



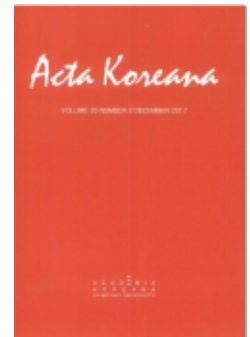
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INTRODUCTION TO HYŎN CHINGŎN'S "HOME"

By BRUCE FULTON

Hyŏn Chingŏn (1900–1943) was born in Taegu and was educated there and in Japan and China. While still a schoolboy in Japan he and other budding writers such as Yi Sanghwa produced a journal called *Kŏhwa* (Torch). First published in 1920, Hyŏn had turned out some two dozen stories by the time that “Kohyang,” the story translated here, appeared in 1926, in his story collection *Chosŏn ūi ōlgul* (The faces of Korea). Much of his working life was taken up with editorial positions at the *Shidae ilbo* and *Tonga ilbo* newspapers. Late in his short life he turned to historical novels.

Hyŏn along with Yŏm Sangsŏp and Kim Tongin deserves major credit for laying the foundation for the modern Korean short story. His short fiction, starkly realistic third-person narratives such as “Sul kwŏnhanŭn sahoe” (A society that drives you to drink, 1921) and the ironically titled “Unsu choŭn nal” (A lucky day, 1924) as well as first-person confessional narratives such as “Pinch’ŏ” (The poor wife, 1921) and “Kohyang,” provide us with invaluable slices of life in colonial Korea. These and other stories were collected in *Chosŏn ūi ōlgul*, arguably the first modern Korean story collection to stand the test of time.

“Kohyang” (Home) is the source of the phrase *Chosŏn ūi ōlgul*, which in the story is applied to the worn visage of the oddly dressed individual the narrator finds sitting across from him on a train bound for Seoul. Like the author himself, this unskilled laborer has lived in China and Japan and is seeking his future in the colonial capital. But the story includes other “faces of Chosŏn” as well, including a Japanese and a Chinese. In depicting a foreign presence on Korean soil, Hyŏn echoes two important works of fiction, one published twenty years earlier—Yi Injik’s *shin sosŏl* (new fiction) *Hyŏl ūi nu* (Tears of blood, 1906)—and one published twenty years later—Ch’ae Manshik’s “Misut’ŏ Pang” (Mister Pang, 1946). The former work opens in the hills outside P’yŏngyang with a scene of the carnage wreaked by the Sino-Japanese War while the protagonist of the latter story, who like the man on the train has made the rounds of East Asia, seeks his fortune amid the chaos of a “liberated” peninsula occupied by the US and the USSR.

Another “face of Chosŏn” is the ancestral village turned ghost town, an image of the migration of colonial subjects to Manchuria that foreshadows subsequent momentous population shifts on the Korean peninsula: of native northerners to the south and native southerners to the north during the post-Liberation years, the refugee movements during the Korean War, and the movement of human labor from the countryside to the capital of Seoul and its satellite cities during the Park Chung Hee era of industrialization. Other “faces” are that of the agrarian landscape, newly controlled by the Oriental Development Company and its comprador landlords, and those of the girls and women who, like the childhood playmate and potential bride of our oddly dressed hero, have been sold into servitude in modern times. “Kohyang” in short depicts an ancestral home whose features have been distorted beyond recognition.