Cultural Hybridity and “Mimic Men” in Colonial Korea: The Case of Yu Chin-o (1906-1987)*

Sang-Ho RO
Graduate School of International Studies, Ewha Womans University

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how a new nation-wide school system implemented in 1910 created the Korean student population of that time and the three decades that followed. Moreover, it shows the effects of the colonial examination system imposed by the Japanese government. My argument is that the new educational system engendered “cultural hybridity” in Korean students who successfully passed examinations in their attempt to climb the ladder of success. A remarkable consequence of receiving an education and being subjected to the examinations was that successful candidates took advantage of their literacy in order to pursue learning beyond the official curriculum. Although elite students were more assimilated into the Japanese system than were their less favored contemporaries in the colonial society, this assimilation could have the paradoxical effect of destabilizing the regime rather than reinforcing it. As “mimic men,” therefore, elite Korean students can illuminate the complex trajectory of Korean cultural history under Japanese rule. I make this argument by analyzing the 1927 diary and short story Kim Kangsa wa T Kyosu (Lecturer Kim and Professor T) of Yu Chin-o, a graduate of Keijō Imperial University, thereby shedding new light on the daily politics and multiplicity of Korean identities under Japanese colonial rule.

Keywords: cultural hybridity, school examinations, Yu Chin-o, Keijō Imperial University, Kim Kangsa wa T Kyosu (Lecturer Kim and Professor T)

Introduction

The effects of Japanese colonial rule in Korea have been a controversial issue in South Korea as well as in Japan. More often than not, historical debates on the colonial experience have been diverted by political arguments between modernization theorists and nationalist historians. Moreover, the war crimes committed by the Japanese Empire against Koreans remain an unresolved issue between the two countries. So far, many historians, as part of the academy, have tried to reclaim from politics the task of considering the issue of colonial experiences. Following up on such recent efforts, I examine in this article one murky area of colonial history that cannot be exclusively located on one side of the two dominant narratives: modernization or resistance. My intention is not, of course, so ambitious as to settle this age-old debate. However, I would like to argue in this paper that the cultural identity of Koreans was much more fluid than we assume today, as they possessed many possibilities of developing multiple identities.
in everyday life. Specifically, I will uncover one particular dimension of cultural exchanges between the colonizers and the colonized. In short, this article is intended to shed light on the everyday experiences of Koreans under Japanese rule through a new angle, that of “cultural hybridity.” Cultural hybridity has been found in many modern countries, including South Korea. Many scholars in colonial studies have agreed that the modern colonial regimes in Asia and Africa were frightened by the possibility of cultural mixture (Prakash 1999; Stoler 1995). The civilizing mission of the empires continued to train “natives” to speak and behave exactly in the same manner as the colonizers with the purpose of assimilating their culture into Western modernity and civilization. Notwithstanding, many colonizers doubted whether their education could “civilize” the native up to their own level. Then, how can we understand the effects of colonial education? Cultural anthropologist Homi Bhabha argues that such an “in-between” cultural mixture can create a new subjectivity surpassing the previous discourses of cultural originality. According to Bhabha, the birth of “mimic men” dismantled colonial regimes, which discriminated against large numbers of people based on the imperial ideology that Asians and Africans were culturally and biologically backward (Bhabha 1994, 2). More specifically, assimilation not only destroyed indigenous cultures, but also generated new ones. Likewise, the boundary between the Japanese and the Koreans was neither firm nor fixed. In the colonial context, Japanese and Koreans were constantly redefined and remade in everyday life. As Ann Stoler points out, imperial civility was not imported from the metropole, but was rather a process that went on within colonial society where imperial subjects had to live together with colonial subjects (Stoler 1995, 95-98). Japanese colonial education, in this sense, was a powerful institution that defined what language the imperial subjects should use and what kinds of literature they should enjoy. As more and more indigenous Korean students were willing to be like the Japanese, the border between the rulers and the ruled blurred. Interestingly, though, many Japanese settlers viewed cultural mixture as a threat and instead preferred to maintain a policy of segregation (Uchida 2011, 133; Caprio 2009, 92-96, 110).

Then, how did the Korean people who faced ethnic discrimination day by day think of assimilation and cultural mixture? Did they, as a whole, sabotage the chance for a new education? It is, of course, hard to generalize how all Koreans (or other colonized people of the Japanese colonial empire) reacted to the assimilation policy (Caprio 2009, 172-73; Kwón 2008, 122-24; Ching 2001, 92-93). However, we may well discover new aspects of the colonial Korean experience if we listen carefully to their voices, which sometimes sounded timid and dishonest due to

I am grateful to Professor Sheldon Garon at Princeton University, Professor Hwang Sang-ik at Seoul National University, Professor Ch'ŏng Chun-yo'ng at Hallym University, and many others who gave me excellent comments and kindly shared their knowledge about imperial Japan and colonial Korea. Also, I wish to thank the commentators of the Society of Korean Historical Research (Han'guksa Yŏn'guhoe) and the seventh workshop of Ritsumeikan Center for Korean Studies and anonymous peer reviewers of the Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies. I am also thankful to Hyung-bae Lee, a librarian of Korean books at Princeton East Asian Library, for his wonderful help.
Cultural Hybridity and “Mimic Men” in Colonial Korea: The Case of Yu Chin-o (1906-1987)

Police censorship and fear of punishment. If we can refrain from stereotyping Koreans under Japanese rule as either pro-Japanese or anti-Japanese, it may be possible to unveil the complicated everyday-life experiences of Koreans in the colonial regime. As a case study, I approach the issue of cultural hybridity from the analysis of the 1927 diary and a short story *Kim Kangsa wa T Kyosu* (*Lecturer Kim and Professor T*) written by an elite Korean man, Yu Chin-o (1906-1987). He was not at all a typical Korean and his experience therefore can only represent a part of the Korean population of his time, that of the highest echelon of the cultural and social hierarchy. He was born in a rich and well-educated former yangban family and later entered and graduated from Keijō Imperial University with honors. Only a few ethnic Koreans could enjoy such a prestigious environment. However, this indigenous elite man carefully recorded his unusual journey, which started with a boy’s dream to be like the Japanese and ended up with the return to his own ethnic and language community. Did the assimilation process therefore fail in the end? As we can see from the cases of Gandhi and Nehru and many other native and creole elites in the colonial setting, I would like to argue in this paper that the Japanese assimilation policy created “mimic men” who could not be the same as their masters no matter how extensively they educated themselves (Prakash 1999, chapter seven). The subaltern identity, in other words, came into being in the cultural mixture where Japanized Koreans re-assessed their subjectivity. Seen from the perspective of “mimic men,” therefore, we may better understand the complicated mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, which cannot be simplified merely as the Japanese assimilation policy in Korea.

**Testing the Degree of Civility**

In principle, Japanese civility was within the reach of Korean men (not women) in colonial Korea. The colonial state granted official recognition in the form of school diplomas to those who faithfully completed the assimilation programs from elementary school to university. The greatest reward for those degree-holders was life-time employment in the state bureaucracy. The Korean society had experience with civil service examinations for many centuries; hence, it was not a secret that to master the civility defined by the state would guarantee access to the ladder of success as well as high social status. The Koreans had tried to reform their age-old testing system before the Japanese takeover. First of all, the traditional civil service examinations were abolished by the Korean government in 1894 during the middle of the Sino-Japanese War. Although there was a plan to replace it with a new system of public education and degrees, it never came to fruition. The meritocratic principle held sway for a while as the examination system to recruit civil officials returned in 1908. Imitating the Japanese model, the “Civil Official Appointment Regulations” became the foundation for the exam system in modern Korea (Chang 2002, 50-52; *Hwangsŏng sinmun* July 31, 1908).

Koreans had sufficient reasons to embrace the new examination system. Most of all, the prestige and material rewards that Koreans could enjoy from government jobs had no parallel. After the Russo-Japanese War, the size of the government bureaucracy quickly increased in Korea. In contrast to the mere 800
positions available during the 19th century, by 1911, there were approximately 15,113 total positions in central and local governments. This included 42 royal appointees (ch'igim), 996 senior officials (chuim), 5,595 junior officials (p'anim), and 8,480 clerks and contractors (taeu kwalli, ch'okt'ak, and kowo˘n). Compared with the relatively small size of the pre-modern Chosón bureaucracy, the demands of the Japanese colonial regime for degree-holders were unprecedentedly extensive. The two largest hiring institutions were local administrations and the police force. In 1911, the Agency of Provincial Affairs (Chibangch'ŏng) employed 4,098 officials, and the Police Agency (Kyŏngch'al kwansŏ) hired 2,600 employees. Reflecting the rapid building of new infrastructure, the Agency of Communication (T'ongsin kwansŏ) and the Bureau of Railroad Transportation (Ch'ŏltoguk) also created many new positions in colonial Korea. As long as Koreans could pass the tests of civility, there were vastly more opportunities to be a part of the state apparatus than ever before. Selected ethnic Koreans who could speak and understand the Japanese language appeared to their people as representing the coming of a “new age” (Chŏsen sótokufu 1991-1992b, 34-36).

We cannot take the increase in job opportunities as a sign that the colonial state treated ethnic Koreans with special favor. Koreans had to endure the glass ceiling in the bureaucracy as well as official ethnic discrimination in daily life. While ethnic Japanese elites began to fill the higher ranks, new recruitment was concentrated on the lower echelon below the junior officials. From the beginning, colonial education itself placed a major focus on intermediary education, which was necessary for training candidates for positions as junior officials and low functionaries. Japanese language ability was the basic prerequisite to participate in the government as a civilized Korean man; whereas a high level of education in science and philosophy, of course, was deemed unnecessary and was regarded as a superfluous luxury for ethnic Koreans. We can see the same policy of the Japanese empire in colonial Taiwan (Tsurumi 1977, 69-71). That is, Japanese colonial education for colonial subjects initially emphasized the acquisition of basic literacy in Japanese and paid little attention to the systematic development of higher education. As soon as the Japanese Empire annexed Korea, it relegated Korean high schools to an adjunct position beneath the Japanese schools. Thus, high schools were renamed “Advanced Schools” (kodŭng pot'ong hakkyo) and were denied the right to grant the degree required for college entrance. Graduates of the Korean schools were also no longer eligible to apply for junior officials positions. The logic of such discrimination was that ethnic Koreans needed extra education in order to have the same level of knowledge and civility as ethnic Japanese. If Koreans wished to work for the government, they had to complete additional education at Korean professional schools (chŏnmun hakkyo). Otherwise, they had to advance to a Japanese middle school.

How did the Koreans respond to the new system of tests administered by the Japanese? Did they protest against and resist discrimination? It seems obvious that not everyone could afford schooling or was willing to undergo such education. But at least among the students, the discrimination policy engendered widespread frustration and anger, becoming an important reason for student protests in the
1919 March First Movement. Interestingly, though, Korean students were as much or more frustrated by the fact that they were not treated like the Japanese as by the fact that they should speak and behave like the Japanese in order to succeed. Korean schoolboys showed little hesitation in consuming Japanese textbooks and study-aid books (Ro 2009, 392-95). In the decade following 1910, for example, the number of graduates who advanced to higher education steadily increased, according to one survey at a Korean school. In 1910, none chose to continue their education after their graduation from Keijō Advanced School. However, after seven years, 38 students advanced (chinhak) to the next level after graduation (Keijō kōtō futsu gakkō 1918, 1-8).

Two different competing desires—one for success at a colonial school and another for Korean independence—were compatible with each other in the minds of Korean elite men. When the March First Movement erupted in 1919, many elite students participated in the demonstrations. For instance, a student named Pak Hŭng-wŏn happened to join the protest when he was shopping at a Japanese bookstore in Seoul. He was a freshman at the Korean Professional School of Pharmacy (Chosŏn yakhakkyo). The lifestyle of this 20-year-old student had a routine. He lived at a boarding house (hasuk), for he had come from his rural village to Seoul in order to study. On his way to and from school, he often visited the bookstore in order to buy reference books. On March 1, as he followed his daily routine, he happened to come upon the street demonstration and decided to participate in the protests (“Pak Hŭng-wŏn sinmun chosŏ”). As can be seen from his case, many Korean students came to terms with and accepted Japanese teachers and were willing to learn, speak, and write as ethnic Japanese did (Im 2006, 261-67). However, this did not mean that they had no objection to Japanese colonial rule.

Rather than a simple sense of belonging, the mixed experience of alienation and assimilation characterized the everyday experience of educated Korean men. Given their successful records at entrance examinations, it can be inferred that they must have devoted much time and attention to reading school textbooks written in Japanese. The majority of them did not struggle with the colonial police, but wrestled with Japanese books. It was the fierce competition and the scant opportunities that made Koreans angry, especially when they compared themselves with their Japanese counterparts. According to a statistic in 1917, the probability of success in the colonial exams, which could lead them to government jobs, was extremely low. Only thirteen percent of first graders successfully finished the entire elementary school curriculum. There must have been numerous factors explaining this high number of drop-outs; however, the difficulty of studying a foreign language, Japanese, was apparently one of the most significant (Kim Pu-ja 2005, 61-62). In addition, those students who did succeed still had to pass the entrance exam

---

The table below shows the number of Keijō Advanced School students who entered higher education in colonial Korea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1912</th>
<th>1913</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
to advance to higher schools. Only three percent of degree-holders from elementary schools earned the chance to study in a major city where all the “Advanced Schools” were located. Again, two-thirds dropped out at some point during the course of their schooling. However, graduation from “Advanced Schools” could not guarantee a bright future, either. There remained more tests ahead. Graduates still had to choose either to go to Japan or to study further at professional schools, necessitating greater expenses. Nonetheless, even these selected people had to compete with the ethnic Japanese in the metropole and the colony in the job market of degree-holders.

The Chosen

What would one obtain finishing the entire curriculum of colonial education? Could the Korean man become civilized as the colonial regime promised? These questions can be addressed by using the case of Yu Chin-o. Yu Chin-o later became a prominent political, intellectual and cultural leader of South Korea; however, he was one of only a few elite Korean males who had received the best education in the colony. Born into a former yangban family which was famous for its academic achievement in the late Chosŏn period Yu Chin-o easily passed the entrance examination of the Keijō Advanced School in 1919 and entered Keijō Imperial University in 1924. He was one of the few Koreans who were accepted into the Japanese imperial university, and after he entered, he enjoyed the fact that ethnic Japanese people finally treated him with respect. In his memoirs, he vividly recalled:

I could puff my chest out whenever I wore a university hat, which was decorated with three zelkova leaves in gold surrounded by two white stripes … The most exciting moment that I devoured was the visit to the streets of Chingogae (J. Honmachi, the Japanese commercial districts in colonial Seoul). The Japanese, who always looked down on ethnic Koreans, changed their attitude as soon as they noticed my university hat (Yu 1976b, 26-27).

Of course, the Japanese Empire granted such prestige and privilege only to those Koreans who mastered Japanese imperial civility. In other words, Yu Chin-o represents the most successful case of the Japanese assimilation policy, especially considering that ethnic Japanese men also struggled to enter the imperial

---

2 Novelist Yö̞m Sang-sŏp (1897-1963) sarcastically depicted the pressure on Korean elite students in Japanese schools in his short story Mansŏn (Before 1919). The protagonist is a Korean student in Japan living on a tight schedule of “exams” at school. When he visits his older brother, the first question the brother asks is: “How did you do on your school exams?” He is then scolded by his brother for not being sufficiently serious about schooling, and he defends himself, saying, “[School education] should have nothing to do with an ambition to wear a bullshit stripe (ttongt’ače) (I always called the golden line a shit line) around my head.” The golden line to which he contemptuously refers here symbolizes the position of a junior official (panimgwan) who wears this golden decoration on his hat ( Yö̞m Sang-sŏp, 2009, 127-28).

3 The opening of the Keijō Imperial University was promised in 1922 by a Japanese imperial edict. When the colonial government revised the Regulations on Korean Education (J. Chosŏn kyō ולהיט) in the same year, the government also announced that a new institution of higher learning would be established in Korea in two years.
university (Yu 1978, 46). Yu’s command of the Japanese language and education in the official curriculum was sufficient to allow him to outperform even talented ethnic Japanese boys. The imperial university allowed thirty-seven ethnic Koreans to study with 131 ethnic Japanese at the Keijō Imperial University in its opening year. Although the university unofficially maintained an admission quota for ethnic Koreans, it was not at all easy to enter the school for either Koreans or Japanese. In addition, the university education was administered entirely in Japanese; thus, Koreans without sufficient Japanese skills could not graduate from the school. Even after Korean independence in 1945, Yu Chin-o clearly remembered the names of the Japanese faculty members at the university. In particular, young philosophers, such as Abe Yoshishige (1883-1966) and Ueno Naoteru (1882-1973), impressed this young Korean man with their deep understanding of Marxism. Yu Chin-o remembered that they were called by students the “Iwanami Group,” which spread new critical thought and trends of the Taisho liberal culture at the university.

Immersed in the Japanese culture and language, young Yu Chin-o was intellectually and culturally more connected to the metropole than to his own country. The university campus in Seoul was like a “little Tokyo.” According to his 1927 diary, he not only read Japanese school textbooks extensively, but also many other types of Japanese books as well. In this diary, he revealed how much he loved Japanese literature and science books when he was a college student. We can glimpse the everyday reading habits of this young man in 1927 from the list below:

List 1. The Reading List of Yu Chin-o in 1927

1. Detective novels by L. J. Beeston and McCurry
2. Murobuse Kōshin, Ajia shugi (Asianism)
3. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Kessakushu (Anthology), vol. 3
4. Karl Marx, Keizaigaku hihan (Kritik der Politischen Okonomie) with New Introduction
5. Films The Bat and Napoleon
6. Ongnumong (Dream of the Jade Pavilion)
7. Magazine Kaizō (Reconstruction), February 1927
8. Faust

In 1924, Yu Chin-o entered the first year of the First Department (law major) in the Keijō Imperial University as an honor student. The Keijō Imperial University first educated middle-school graduates, such as Yu Chin-o at “preliminary school” (taehak yekwa) before they chose their majors at “university proper” (taehak ponkwa). In his class, there were forty-five freshmen (thirty five ethnic Japanese and ten ethnic Koreans).

It is unclear how the admission quota was managed by the university. The university kept the initial quota of the 1920s even in the following two decades when the number of Korean students increased. It is, however, an open question how the quota worked for the benefit of Koreans in the 1920s. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for comments about the ambivalence of the quota system.

He published his 1927 diary in a general magazine, Sasanggye (World of Thought) in 1964. The diary itself was subjected to self-censorship in postcolonial South Korea, but it still reveals his reading habits as a third-year student at Keijō Imperial University. He commented that “I discovered my diary in the pages of an old magazine from my bookshelf” and decided to publish it in order to give a message to young college students. He said, “I removed nasty expressions or hateful and jealous comments” (Yu 1976, 46-47).
As we can see from his reading habits, Japanese and Western literature dominated the everyday life of this colonial elite man. He mentioned only briefly a Korean novel, *Ongnumong* (*Dream of the Jade Pavilion*), but it was because this Korean novel reminded him of his late sister who loved it. Also, he commented on a Korean magazine, *Choso˘n chi kwang* (*The Light of Korea*) in which he published his short stories. Except for these two, all other texts were written in languages other than Korean.

This list also draws our attention to the fact that this college student went beyond the confines of school textbooks. As he did before entering the imperial university, Yu Chin-o read textbooks in order to obtain a better score on school examinations. His diary clearly illustrates that the preparation for class examinations took a significant part of his campus life. All classes were taught in Japanese, and he also had to take exams in Japanese together with native Japanese-language speakers. Even so, he never complained of linguistic difficulties in any of his entries in his diary. Speaking and listening to Japanese for educational purposes was perfectly normal to him. When he was freed from the duty of preparing for exams, however, he devoured non-canonical books written in Japanese and German. Korean was essentially a language for daily life, whereas Japanese and Western literature were his primary interests.

---

7 Akutagawa’s “Kappa,” in fact, appeared in Kaizō, March 1927. Yu Chin-o had recorded the date incorrectly.

8 The transcription of the author’s name is tentative; most likely it is the German political economist Karl Diehl (1864-1943) who in 1922 had published a study of socialism, communism, and anarchism.
German were critical languages for learning modern civility.

Therefore, Japanese bookstores played a critical role as a cultural window for elite Koreans to connect to metropolitan culture. Yu Chin-o regularly purchased Japanese books on broad topics of literature, literary criticism, and political science, as well as popular novels. His literary taste was especially oriented to modern Japanese literature. In fact, it was in 1927 that he seriously considered becoming a professional writer, and he often found artistic inspiration from a Japanese-language magazine dedicated to critical theory and literary criticism, *Kaizō* (*J. Reconstruction*). He loved the works by Hayashi Fusao, Yokomitsu Riichi, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Tanizaki Jun’ichiro. Thanks to his excellent Japanese and the Japanese magazine *Kaizō*, he was able to follow the development of the new Japanese literary movement of proletariat literature and the “New Sense Movement” (*J. Shinkangakuha/K. Sin’gamgakp’a*). In other words, Japanese books became his own personal “textbooks” even though the colonial regime never recommended that he read them. Thus, we can find here again that elite Korean students embraced Japanese education and books without feeling any conflicts with their ethnic identity. It seemed normal to him that Koreans could use Japanese language skills for their own purposes, as we saw above in the earlier case of the student whose participation in the March First Movement was linked to a Japanese bookstore.

In addition, Yu Chin-o enthusiastically kept up with new Japanese publications in political science. In particular, Yu Chin-o grew interested in the Japanese socialist art movement. In 1927, he bought the Japanese translation of Karl Marx’s *Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. Although his interest in Marxism declined in the 1930s, he was one of the few Koreans who could understand its critical theory in 1920s Korea. He calmly recorded the moment when he bought Marx’s book from a Japanese store:

> It has been raining for a whole day. Quiet outside. A rainy day in January is quite rare. I wish that the climate of Korea would become like this forever. Then, Koreans could work outside as much as they want and they could earn more money. The formula which Marx presented in the introduction of *Keizaihō hihan* is fascinating. It is clear and straightforward. I am not sure, though, at my current level of knowledge, if he is right or wrong (Yu 1976, 197).

Until his underground Marxist circle was detected by the colonial police in the early 1930s, he remained quite engaged with Marxist theory and the left-wing movement. What he bought from the bookstore was the new translation made by the Japanese Marxists Kawakami Hajime and Miyakawa Minoru. The book was issued by the Japanese publisher Köbunkan, and Kawakami Hajime designated it as volume six of the series entitled *The Collection of Marxist Theory*. It was not the intent of colonial education, of course, to spread Marxism to Korea when it taught Koreans Japanese. Hence, we should note that elite Koreans had enough room and intellectual ability to use their acquired language in order to attain information and knowledge of their own choice in spite of close state supervision.

More important was the fact that Yu had, in the same university, some Korean friends who did not take Japanese civility for granted, either. In fact, Korean
students at the Keijō Imperial University became core members of the Marxist movement (Cho 1992, 51). Known as “fellow travelers” (a phrase that comes from the Russian word *poputchiki*), Yu Chin-o and his schoolmates surprised the Korean literary world with their early adoption of socialist realism (Yi 1983, 6-7). Along with him, Ch’oe Yong-dal, Yi Kang-guk, and Pak Mun-gyu comprised the young left-wing student group. Accordingly, their thorough education in the colonial schools brought about unexpected consequences. High levels of education and excellent ability in Japanese enabled indigenous elites to be chosen for the best schooling, but after they had learned to read and speak Japanese like the Japanese the Japanese Empire could not imprison them within the tight boundaries of orthodox textbooks. The chosen indigenous elites like Yu Chin-o were not interested in simply translating Japanese imperial propaganda. They were attracted to the ideas and thought that the Japanese Empire did not want to be taught in school.

**“Mimic Men” on the Border**

Despite all the years of education at Japanese schools, the Korean elite man Yu Chin-o never took the civil service examinations. To many Korean men, passing the exams and becoming high-ranking officials was their cherished dream. With his degree from the imperial university, Yu Chin-o was one of the few candidates eligible to be a senior official (*J. sónin*) of the Japanese Empire. Regardless of what was commonly expected of him, Yu abandoned his preparation for the exams at the last minute. It seems that he wished to stay at the university as a faculty member. And yet, there was not a single ethnic Korean professor at Keijō Imperial University at that time, and in fact there would not be any even when colonial rule ended in 1945. Yu Chin-o, therefore, threw to the Japanese and himself a hard-hitting question: were the Japanese willing to acknowledge the same level of civility to Koreans if they completed all the imperial curricula? For years after his graduation, Yu Chin-o taught at the university as a part-time lecturer to hear the answer to this question. Perhaps, he naively expected that his university degree would grant him a faculty position in some near future despite his Korean ethnicity.

It did not, however, take long before he realized that Japanized Koreans were not warmly welcomed in colonial society. In particular, some Japanese settlers viewed elite Koreans as troublesome outsiders who constituted a potential threat to the colonial regime. Some Japanese looked at him with suspicion, because his success story itself could inspire the hope that Koreans could someday be equal to their imperial masters. “Mimic men,” such as Yu Chin-o, were feared as dangerous subversives who might harbor the ambitions and the potential to replace the Japanese. Given the case of Yu Chin-o, Koreans could believe that modern civilization was within their reach and that Japanese guidance would not last forever. After years of teaching at the imperial university as a part-time lecturer, Yu Chin-o finally gave up his hope and moved to Posǒng Professional

---

9 Korean socialism received the strongest support from students in Seoul. Even after 1945, many well-educated students were sympathetic to socialism and the new regime in North Korea (Armstrong 2013, 26-27).
School, which Korean millionaire Kim Sŏng-su managed for the education of ethnic Korean students. Therefore, Yu Chin-o learned from his own experience that discrimination against Koreans did not disappear in one day despite imperial propaganda proclaiming equality between Japanese and Koreans.

It is also interesting that Yu transformed his cultural identity after he realized colonial reality. As discussed above, he loved to read many different genres of Japanese literature and science. He was interested in “dangerous” Marxist thought, and his main language of academic and cultural life was Japanese. Beginning in 1927, the year Yu Chin-o made his sensational debut into the Korean literary world, the Korean language began to have a fresh meaning to him. Since then, he continued to write in Korean, publishing many short stories and plays. Why did he try to communicate in the Korean language with a Korean audience? One reason can be found in his own narrative: the Japanese did not treat him as an equal, whereas the Koreans did.

For example, one of his Korean stories, Lecturer Kim and Professor T, well illustrates his frustration and his motivation to reintegrate into the Korean community. Published in 1935, this short story was an autobiographic account about Yu Chin-o himself. The narrator was a young ethnic Korean man who had graduated from Tokyo Imperial University. Regardless of his outstanding education in Japan, this character could not confidently look forward to enjoying a bright future as a successful and ambitious Japanized Korean. On the basis of his own experience, Yu Chin-o depicted this Japanized Korean as a helpless victim of ethnic discrimination. After the protagonist graduates from university, he comes back to Korea but cannot find a job for over a year. He finally takes an opportunity to teach one course at a colonial school in which he is the only ethnic Korean faculty member (Yu 2005, 51).

This story chooses to portray the protagonist “Lecturer Kim,” a rare Korean university graduate, as a victim in order to symbolize the ambivalent status in colonial society of a well-educated but eviscerated Korean vis-à-vis “Professor T,” an ethnic Japanese degree-holder. In his daily life, Lecturer Kim never thinks about big topics, such as colonialism, Korean independence, or Japanese imperialism. His only concern is to secure his part-time job. In fact, he could not have attained the temporary teaching position unless his Japanese professor at the imperial university had asked a special favor from the school. Yu Chin-o added one more intriguing identity marker to Lecturer Kim. Kim has to hide his past support for the Marxists, as he had at one time been a member of a left-wing student group called The Society of Literary Critics (Munhak pi'yŏnghoe). Kim had to keep his membership secret in Korea, where Marxism was strictly prohibited by the colonial police. Marxism was considered “dangerous thought” (J. kiken shiṣo) in colonial Korea. When Kim begs for a job from a colonial bureaucrat who is a senior

---

10 Yu Chin-o himself organized a left-wing student group in Keijō Imperial University in the late 1920s. Along with him, Ch’oe Yong-dal, Yi Kang-guk, and Pak Mun-gyu were the members of the Marxist group, the Research Group of Economics (Kyŏngje yon’guhoe). Ch’oe, Yi, and Pak all later became important architects of the North Korean state, while Yu Chin-o stayed in South Korea.
graduate (sonbae) of the same university, Kim lies and insists that he is innocent of ever harboring “dangerous thoughts.”

Forced to hide his past activities in order to survive, Lecturer Kim resembles a fugitive who desperately tries to keep his past secret. Thus, he symbolizes the dangerous hybrid identity of a university-educated Korean socialist in the Japanese colony. His suspicious colleague, Professor T, tenaciously investigates Mr. Kim and his past activities. Although Professor T pretends to treat him in a friendly manner, he slowly drives Mr. Kim into a corner by investigating his personal history. The tension between the two reaches a climax when Kim’s secret is finally uncovered by Professor T. The Japanese regard Mr. Kim as a serious and dangerous threat. To Professor T, this Japanized Korean not only spreads dangerous thoughts, which Koreans should never hear about, but also catches up with his imperial masters by imitating them. Professor T finally pressures him, saying “I read your wonderful article about new German writers. It was very impressive, because there are only few Japanese who understand German literature as much as you do … I hope that you can continue your writing [about such movements].” These words sounded like a death sentence to Lecturer Kim, who said to himself, “My article was all about German left-wing writers and such kind of writings must be kept secret if I do not want to lose my job at this school” (Yu 2005, 64).

The story ends tragically when the colonial government learns of his “dangerous thoughts” and his writings about the socialist movement, for which ironically he owed his Japanese education. After Professor T has discovered his secret, the colonial bureaucrat who initially arranged his job summons him. Having no option, Lecturer Kim reluctantly goes to the house of the high official with a small present. Turning to him, the bureaucrat starts yelling, saying “That’s why [Japanese] people call Koreans disrespectful! … I trusted you. But how can you deceive me so cunningly and humiliate me in public? … Didn’t you say that you have had nothing to do with that ideology?” (Yu 2005, 77) Lecturer Kim, of course, desperately defends himself, but it does not take long before he realizes that such an effort is useless. At that moment, Professor T enters the room and sneers at him. This short story then ends and readers can easily imagine that this elite Korean will again be unemployed. The story is a complete fiction, even though Yu Chin-o confessed that it was based on what he actually experienced at a colonial school. In this story, however, Yu Chin-o successfully constructed a timid and egoistic fictional character, Lecturer Kim, by combining the multiple risk factors that an elite Korean might have—ethnicity, high education, and socialist tendencies.

It would be an overstatement, nevertheless, to argue that Yu Chin-o wished to protest against the ethnic inequality of the Japanese colony. Considering that only a few Korean men were educated at Japanese universities, we cannot argue that Lecturer Kim represents the discrimination which ordinary Koreans faced in everyday life. This kind of tension and grumbling could exist only at the highest level of Korean society. However, it deserves our attention that Yu, as a member of the Korean elite, believed that Korean audiences would understand his situation and would be sympathetic to the character. Popular audiences indeed felt that
Lecturer Kim's suffering was that of “their own” (Kim Hwan-t'ae 1935, 12-13). In other words, the author Yu Chin-o trusted his popular Korean audience. His strong trust in popular readers helps us understand why he crossed from the realm of Japanese education and the Japanese language to the subaltern realm of Korean language and literature. Disenchanted by the glass ceiling, this elite man found a reason as to why he should speak to the Koreans. It was because he had rediscovered the new meaning of “us” and subjectivity when the imperial masters treated him only as an inferior “Mimic man.”

Conclusion
To summarize, it was a matter of choice whether colonial Korean elite students sided with the masses or the state. Many successful elite students chose to enter the state bureaucracy. The colonial state allowed them access to state power, because they completed all civilizing programs, which made them almost equivalent to the Japanese. As we can see from the case of Yu Chin-o, it is not surprising that the successful candidates of colonial schools spoke Japanese fluently and even admired the culture of the metropole. To many Korean students, reading Korean books was simply a waste of time. Naturally, the degree of assimilation increased according to the level of colonial education. But, why did some university graduates, such as Yu Chin-o, Yi Hyo-sŏk, and many other young members of the early Korean socialist movements refuse to take for granted state-authorized civility? Were they exceptional? By analyzing the case of Yu Chin-o, I argue in this article that assimilation simultaneously caused alienation. As we can see in many other colonial societies, it was the common paradox of the civilizing mission. Even if Koreans completed the highest levels of education, they were not received by the Japanese as equals. Many Japanese did not sincerely believe that their educational program would raise Koreans to the same level of culture and civilization as their own. In addition, their high level of education and Japanese language skill exposed the Korean elite students to many ideas that were different from the state orthodoxy. If well-educated Koreans escaped from the track designated by the state, these Korean elites seemed more suspicious and even hazardous to the Japanese than ordinary Koreans did. Unless the “mimic men” remained within the state's control, their example showed the risk of educating Koreans.

When Korean elite students graduated, some chose to reintegrate into Korean society. Because of their desire to be like Japanese, they were more critical of the ethnic hierarchy than any other Koreans. Instead of living as a second-grade Japanese, therefore, someone like Yu Chin-o preferred to live as a first-grade Korean

11 Kim Hwan-t'ae, one of the leading contemporary literary critics, praised Lecturer Kim and Professor T for successfully exciting its readers by “exposing (p‘ongno) the hidden truth of the drama.” He said, “In this work of fiction, the current social system, the personal situation of Lecturer Kim, the atmosphere of the professional school, and the wickedness of Professor T are all intertwined to victimize Lecturer Kim, who is a naive and passive character.” It is unclear what this critic meant by “the current social system.” However, he commented that “we (uri) all know why Lecturer Kim cannot protest and has no choice but to give up.” This critic assumed that all readers could understand Lecturer Kim, but that none would be impressed by him.
writer and educator in the subaltern realm of ethnic Koreans. In other words, Korean society became an alternative space where colonial Korean elites could practice their own subjectivity without their imperial masters. Thus, we should remember that assimilation through education only reveals a part of the big picture, for, if we see it from the Korean point of view, it becomes clear that education also boosted the Korean ability to think critically of the state. Furthermore, we should not forget that the majority of students failed to climb the ladder of success. Although the degree of Japanese civility differed according to the point where they were no longer accepted into the next level of schooling, many students sensed that they in the end they still were the losers. By creating Korean-language magazines and schools, those who returned to Korean society were able to develop their own sense of subjectivity and civility in their own Korean language. In this sense, the colonial education contributed to the development of Korean culture, albeit unexpectedly. If the colonial state wanted to train bilingual Korean men for its own needs, Koreans also had their own goals and agendas when they decided to attend school. In short, Korean graduates of colonial schools were not simply uniform puppets, but rather came to develop multiple identities, which they separately used for meeting the needs of state and society. Different identities and languages sometimes conflicted and sometimes reinforced one another in the mind of one person. Therefore, it is more important, when we think of colonial experiences, to ask why Koreans chose to use a certain language or identity in a given situation rather than to assume that everyone had only one identity for life. Yu Chin-o is certainly a case in point.

GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Korean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abe Yoshishige</td>
<td>安倍能成</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akutagawa Ryūnosuke</td>
<td>芥川龍之介</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch'ígim</td>
<td>勵任</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch'oe Yong-dal</td>
<td>崔容達</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch'ok't'ak</td>
<td>嘱託</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch'oltoguk</td>
<td>鐵道局</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chibangch'ông</td>
<td>地方廳</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chinhak</td>
<td>進學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chōmnun hakkyo</td>
<td>専門學校</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chōsen kyōiku</td>
<td>朝鮮教育令</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choson chi kwang</td>
<td>朝鮮之光</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choson yakhakkyo</td>
<td>朝鮮薬學校</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chuim</td>
<td>奏任</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hasuk</td>
<td>下宿</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayashi Fusao</td>
<td>林房雄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honmachi</td>
<td>本町</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaizō</td>
<td>改造</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawakami Hajime</td>
<td>河上肇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keijō Imperial University</td>
<td>京城帝國大學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiken shisō</td>
<td>危險思想</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Kangsa wa T Kyosu</td>
<td>金講師와 T教授</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kōbukan</td>
<td>弘文館</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kodüng po't'ong hakkyo</td>
<td>高等普通學校</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kowôn</td>
<td>雇員</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyōngch'äl kwansō</td>
<td>警察官署</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Hybridity and “Mimic Men” in Colonial Korea: The Case of Yu Chin-o (1906-1987)

REFERENCES

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Keijô kôto futsu gakkô 京城高等普通學校. 1918. Keijô kôto futsu gakkô ichiran Taishô 7 nen 京城高等普通學校一覽 大正7年 [1918 Yearbook of Keijô Elementary School].

Keijô teikoku daigaku 京城帝國大學. 1924. Keijô teikoku daigaku yoka ichiran 京城帝國大學豫科一覽 [1924 Yearbook of General-education College of Keijô Imperial University]. Seoul: Keijô teikoku daigaku.


_________. 1978. “Kyŏngsŏng cheda’e ŭi paegyŏng” 京城帝大의 背景 [The circumstances surrounding the Keijō Imperial University]. *Na ŭi insaenggwan: chŏlmŭm i kitch’il ttae* 나의 人生觀: 젊음이 깃칠 때 [My life: the days when young wings stretch out], 73-75. Seoul: Hwimun Ch’ulp’ansa.