

## Evolution of images of Korea in the paratexts to Korean literature in English translation

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### *Abstract*

This research looks into the construction and evolution of national images of Korea presented in Korean literature in English translation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It categorizes the discourses present in peritexts of Korean literary works translated into English between 1951 and 2000 in relation to the agents producing them and the historical context. Results show a stable tendency to rely on Orientalist descriptions of the Republic of Korea and to avoid conflicting discourses in the wider historical and political context (i.e. relationship to Japan, China and DPR Korea), unrelated to the specific profile of the agents.

### *Keywords*

Cultural representation, paratexts, Korean literature, translation and history, orientalism



### *Introduction*

The aim of this research is to uncover the evolution of discourses presenting Korean literature in English translation published or distributed in the United States between 1951 to 2000 in their context of production. The definition of this period is based on the common history and exchanges between countries: despite previous anecdotal exchanges in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first contacts between both countries started to take stable ground in late 1940s or early 1950s. Then, translation circulation dynamics changed exponentially after the turn of the millennium with the foundation of the Korea Literature Translation Institute

in March 2001 and the expansion of the *hallyu* or Korean wave in the following decade. Results can help us understand how the presented national images evolved in this early period, and appreciate how they relate to their wider context of cultural production. This is important in a context where literature in translation can be seen as a tool to build a national image (e.g. Li, 2016, on Chinese strategy or Sicari, 2020, on Western literature in the USSR), to receive world literature (e.g. Alvstand, 2012, on Sweden or Liu, 2021, on patronage) and to contribute to intercultural understanding (e.g. Roditakis, 2012, on Greek-Turkish exchanges or Lee, 2020, on feminism in Korea).

In this sense, it is key to remember that the peninsula had been virtually isolated from the West prior to the end of the Second World War. It was the war's outcome, and the posterior Korean War, that put the Korean peninsula in the Western imaginary. Prior to that, the peninsula was, if popularly known, an appendix to Japan and China. This means in the early stages studied, there were few shared references to present Korea to the world.

### *1. Context of translation production*

Translation into Western languages was also scarce before 1950. The Korean translation context developed along the emergence of the Republic of Korea as a world power (Korean Literature Translation Institute, 2002: 3). Initially, the translation of literary works was possible thanks to UNESCO investment and other subsidies, and not systematic, that is, it relied on projects initiated by individuals who would often have translation as a circumstantial occupation. By the end of the period, a more professional Korean literature in translation (though still highly subsidized) was working to find a niche in the American publishing and distribution system (Torres-Simón, 2013). Initial personal endeavors would start receiving (Korean) government support and, at the end of the covered period, eventually involved established (American) publishing companies. Translators went from taking part in all the steps of the translation process (selection, translation, publication and distribution) to devoting more of their time to translation activities only (cf. Shin, 2004; Einarsen, 2005; Koh, 2008; Montgomery, 2010; or Lee, 2008 for interviews with translators reflecting on those changes) as more agents entered the field. At the same time, publications specialized and reached wider distribution networks (Torres-Simón, 2015a). All in all, during the entire period under analysis, the Korean-English

translation flow was still unstable, with shared characteristics to other minor to major translation exchanges.

This context might affect the discourses presenting Korea as with time, more shared referents should be available and as the field specializes, bigger publishers gain agency and commercial objectives might influence the outcome.

## 2. Paratexts and images of Korea

In order to analyse what shared referents are invoked, mentioned and used widely in association with Korea, this research looks at the discourses present in the paratextual elements attached to volumes of Korean literature translated in English.

As previous studies have shown, (see among others, Pym, 1997; Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2002; Kos, 2009; Pellat, 2013; and Gil-Bardaji, Orero and Rovira Esteve, 2012), paratexts are a useful tool to unveil cross-cultural discourses because their main function is to present a text to a public. As defined by Batchelor "[a] paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received' (2018: 142). Being more flexible and versatile than body texts, they function like 'an instrument of adaptation' (Genette, 1997: 408) and might mirror changes in the presentation of Korea to the world.

Full information and paratexts on 95 volumes were compiled (out of 163 existing volumes as listed in bibliographies and databases) to conform the corpus of study. Given the limited number of volumes (95 in 50 years), they will be analyzed in blocks of ten years to also look at the general evolution. Paratexts (or what Genette would classify as peritexts: introductions, translator's notes, prefaces, postfaces, acknowledgements, covers and flaps) were manually scanned and tagged. The discourses used to present Korea were identified bottom-up. Solutions were categorized *a posteriori* into three main groups: Oriental references, Geo-Historical references, and Cross-cultural references. These groups were then divided to analyze the implications of the findings: 'Oriental references' are those that emphasize an evocative and suggestive scenery and spirituality (some sort of 'Asian mist'), stressing the East-West dichotomy and connecting West to modernity and East to tradition (folklore). That is, presentations that could be framed within Edward Said's Orientalist

paradigm. ‘Geo-Historical references’ mention the country’s historical development or geographical location, especially with respect to modern events (Korean War), or in association with neighboring countries (China, Japan, and North Korea). ‘Cross-cultural references’ are defined as those of the target audience’s specific cultural items that are well-known in the source culture and vice versa. Being literary works, some of those references draw comparisons between literary traditions. Table 1 summarizes the proposed categories.

<b>Oriental context</b>	<b>Geo-historical references</b>	<b>Cross-cultural references</b>
Asian mist	Japan	Literary
Korean Folk	China	Other
East vs. West	North Korea and Korean War	
	Other	

Table 1: Categories of references presenting Korea developed from bottom-up analysis

The analysis of these elements helps provide an understanding of what image of Korea was circulating within these translated volumes. The following analysis is presented with reference to the historical context (as, obviously, much more was circulating on top of literature) and reflections on where the discourses are found (see Torres-Simón, 2015b for a more exhaustive analysis comparing book covers and literary genres) and who was producing them.

### *3. This is Korea to us!*

In the 1950s the United States’ imaginary hosted limited images of Korea: some related to its geographical location (in Asia between China and Japan and too close to Russia) and historical context (the country of the War and the last stronghold against Communism), and some that assimilated the country with the mystic vision of the continent (Oriental). As diplomatic relations increased and the memory of the Korean War was replaced by the image of economic recovery, there was a theoretically greater knowledge of Korea and their culture. However,

the analysis of the paratexts summarized in Table 2 shows how agents seem to struggle to present Korea beyond two axes: The Oriental land and the country with a role in World history.

Period	Volumes	Oriental	Geo-Historical	Cross-cultural
1951-1960	5	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
1961-1970	7	5 (70%)	2 (29%)	0 (-%)
1971-1980	20	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	9 (45%)
1981-1990	39	13 (31%)	24 (62%)	8 (20%)
1991-2000	24	13 (50%)	17 (71%)	7 (30%)
Total	95	47 (49%)	56 (59%)	25 (26%)

Table 2: Main discourses presenting Korea divided in 10-year periods.

All in all, the distribution of the discourses is not regular, although all periods include Oriental and Geo-historical references. If we look at the percentages, Oriental references have a much greater presence in the early years of the diplomatic relations, while Geo-Historical references seem to have a wider presence in the late years of the studied period. Cross-cultural references are more irregular, and, as we will see, most often related to literary contexts. A closer look at the different references and the discourses associated to them might not only show how Korea was presented but also the role of the contextual history and involved agents in shaping it.

### 3.1. *Oriental Korea*

Paratexts present early volumes as ‘Far East Poetry’, ‘Oriental literature’ or ‘within the East Asian tradition’, whatever any of these framing means. Similar instances can still be found in later volumes, though scarcely. Such division could easily be an example of what discussions on world literature define as the risk ‘of reintroducing the very cultural-political divisions it seeks to contest’ (Huggan, 2011: 501, cf. Gallagher, 2008).

Paratexts in the volumes recommend the works for readers to ‘[f]ind the mysteries of the Oriental soul in full exposure’ (Kim, 1979: flap). These Orientalist discourses, which are present in nearly 50% of the volumes adopt various and non-mutually exclusive strategies to present Korea (see Table 3).

Period	Total volumes in corpus	Oriental references (volumes)			
		Total	East vs. West	Oriental Mist	Tradition and past
1951-1960	5	5 (100%)	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
1961-1970	7	5 (70%)	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	2 (29%)
1971-1980	20	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	7 (35%)	4 (20%)
1981-1990	39	13 (31%)	6 (15%)	9 (23%)	6 (15%)
1991-2000	24	13 (50%)	10 (42%)	5 (21%)	8 (33%)
Total	95	47 (49%)	29 (31%)	28 (29%)	23 (24%)

Table 3: Orientalist references in the presentation of Korea (1951-2000)

The East and West cultural division is often highlighted or at least assumed in the presentation of Korea. Sometimes the risk of misunderstanding the Other is specifically mentioned: the translator of *The Songs of the Dragons* justifies the inclusion of comments and notes to the Korean epic tale by highlighting the need to ‘illuminate the texts of the songs for the modern Western reader’ (Hoyt, 1971, back cover). Often, there is a passing reference to the lack of knowledge of Korean culture: Chung starts his preface to *Meetings and Farewells* stating how ‘[in the West] few people understand or appreciate the country’s highly unique culture’ (Chung, 1980: ix). In other situations, the assumed difference is not

clearly stated, but East and West are presented as differentiated cultural blocks: Kim Chong-un selects 'stories translated into English for the Western reader' for his anthology of Korean short stories (Kim, 1974: vii). These arguments do not necessarily present one entity as better or worse, more traditional or more modern, but it does sustain the idea of homogeneity within the cultural constructions. On the other side of the spectrum, for example, Tennant claims that 'in recent years in the West the short story has somewhat lost its prestige' (1996: xiii) as if it was a uniform phenomenon in Europe and America.

In some cases, a 'geographical' distinction is combined with a stereotypical presentation of an Asian space with blossoming flowers and obscure hidden feelings. Statements assure the reader that the translation 'will appeal to anyone with a taste for the cool wit and refined pathos of Chinese poetry, with the added attraction of its fresh setting in Korea' (Kim, 1987: back cover). In general, the volumes are presented '[t]o anyone who would like to look somewhat into the inner soul of the Oriental' (Gale, 1963, vii), as in *The Stony Road* where 'the quiet tone of the stories give readers into what is unique about Korean literature, a technique that may be comparable to watching a gentle ripple on a pond' (Yee, 1993: 14) or in *The Yalu Flows*, which presents 'the qualities of an Eastern brush drawing, its warmth and its most sensitive delicacy' (Hammelmann, 1956: 190). In some cases, their extremely orientalist presentation of the Korean scenery criticizes the trend it imitates. So, O'Rourke present Korea as the place where '[w]e think of moonlight on the Autumn river, flower petals in the yard, travelling scholars with lame donkeys' (1995: ix) and McCann claims that '[e]ven the hills and mountains seem to arrange themselves like scenes from a folding screen' (1982: 9) in an effort to ask the reader to forget about traditional Korea and move on to a more modern vision.

Finally, some instances inspire the idea of a country with a treasured cultural tradition, which has shaped modern Korea: 'Korea is not a primitive country, it has a long cultural history' (Zong, 1953: vii). While this discourse is undoubtedly positive, it still encourages the reader to center on the past as the token of value. When Setsu Higashi comments how '[i]t is somehow deeply reassuring to know that [...] these same stories are still being told to children as they have been for generations' (Kim, 1955: back cover), the positive idea of a long-lasting traditions bring along a sense of stagnation. Equally Tennant's translator's note links traditional Korea to a modern generalized image: 'The source of this humanity lies in two things which are characteristic of Korean people, namely powerful family bonds [...] and nostalgia for a past [...]' (Tennant, 1996: xiii).

It must be noted that during 1982 and 1983, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO edited a collection to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary from their founding in 1954. The secretary-General of the commission claims in the Foreword common to all 12 volumes that ‘Tradition is alive and vital in Korea today’ (Park, 1983: v). To avoid the distortion in results, we noted it as one and looked at the discourses in the remaining paratexts of the volumes.

Other examples of traditional references are more heterogeneous as they center their specific examples in religion, literature or expected actions. For example, one reference summarizes the plot of the *Shaman Sorceress* as ‘[t]he conflict between the ancient Shamanism of Korea and Christianity’ (Kim, 1989: flap). Other agents try to justify their work: Lee Sung-il states that ‘I undertook these translations in order to introduce this magnificent part of Korea’s literary legacy to English readers’ (Lee, 1998: xix).

There is an undeniable difficulty to present a culture so it fits the requirements of two different systems of reference, the Self and the Other. Orientalism endorsed a collection of features to a whole continent based on the first impressions of travelers, who evaluated the new places with paternalism and indulgence. So even if the created esoteric imaginary related to the East was not optimal, it was an existing common subtext and it was conveniently used.

### 3.2. *Geography and History of Korea*

References to geography and history can be found throughout the corpus. Most refer to Japan, China and the Korean War and Post-war (including North Korea), see Table 3. The remaining are labeled under ‘other’. These subsections are curious as source and target cultures held (and hold) conflicting views on these referents: China and Korea have several cultural links which are still highly valued while the relationship between China and the United States is bumpy to say the least; the opposite is true when Japan is the third wheel, as Korea and Japan still have open historical disagreements, while the United States has mostly accepted the redemption of Japan; regarding North Korea, its inclusion of the Democratic Republic of Korea in George W. Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ was harshly received in the Republic of Korea, as for many they are the brothers of the North (especially during the years the volumes were published). How these topics are handled might provide a vision on whose discourses are preferential.



Period	Total vols. in corpus	Geo-Historical references (volumes)				
		Total	Japan	China	War and Post-war	Other
1951-1960	5	4 (80%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	0 (-%)
1961-1970	7	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)
1971-1980	20	9 (45%)	3 (15%)	0 (-%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)
1981-1990	39	24 (62%)	8 (21%)	2 (5%)	16 (41%)	5 (12%)
1991-2000	24	17 (71%)	6 (25%)	2 (8%)	9 (38%)	5 (21%)
Total	95	56 (59%)	22 (23%)	7 (7%)	35 (37%)	13 (14%)

Table 4: Division of geo-historical references presenting Korea (1951-2000).

### 3.2.1. Japan

Since paratexts are expected to bridge differences between source and target cultures, discourses on Japan are difficult to handle. In the 1950s, for the Republic of Korea Japan was the vicious tyrant, the merciless colonizer who had looted the Korean peninsula. However, for the United States Japan was the defeated rival of World War II, with a shared story of collaboration and the hope for creating a strong ally in Asia. And, effectively, with time America-Japan relations were normalized and Korea-Japan relations improved. Nevertheless, several diplomatic tensions have not been resolved like the presentation of the common history in textbooks, the status of Japan-born Koreans or certain territorial rights, among others.

Consequently, the assumption was that mentioning Japan in early periods of the study, when the trauma of the Japanese colonization of Korea was in a healing stage, would have been too controversial. That is, references to Japan were expected to be more present in later years. Contrary to these expectations, references to Japan helped presenting Korea throughout the corpus. However, it is especially present in the first years of the translation exchange.

In earlier publications remarks come from the standpoint of a certain Korean ethnocentric paternalism. Zong In-sob, for example, highlights how

In the cultural field, Korea was not only the channel through which the civilization of China and the religion of India were transmitted to Japan, but also by the ingenuity of her people made a great contribution to the inventions of the world. (Zong, 1953: xvii)

In a similar line, according to the general editor of the series where *Voices of the Dawn* was published, the influence of Korean poetry on Japanese verse happened ‘when cultured Korean travelers were sent to enlighten the backward natives of the island’ (Cranmer-Byng, 1960: inner flap), positioning Korean culture and tradition over the Japanese one.

In most cases, and especially in early paratexts, references to Japan are negative. In the paratexts the reader is reminded of how Korea suffered by the expansion of the Japanese Empire, which lasted from the moment when the imposition of the land survey ‘deprived the peasantry of the basis of their live hood [sic]’ (Lee, 1974b: xv) until Japan surrendered and ‘[s]ome of those who had barely survived the last years of Japanese rule emerged from imprisonment’ (Lee, 1974b: xxi). Slowly, reminders of how ‘many others were subjected to imprisonment and torture’ (Holman, 1989: vi) and descriptions like ‘Japanese atrocities,’ ‘brutalities’ or ‘perverse atmosphere’ become uncommon and give room to somewhat more neutral comments to Japanese colonial rule. We find comments on ‘the oppressed nation under foreign rule’ (Choi and Hwi, 1983: flap), and then later merely mentions of ‘the Japanese rule’ (Holman, 1989: vi) or ‘the Japanese colonial period’ in the context on how that period affected writers and literature (Pickering, 1999: v).

Positive or neutral views of Japan can only be found in much later volumes. Japan, for example, works as testing ground for the quality of some authors: Yun Heung-gil is presented as ‘the most widely read Korean writer in Japan’ (Yun, 1989: back cover). Also, as a comparison point or entry point to ‘[t]o most foreigners familiar with Chinese and Japanese art,’ for who ‘Korean art comes as a profound revelation and a delightful experience’ (Park, 1983b: v).

To wrap up, references to Japan are found throughout the corpus. The neighboring people are usually presented in a negative view, particularly in the first part of the analyzed period, with emphasis put in the brutality of its rule during the colonial period. Neutral views of Japan appear in volumes of later years.

### 3.2.2. *China*

Again, China is the elephant in the room of Korea-United States relations. The United States' attitude towards China during the first stage was clearly unsympathetic: in the Cold War atmosphere, communist China was a Russian ally. Meanwhile, the position of the Republic of Korea was not straightforward: China had supported the North during the Korean War, but that could not fully erase hundreds of years of peaceful relations and the influence it had exerted on Korean culture.

China appears as a background referent to Korea fewer times than Japan (7 times). Moreover, unlike Japan, when China is mentioned, it is usually in a positive light. References to China usually discuss their common past and traditional culture.

This shared past is introduced either by highlighting similarities -'Korea has shared with his neighbor, China, the Confucian tradition for scholarship' (Steinberg, 1967: iv)- or differences -'the vocabulary reflects the two traditions of Korea, that of China and that of Korea' (Skillend, 1994: xiii). One of the few modern reference to China appears in *The Yalu Flows*, where the author 'crossed the Yalu to seek asylum in Shanghai' (Chung, 1956: 194) in his escape towards Europe during Japanese colonization.

All in all, little mention is made of modern China, its communist regime or its alliance with the North. So, in general, the discourses present China as an actor in the traditional and cultural origins of Korea, but not as the neighboring country that supports the Communist half of Korea.

### 3.2.3. *War and Post-war*

Most usual references within this category relate to the War. Remarkably, Zong In Sop mentions in the introduction to their 1953 collection of tales how '[t]he situation of Korea since the Second World War may give rise to folk tales, for example, on the subject of the 38th parallel' (Zong, 1953: xxviii). In any case, all the volumes published between 1953 and 1975 make some kind of mention to the war. Afterwards, the number of references wanes but it becomes the theme of the books. As Zong In Sop predicted, many short stories and novels arose on the topic of the War and post-war periods. Surprisingly, the paratexts compile

few comments on atrocities committed during the War. Some authors mention the number of casualties - McCann talks about 'as many as three million Korean people' (1993: 10) - and others refer to 'the full horrors of the Korean War' (Y. M. Kim, 1997) but these impersonal comments provide a sharp contrast to detailed descriptions of torture and criticism of the post-war military dictatorship. For example, the introduction to *Back to Heaven* explains this story of the author nearly at the beginning:

He [Chon San-Pyong] had already left the world a first time in 1967, when the agents of the National Security Agency (KCIA) whisked him away to the dreaded cellars of their building in Central Seoul. There he was subjected to torture by water, and by electro-shock applied to his genitals. (An and Kim, 1995: ix)

It is true that writers were heavily targeted during the postwar. Therefore, the fact that out of 29 references to war, 15 are on the Korean War and 14 on the Post-war, might reflect how the post-war period was equally relevant as the war in shaping not only Korean national image, but also Korean national literature. Then, not only the dictatorships are criticized for their brutality but also for the 'Miracle of the Han river' that they facilitated. The system, built over the hardships of many, is the topic of several short stories in our corpus, and so some paratexts also indicate how many 'appear to be left out of the much-touted economic-miracle and fall victim to the oppressive excesses' (Holman, 1989: iii). However, their positive outcome is also highlighted: *Words of Farewell* (Fulton and Fulton, 1998) presents the Korean economic miracle as the turning point for Korea's world relations.

This unambiguous presentation of the post-war dictators as the villains is paradoxical if compared to hints about North Korea. The scarce references to the North do indicate that the political situation affected writers, as for example, encouraging some to flee to the South before the division of the country (Ku Sang or Hwang Sun-won would be two examples). But tensions also affect writers in the South. There is also mention on how Lee Munyol having family in the North would bring him suspicion and trouble. Rarely, statements indicate an opposition to Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Gil. As an example, McCann mentions how the North is to be ruled by 'the so-called Great and Fearless Leader Kim Il Sung' (1993: 10). However, the comment is not followed by further criticism other than the implied irony. Paratexts do not seem to draw a line connecting 'evil' and 'North Korea' after the War.

All in all, the period of the post-war dictatorships is more openly criticized than the period of the Korean War itself. As a possible explanation we might consider that the ‘enemies’ of the post war were generic entities –‘the police,’ ‘the government,’ ‘the corrupt system’– while the ‘enemies’ of a civil war were pictured more closely –someone’s son, brother, or friend.

#### 3.2.4. Other

The Geo-Historical perspective was not limited to connections with Japan, China, and the War and Post-war. A further 15 references were found, related to historical figures in Korea (8), other countries or cities (3) and the economical situations (2). In some cases, this historical perspective is necessary to introduce the main character of a book. *Han Joong Nok* explains the role of Lady Hong, the writer, in Korean history, as background to the book. A similar introduction is found in *King Sejong*, whose introduction explains the role of King Sejong, the ruler that promoted the invention of *hangeul* among other developments. In other cases, the references help situate the book in their context of creation. That would be the case of the epic tale *Songs of the Dragons* or *The Hye Cho’s diary*, in which understanding the links to India and Central Asia encourages a more in-depth reading. Regarding locations, as *The Book of Masks* compiles stories set in the capital, Seoul, those are introduced before the main translation.

So, except for this last example, specific introductions to modern locations and history are always closely tied to the content of the translated volume. We could even argue that they function as a means of knowledge transmission.

#### 3.3. Cross-cultural Connections

Most cross-cultural references in the corpus are literary (see Table 5). Only, three non-literary cross-cultural references appear in the corpus. Kim So-un makes a reference to Air Smith, the first person to fly an airplane in Korea in his foreword to the *Story Bag* (Kim, 1955: vi); Sol Sun-bong creates a parallelism of subjugation comparing Koreans under Japanese rule and Jews (or Christians-to-be) under Roman rule (Sol 1983: ix); and McCann points at a pop culture reference of Korea in the United States –the country backdrop to M.A.S.H. (McCann, 1993: 9).

Period	Total volumes in corpus	Cross-cultural		
		Total	General knowledge	Literary comparisons
1951-1960	5	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	0 (-%)
1961-1970	7	0 (-%)	0 (-%)	0 (-%)
1971-1980	20	9 (45%)	0 (-%)	9 (45%)
1981-1990	39	8 (20%)	1 (3%)	7 (17%)
1991-2000	24	7 (30%)	1 (4%)	6 (25%)
Total	95	25 (26%)	3 (3%)	22 (23%)

Table 5: Division of cross-cultural references presenting Korea (1951-2000)

Within international literary references, links are made to literary movements. For example, *The Immortal Voice* (1974) was presented as an example of ‘world realism’, *Postwar Korean Short Stories* (1974) as ‘realism’ and *Flowers of Fire* (1974) as ‘naturalism’. Later works draw more specific parallelisms. Thus, the stories collected in *Two travellers* ‘attain classical aestheticism’ (Oh, Soh et al, 1983: flap), or Kim Chunsu’s work is described as ‘a chemical combination of realism and anti-realism’ (Kim, 1998: 2). Moreover, classification of Korean authors grouped by characteristics or under certain generations can be observed. For example, according to the editors, all the authors translated and compiled in *A Respite and Other Korean Short Stories* belong to ‘the so-called postwar generation’ (Son, Nam et al, 1983: flap). Kim and Fulton give a special mention to *weolbuk* writers in their review of early modern authors (Kim and Fulton, 1998: 5).

At the same time, Korean authors are increasingly associated to more international referents. Lee sees Tagore as a major inspiration in the work of Han Yong Un (Lee, 1980: xiii) and the masters of French Symbolism, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine as an influence on Kim Ok’s work, who was not only a writer but also a translator from French (Lee, 1980: xii). For the translator and scholar D. McCann the short story ‘The honey jar’ collected in *Black Crane* ‘[...] has the confessional stance of such contemporary poets as Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath’ (McCann, 1982: 4). The translator An Sonjae sees similarities between Yi Munyol’s *The Poet* and John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (An 1995: viii). The work of the Korean poet Ko Un is

compared to the *Characters* by WC Williams and Charles Reznikoff (Ginsberg, 1997: 10).

These comparisons and categorizations encourage literary interchanges and exploration on the assumption of equal literary value. That is, they tend to highlight common ground between the known and the unknown rather than stressing the differences.

#### 4. *Who is 'us' in this image of Korea*

All in all, Korea is presented within an Oriental framing and in relation to Japan and the Korean War. The Oriental discourses are more prevalent in the early periods, the cross-cultural references seem to appear suddenly in the 1980s, while the war-related discourses take the spotlight in the 1990s.

This descriptive evolution becomes of interest when we pay attention to the agents in charge of them. By themselves, the discourses of mist and shadows of the early period would have been unexpected: at the time, most of the translation process was in the hands of individual actors, often Koreans or foreigners living in Korea, and encouraged and subsidized in Korea. In that sense, interviews with translators of the time show how they are aware of their responsibility to building bridges between cultures and how they know of the lack of cultural subtext for non-Korean readers (cf. Fulton, 1992 or An, 1996). In the line of other self-orientalist discourses, using the East-West divide proposed a point of entry to present a relatively unknown country to the world –that is with the intention to ‘make his own country better known to the West’ (Zong, 1953: flap). The reluctance to abandon this discourse may not be blamed on the translators, though. In later years, these discourses might still be linked to translators in two out of three occasions. However, the relevance stands out when that one statement is by critics and publishers and appear on the most visible part of books: the front cover and the flaps.

The image of Korea with a long and rich tradition cohabits in the early period with a stated differentiation from the (bad) Japanese. During the Japanese occupation, Koreans in exile had worked extensively to emphasize the value of Korea as a country in its own right (trying to regain Koreanness) and literary paratexts seem to highlight the very same image. In the 1990s, the discourses on war and postwar take the spotlight. Several aspects converge: the restlessness of

the Korean people tired of consecutive military rules (which would eventually lead to full democracy), the commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war, the opening and growing internationalization of the Republic of Korea getting ready to host the 88 Olympics. All these aspects encourage a growing number of volumes talking about the War, which require contextualization. All agents involved –and the expansion of the translation flow is now composed of public subsidies, translators and publishers– seem to agree on what discourses to avoid: Communist China and the North-South divide are rarely mentioned. Actually, the few paratexts approaching these topics are usually penned by academics (not the translators of the works) and they are rarely shown on covers. Whether this a question of self-censorship or of shared goals stays in the realm of speculation.

Throughout, cross-cultural referencing seems to be missing in those fifty years, with the exception of literary comparison. The Korean National Commission for UNESCO and later the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, both working on the exportation of Korean literature, seem to be successful in relating Korean literature to World literature or categorizing examples of Korean literature within World literature frameworks and movements (such as realism, postmodernism, or x generations). The early efforts of the 1990s to create common bonds and bridge intercultural references through literature extend afterwards, with Korean literature being increasingly related to international referents and framed in more precise subgenres, no longer examples of ‘Oriental literature’. The evolution also helps framing the work within a certain publishing strategy: the marketability of a product is promoted based on its differentiation from other similar products (no more Asian, but now Korean). That is, this period seems to indicate a preference for an all-encompassing presentation of Korea that avoids conflicting points of view.



### *Conclusions*

All in all, the evolution of the Korean translation field, as do others, is defined by political, economic, cultural and social factors (cf. Sapiro, 2016). From the target culture perspective: The Republic of Korea, the last bastion resisting communism; the Korean War, a necessary investment; Korean literature, a source of new ideas. From the source culture perspective: the need to strong allies, the recovery after the war, the recovery of a lost identity or Koreanness, the need to become known.

And as the model moves from a fully subsidized exporting culture to dependent on commercial means of production, images are shaped to meet readers' expectations, working on common subtexts, even if not ideal, and only slowly introducing new referents, that tend to avoid conflicting discourses. As bigger publishers gain agency and commercial objectives seems to influence the outcome, results confirm that the orientalist image of the country is highlighted at the expense of a more modern image of developed Korea. It can be argued that this image is positive for both source and target cultures, and even sometimes encouraged in the source (self-Orientalism): Korea could see benefits from being presented as having a solid cultural history. However, stripping Korea from its historical background and context favors the image of a harmonic nameless Asian nation over the reality of a country that rebuilt itself from scratch in barely half a century in an unstable geopolitical situation. That is, despite concessions to Korean modernity, discourses reproduce anachronical colonialist assumptions in a moment when more is known of the country.

So far, this research shows that if literary presentations were based on the perception of popular understanding half a century is not long enough to overturn a fixed collective memory. In fact, new visions and stereotypes are added only as extra layers to old referents, thus perpetuating them. This persistence of stereotyping in paratexts look like a missed opportunity in developing a better understanding of the Other.

Given that, currently, translated literature does not have the central role of culture-shaping it had prior to globalization, we must learn from previous mistakes and acquire a compromise to avoid the exploitation of foreignizing discourse to present cultures that are increasingly closer in time and space

Just in the turn of the 2010s did 'Korea' become synonym of modernity and seems now to be again presented within a proper regional and historical

background. Further studies should look at how the break from previous discourses could only happen in posterior years through an intense government supported, economic viable and internationally accepted cultural phenomenon: the so-called 'Korean wave' or *hallyu*.

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