak suyong yangsang yŏngu” (A Study of Yeats’s literary influence on Kim Suyŏng), *The Yeats Journal of Korea* 53 (2017): 375–8.

more natural translation. However, by again choosing to translate “that” into “this,” as Kim Kirim had, Kim Suyŏng appropriated the poem to draw an analogy between the two colonial experiences of Korea and Ireland.

[Back-translation]
This is no country of the old.
The young are arm in arm,
Birds on the trees,
Singing — the dying generation —
The falls with soaring salmon, the sea crowded with mackerel.
Fish, beasts, fowl,
Begotten, born, and dying
Praise the long summer.
Fascinated by the sensual music
All legacy of eternal intellect is neglected.⁴¹

Kim Suyŏng summarizes this poem as follows: “This is a song of the old Yeats’s (in his 60s) voyage from the crumbling present to the ancient city of Byzantium, where there is an eternal soul. However, neither retrospective nostalgia nor sorrow of an old man regretting bygone times is found in this poem. It only criticizes the present time and presents the soul (eternal intellect) to the alienating materialism.”⁴² Kim Suyŏng valued this poem highly for its dissociation from sentimental romanticism and emphasis on intellect.

In contrast to many poets whose best works or most flourishing productivity occurred at particular life stages, the quality and quantity of Yeats’s work were more consistent throughout his lifetime. He wrote as much as he could his whole life, growing in maturity over time, throughout the political ups and downs of his country. Nonetheless, a significant style shift is shown in Yeats’s late-period poems when compared with his earlier works, as suggested above. If his earlier poems were mostly love poetry addressing Maud Gonne and mystical poetry that paid homage to the natural beauty of Ireland’s landscape, his late-period poems express cultural-critical thoughts with a characteristic emotional dissociation.

Like Kim Kirim, Kim Suyŏng seems to be much more interested in Yeats’s late-stage poems and their lack of sentimentality than the early-stage poems. He appears to regard “Sailing to Byzantium” as the best among the late-period poems, as demonstrated by his exalted praise: “Succinct lines without ornaments, determinative elegance without suppleness, perspicacity, uniformity, and objectivity—all these are qualities that the young Yeats would have never achieved.”⁴³

Kim Suyŏng begins his critical essay on Yeats with the first stanza of “Leda and the Swan,” published in the 1928 collection *The Tower* along with the Byzantium poems. Considering that

⁴¹ Kim Suyŏng, *Complete works* 2: 295.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kim Suyŏng, *Complete works* 2: 294–5.

“Leda and the Swan,” based on the tale in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, was an attempt at rewriting a foundational Western story, it seems natural that Kim Suyŏng was attracted to this poem given his keen interest in reshaping the Korean literary tradition.

[Back-translation]

A sudden blow and the great wings
Still beating the staggering girl.
Her crotch caressed by the black wing blades,
Her nape pecked by the beak.
He crushed her helpless breast
With his breast.

— from *Leda and the Swan*⁴⁴

Kim Suyŏng comments on the aged Yeats with the following words: “he projects himself into his poetry and maintains both a healthy and passionate tone, including his holistic personality, within the poetic realm.” It stands to reason that this may also be Kim Suyŏng’s self-portrait, as he and Yeats also share a common denominator in the rewriting of tradition.

Kim Suyŏng had a reputation of refusing any unidirectional influence, whether domestic or international.⁴⁵ This led, in his own words, to a strategy of selective adoption of good traits; indeed, he once confessed that he dumped any good books that might influence him after reading them. Despite this self-imposed measure, it appears that Yeats’s mystical and nationalist tendencies were assimilated unconsciously and exerted their influence on his poetry. The intellectual statements in Kim Suyŏng’s poetry can be said to be the product of a fusion between the emotional dissociation of Yeats’s late-period poems and a positive nationalism. Similarly, the intellectualism of Yeats’s later poems was also reflected in Kim Suyŏng’s later work, and Kim came to feel ashamed of his first poem, “*Myŏjŏng ŭi norae* (Song of a shrine)” (1946) published in *Yesul purak* (Art village) and to view it as amateurish; he seldom wrote love poems⁴⁶ and was much more interested in history and historical awareness. His poems “Hyŏndaesik kyoryang (A modern bridge)” and “Kŏdaehan ppuri (A gigantic root)” (both 1964) demonstrate this characteristic inclination. “A Modern Bridge” talks about the possibility of communication between past and present, focusing on the metaphor of a bridge. Its interest in generational issues and modernity reminds readers of “Sailing to Byzantium,” which Kim Suyŏng had translated.

Whenever I cross a modern bridge, suddenly I become a retrospectivist
Without knowing how this is sinful
Insects of a colony cross over this
Bridge like it’s their own

⁴⁴ Kim Suyŏng, *Complete works* 2: 287.

⁴⁵ Kim Suyŏng, 432.

⁴⁶ Kim Suyŏng, 332-7.

Young people don't know why this bridge is unnatural
Therefore I stop my heart like a machine
Whenever I cross this bridge
(I have been doing numberless exercises like this.)

But the question lies not in this resistance
but in my love of those young people
or in my trust of them
Whenever I hear from them, "your story is about twenty years ago"
I slowly go back over their age
and feel new composure
You may well call it a new history

This wonder makes me get old and young at the same time
no, neither old nor young
There is no difference between young and old
Like trains crisscrossing under this bridge
The bridge is the witness of this halt
Of the moment of crisscrossing of young and old
In this speed and arrangement of speed
The bridge learns love
It's really extraordinary
Now I saw it correctly, leisurely,
The evidence that makes an enemy a brother

November 22, 1964⁴⁷

In this poem, the narrator portrays the younger generation, 20 years younger than himself. As "colonial insects," they cross bridges built in the colonial period, without any awareness of the history. Nor will they acknowledge it, saying, "Your story was written about twenty years ago."

This poem has two main interpretations. First, "A Modern Bridge" can be interpreted as an intergenerational communique; however, in contrast, the impossibility of such communication can also be interpreted as its theme. Adopting the latter interpretation, with its inevitability of intergenerational conflict, the patience and love the poetic narrator feels towards the younger generation then take on the cast of resignation coming from disappointment and despair. The narrator is certainly criticizing the attitude of the younger generation; in lines 22–23, for example, "In this speed and arrangement of speed/The bridge learns love," "arrangement" means stagnation. Like two trains passing by each other, the

⁴⁷ Translated by Lee Young-Jun, from Young-Jun Lee, "Grand Affirmation: Kim Suyŏng's Poetic Vision," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2006), 312.

older and younger generations cannot even meet, but merely confirm their own positions. Objects with different velocities are moving farther and farther away from each other not only physically but also psychologically. Whereas the colonial legacy is a negative memory of subjugation by an enemy to be shaken off for the older generation, this trace has become a natural part of life for the younger generation, just like their siblings or like the bridges built in the colonial period but used naturally in the 1960s as if they were natural products of Korea and had just “grown there.” The historical “enemy,” imperialism, becomes like a “sibling” to the younger generation, and the poetic narrator shows an attitude of resignation with the metaphor of “love.” The narrator acknowledges the pain of colonial domination when he was young, but at the same time he understands the newer generation, who employs these remnants unaware of how they were previously imposed on society. He has mixed feelings regarding colonialism and decolonization but comes to understand and accept the historical difference between his and the younger generation.

A strong self-assertion in the name of “history” and “tradition” is also manifested in “A Gigantic Root,” written nine months before “A Modern Bridge.”⁴⁸ The poetic narrator proclaims the “root” to which he must return, as follows.

...
 In order to put a foot on this land
 Compared to the gigantic root,
 The iron pillars of the third bridge of the Han River, planted under the water, are hairs
 of a moth,
 compared to the gigantic root, I thrust down into my land

 Compared to the root, reminding me of the mammoth in a horror movie,
 With deep black boughs repelling even crows even magpies,
 that I cannot dare to imagine,
 Compared to the gigantic gigantic root...

February 3, 1964⁴⁹

Kim Suyŏng’s poetic root seems to reach into the substrate of the modern bridge produced by Japanese imperialism, far beyond its surface frame. He always wished that the younger generation would remember the provenance of their culture, and it is presumably this wish

⁴⁸ Han Sejöng renders the title as “Kōdaehan ppuri (A gigantic root),” with a line from Yeats’s “Among School Children,” “O chestnut tree, great rooted blossom,” (line 61). She argues that “[a]lthough this might be a mere coincidental correspondence of expressions, in view of Kim Suyŏng’s particular interest in Yeats’s literature, this can be regarded as a basis for investigation in a new perspective on the traditional perception embodied in ‘A Great Root.’” (Han Sejöng, 2017, 382)

⁴⁹ Translated by Lee Young-Jun, in Lee, “Grand Affirmation,” 309. The translation seems more persuasive as “A Gigantic Root” than “A Great Root,” because this poem touches upon the poetic narrator’s faith to dig for a cultural provenance that transcends the general idea of a cultural tradition.

that drove him to use the expression “poet of mysticism and nationalism” to refer to Yeats. Translating “Sailing to Byzantium” with its intergenerational conflicts, Kim Suyŏng eulogized the moral conviction of the aged Yeats, admiring his non-xenophobic nationalism. At the junction between Irish history and Byzantium, the Irish root can be in the Roman Empire, and the intellect of the aged poetic narrator clearly distinguishes it from the forgetfulness and ignorance of the younger Irish, who indulge in sensuality. Accurate memory and perspicacious historical awareness were the “great root” of the Korean cultural tradition with which Kim Suyŏng sought to inspire the younger generation. In his critical essay on Yeats, as well, he expressed his heart’s desire to see the emergence of a younger generation seized with such conviction.

Where Kim Kirim appropriated Yeats to highlight the position of his generation in the history of Korean poetry during the colonial period, Kim Suyŏng applied Yeats’s sense of history and tradition to raise awareness among the postcolonial younger generations, who had been less exposed to literature education than the older generations. He emphasized Yeats’s tendencies towards mysticism and nationalism at a point when Yeats’s position in the history of world literature had been established to some degree. Kim’s poetic world reflects the mysticism and nationalism based on tradition. His poem “A Modern Bridge” asserts the impossibility of intergenerational communication, with a skeptical glance at younger generations’ ability to maintain the pursuit of the “great root” of Korean tradition. Kim Suyŏng believed that his generation had to play the role of inculcating the younger generation with traditional awareness; however, he came to realize how difficult it would be to play this “bridge” role. The feeling of impasse in the face of the impossibility of communication caused him to feel despair and produce a metaphor of lamentation, namely, nearsighted “colonial insects,” to which the poetic narrator of “A Modern Bridge” compares the younger generation, who are only concerned with their own contemporaries.

IV. Conclusion

This article investigates the genealogy of Korean modernist poetry by exploring the generational differences in Kim Kirim’s and Kim Suyŏng’s views on poetry as mediated by Yeats; it does so through analysis of their translations of Yeats, Kim Kirim’s essay “The historical position of modernism” (1939), and Kim Suyŏng’s essay “Yeats, a poet of mysticism and nationalism” (1964). Yeats provided Kim Kirim with cues upon which to base his criticisms of 1920s Korean poetic circles. The many love poems Yeats wrote up to the 1920s, before shifting to critically committed intellectual poems in the 1930s, led Kim Kirim to fix Yeats as a romantic poet (while acknowledging the change), and to note that the position of a poet in literary history, once somewhat fixed, cannot be easily changed by the poet’s later efforts. This can be interpreted as showing Kim Kirim’s determination as a modernist poet to defend the position of the 1930s modernist poetic circles in distinction from the 1920s romantic ones.

Kim Suyŏng, who used to meet Kim Kirim for literary talks in Pak Inhwon's bookstore-salon, Mari sŏsa, during the post-liberation period, wished to reshape the Korean literary tradition after surviving the Korean War. During the peak years of his literary activity in the 1960s, Korean literary circles sought to establish their own literary tradition in liberated Korea, although the country was divided into two parts. Tackling the task of cultivating a literary tradition, Kim Suyŏng saw a solution in avid readings of contemporary Japanese and Anglo-American literary works and consequently became a prolific translator of contemporary works and criticism from Japanese and Anglo-American literatures. In particular, he saw in Yeats's non-xenophobic nationalist ideas the driving force necessary for the construction of a "great Korea" led by the younger generations. Whereas Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" inspired Kim Kirim with ideas of generational distinction, it touched Kim Suyŏng as a message for constructing an ideal country like Byzantium, an eternal empire.

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