

*White and Purple*  
(*Shiro to Murasaki*)  
Written by Sata Ineko

Translated by Samuel Perry  
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## Introduction

“White and Purple” (“Shiro to murasaki”) was written by Sata Ineko (1904–1998) in June, 1950, during Japan’s occupation by the Allied Powers. Full-scale war had just broken out on the Korean peninsula. The story was published in the journal *Ningen* (*Human*) in September of the same year, by which time the Communist northern forces had overtaken most of southern Korea, and General MacArthur was on the point of making his decisive landing at Inchōn. In her memoirs, Sata notes that she could hear US war planes flying overhead from her home outside of Tokyo as she wrote “White and Purple”—one of the author’s own favorite stories—which explores Japan’s relationship to its neighboring country, newly engaged in what would become a long, internecine civil war.

For almost forty years Japan had governed the Korean peninsula as a colony before it was defeated in WWII by the Allied Powers in August, 1945. Initially seen as a colony that would produce cheap agricultural goods and create new markets for Japanese-produced commodities, colonial Korea was by the mid-1930s being increasingly developed as a base for heavy industries and for the expansion of the Japanese empire into the Asian continent. Although Japan had permitted a limited degree of cultural nationalism in Korea for much of its colonial rule, in the late 1930s, as the Pacific War intensified, the Japanese Governor General of Korea instituted a program of coercive cultural assimilation. Under these policies Koreans were educated almost exclusively in Japanese, most Korean-language print culture became effectively banned, and Koreans were strongly encouraged, if not coerced, to replace their traditional names with Japanese names. Willingly or not, colonial Koreans were becoming subjects of the Japanese empire.

Taking as its main historical backdrop this moment of coercive cultural assimilation in the Japanese colony, “White and Purple” is remarkable for the way it highlights how gender acted as a decisive site of cultural contestation within these conditions of colonial modernity. Focusing on the relationship between two well-educated, but unmarried women, both with prestigious jobs in the Office of the Governor General, Sata’s story foregrounds the colonial difference that divides her Japanese and Korean characters. At the same time, the story offers a nuanced understanding of how each of her characters has been marginalized in her own right and attempts to manage feelings of dependency and inadequacy. Sharing many of the psychological insights made by philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon in his 1952 *Black Skins, White Masks*, “White and Purple” shows how colonial feelings of marginalization manifested themselves in the racist

arrogance and indifference of her Japanese characters, and in a particular attachment to the Japanese culture of her oppressor in the case of her Korean character, Den Teiki.

Once a member of the illegal Japanese Communist Party, Sata Ineko had trenchantly criticized Japan's military expansion into Asia in the early 1930s before being brought to trial for her anti-war activism. In the early 1940s, she eventually agreed to travel through Korea and other Japanese colonies at the invitation of the South Manchuria Railroad Company. One might say she collaborated with the wartime culture industry insofar as she published accounts of her travels that closely aligned themselves with official imperial discourse. No doubt the product of much soul searching on the part of the author herself, "White and Purple" negotiates the contradictory pressures shaping the Japanese memory of Korea in the period following its loss of the colony. On the one hand, the story's narrator reflects nostalgically about Korea within conventions of colonial travel writing that characteristically saw its ancient cultures and natural scenery as quintessential markers of Asian beauty, while typically overlooking the hard lives of the colonized people. But at the same time, the narrator seems intent on unmasking the dark side of imperialism—and her own participation in it—through a far more poignant reflection on her relationship with her Korean colleague, whose complex relationship with the Japanese language carries great significance in Sata's story.

Because naming plays an important role in "White and Purple" and the Japanese characters used for Korean words do not indicate pronunciation in the original, the transliteration of personal names and place names into English becomes a bedeviling affair. In the case of Korean place names, contemporary Korean pronunciation is used throughout this English translation in all cases except for Keijō, the Japanese name for Seoul in the colonial period. With regard to the Korean character's name (田貞姫, Chōn Chōng-hŭi), the translator has chosen to use the Japanese pronunciation (Den Teiki) in light of the fact that a colonial government employee, such as the narrator, would most likely have referred to her Korean colleague using the Japanese pronunciation of her characters. This selective use of different reading practices is meant to preserve some of the historical specificity that a more consistent practice of Romanization might not so easily accommodate, while at the same time keeping familiar those places in Korea that English-speaking audiences might still recognize today.