

A STUDY ON THE VOICES OF RESISTANCE IN KOREAN POETRY UNDER JAPANESE COLONIAL RULE

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Abstract: The Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945) marked one of the darkest periods in the nation’s history, as Koreans endured political repression, cultural suppression, and constant fear under colonial rule. Beyond the physical struggles of survival—forced labor, sexual slavery, and the eradication of the Korean language—Koreans sought alternative forms of resistance. Among the most powerful of these was literature. This paper examines how prominent writers such as Yi Sang, Yi Sanghwa, Yi Yuksa, Yoon Dongju, Kim Sowol, and Yi Hyoseok used poetry and prose to express resistance, preserve cultural identity, and sustain hope for independence. Although these writers did not live to witness liberation, their works became enduring voices of defiance and continue to shape the cultural memory of modern Korea (Lee Peter H. 1974:161-193).

Keywords: Korean literature; resistance writing; Japanese colonial rule; cultural identity; modern Korean history; Yi Sang; Yi Sanghwa; Yi Yuksa; Yoon Dongju; Kim Sowol.

일본 식민 통치 하 한국 시에서 저항의 목소리 연구

초록: 본 논문은 일제 강점기(1910~1945)에 대해 다룬다. 당시 한국인들은 식민지 지배 하에서 정치적 억압, 문화적 억압, 그리고 끊임없는 공포에 시달렸다. 생존을 위한 육체적 투쟁(강제 노역, 성노예, 한글 말살)을 넘어 한국인들은 대안적인 저항 방식을 모색하였다. 그 중에서도 가장 강력한 저항은 문학이었다. 이 글은 이상, 이상화, 이육사, 윤동주, 김소월과 같은 저명한 작가들이 시와 산문을 통해 저항을 표현하고, 문화적 정체성을 보존하며, 독립에 대한 희망을 어떻게 이어갔는지 살펴본다. 비록 이 작가들은 해방을 직접 목격하지는 못했지만, 그들의 작품은 저항의 목소리로 남았고, 현대 한국의 문화적 기억을 형성해 왔다.

키워드: 한국 문학; 저항 문학; 일제 식민 통치; 문화적 정체성; 한국 현대사, 이상, 이상화, 이육사, 윤동주, 김소월.

BADANIE NAD GŁOSAMI OPORU W POEZJI KOREANSKIEJ W OKRESIE JAPOŃSKIEJ OKUPACJI

Abstrakt: Japońska okupacja Korei (1910–1945) stanowiła jeden z najciemniejszych okresów w historii narodu, w którym Koreańczycy doświadczali represji politycznych, ucisku kulturowego i ciągłego strachu pod rządami kolonialnymi. Poza fizyczną walką o przetrwanie – pracą przymusową, niewolnictwem seksualnym i wykorzenianiem języka koreańskiego – Koreańczycy poszukiwali alternatywnych form oporu. Jedną z najpotężniejszych z nich była literatura. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje, jak wybitni pisarze, tacy jak Yi Sang, Yi Sanghwa, Yi Yuksa, Yoon Dongju i Kim Sowol, wykorzystywali poezję i prozę do wyrażania oporu, zachowania tożsamości kulturowej i podtrzymywania nadziei na niepodległość. Choć pisarze ci nie dożyli wyzwolenia, ich dzieła stały się trwałymi głosami buntu i nadal kształtują pamięć kulturową współczesnej Korei.

Słowa-klucze: Literatura koreańska; pisarstwo ruchu oporu; japońskie rządy kolonialne; tożsamość kulturowa; współczesna historia Korei; Yi Sang; Yi Sanghwa; Yi Yuksa; Yoon Dongju; Kim Sowol.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how Korean writers under

Japanese occupation used literature as a form of resistance and national expression. By examining the biographies and writings of several key authors, this study demonstrates how literature became a vital medium for sustaining cultural identity and hope during a period of political repression and cultural suppression. In 1910, the last Emperor of Korea, King Sunjong, signed an annexation treaty that created the General Government of Korea. From that time Korea was a colony completely subordinate to Japan- a situation that lasted until the end of World War II in 1945, when Japan's political situation changed radically. The dominant country, calling itself the “elder brother of Korea”, implemented a series of changes across the Korean Peninsula beginning in 1910. These restrictions affected various areas of life, including severely limiting Koreans' access to education, introducing school uniforms resembling military attire, and restricting Koreans' ability to hold public office or work in government agencies. Only Japanese people had access to these spheres, and the only Koreans who had a chance for social advancement were collaborators or those who had become Japanese-educated. Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula lasted 35 years. During this period, Koreans had lived under constant-oppression: Japanese authorities forced Koreans to change their names, they banned the teaching of Korean language at schools, and conscripted many Korean men into the Japanese army. Despite these conditions, the literary spirit of the Korean nation persisted. Korean literature developed under extremely turbulent circumstances. Korean writers contributed to the survival and spiritual salvation of the Korean nation, often at great personal risk, including the threat of death and persecution (Rurarz, 2005: 327–351).

“(…) the pressure to become “Japanese” took place under the banner of “Japan and Korea as one body” (naisen ittai). For example, full-blown imperialization policies (kōminka seisaku) such as forced name changes from Korean to Japanese (sōshi kaimei) or “worshipping the Imperial Palace from afar” (kyūjō yōhai) were required rituals for becoming “Japanese.” Because these policies affected all Koreans, in contrast to the expropriation of land or labor-power, they constituted the first form of directly experienced Japanese rule for most people”(Rurarz 2005: 327-351).

This research focuses on Korean literature produced under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), a period during which Koreans were deprived of basic freedom, including assembly, association, the press, and speech. The colonial government employed education as a

key tool of assimilation, banning the teaching of Korean language and history while enforcing instruction in Japanese. Within this context, two primary literary approaches emerged: one that maintained the didactic tradition of enlightenment literature as a form of adaptation and resistance, and another that embraced literature as autonomous art, influenced by Western aesthetics. Both approaches grappled with themes of separation, alienation, and identity under colonial oppression. The study also acknowledges the brief rise and swift suppression of Korean women writers during this period. By situating these developments within the larger framework of colonial domination, this research highlights how Korean literature simultaneously reflected and resisted the realities of occupation. This research employs historical-literary analysis, combining close reading of texts with historical contextualization. Primary works of the authors are examined alongside secondary scholarship on Korean history and literature. A qualitative approach is adopted, aiming to interpret symbolic language, thematic structures, and the role of censorship, translation, and colonial education in shaping literary production in the history of Korea (Ruraz 2005: 327-351). The study draws upon literary theory; according to Alain Viala “a theory is a set or more precisely a chain of concepts organized in such a way as to describe a phenomenon” (Viala 2006). In Viala’s view, the literary field is an important connector between social life and literature. In the context of the colonial era in Korea (1910-1945), this perspective is particularly significant, as literature reflected the social realities of Koreans during that time. The study draws upon primary source – poetry produced during the Japanese occupation – as well as scholarship analyzing their cultural and social significance. Given that poetry was one of the preferred genres of the period due to its accessibility and immediacy, particular attention is paid to how this form captured the social problems of the colonial era. The analysis further considers how Japanese authorities sought to efface Korean culture by controlling education, language, and public life, and how writers responded to these pressures through literature. Close reading of selected texts allows for the identification of recurrent themes such as nationalism, identity, and resistance (Seth 2006). This study focuses on Korean poetry written during the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), examining selected poems and biographical details of five major writers – Yi Sang, Yi Sanghwa, Yi Yuksa, Yoon Dongju, and Kim Sowol to illustrate broader themes of resistance, resilience, and identity. While not comprehensive of all literary activity during this time, these writers represent the most prominent voices of the era”. (Seth 2006;

Haggard 1997: 867-881).

“What is the authenticity, autonomy, of a nation, national consciousness, when the Other is its unwanted, unacknowledged, origin and the continuing target of appeal?” (Lac 2020: 3).

Several guiding questions frame the study:

1. Why were these particular five writers chosen for analysis?
2. How do the literary “voices” of these writers embody resistance?

3. How does aesthetic resistance – that is, the pursuit of artistic autonomy – relate to political or nationalist resistance, and how do these dimensions converge under the shared concept of “resistance”?

The five writers, who were active during the Japanese occupation contributed to dissemination of literature, which expressed resistance and highlighted national identity. Because literary activity was under strict control by the occupying forces, all these writers lived in danger and risked their lives. Unfortunately, none of them survived to see Korea’s independence, often dying under unexplained circumstances. That is the reason why the author of this paper chose to focus on these literary figures. Their courage, strength, and sacrifice for national resistance must be remembered and continually highlighted.

“Aesthetics becomes a tool for reflection, intuition, and practices of power and resistance because aesthetics allows us to deal with the possible, the counter-factual, the ideal, the implausible, and it allows through accentuation, exaggeration, but also through idealized representation, to understand the essence and accidents of a problem as they are experienced in human subjectivity”(Teo 2015: 303-310).

Aesthetic resistance in the humanistic fields of art, literature, and film consists of influencing people’s thinking without the use of physical force. It provides mental support and encouragement, particularly in times of oppression. In the context of colonial Korea, aesthetic resistance is reflected in literature. This study addresses the questions: How do the literary “voices” of these writers embody resistance? What subjects did they explore using metaphors and allegories?

2. The voices of resistance

To better understand resistance literature, it is advantageous to examine the biographies of selected authors and analyze some of their works. The first one, who did not live to see the country's independence was Yi Sang (이상, 1910–1937), born Kim Hae-Gyeong. He produced a body of work during the Japanese occupation of Korea that included poetry, short stories, and essays. His education was conducted exclusively in Japanese, which influenced his early writing; many of his poems from the early 1930s were written in that language. In 1931, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and references to illness appear throughout his texts from this period. His works also address contemporary political events, including the Mukden Incident of 1931 and subsequent Japanese expansion into Manchuria.

The findings show that literature produced during the Japanese occupation served multiple roles: preserving national identity, expressing despair and resistance, and offering hope for eventual liberation. Yi Sang experimented with modernist aesthetics, blending illness and surrealism as metaphors for colonial oppression (Lee, Peter H., 2009). After training as an architect, Yi Sang briefly practiced in that field before poor health forced his resignation. He later managed a coffee shop where the Korean writers' group Guinhoe (구인회) convened. His involvement with the group led to the publication of his first works in Korean. Toward the end of his life, Yi Sang was employed at a printing house that produced the sole issue of Guinhoe: Poetry and Fiction, the group's journal. In his final years, Yi Sang continued to publish poems in Korean, along with short stories and essays. Both his early and later writings reflect influences from avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, particularly surrealism and Dada. At the end of his life, he was arrested by the imperial police in Tokyo, who had power to detain any Korean they deemed suspicious without evidence. His respiratory illness, incurable at the time, worsened in jail, and he died soon after being released (Lee peter H. 1974; Ogarek-Czój 2007). He was a prominent writer of colonized Korea and was using surrealism both as a means to escape a world full of pain and to portray the darker realities of life during Korea's occupation. One of his most known works is the novel *Wings* (날개), written in 1936, which employs an allegory of colonial persecution, describing the inner world of a first-person narrator, an isolated individual who lives in a world full of frustration in a dimly lit room, symbolizing the experience of living

under colonial rule. The protagonist is portrayed as a hermit who seems to abandon all hope for a better existence. Themes of isolation, loneliness, and sadness are also evident in his poem Flowering Tree (꽃나무).

Flowering Tree

“Dead center of an open field there is a flowering tree. In the neighborhood

not even one That flowering tree with as much ardor as it thought about its

thought-about tree opened ardently its blossoms and stood It cannot go to

the tree it thinks about Wildly I fled For the sake of one flowering tree I

really went that far to make such uncommon mimicry.” (Korean Literature Today).

The flowering tree in the title feels isolated, unable to reach other trees, yet dreams of a better life in their company. This can symbolize an abandoned country- bereft of hope and assistance – yet still holding onto a fragile dream of freedom. The interpretation suggests that one day this flowering tree may finally attain its dream.

Joyelle McSweeney and Jack Jung offer an illuminating perspective:

“The immobility of the tree is radiant; the tree is as much flaring as flowering and it drives the speaker to Art, the ‘weird mimicry,’ rare replications, the ultimate place, the mise en abyme, one guesses that he, too, is radiantly immobilized in fire like the tree. (...) Korea in 1930s was a colonized nation suffering under the Japanese imperial regime. Its poets and writers were constantly censored, jailed, tortured, and disappeared. Yi Sang came barreling into this scene with his surreal, confessional, experimental, and secretly political poems. The conditions of Yi Sang’s time are particular but not so long gone, and his language echoes with a ring of truth in our present moment, in both private and public spheres.” (McSweeney and Jung, 2020: 224)

As they notice, Yi Sang tried to show the alienation and hopelessness that permeated the colonial condition of his country. It is needed to highlight that he spent all his life in colonial country in a time

of Japanese censorship and political turmoil. His surrealistic approach was a tool to speak to an audience living under national trauma.

The next prominent author of that time was Yi Sang-hwa (이상화, 1901–1943), also known as Lee Sang-hwa. A nationalist poet active during the Japanese colonial era, Yi published under several pen names, including Muryang, Sanghwa, and Baega. He participated in the March 1st Movement of 1919, which sought to restore Korean sovereignty. In 1921 he traveled to Japan to study French literature but returned to Korea in 1923 after the Great Kantō earthquake. In the early 1920s, he joined the White Tide (Baekjo) circle along with Hong Sayong, Park Jonghwa, Park Yeonghui, Kim Gijin, and others, and began his career in poetry with the publication of the poems *Joy of the Corrupt Age* (말세의 희탄) *Double Death* (이중의 사망), and *To my bedroom* (나의 침실로) in the journal “Torch” (거화). His early work, highly romantic and prose-like, explored themes of decadence and narcissism. However, beginning in 1925, Yi shifted from romanticism to overt nationalist poetry. His later poems employed natural imagery and individual suffering as indirect expressions of opposition to Japanese rule (Lee, 1974; Digital Library of Korean Literature).

His most famous poem is *Does Spring Come to These Stolen Fields?* (1926):

Does spring come to these stolen fields?

“Does spring come to this land no more our own,

to these forfeited fields?

Bathed in the sun I go as if in a dream along a lane

that cuts across paddy-fields like parted hair

to where the blue sky and the green field meet.

You mute heaven and silent fields,

I do not feel I have come here on my own;

tell me if I am driven by you or by some hidden force.

...What am I looking for? Soul,

my blind soul, endlessly darting

like children at play by the river,

answer me: where am I going?

Filled with the odor of grass, compounded

of green laughter and green sorrow,

limping along, I walk all day, as if possessed

by the spring devil:

for these are stolen fields, and our spring is stolen (...)." (McCann 2004: 47-50)

The imagery of “stolen fields” clearly symbolizes Korea under occupation. The rhetorical question in the title – Does spring come to these stolen fields? – asks whether independence will ever return. There is a beautiful dream of freedom, what means beautiful country, where there is cloudless, blue sky, silent fields, children play by the river, everything could be so beautiful, the hero seems to be possessed by lust of feeling spring. Spring comes after dark, long winter with heavy snow, and winter is always hard for people to survive. Spring is something that people wait for, like fresh air in stuffy place. But, the hero of the poem loses his hope, because his fields are stolen, as his spring is. “He delivered his liberation message through his poems.” (Deshan 2022). Spring becomes a metaphor for freedom after a long, harsh winter of colonial suffering. The speaker longs for renewal, but his hope falters because both his land and his spring are stolen. As Deshan (2022) notes, Yi Sang-hwa delivered his liberation message through poetic symbolism.

The dream of freedom also appears in poems written by Yi Yuksa (이육사; real name 이원록: Yi Won-rok; 1904–1944), one of Korea’s most celebrated resistance poets. Born Yi Won-rok, he joined the clandestine independence organization Uiyeoldan (의열단) in 1925 and later engaged with independence groups in Beijing, including the Korean Provisional Government (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture). As one of his country's most famous poets, he and his works symbolize the spirit of the anti-Japanese resistance of the 1930s and 1940s. In 1930 he published his first poem, *Horse* (말), in the Joseon Ilbo under the name Yi Hwal. Later that year he signed an essay with the pseudonym “Yi Hwal, Daegu 264” (the figures being pronounced in Korean ‘이 육 사-yi yuk sa’) derived from his prisoner identification number. From this,

he developed the pen name Yi Yuksa, combining the standard character for his family name with characters meaning “land” (육지) and “history” (역사) (Encyclopedia of Korea Culture). Between 1931 and 1933 Yi continued his studies in China while strengthening his connections with resistance organizations. He returned to Korea in 1935, when he began to publish poems and critical essays in journals such as *New Joseon* and *Poetics*. Over the following years he wrote actively while maintaining covert involvement in nationalist activities. He was reportedly arrested multiple times, though without long-term imprisonment. Yi’s most widely known poem, *Green Grapes* (청포도) was published in 1939. By 1941 he exhibited symptoms of lung disease and spent several months hospitalized. In April 1943 he traveled to Beijing, where he engaged in activities connected to resistance, including efforts to arrange weapons transport into Korea. Later that year he was arrested and transferred to the Japanese Consulate General’s military police prison in Beijing. He died there on January 16, 1944. After his death, efforts to preserve his literary legacy began with the publication of a collection of approximately twenty poems by his brother in October 1946. A second edition followed in 1956, and an authoritative edition was issued in 1974 (Lee Peter H. 1974; Korean Literature House Association). One of the most known poems of Yi Yuksa is *Green Grapes* (청포도).

Green Grapes:

“The July of my hometown,

The season of ripening green grapes

Whisperings of an approaching village epoch

The far-off sky dreams and little by little sets in

The blue sea beneath the sky bares her bosom

And the ship in white sail is gently pushed in

The guest whom I await, with body so weary

Draped in grape-green topcoat, said he would call on me

If I could but meet him to pick and partake of these grapes

Getting my two hands dripping wet would be such a pleasure

On our table, my child, place the whitest ramie serviette

Upon a silver tray.” (McCann 2004: 60-64)

Like *Does Spring Come to These Stolen Fields?* by Yi Sang-hwa, the description of July in his hometown is so beautiful, that the reader is transported to a vivid world, sees wonderful images, and feels a sense of delight. The poem is full of utopian description like: “blue sea beneath the sky, ship in white sail, place the whitest ramie serviette Upon a silver”. The mysterious “guest... draped in grape-green topcoat” may symbolize freedom itself. When freedom comes, everything will be beautiful. Yi Sang-hwa uses metaphors to cheer up his audience, to transfer them into a better world, to give hope for a better tomorrow. Tragically, the author died a year before Korea regained the independence. Both his early and later writings reflect influences from avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, particularly surrealism and Dada.

Yi Sanghwa and Yi Yuksa developed nationalist poetic voices that used natural imagery to mask political resistance. Yoon Dongju’s lyric poetry captured personal anguish and collective struggle, while Kim Sowol revitalized traditional folk-song forms to convey loss and longing (Lee Peter H. 1974).

Yun Dong-ju or Yoon Dong-ju, (윤동주, 1917 –1945) was a Korean poet during the final years of Japanese colonial rule. He began writing poetry in the 1930s and selected nineteen poems for a collection he intended to publish under the title *Sky, Wind, Star, and Poem* (하늘과 바람과 별과 시). The collection was not published during his lifetime. In 1942 Yun enrolled at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. Arrested in 1943 in connection with independence activities, he died in Fukuoka Prison in 1945, likely due to medical experimentation about six months before Korea’s liberation on August 15, 1945 (Ogarek-Czój, 2007). His book, *The Sky, the Wind, the Stars, and the Poem* (하늘과 바람과 별과 시), was published after death. He was recognized as one of the conscientious intellectuals in the latter half of the Japanese colonial period, and his poems were based on criticism and self-reflection of the Japanese colonial government and the Joseon Governor-General. Yun’s poetry is notable for the childlike persona of his narrators, sensitive awareness of a lost hometown, and an unusual scapegoat mentality deriving from a sense of shame at not being able to lead a conscientious life in a period of gloomy social realities. Among

his early works is *Life and Death* (삶과 죽음) written between 1934 and 1936, his period of literary apprenticeship. It describes the conflict between life and death, or light and darkness, but its poetic framework is more or less crude. From 1937 onwards, however, his poems reveal ruthless introspection and anxiety about the dark realities of the times. The poems of this later period reach clear literary fruition in terms of their reflection on the inner self and their recognition of nationalist realities, as embodied in the poet's own experiences. In particular, they evince a steely spirit that attempts to overcome anxiety, loneliness, and despair and to surmount contemporary realities through hope and courage (Ogarek-Czój 2007).

No tomorrow:

“They repeatedly say, «Tomorrow, tomorrow».

I ask them, «When does it come?»

And they reply, «When it dawns, tomorrow comes.»

I search for the new day myself.

When I awake and look around

I find no tomorrow.

Rather I find the today

that has already come.

My folks!

There is no tomorrow.” (Lee Tae-don 1999)

His poem *No tomorrow* (내일은 없다) reflects profound despair and gives a rhetorical question «When does it come?» when waiting for freedom. The poem is steeped in hopelessness and portrays the grim reality of colonial rule, along with Yun’s deep sense of guilt and powerlessness. The poem is sad, does not give any hope, it highlights the difficult situation of his country. He shows a gloomy reality and is a self-reflection of the Japanese colonialism in Korea and lost hometown. As Lac (2020) observes, Yun’s lyrical introspection

seems to foreshadow his own tragic death at the hands of colonial violence:

“Just months before Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allies and relinquishment of control over Korea and other colonies, Yoon died in Fukoka, a political prisoner wrongly accused of underground political activities against Japanese rule. Yoon’s poetry, emphatically situated within the historical context and delicately modulated by youthful pathos, almost seems to have augured his death, whose tragic appeal lies precisely in the absurdity of the portrait of a young, and by all accounts extremely sensitive, man of literature hounded by colonial violence.”

Kim Sowol (김소월, 1902–1934), born Kim Jeong-sik, is a foundational figure in early modern Korean poetry. His only collection, *Azaleas* (진달래꽃), published in 1925, became a classic of Korean literature (Lee Kyung-ho, 1996). After graduating from High School, he taught for a while in Gwaksan (곽산) Province on the north and then moved to Japan to study at a college of commerce. During this period, he published poems in literary journals such as “*Gaebyok*”. He returned to Korea before completing his studies due to family financial difficulties (Lee Kyung-ho 1996: 265). Kim later managed a branch office of the “*Dong-a Ilbo*” (동아일보) newspaper in Gusong (구성) but left the position after a short time. He continued to publish poems in journals including *Yongdae* (영대). He died in 1934; the cause of death was uncertain but was regarded as suicide at the time. In 1935 his teacher, Anso, published a posthumous volume of Kim’s selected poems accompanied by a memoir and critical essay (Lee Kyung-ho 1996: 265, McCann 2004).

According to Jeong Meyong Kyo “The titular poem “Azaleas” has long been recited as a classic example of Korean poetry, achieving a maximum level of emotional density.”(Jeong 2019: 9).

The title poem, *Azaleas*, is renowned for its emotional density (Jeong, 2019):

“When you leave,
weary of me,
without a word I shall gently let you go.

From Mount Yak

in Yongbyon,

Marlena OLEKSIUK: A Study on the Voices of Resistance...

I shall gather armfuls of azaleas and scatter them on your way.

Step by step

on the flowers placed before you

tread lightly, softly as you go.

When you leave,

weary of me,

though I die, I'll not let one tear fall."(Lee Peter H. 1990: 29).

Azaleas in Korean culture symbolize resilience and the arrival of spring – renewal after hardship. Thus, the speaker's act of spreading azaleas before a departing lover may symbolize the Korean nation's endurance in the face of separation from its homeland.

Another notable poem, *Gasiri*, echoes themes of loss:

Gasiri

"Are you going away, going away? Are you leaving me and going away?

How shall I live? Are you leaving me and going away?

I would like to hold you back, but I fear you might not return

I sadly let you go, so please return just as you go." (Jeong 2019: 9).

In the poem *Gasiri* (가사리), the speaker is in 1st person "I", who is acquiescent to destiny, fear that "you" will not return. It is interpreted as "I" being the nation, and "you" as the independent country. Jeong notices that "Kim Sowol's poems were being posited and analyzed as the most exemplary cases amid a wave of 'nationalistic perspective'"(Jeong 2019: 9). Jeong's paper also highlights that "the methodological mechanism of the parting is rooted in the belief that the lover will never return. In other words, the poem is unaware of a 'separation' – and that aspect signifies that the poem lies on the far side of modernity, for modernity starts from such a separation"(Jeong 2019: 9). The separation is also noticeable among the Korean nation, because they become separated from their land, and it's no longer their own.

„Kim So-wol effectively portrays Han in his poem *Azaleas* as the poem provokes an image of a woman, who is in absolute despair due to her separation from a lover, but who conceals such feelings by spreading azaleas on his way. Spreading flowers is an act of blessing, an act contrary to the despondent situation that the narrator and her lover are facing. However, the azalea flower is not like any other flower. A wildflower found only in the deepest areas of secondary forests that were previously destroyed due to wildfires or deforestation, azaleas are known for their endurance and long lifespan, as described in *The Plant Book of Korea*. These characteristics of azaleas suggest that Kim envisioned the female voice used in his poems to be that of a resilient figure faced with tragedy; determined not to outwardly show her weaknesses and perhaps even indicating that her love will survive its present misfortune and prove to be eternal”(Lee Chae-wan 2018).

It is obvious that Kim Sowol chose the azalea to show determination and endurance of Korean nation, this metaphor is used to boost the morale of an oppressed nation. Kim Sowol’s use of Han – the deep sorrow and perseverance characteristic of Korean emotional experience – strengthens this interpretation (Lee Chae-wan, 2018). His poems evoke the longing of a people “who had their land” but lost it to colonial occupation.

“Only think, if we had our land, our own to plow!

Instead we wander at evening, and in the morning

Earn newer sighs, new lamentations.

- Only Think, If We Had Our Land, Our Own to Plow.” (Lee Chae-wan 2018)

Literal loss of home is visible in this poem, the speaker wrote “we had our land” what is hidden intention to show the disastrous political situation in his country, colonized by Japan. Reading this poem leads to the thought that it is about Koreans, who lost their national sovereignty. Kim’s work ultimately reinforced national identity and offered hope to an oppressed people, reminding them that even in suffering, unity and resilience endure.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of the poetry discussed in this paper demonstrates that resistance does not need to be expressed through force or bloodshed; rather, it can be even more powerful when it appeals to people's hearts and minds. The five writers examined here fought not with the sword but with the word. Although they did not live to witness their country's liberation, they offered hope to their fellow Koreans. Each of these writers endured difficult and often tragic lives. Living in a colonized country is akin to living in a prison, and all of them spent their entire lives under such constraints, never experiencing independence. This is the primary reason why they and their works were selected for analysis. Their literature expresses profound sorrow, longing for their homeland, and a deep desire for freedom. Their poetic voices embody resistance and a refusal to accept subjugation within their own country. Open political resistance, expressed explicitly, could result in imprisonment or execution. Therefore, aesthetic resistance required careful self-awareness, strategic subtlety, and exceptional resilience. These writers turned to literary devices that allowed them to criticize colonial oppression indirectly – through metaphor, symbolism, and allegory. Examples include “stolen fields” symbolizing the colonized nation, the “flowering tree” representing hope for the future, and the utopian world in *Green Grapes*, suggesting that all is not yet lost. Yun Dong-ju's poem *No Tomorrow* employs the rhetorical question “When does it come?” as a symbolic invocation of freedom. An illuminating perspective on the poetics of Yun Dong-ju and Yi Yuksa (Yi Won-rok) is provided by Deshan (2022), who argues that:

“Yi Won-Rok and Yon Dong-Ju are the best poets of this period who should be studied, and some other famous poets were named national heroes because their poems strongly expressed the liberation of their motherland from Japan” (Deshan 2022).

Symbolism is also central to Kim Sowol's work, with the azaleas representing resilience. The Japanese occupation of Korea was marked by severe repression; yet it also gave rise to some of the most powerful voices of resistance in Korean literature. Some writers participated in uprisings or organized ambushes, while others resisted through their writings. This literary form of resistance strengthened morale and sustained the people's spirit. Resistance literature became both a means of survival and a form of battle – one that proved

indestructible because of the Koreans' unbreakable will. Despite the 35-year occupation, Koreans maintained a persistent hope for independence. Tragically, many of these writers died before independence was regained. Several died under unexplained circumstances; some perished in prison, such as Yun Dong-ju and Yi Yuksa; others died from illness, such as Yi Sang and Yi Sang-hwa. In the case of Kim Sowol, the cause of death remains uncertain, though suicide was suspected at the time. Despite their premature and often violent deaths, the authors examined here left behind works that continue to testify to the resilience of the Korean people. Their literature offered not only consolation but also defiance, shaping a cultural memory rooted in endurance and the quest for independence. Their legacy endures and remains a cornerstone of modern Korean identity.

4. Outlook

Further research should expand on comparative studies between Korean colonial literature and other colonized nations' literary movements, such as those in Africa, India, or Eastern Europe. Additionally, more interdisciplinary approaches integrating history, translation studies, and cultural memory could deepen understanding of how literature sustained resistance across generations.

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