

PAK, Chiwŏn. *The Jehol Diary*. Translated and annotated by Yang Hi Choe-Wall. Kent: Global Oriental, 2010. 208 pages. ISBN: 1906876177 (Hardcover). 79.00 USD.

Compared to his status as a cultural hero in present day Korea, Pak Chiwŏn appears strangely under-represented in Western, especially English-language Korean Studies. Dieter Eikemeier's doctoral dissertation on elements of Pak Chiwŏn's political thought, published in 1970 in German, seems to have remained the only Western language monographical study of this intellectual giant to date. While his so-called "short stories" have found their way into Western languages early on (collections of his fiction have only recently been published both in English and German,¹ but some like *Hŏsaeng chŏn* have been included in anthologies for decades), there have been few attempts to make his major work on which his influence during his life-time primarily rested, *Yŏrha ilgi* or "The Jehol diary," more accessible to a Western readership. Part of the reason may be found in the fact that one of the most immediately likely audiences for this account of a 1780 journey to Peking and Jehol, scholars interested in the object of description, are able to access the original *hanmun* text (and have done so with visible success, as Susan Naquin in her splendid history of Peking²); an even better explanation is certainly provided by the enormous difficulties that the text poses, which made an early would-be translator give up after a couple of pages.³

Thus, this translation of the first three chapters of *Yŏrha ilgi* merits gratitude and compliments by its sheer existence. Having tried my hand at a German translation of the first two chapters, which still lingers unpublished in a drawer due to the time-consuming difficulties involved in giving the final touch to such a text and the never-ending doubts on decisions taken in translation, my respect for the efforts that have gone into this book is all the greater.

The *Yŏrha ilgi* is a both massive and composite text, consisting of seven diary chapters that are basically organized along chronological lines, and—depending on the edition used—19 to 20 thematically ordered chapters, a number of them records of brush talks with literati met during the sojourn, others the author's miscellaneous jottings on certain topics, or collections of essays in high literary style. The fact that one of these later chapters—*Okkwap yahwa*, which contains the famous "story" *Hŏsaeng chŏn* mentioned above—carries the format of the brush talks over to the realm of oral conversation (the chapter is supposedly a record of conversations with a group of interpreters) is further witness to the great formal variety of *Yŏrha ilgi*. Although even within the diary chapters additional materials of miscellany character are inserted and the narrative is time and again interspersed with discursive passages, the choice to start offering the treasures of this text to a Western readership with the more entertaining diary chapters is an obvious one. The first three that are translated here—*Togangnok*, *Sŏnggyŏng chapchi* and *Il sin sup'il*—lead us from Ŭiju at the southern bank of the Yalu river, where Pak Chiwŏn's narrative sets in, through Manchuria up to the Great Wall, from where China proper starts; they thus can be regarded as a sort of unit within the overall travel narrative which again fully justifies the decision to publish a translation of

these three chapters as one volume, potentially the first in a series. However, to call this book just “The Jehol Diary,” without indicating anywhere in the title, the imprint or even the flap texts that this is a *partial* translation (only by the third page of the introduction is this information disclosed to the unsuspecting reader) may be somewhat misleading for those not familiar enough with the text to have guessed this from the book’s size, or lack thereof (a full translation would comprise about a thousand pages). The chance that the uninitiated and careless reader comes away with a wrong impression is reinforced by the insertion of the words THE END below the text (and above the notes) of chapter three, an obvious disservice not only to the audience but also to a text that is characterized by an organization, and a history of production, that rather suspends any notion of a clear-cut beginning and end.⁴ These were probably decisions made by the publishing company afraid of diminishing the attraction of the book when advertising the fact of its being a partial translation too clearly, and as such are understandable. Readers would have been served well, however, by attempts to provide them with a better understanding of the remainder of the text from which these chapters are taken. The “Table of Contents” given in the appendix, which only lists the chapters (26 in this case) by title in transcription, in *hangŭl* and in the original Chinese version, fulfills this task only insufficiently; a thorough exposition of the full scope of *Yŏrha ilgi* in the introduction would have been preferable, but at least the chapter titles in the Table of Contents should have been translated. As it stands, it offers information only to those who are able to glean the same from the original text or from one of its Korean translations anyway.

The translation itself is characterized by priority given to general readability and straightforwardness of style, rather than philological fidelity. The often convoluted sentences of the original are usually broken up into smaller, easily intelligible units; irritating details are sometimes just ignored. Pak Chiwŏn’s own interlineary commentaries, for example—explanations inserted in smaller characters into the original text—are consistently either deleted or integrated into the main text. All this goes a long way in reducing the experience of strangeness for the Western reader and to keep up a pleasant narrative flow. Similarly, occasional minimal insertions aim at providing what might feel like missing links, or at enhancing the liveliness of the narrative. The description of the uniforms worn by the military policemen (*kulloe*), for example, is introduced by a short sentence that could be rendered as “their attire is ridiculous” (其

¹ Elke Golchert-Jung and Hyungkang Jung, trans., *Yeonam Park Jiweon: Die Schelte des Tigers. Erzählungen* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2009); Emanuel Pastreich, trans., *The Novels of Park Jiwon: Translation of Overlooked Worlds* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2011).

² Susan Naquin, *Peking—Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

³ Ross King, in a Korean Studies e-mail list contribution which will probably be quoted in every review of this translation, let the Korean Studies community know the following details about an “abortive translation manuscript left behind by James S. Gale: “After 8 pages of carefully written out English translation (about 15 pages double-spaced when typed up), he gives up, and the last words on the manuscript page are: ‘Too difficult and obscure for words.’ And he had excellent hanmun ‘pundits’ to help him “(his term).” January 26, 2011, http://koreaweb.ws/pipermail/koreanstudies_koreaweb.ws/2011-January/008390.html.

⁴ Chapters of *Yŏrha ilgi* had started to circulate while Pak Chiwŏn was still busy writing further chapters, which precluded the finalisation of a definite manuscript—if that was ever planned. Thus, different editions arrange the extant materials in slightly variant ways.

打扮令人絕倒); the translation by Choe-Wall reads: “The way they dress looks so droll that I nearly died from laughing the first time I saw them in their uniforms” (14). The additions may have been necessitated by the translator’s decision to understand *in* (人) in this sentence as a first person pronoun (which is possible, but not necessarily so), but whatever prompted her to opt for such a free rendering, the result comes very close to the atmosphere and narrative style of the original text. Sometimes this easy-going style of translation results in small gems of prose, like when the rather straightforward explanation for fish being easy prey to the fishing rod in the “de-militarized zone,”⁵ reading literally “for the fish are not used to the fishing hook” (蓋魚未慣釣故也), becomes “[p]erhaps a baited hook had never before tempted these freshwater fish” (15).

Given all these techniques of adapting a difficult text to modern English and of safeguarding its literary appeal through artful but clear prose, this translation of *Yŏrha ilgi* will be a very pleasurable reading experience for those who want to get an impression of an eighteenth century Korean traveler to a land almost as foreign to him as it is to us now. Almost by necessity, this implies that the translation has to be used with great care by those who are interested in the finer points of Pak Chiwŏn’s arguments and literary techniques, which are sometimes obfuscated by the free renderings. Some rather obvious examples would be the lack of identification of indirect quotes from Chinese or Korean sources, which obliterates Pak’s use of and play with literary learnedness; or the treatment of the formulaic records of weather conditions that are, in the original text, found almost invariably at the beginning of each day’s entry (often followed by a similarly formulaic enumeration of stations and distances), but in the English version are either eliminated or built into the narrative. Thus, the dry notation “Foggy in the morning, clear in the evening” (朝霧晚晴) becomes a full sentence “It was another foggy morning, which lasted until quite late, leaving us only part of the day with a clear sky” (32), and is made to change place with the following sentence, thus giving the impression of stylistic variation where, purposefully, none exists: Pak Chiwŏn’s use of the traditional, dry style of Sinic travel diaries at the beginning of each entry is, as I see it, *meant* to provide a sharp contrast to his breach of travel diary conventions in the remainder of almost each entry.

While the translator may have consciously accepted this loss of information on Pak Chiwŏn’s literary techniques for the sake of accommodating assumed reader expectations, there are instances where such carefree departures from the original result in a loss of substance. To provide just one, rather randomly picked example: The entry for the first day of the seventh month (31 July, in Choe-Wall’s westernized rendering) recounts a small gambling party from which the narrator is purportedly excluded due to his lack of skill. The narrator resents this, but, in Choe-Wall’s translation, comes to terms with his situation in the following way: “I sat alone on the side and drank a lot of wine while watching the game. Eventually I thought that being excluded was not such a bad idea after all” (48). A more literal translation would read: “To sit and watch who wins and who loses, and have my wine first, was not a bad thing after all” (坐觀成敗 酒則先酌 也非惡事). The difference may appear small, but might carry some significance

⁵ My expression.

in the context of the theme that is played out in many variants throughout *Yŏrha ilgi*: the question of Chosŏn's relationship with Qing China. Did not Chosŏn "sit and watch who wins and who loses" during the Manchu conquest of China? Questions of the inclusion or exclusion of the Chosŏn literatus with regard to the Sinic ecumene, culturally and politically, pervade the travelogue; to speak of the advantages of a position at the margin acquires a certain significance in this context that makes itself hardly felt in a translation that lets the narrator appear as just drinking and watching a game. As this example shows, keeping translations closer to the source text, while often resulting in less digestible versions in the target language, may help to transport layers of meaning that are not necessarily obvious to the translator himself.

Such instances of paying for a fluent style with the loss of nuances are, of course, of minor concern for a book that aims at making known this masterpiece to a wider audience on whom such finer points would be lost anyway. It might be countered that for such a readership, "Anglicization" of the translation at hand again doesn't go far enough; e.g., the use of untranslated Korean words like titles and measuring units might deter non-specialist readers. On the other hand, translating or converting these might have led to incorrect connotations and thus to irritations, and at any rate the latter problem is mitigated by a conveniently placed "conversion table for units" (xiii). In some instances, though, the liberties taken in translation render it difficult to make sense of the text; in these cases, more care should have been taken. An early example concerns the "Prologue" to the first chapter,⁶ which is in fact an explanation for the first words of the main text, similar in character to the interlineary commentaries that are otherwise left untranslated. It starts with the words:

"The reader may ask why the 'Record of Crossing the Yalu (Amnok) River' begins with the words 'the third sixty-year cycle of the year Gengzi (Kor. Kyŏngja, 1780), since...'" (1)

The translation is correct; however, the reader of the translation may ask which 'Record of Crossing the Yalu River' is alluded to here, for in the text in his hand, he will be unable to find the phrase, which in the original equals the first words of the ensuing entry for the first day of the travelogue: because it is the first entry, not only month and day are given for the date, but the year as well. The translator, however, following Yi Kawŏn's translation too closely in this case, understands these first words of the date as the last sentence of the prologue and translates:

"1780 was the fourth year of our King Chŏngjo's reign and Qianlong the forty-fourth year of Qing dynasty" (2).⁷

A useful translation would have been:

⁶ The "prologue" to *Togangnok*, untitled in the original, has to be distinguished from the preface to *Yŏrha ilgi* which is omitted from this translation.

⁷ The dating of the first entry reads like this in the original: 後三庚子我聖上四年 清乾隆四十五年 六月二十四日辛未。

“The year Gengzi in the third sixty-year cycle since..., the fourth year of our King Chǒngjo’s reign (and the 44th year of the Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty) [...]”.

As it stands, the *explanandum* that necessitated the explanatory prologue is untraceable; the very first page of the translated text must thus leave an attentive reader at loss.

Naturally, such losses of meaning tend to occur more often in the more philosophical passages that require of the reader a higher degree of familiarity with the sinic tradition from which a Chosŏn literatus would derive his inspiration and his phrasing. This is deplorable, as it is often exactly the more charged and meaningful passages of *Yŏrha ilgi* that pose these difficulties. The following example concerns a piece of narrative reflection that, in my mind, highlights some of the basic and pervading themes of the text as a whole and is therefore one of its central passages: the dialogue between the narrator and the embassy’s main interpreter, Hong Myŏngbok, during the actual crossing of the Yalu river. The narrator has talked about the sublimity of all borders and delimitations drawn by humans, exemplified by the river-border that they are just crossing, which the interpreter found difficult to understand. The ensuing lines of the dialogue are translated as follows:

Tiring of this, I replied, ‘An old saying reminds us that, as people’s minds incline to more risky things, their sense of morals becomes blurred.’ The Western people in earlier times, on demonstrating one stroke of line in geometry, thought it was not enough just to describe the delicate quality of the line. Instead, they demonstrated its characteristics by resolving whether it had light or not. Buddha explained it as something which would neither stick to a surface nor fall off. Because of this, it is only those who know the way who will act with prudence at any time.⁸

“Tiring of this” has no equivalent in the source text, and direct speech does not end after the first sentence; but these trifles aside, my main problem with this translation is how it not only leaves the reader alone and confused with an admittedly terse philosophical discussion, but adds to the bewilderment through the failure to correctly render the surface significance of the sentences. Three sayings from three different traditions are adduced here to illustrate the subtleness involved in making distinctions. The first, a quote from the Shangshu literally translatable as “the human heart is always at risk, the heart of the Way is always subtle,” is translated according to the commentary tradition which usually is a good thing, but tends to cover up rather than clarify meaning in *this* context. The example from Western geometry means something like the following: “When the men of the Far West discuss the geometrical line, they find comparing it to a thread insufficient to exhaust its subtlety, so they compare it to the borderline between light and shadow.” And the Buddhist phrase of course has nothing to do with something neither sticking to a surface nor falling off, but speaks of two things being neither identical nor distinct, like water and wave. A more considerate translation would not have solved the difficulties of this passage, but at least have

⁸ The original text reads: 余曰 人心惟危 道心惟微 泰西人辨幾何一畫 以一線論之 不足以盡其微 則曰 有光無光之際 乃佛氏臨之曰 不即不離 故善處其際 惟知道者能之。

afforded the reader some means to mull over it on her own, rather than shrug shoulders and read on.

These criticisms are uttered in full awareness that it is impossible for any translator to do full justice to Pak Chiwŏn's literary genius, enormous erudition and depth of reflection, and that my own translation may be full of similar mistakes. Thus, they should not deter anyone who is not able to read the *hanmun* original from getting hold of a copy and reading the book. The benefit will consist in delightful hours of making first contact with one of the most multi-layered and entertaining texts of the Late Chosŏn period. The translator should be congratulated for having made an important contribution to the availability of Korean "classics" in the English language.

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John HOLSTEIN. *A Moment's Grace: Stories from Korea in Translation*. Cornell East Asia Series 148. Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University. 2009. 408 pages. ISBN: 1933947187 (Hardcover). 52.00 USD.

It is now more than thirty years since John Holstein first gained recognition as a translator of Korean fiction by winning the *Korea Times* Translation Award in 1978 for his translation of Kim Tong-ni's 어떤 상봉 (*Ottŏn Sangbong*) (then titled "A Meeting" but called "The Visit" in this volume). He went on to win the same award for "The Gulls" in 1979, "House of the Idols" in 1981 and "River" in 1986, all of them now published here for the first time (I think). It therefore comes as something of a shock to realize that the 215 pages containing the twelve stories included in this collection represent (apparently) the sum total of Professor Holstein's work as a literary translator of Korean. Of course, he also deserves recognition for his translation of *Things Korean* by the former minister of culture, Lee O-Young, which was also not a very long text. His main activity as a professor of English at Sungkyunkwan University seems to have taken the bulk of his time and energies.

The present volume is a composite, beginning with a brief Preface stressing the relationship between the works selected and the period of Korean history (roughly from Liberation in 1945 until the Olympics in 1988) in which they were written, a note about pronunciation, and a list of people who gave help in the acknowledgments. This is followed by a 12-page Introduction by Professor Bruce Fulton, locating the works translated in their literary-historical context. After the twelve stories, there is a 35-page set of notes, "Stumbling Across a Language Barrier," in which the translator discusses in detail some of the issues arising in translating from Korean, justifying his own options. Then come no less than 102 pages devoted to "The Stories' Background" in which the social evolution of modern Korea is presented with constant reference back to the stories. This is completed by a set of 369 endnotes, eleven pages of "References" and a 2-3 page list of books or articles as "Recommended Reading." Clearly, this all indicates an expectation that the book will be used in a classroom setting, as a textbook for students of Korean literature and history.

The stories are mostly well-known in Korea, widely recognized as "representative works" by their authors. Kim Tong-ni's "The Shaman Painting" symbolizes the conflict between tradition and modernity by the tragic encounter between a shaman mother and her Christian son, which ends in the death of both. "Loess Valley," also by Kim, relates the strangely violent relationship between two rural strongmen who are friends yet rivals in a remote, premodern village setting. Hwang Sun-wŏn's "The Game Beaters" evokes the poverty of Seoul in the post-liberation years, relating an incident in which a waif is spotted entering a sewage pipe, clearly intent on gaining access to the house of a foreigner. A group of citizens gathers and they wait for him to come out so they can catch him, but finally his dead body comes floating down. Another story by Kim Tong-ni, "The Visit," depicts the journey of a poor peasant to

visit his son who is a soldier during the Korean War, and their extremely limited conversation before they part, suggesting that poverty is not only material but also emotional.

O Sang-wŏn's "A Moment's Grace," another war story, focuses on a southern soldier who has been captured by the communists; the events leading up to his capture are evoked in flashback while he lies in a freezing pit waiting to be taken out and executed. Yi Pŏm-sŏn's "The Gulls" is set on a tiny island several years after the war, in a warm, human community where a family from the North have settled, the man teaching in the school. Small incidents, sad and happy, occur and at the end the man realizes he might one day have to go back into the wider world. Ch'oe In-hun's "House of Idols" is by contrast a melodramatic piece set in a literary milieu, about the growth and destruction of the relationship between the narrator and a young man who claims to have experienced a terrible loss during the war but who turns out to be a pathological liar. By the same author, "End of the Road" is the account of a bus moving through the Korean countryside; everything it encounters stresses the dominating, corrupting presence of the American military. Perhaps the most intriguing thing about "River" by Sŏ Chŏng-in is why it never mentions a river. It too follows a small group of men and a girl on a bus journey into the countryside.

The last three stories are far removed in time from the others. For some unexplained reason, there is no story in the volume that was written in the 1970s or the 1980s; "River" dates from 1968, the next story, "First Love" by Sŏng Sŏk-che, was published in 1995. The reason for the inclusion of these more recent stories, if there is a reason, is presumably the way in which they evoke memories of earlier times. "First Love" is said by Bruce Fulton in his introduction to treat of "male same-sex desire" but that seems completely wrong, since the tale merely shows an older tough adolescent initiating a younger, softer boy into the world of sex with women, offering him a form of male-bonding friendship that the younger boy only responds to at the very end. In Kong Chi-yŏng's "What's to be Done" (1992) a woman standing at a crosswalk remembers at great length her relationship with a man whom she knew when they were activists in the years of dictatorship. This is the first story written by a woman in the collection. Finally, O Chŏng-hŭi's "The Face" (1999) happens in the mind of a paralyzed, hallucinating and presumably dying man whose wife goes out, saying she is going to meet a long-lost friend, and has not returned by the end of the story.

It is hard to know how to review this book. It is obviously intended to be useful for teachers of Korean studies outside of Korea, as well as their students. It is constructed on the premise that its readers will be as interested in the social history as in the literature of this period of Korean history, that works of Korean literature can be studied as social documents, and that the readers will also be interested in the details of the translator's struggles to put the tales into English. The essentially literary quality of the stories is not addressed, since even Professor Fulton's introduction views them as items in an ongoing academic process known as the "history of Korean literature," which at times degenerates into lists of dates, authors and works. The danger is that the intrinsic nature of the stories is displaced from their status as works of literature to their ability to show "what life was like then" or "what writers

wrote then.”

There are two important issues that might be discussed in an extended review. One is the way the stories are translated, the other is the question of their actual literary interest. Yet in the end, neither is necessarily a useful topic. Translators translate as best they can, and writers write as they do. Readers are free to go on reading or not. What more is there to say? John Holstein gives quite a lengthy account of his approach to issues that arise in translating and the solutions he has selected. Like many North American translators, he feels that part of his work involves stylistic revision to make the text feel “natural” to English-speakers. In part this is obviously justified, in terms of “readability,” but he is probably not aware of recent discussions in translation theory about the demerits of “domestication.” He includes in his notes on translation a series of quotations about translating, but they are all from less than contemporary (twenty-first century) sources.

He is certainly aware of the demands of “faithfulness” but he confesses that he tends to move away from the original as he revises, as though that were natural and acceptable. It is sometimes argued that, just as the great Russian writers first became popular in English thanks to Constance Garnett’s very free (inaccurate) versions that made them sound like genteel nineteenth century English writers, so too Korean works need to be made accessible by eliminating a lot of their specific Korean-ness. But modern theory sees that kind of domestication as a colonizing approach, eliminating or veiling essential cultural differences and aspects of original cultural identity.

One key issue involves the translation of slang, idiom and dialect, where the Korean obviously has no direct equivalent in English. This overlaps with the issues arising from humorous word-play, puns perhaps being the most untranslatable of all. However, the most important point to be made here is that, this being so clearly a text-book for class use rather than an edition destined for general readers, the translator should be careful to keep as close as possible to what the Korean says. It is almost too easy for an American translator to make Koreans speaking to Koreans sound like regular North American guys when, precisely, they are not.

Of course, as Professor Holstein points out, there are impossibilities at every step. Koreans very often use “relationship markers” (older brother, younger sister, school senior etc) when addressing one another, very rarely given names, and this is very “foreignizing” for an English reader. Even when we try to be very “faithful” we cannot help dropping most such words, in order to maintain a reasonable flow of English discourse. Obviously, if a text is meant as a “crib” for bilingual study, it might at times need to include even such words. I wonder about one detailed example of an idiom he mentions, where the Korean has “Where do you think this is anyway, a Chinese restaurant?” addressed to a bus-girl who keeps giving the same reply. The translator has replaced the (certainly very unclear) joke about waiters always giving the same reply, with, “What are you, a broken record or something?” The problem here is not the departure from the Korean, so much, as the use of an idiom that is no longer current in a world of download-files and iPod. No young reader today has ever heard what happens when the needle of a gramophone gets stuck in one groove of a scratched record. The only contemporary use of “broken record” is a new athletic record.

There is one unfortunate omission in this volume and that is a list of the original, Korean titles of the stories. Such information would be very helpful to any reader trying to trace the originals. I am especially puzzled by the title “Loess Valley” for “Hwangt’o-gi.” It is true that the Chinese characters “hwangt’o” (yellow earth) are used to designate the loess deposits in Northern China that give birth to the “hwangsa” dust-storms. But there is no loess in Korea that I know of. Especially, the opening lines of the story make it clear that the main characteristic of this substance is its blood-red color. In Korea, “hwangt’o” is a red loam or clay that, when it dries, turns an ochre color. It was used, mixed with straw, for making the walls of houses and is now popular in the hot rooms of bathhouses. The translated title does not represent the ‘gi’ (diary etc) at all.

The approach employed by Professor Holstein is on the whole one that appeals to North American translators, who feel that their translation should sound natural to North Americans, and strongly upsets Koreans who feel that it takes far too many liberties with what the original author wrote, for no reason that they can see. A few examples will have to do. Near the start of “Loess Valley” Holstein has: “So the general drew his sword and cut through the mountain to its heart. Torrents of blood coursed throughout the entire region for a hundred days, and gave the earth the color it has today.” This sounds fine, certainly, but the Korean actually says: “이에 혈을 지르니, 이 산골에 석달 열흘 동안 붉은 피가 흘러내리고 이로 말미암아 이 일대가 황토지대로 변하니라.” This means: “Then he pierced a pulse-point in the ground, at which for three months and ten days blood poured down the valley, as a result of which the ground of the whole area turned into red clay.” The style of the passage is deliberately archaic and the geomantic notion of “pulse-point” is integral to that. Holstein’s “heart” is probably meant to preserve the image in a more accessible form, but the implication would seem to be that he killed the mountain. The other variations are in themselves each minor but they accumulate to the point where the text is a paraphrase rather than a translation.

The same excessively free approach is found at the end of the story: “One of these days we’re both going all the way and finish this farce for good,” is Professor Holstein’s rendering of “네 늬이 내 초상 안 치르고 자빠질 줄 아나.” Now unless we are looking at different versions of the text, that has very little in common with, “Lout, don’t imagine you can croak before you take care of my funeral,” which is what I believe the Korean means. The concluding lines in his version after this are:

Tükbo had recently sworn, spitting out his bitterness with his phlegm. This and the thought of the gleaming dagger which Tükbo had slammed on the table plunged Ökswae into a deep reverie and stopped him in his tracks. He imagined Tükbo plunging the eight-inch dagger into the middle of his chest and he could feel it gouging around in there, scraping out down to their roots the burning and itching liver and lungs of his tempest. His body thrilled at the thought.

When he lifted his head again, a gossamer sun was already hanging low over Loess heights. There, maybe a li ahead, Tükbo plodded on alone toward Dragon Creek.

My own options are different, starting with the identity of the speaker of the strange phrase, that I assume to be spoken by the older Ōksoe who is saying he does not wish or intend to kill Tūkbo. I have underlined the words in Professor Holstein's text that have no obvious equivalent in the Korean ("and stopped him in his tracks" is placed significantly earlier in his text than in the Korean). I would write:

Ōksoe suddenly recalled the knife with its sharp blade that Tūkbo had laid on the table, spitting as he did so, a while before. Suppose Tūkbo's knife blade, more than a span long, slashed through the middle of his breast, slicing through his madly fretting, itching liver and lungs, he thought, and shuddered once; he stopped abruptly and looked up, and there the sun was, already setting over Red Clay Ridge, while some way ahead of him Tūkbo was plodding on alone down toward Dragon Stream.

There is a constant pattern of inaccuracy in the details of Professor Holstein's translation, clearly at times produced by a wish to render the events more vivid or dramatic. The "liver and lungs of his temper" is meaningless and "thrilled" is hardly the best word in the context. The degree to which a translator of a text destined to serve as an accurate record of the original for classroom or study use (as opposed to publication for a general readership, perhaps) is allowed to rewrite the original should be limited. There is no explanation as to why the MR Romanization of Ōksoe is changed to Ōkswae in this story, or Puni to Buni.

A Korean colleague who read Professor Holstein's translation of "The Shaman Painting" noted with considerable exasperation a similar, overall lack of precision, a tendency "to omit awkward details and to add things unnecessarily." The first sentences (15), "Low hills slumbering on night's distant horizon. Broad river winding black across the plain. Sky spangled with stars about to rain on hills, river, and plain as this night approaches its climax," sound magnificent in English, but the original says something more like: "In the background, dusky hills lying remote; in the foreground, a river flowing wide; blue stars all seeming about to come raining down on ridges, meadows, black river; it is now deepest night, utterly breathless." It is not at all self-evident that a translator should rewrite to the extent Professor Holstein has done, "improving on the original" in this way. A few phrases later, the women watching the shaman, he says, have "sadness and hope in their faces" but the Korean says that their faces are impregnated with a "sorrowful agitation (슬픈 흥분)."

A little later, (16-17) Professor Holstein relates that "father and daughter stayed on for over a month, daughter painting and her father recounting to Grandfather the sad details of the girl's hard life." The Korean says: "그들 아버 딸은 달포 동안이나 머물러 있으며 그림도 그리고 자기네의 지난 이야기도 자세히 하소연했다고 한다." which means that the father and daughter stayed for about a month, painting and lamenting as they gave Grandfather a detailed account of their past. No precise division of their activities or tales is indicated.

Later still, (21) telling the origins of Ugi (wrongly romanized as Woogi), we read: "Even when Woogi was still very young everybody around remarked what a precocious one he was, but Mohwa was so poor she could not send him to the

classics primer school that most of the children in the village went to” where the original says: “그는 어릴 때부터 무척 총명하여 신동이란 소문까지 났으나 근본이 워낙 미천하여 마을에서는 순조롭게 공부를 시킬 수가 없어.” The misunderstanding here is deeper, the translation quite wrong. “From early childhood he was so bright there were even reports he was a prodigy, but their social status was so low that he could not easily (smoothly) be sent to study in the village.” All the rest is added and inaccurate.

Professor Holstein gives some indications about the reasons for these failings in his translator’s notes. First, he has been translating without a reliable Korean guide/ editor, someone who is capable of reading his drafts carefully and telling him where he has missed the point of the Korean. We easily recognize incomprehensible phrases; it is when we think that we understand everything that the trouble starts. Second, he has been ‘revising’ his versions stylistically for much too long, and often, he says, without reference to the original. Too much tweaking can be dangerous for the health of a text.

A more fundamental question is what literary qualities these stories have, in particular when they are read in translation in an English-speaking context. It is an impossible question to answer, of course. But as noted before, the format of this book buries the actual stories under thick layers of documentation, suggesting that they will mainly be read either for information about Korean social history or as representative works in Korean literary history, and that they can only be read at all if you know an awful lot about Korea. There is a huge emphasis on “contextualization” whereas “a good story” is usually perfectly comprehensible without much secondary information. The question of whether these stories are worth reading “as works of fiction” in themselves is never raised. This leads me to wonder how much training in fundamental literary analysis and appreciation students in Korean Studies programs receive. Narratorial strategies, setting, characterization, tone, plot structure, ambiguities . . . these are the initial topics for any reading of a work of fiction in any language. And the starting point for any approach to a work of fiction would normally be a question such as, “What does this story say? What is the point of it? What is its theme?”

Looking at the twelve tales in this collection, we of course note at once their shared liking for familiar, “realistic” episodes, their lack of fantasy, suspense or irony, their limited point-of-view. Even when we are given access to the thoughts of a character, those thoughts are mostly restricted to immediate probabilities or prospects and rarely if ever turn to deeper self-analysis and introspection, there is no true inwardness. Many foreign readers of this kind of Korean fiction are disturbed by what they call its “dark, depressing” side, with death, separation, division, alienation, lack of communication on every page.

This leads to the most serious indictment of all. There is no humor, not a moment of joyful laughter to be found anywhere in any of these stories, whether among the characters, or in the way of narrating, or in the reader’s response. For the western reader, accustomed to seeing humor as a redemption, an expression of the triumph of the human spirit amidst the direst tribulations, this absence is more than troubling, it renders the stories inhuman and discredits the writers. The readers are right, and since Koreans have plenty of spirit and humor, there would be every

reason to reject this selection of stories. These tales are utterly pretentious in their pseudo-seriousness, devoid as they are of the vivacity that characterizes the Korean life-experience.

Perhaps the reply would be to say that they are records of lives almost completely deprived of free choice. What happens to the people in virtually every case has nothing to do with them, their wishes or choices; the only explanation as to why a person does this or that seems often to be that they had no other choice. It is not quite the same as fatalism, perhaps, but the processes of life and death are undergone with far less questioning or resistance than would be normal in the West. Revolt is not an option; preserving one's essential dignity through thick and thin is the most important value. Austere stuff in austere style. But I do not think it is convincing. The writers wrote as they did in order to be admired by academic critics, who affirmed that "serious" literature had to be intensely "serious." They were wrong, and it is time we found some happy stories for our students to read, instead of boring them to death.

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Kenneth M. SWOPE. *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. 398 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8061-4056-8 (hardcover). 34.95 USD.

Kenneth Swope's book, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (hereafter *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail*), offers a detailed description of the war that took place on the Korean peninsula between 1592 and 1598. The title of the book is derived from one of the Japanese names for the war, "meaning something that has an impressive beginning but no real ending" (299). By narrating this war, Swope aims to depict a militarily efficient and aggressive Ming empire between the 1570s and the 1610s, contrary to many of the previous portrayals of the Ming military as being incompetent and technologically backward during that period (x). Moreover, Swope joins scholars, such as Ray Huang, who casts a sympathetic light on the Wanli Emperor 萬曆皇帝. He argues that Emperor Wanli showed military prowess and that his leadership during the war was, in general, successful.

Swope's book is divided into seven chapters. An introduction precedes the first chapter. In the introduction, the author explains why he names this war "the first Great East Asian War". This war was the first to be "explicitly waged for Asian hegemony" (11). Moreover, according to the author, this war has relevance to what happened in East Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (6-8). The author suggests that it constituted a rupture from prior wars fought in East Asia and that those that broke out after it were more or less a continuation of it. Then what caused this rupture and why did it occur at that moment? The author briefly mentions the increasing contacts between East Asians and Westerners during the sixteenth century as a reason for this rupture (10); however, an in-depth analysis of this war's epoch-breaking significance is still needed to justify the grand title that Swope gives to this book.

In the first chapter of the book, "Wild Frontiers," Swope claims that the Wanli Emperor played a key role in the Ming military revival from 1570 to 1610 (22). The emperor's full support of competent generals such as those from the Li 李 clan is one of the primary reasons for the victories in two of the "Three Great Campaigns" fought during this military revival—the campaign against Pubei 拜 and the suppression of Yang Yinglong 楊應龍. Swope offers a clear, concise narrative of the two campaigns, which sets the stage for his subsequent, more elaborate, treatment of the third of the "Three Great Campaigns,"—the war in Korea.

Swope examines the primary reasons for the war in the second chapter, "Prelude to War." He identifies Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豐臣秀吉, a Japanese daimyo, as the "war's architect" (50), and offers a review of previous scholarship on Hideyoshi's motivations for launching the war (63-67). Swope argues that "the desire to gain control of foreign trade and create a new international order to supplant the Ming were Hideyoshi's main motivations" (66). The author apparently conducted thorough

research regarding Hideyoshi's reasons for starting the war, and his mastery of the relevant scholarship is impressive. However, he appears simply to list two of Hideyoshi's motivations that he considers the most important. Further analysis of these two motivations would be necessary to show how his arguments differ from or complement previous scholarship.

The third chapter, titled "A Dragon's Head," depicts the beginning of the war. The invading Japanese army repeatedly defeated the Koreans, despite several minor Korean victories. This chapter also describes the initial encounters between Chinese and Japanese troops during the war. During this early stage of the war, the Ming Empire not only sent a small force to Korea to combat the Japanese, but also appointed envoys to negotiate with the Japanese. In this chapter, Swope's account of the three parties involved in this war is balanced, engaging, and informative.

The fourth chapter of this book is entitled "A Serpent's Tail," and focuses on the "full-scale Ming intervention," to use Swope's own words from his preface to the book, in which a large number of Ming soldiers entered Korea (xiii). After the China-Korea allies fought several battles against the Japanese troops, they recovered major cities such as P'yŏngyang and Seoul (156, 170). Despite these battles, negotiations continued, and the outcome of the war was still inconclusive. At the end of this chapter, Swope discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the Wanli Emperor's leadership of the Chinese military during this war (185-6). This chapter would have benefited from a comparison of the approaches to the war taken by the Wanli Emperor, Hideyoshi, and King Sŏnjo 宣祖. Such a comparison could have revealed the differences between the leadership styles of these three people and helped the reader to understand better the role that Wanli played during the war.

Swope describes the peace talks between China and Japan in the fifth chapter, "Caught between the Dragon and the Rising Sun." The first part of this chapter presents a vivid portrayal of the difficulties the Ming government faced in reaching a consensus regarding its policy towards Japan (190-202), giving an interesting glimpse of how it operated at that time. The remaining part of this chapter gives a detailed account of the peace talk process, and examines the reasons for its failure which he primarily locates in the fundamentally different views that China and Japan held towards "the East Asian world order" (226). The Ming wanted to maintain the tributary system, whereas Hideyoshi intended to create a new system where Japan occupied the center (226). This is an insightful argument, which places the war within a larger historical context.

The sixth chapter, "Back to the Gates of Hell," offers a detailed description of the final phase of the war. Following the failure of the peace talks, an angry Hideyoshi restarted the war in 1597. From Swope's point of view, the war bogged down in a stalemate, despite several victories won by the Japanese army. In 1598, Japan withdrew all of its troops from Korea. Swope disagrees with some scholars that Hideyoshi's death in the summer of 1598 led to this withdrawal. Rather, he postulates that Hideyoshi made the decision to withdraw prior to his death (266). In this chapter, Swope does an excellent job of demonstrating the complexities of this war and successfully challenges the simplistic claim that Japan would have won had Hideyoshi not have died.

Swope discusses the lingering influence of the war on Korea, Japan, and China. It “inspir[ed] institutional reforms” in Korea (288). For the Japanese, it meant an unsuccessful challenge to the China-centered East Asian order (292). According to Swope, the outcome of this war testifies to the fact that China was still strong and expanding at that time (296-97). This 16-page study of the impact of the war on the three countries needs further development, given that the author designates this war “the first great East Asian war”.

A Dragon’s Head and a Serpent’s Tail shows Swope’s familiarity with the scholarship on this war, putting together materials from China, Japan, and Korea, and offers a comprehensive description of the war. He demonstrates that the war, which took place on such a large scale and involved many parties, offers a great many possibilities for interpretation and evaluation, which he skillfully presents, while at the same time, pointing out their limitations. His thorough, critical review of the scholarship on this war makes this book a valuable resource for any scholar interested in this topic.

Swope’s comprehensive depiction of the war and his introduction of different perspectives concerning it are his main strengths. However, his descriptions and introductions often obscure his main arguments that the Wanli Emperor was a militarily competent leader and that Ming was still in the process of expanding its frontiers. Sometimes his grand narrative of the war does not naturally lead to his conclusions and on other occasions, the author would need to provide a more focused narrative in order to support his arguments.

Despite this quibble, *A Dragon’s Head and a Serpent’s Tail* is a well-researched, informative work. Swope writes in a lucid manner, and uses vivid descriptions to bring this war to life, which, when combined with his arguments, provides a solid foundation for future research on this topic in East Asian history.

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