

Tenma

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Introduction

1940 was the year of the “Korean boom” in the publishing circles of imperial Japan.¹ Three decades of Japanese-language education policies in Korea had produced a new generation of young, mobile colonial subjects with the ability to speak in both Korean and Japanese, and 1940 saw a record number of Japanese-language texts by Korean writers published in prominent journals such as *Bungei shunju* and *Bungakukai*. Meanwhile, the full-scale implementation of *kōminka* (imperialization) policies had sparked a rising interest in Japan for the colonies: their foods, their culture, their lifestyles. The *kōminka* movement had a profound effect in Korea on both an administrative and ideological level. With the rallying call of “Japan and Korea as one body” (*naisen ittai*), *kōminka* sought to radically erase the demarcation between metropole and periphery under the totalizing rubric of “empire,” even while its policies perpetuated the very discrimination they proposed to eliminate.

Leading the Japanese-language publications trend was the prose writer and journalist Kim Saryang (1914–1950), whose short story “Hikari no naka ni” (Into the Light, 1939) was nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize early in 1940. Born in Pyongyang in 1914, Kim grew up under the shadow of Japan’s colonial rule and lived to see its end. Many of his stories feature a conflicted male protagonist, marked ethnically as Korean but *linguistically* as Japanese, and unable or unwilling to reconcile the two. In “Tenma” (1940)², however, the reader is presented with a protagonist who is more harlequin than hero, and an omniscient narrator who casts a critical eye over the Korean and Japanese characters alike. The Japanese word *tenma* has several meanings: the mythological figure of Pegasus; the horse that Tentei, the God of Providence, rides to heaven; and a swift, exceptional steed. The word refers to the story’s protagonist, a Korean man named Genryū whose shifting, malleable personality straddles a bewildering array of identities: imperial subject, collaborator, spy, madman, fool. There is no mistaking Genryū as a satirical figure, but to dismiss him as *only* such would be to deny him a crucial agency. Others may laugh at him, but it is important to remember that Genryū has the ability to laugh back.

At the beginning of the story, Genryū’s multiple performances allow him to move in and among different colonial spheres: the shady back-alleys of Shinmachi, the rich Japanese district of Honmachi, chic cafés, grand hotels, and the history-laden neighborhood of Jongno. By the end of the story, however, he finds himself lost in the very same maze of streets he began in, faced with the threat of imprisonment in a Buddhist temple. The temple emblemizes a decisive sundering from society in its physical distance and functional difference from the urban space, and Genryū

¹ For more information on the publications produced during this “Korean boom,” see Watanabe Kazutami, *Tasha to shite no Chōsen: bungakuteki kō satsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003) and Kajii Noboru, “Gendai Chōsen bungaku e no nihonjin no taiō (2)” in *Toyama daigaku jinbungaku-bu kiyō* 5 (1981), 93-115.

² Kim Saryang. “Tenma,” *Kim Saryang zenshū* vol. 1 ed. Kim Saryang zenshū henshū iinkai (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1973), 67-103. The story was originally published in the Japanese literary magazine *Bungei shunju* in June 1940. This translation makes use of both sources.

finds himself terrified by this threat of isolation. It may be possible to glimpse in Genryū's fear the shadow of *kōminka* discourse, which attempted to totalize identity under the umbrella of "Japanese" imperial subject through the violent destruction of the "Korean" national body. With the war's progression, the maze of censorship would only close in more tightly around the trapped artist – but even (or especially) in the story of the madman, or the fool, we find spaces for contestation, and ambivalence; and voices that interrupt the hegemonic script of empire, in its very reiteration.

Notes on the Translation:

Considering the importance of laughter in the text, the sounds of laughter made by the characters – *wahaha*, *kikiki*, etc. – have been transcribed as they appear in the original whenever possible. Names in "Tenma" are given in accordance with the East Asian practice of surname first. The transliteration of names from the colonial period, in the course of which Japanese increasingly came to be the exclusive public language, presents distinct complexities. Character names in "Tenma" are transliterated according to the Sino-Japanese readings expected by the *Bungei shunjū* readership.

As for place names, the Japanese colonial names or Sino-Japanese readings are given. When applicable, however, the Korean names or Sino-Korean readings (as well as present-day names, if they are different from those in use during the colonial period) are indicated in brackets in accordance with the revised romanization system in order to avoid replicating the erasure of historical memory. Thus, for example: Honmachi [Bonjeong; present-day Chungmuro], Shinmachi [Sinjeong; present-day Mukjeong-dong], or the Chosen [Joseon] Hotel.

During the colonial period, the Japanese words *naichi* (metropole; lit. inside land) and *gaichi* (periphery; lit. outside land) were often employed to refer to Japan and its colonies. The words used for "Japan" and "Japanese" in this particular text are *naichi* (Korean: *naeji*) and *naichijin* (Korean: *naejin*). Exceptions are noted in the translation in brackets. Korean words that appear in the text have been transcribed as they are, with English translations provided in brackets or, when longer explanations are necessary, footnotes.