Yi Sang and Global Modernism

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By
William Wenaus
Regina, Saskatchewan
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William Donald Wenaus, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, *Yi Sang and Global Modernism*, in an oral examination held on September 6, 2016. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

**External Examiner:** Dr. Roy Starrs, University of Otago

**Supervisor:** Dr. Marcel DeCoste, Department of English

**Committee Member:** Dr. Kevin Bond, Department of English

**Committee Member:** Dr. Christian Riegel, Department of Religious Studies

**Chair of Defense:** Dr. Philip Charrier, Department of History

*Not present at defense
**Via Skype
Abstract

Yi Sang (1910-1937), born Kim Haegyŏng, wrote in Korea in the early part of the twentieth century under Japanese rule, composing in both Japanese and Korean. His work has been variously labelled as Modernist, Surrealist, and Dadaist. Despite the past fifty years of Yi scholarship acknowledging his stylistic and thematic affinities with Japanese modernists, Yi has typically been read as a specifically Korean, nationalistic figure who wrote experimental works in a spirit of anti-colonial resistance. These readings, however, are complicated by the fact that Yi’s works and life exhibit no sign of such political leanings.

Moving away from these interpretations, my thesis aims to answer the following questions: what does it mean that we call Yi a modernist, and what does it mean that his works are similar to those of his Japanese and Western modernist contemporaries? To answer these questions I invite Yi into the methodological context of Global Modernism, a theoretical perspective that has recently emerged from New Modernist Studies. By examining Yi’s relationship to other Japanese modernists such as Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), Chika Sagawa (1911-1936), Kōbō Abe (1924-1993), and Osamu Dazai (1909-1948), and to Western modernists such as T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), and James Joyce (1882-1941), I demonstrate that Yi is a modernist who is better understood internationally, whose significance ramifies beyond strictly national concerns. The goal of this thesis is to highlight the contributions Yi made to Korean, East Asian, and global modernisms, and to raise awareness of Korean modernism as an international movement that is crucial to contemporary understandings of global modernism.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my generous, loving parents, Daryl and Susan Wenaus, who both instilled in me the value of diligence and education, and to the rest of my family and friends, all of whom have been greatly supportive. I would also like to thank my older brother, Dr. Andrew Wenaus, who always encourages my academic interests, and who willingly aided in revising portions of this thesis. I consider myself fortunate to be surrounded by—and related to—so many excellent people who inspire me to work harder everyday.
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Introduction

Yi Sang (1910-1937), born Kim Haegyŏng, wrote in Korea under Japanese rule, composing in both Japanese and Korean. He is typically read in rigidly nationalistic terms, as a modernist who embodies a distinctly Korean spirit of anti-Japanese colonial resistance. Such an interpretation of Yi’s significance, however, leads to a number of complications I seek to address in this thesis. A strictly nationalistic reading of Yi overlooks important international elements of his modernism that can help meaningfully connect him and Korean modernism to narratives of how modernism developed globally. By situating Yi in the context of modernism as a global phenomenon, I am inviting new ways of reading his works that extend beyond strictly national concerns. What I hope to show is that Yi and Korean modernism do not need to be understood nationally in order to be taken seriously alongside other modernists and modernisms.

Although Yi’s works have appeared sporadically in English translation for nearly fifty years,¹ he is still marginal enough in English-speaking circles that it is worthwhile to provide a biographical overview. John M. Frankl, who has done much to lay the groundwork for countering strictly nationalistic conceptions of Yi,² points out that “in spite of the sort of tumultuous social circumstances that often accompany mad genius, [Yi] appears to have spent many of his days as a rather content and productive

¹ Yi’s short story, “A Discontinued Knot” (1936-7), was published in English in 1968. His collection of poetry, “Crow’s-Eye View” (1934), was published in English in 2002. His short story “Wings” (1936) was published in Modern Korean Fiction: An Anthology in 2005. The editors indicate that “Wings” was a previously unpublished work (390), but in fact, an English version of “Wings,” translated as “The Wings,” was published in Korea Journal in 1983. More recently, English translations of Yi’s essays and poems have been published as well.
colonial subject” (“Leveling the Metropole” 319). He was raised by his uncle, who worked for the Japanese colonial government (319). This was a decision made by Yi’s parents because his uncle had the financial means to support Yi’s education, which would eventually lead to Yi’s securing a place amongst the colonial elite. In 1929, at eighteen, Yi graduated from the Department of Architecture at the Keijō Industrial High School, which would eventually become the Seoul National University’s College of Engineering. In his class, he was one of only two ethnic Koreans, but despite being outnumbered by his Japanese peers, he was undeterred (319). He excelled academically, and soon after graduating, took a job with the Architectural Division of the Japanese Government General’s Office of Internal Affairs (320). In 1933, however, Yi had to resign from his position as a result of declining health associated with tuberculosis (321). Despite his ailing health, he decided to travel to Tokyo in 1936, but was arrested by Japanese authorities in 1937 on the grounds of being a futei senjin, or “unruly Korean” (323), a purposefully vague term that “allowed authorities in both Japan and Korea to use it when no specific legal offense could be cited” (323).³ In other words, the events or actions leading to Yi’s arrest remain unclear. His health continued to decline in prison, so he was sent—still under arrest—to the Tokyo Imperial University Hospital, where he died on April 17, 1937 at the age of 26. The majority of his literary output, including the works looked at in this thesis, were published between his resignation from the Government General’s Office and his death in Tokyo (a period of approximately four

³ Futei senjin is a term that only applied to Koreans. It is also sometimes translated as “malcontent Koreans” or “Korean malcontents.”
Yi was an accomplished visual artist and excelled professionally as an architect as well, but it is his literary works that are the focus of this thesis.

Yi has been variously labelled as a Surrealist and Dadaist, but he is most typically considered under the more general label of Korean modernism (and more specifically as a nationalistic Korean modernist). This is a label, however, that tends to be applied somewhat loosely. Within English-language scholarship, there is little inquiry into the implications of calling Yi a modernist. For instance, what makes him a modernist? If he is a modernist, how does he fit into narratives of Korean, East Asian, and global modernism, and how might he alter our conception of these movements?

Frankl points out that Yi is often read for his “purported national [i.e., Korean] consciousness or resistance...to foreign governance [namely, the Japanese Empire]” (“Distance as Anti-Nostalgia” 40), and not, as I intend to argue, as a modernist in relation to a vast network of other modernists, East Asian specifically, but more international artists as well. While numerous scholars, Choi Won-Shik being a notable example, have raised important issues relating Yi’s work to Korean nationalism and to the creation of a contemporary, specifically Korean literary canon, I will, in the pages that follow, move away from such nationalistic approaches by demonstrating that he can also be effectively understood in relation to Japanese modernism in the early twentieth century and to its participation in modernism as a global phenomenon. In doing so, I am

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4 For a more detailed biography of Yi’s life, see John M. Frankl’s “Leveling the Metropole: Awakening and Distillation in Yi Sang’s “Tokyo”” (319-323).

5 Choi, in an attempt to demonstrate the essential national significance of Yi’s work, writes that “Yi Sang’s formal experiment did not just fall out of the sky, but in terms of a certain sincerity supporting his radical experiments, it is hard to find precedent, even in Japanese literature of the time” (118-9). Yi’s work, in fact, shares much in common with that of his Japanese modernist contemporaries, but instead of recognizing these cross-cultural affiliations, Choi wishes to emphasize Yi’s experimental style as a way of saying that twentieth century Korean literature is distinct, and that it has certain qualities that no other twentieth century literary tradition shares. This, however, is not the case, especially when it comes to Yi.
not simply deeming Yi a derivative of Japanese modernism; instead, I seek to demonstrate how Yi wrote in ways that—in terms of style and content—were remarkably similar to those of certain Japanese modernists, particularly Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), Chika Sagawa (1911-1936),6 Kōbō Abe (1924-1993), and Osamu Dazai (1909-1948).

While other scholars have pointed out the affinity between Yi and certain Japanese modernists, no one has read him in comparison and contrast to these four. As William Gardner points out, Yi “was reportedly an avid reader of the Japanese modernist journal Shi to shiron, and his poems bear significant resemblances to works of such Japanese modernists as Haruyama Yukio, Kitasono Katsue, and Kondō Azuma” (71). Similarly, Karen Laura Thornber remarks that Yi’s “oeuvre contains much intertextualizing” of other Japanese modernist writers (245), in the way his works “replicate distinctive punctuation, specialized vocabulary, and images that appear in Japanese texts” (245). But, rather than exploring the implications of the shared affinities between Yi and his Japanese modernist contemporaries, Thornber asserts instead that these similarities “bring out the alienation and the ambivalent position of the colonial Korean artist” (245). Gardner does not pursue Yi’s modernist affinities in detail either.7

Despite a modernism label that might link him to Japanese artists, then, Yi’s status as an

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6 Sawako Nakayasu remarks that Sagawa “is Japan’s first female Modernist poet, whose work resonated deeply with, and helped shape, the most dynamic shifts and developments in the poetry of the era. She was a singular and remarkably inventive poet who had developed a poetics influenced by French literary movements as they were imported to Japan, English and American Modernist writers whose work she translated, and contrasts between her nature-filled upbringing and cosmopolitan Tokyo” (i). Tragically, Sagawa died of stomach cancer when she was 24 (Nakayasu i).

7 As early as 1968, Kim Jong-Chool also points out that a “careful reader of Yi Sang will soon notice that his stories are fundamentally not much different from the category of Japanese story form which can be roughly rendered in English as the ‘I-Story’” (15), and two years later Kim Mun-Jik suggests that “Yi Sang’s position in the history of Korean literature should be reviewed for more accurate evaluation of his literary value” (36). However, these cross-cultural affiliations continue to go uninterrogated. By addressing them, however, we will begin to see a more accurate portrait of his literary significance.
anti-Japanese, colonial intellectual, at odds with Japanese literary currents, is often simply assumed.

Consequently, the debate surrounding Yi leads to a number of questions that are left unanswered. In some articles, for instance, Yi is commended for his internationalism and cosmopolitanism, but then explained to be a nationalistic, anti-colonial figure soon afterwards. There is a great deal of tentative discussion surrounding Yi, in other words, and besides readings of his works, especially “Wings” (1936), as anti-colonial allegory, existing English-language lacks a general consensus on the nature of his importance. The most notable example of this nationalistic reading is “Yi Sang’s ‘Wings’ Read as An Anti-Colonial Allegory” (1995), in which Henry H. Em’s claims that “Wings” can be read as “an allegory of how an entire generation of intellectuals sought to survive in a colonial setting by becoming entirely private, shielding themselves with self-deceptions until even that became impossible” (106). Em argues that Yi wrote experimentally in order to confuse colonial authorities and that his difficult use of language is the product of “a writer under colonial rule” (105); clarity of meaning and expression cannot occur because, under colonial rule, “ideas and urges” (105) need to be “repressed” (105). That Yi’s works pose interpretive difficulties, however, cannot solely be attached to the colonial situation. Yi was part of a cultural milieu of East Asian modernism—and global modernism more broadly—in which such experimentation was commonplace.

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As an example, see Walter K. Lew’s article “Yi Sang’s Perpetual Audacity” (2000). On the one hand, Lew claims that Yi’s work, “[f]ar from asserting a timeless Korean identity and culture” (93), actually relies on a “dazzling variety of allusions, ranging from Chinese classics such as the *Chuang-tzu* to texts that had only recently become available in Korea, such as Hollywood films, phonograph recordings of Korean and foreign music, and both Eastern and Western Romantic and Modernist literature” (93). On the other hand, Lew then points out that the “undercurrent of despair and absurdity in Yi Sang’s work readily evokes allegorical meanings about the plight of Korean intellectuals under colonial rule” (93). Lew does not advocate for one understanding of Yi over another. First he draws attention to Yi’s internationalism, but then quickly reasserts Yi’s significance as nationalistic figure.
Nonetheless, it is largely because of Em’s article that Yi is still read as a nationalistic writer. This is problematic because it allows for one interpretation of one of Yi’s works—“Wings”—to speak for his entire oeuvre, which severely restricts new ways of understanding his literary output.

On their own, then, Yi’s ascribed identities as a modernist, as a contemporary of Japanese modernists, and as an oppressed anti-colonial intellectual do not necessarily capture his full significance. This is because, at least in English-language scholarship, scholars (with the exception of Frankl) are not pursuing new ways of reading Yi’s works, or new ways of answering the questions that arise in how he has been read, at least two of which are: what are the ramifications of calling Yi a modernist? And, what are the consequences of pointing out that his work is similar to that of Japanese modernists? These two questions require us to commit to a definition of modernism, particularly in regards to how modernism as an aesthetic and cultural movement developed in East Asia, and to a vision of how these local modernisms fit into broader, international developments in modernism. It also requires us to bring a more detailed discussion of Japanese modernism into contemporary understandings of modernism on the Korean peninsula. Thus, I will be looking at the way Korean modernism developed as a response not only to Japanese imperialism, but also to the rise of modernism in relation to imperialism and modernity in East Asia more generally in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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10 Although Chinese and Taiwanese modernisms are also aspects of East Asian modernism, for reasons of scope, I am primarily restricting this study to a discussion of Japanese and Korean modernism.
To draw attention to the issue of Yi’s affiliation with Japanese modernism is not to assert that he was a Japanese modernist as opposed to a Korean one. I hope to move away from national definitions of modernism and invite Yi into the field of Global Modernism, a critical perspective that has recently emerged from New Modernist Studies. For Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, literary modernism refers to a body of texts that are considered generally to belong to “the core period of about 1890 to 1945” (738). Yet, they explain that New Modernist critics, such as Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, expand the notion of modernism in “what we might think of as temporal, spatial, and vertical directions” (737), freeing modernism from restrictive definitions. Doyle and Winkiel write that it is their “explicit aim is to collapse the margin and center assumptions embedded in the term modernism” (6). Instead, they emphasize a web of “twentieth-century literary practices, shaped by the circuitry of race, ethnicity, nativism, nationalism, and imperialism in modernity” (6). As such, there is a mandate in both New Modernist Studies and Global Modernism to move away from the Western canon of modernist texts as a point of reference when considering non-Western modernists. William J. Tyler expresses this eagerness to consider texts globally as opposed to nationally when he writes that

[as a cultural, artistic, and philosophical phenomenon that occurred across the globe circa the turn of the twentieth century, modernism was not solely the product of the historically privileged master texts, paintings, and manifestos of Western Europe. (18)

Thus, scholars working in the field of New Modernist Studies provide a critical model to enlarge the “when” and “where” of modernism (Mao and Walkowitz 738). Working
from this perspective, Mao and Walkowitz articulate three features of Global Modernism that distinguish it from New Modernist Studies; it aims “to make modernism less Eurocentric[,]…engages with postcolonial theory” (739), and “emphasizes a variety of affiliations within and across national spaces” (739). Although I will not be following through with a traditional postcolonial reading of Yi, I am still engaging with the postcolonial scholarship that does exist on the subject. Therefore, my approach to Yi continues to be in accord with the project of Global Modernism.

Yet my work addresses a gap in this emergent field of study. The most recent survey of the field, *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), includes essays treating modernists from Viet Nam, Turkey, India, China, Japan, Algeria, Nigeria, South Africa, Russia, Cuba, and the Caribbean, among others, but none from Korea. An exploration of Yi’s modernism can thus enrich the developing narrative of Global Modernism. On the other hand, Global Modernism itself lends a methodological context in which Yi’s modernism and its genesis can be understood in relation to the world’s diverse modernisms, and East Asian modernism more specifically. As Gardner makes clear, it is crucial to “take note of the relationship between Japanese modernism and the modernism emerging elsewhere in East Asia at the same time” (70), as “Japanese writings and Japanese translations of Western literature were important sources for Chinese and Korean authors” (70). This crucial global perspective, however, is too often marginalized from the Yi discussion.

Instead, apart from the nationalistic readings that deal with Yi’s specificity as an icon of a homogeneous Korean national identity and literary canon, the other dominant interpretive trend involves postcolonial, allegorical interpretations, which deal with the
issue of the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945). In addition to Em, Jin-A Kim, and Jeong-Hyun Shin, Lew and Thornber each offer variations of this postcolonial interpretation of Yi’s work as well. Following Em, these scholars offer various interpretations of “Wings” as an anti-colonial allegory. Thornber reads the last scene in “Wings,” in which Yi is standing on top of a Japanese department store in Seoul, as being emblematic “of Japanese architectural, consumerist, and cultural penetration of Korea by the mid-1930s” (351). Similarly, Lew writes that it is in Yi’s “work that radical forms of modernism and its associated lifestyles under Japanese colonial rule attain their utmost audacity and alienation” (“Yi Sang” 658), and in line with Em’s thesis, that Yi wrote “during a time when political resistance was being ruthlessly extirpated in both Japan and its Korean colony, [so] [he] explored alternative means of being unruly” (658).  

These readings are valuable to the larger discourse concerning Korean authors writing in the context of colonial oppression, but as Frankl points out, they are frequently part of a “reductionist framework” (“Distance as Anti-Nostalgia” 40) and pertain to a nationalistic agenda that often restricts alternative ways of understanding Yi.

As an example of this, Shin frames her reading of “Wings” by writing how at “the threshold of the modern age, we Koreans, obsessed with a utopia that would never be made…We thought we could be protected, and even could be civilized depending on the foreign powers that were only anxious about their own wealth and prosperity” (22,

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11 Lew goes on to explain, however, that Yi “cleverly exploited channels that colonial modernization had, in fact, stimulated through translation, new mass media, and an emerging cosmopolitan commodity culture’s aesthetics of speed, collage, mechanization, ephemerality, and Western fashion and eroticism” (658). Again, Lew relates Yi to cosmopolitanism and conditions of modernity, but does not explain how this makes Yi a modernist, or how these factors tie Yi to the Japanese modernists who were responding to similar modern, cosmopolitan conditions.
emphasis added). Her insistence on “we Koreans” clearly indicates a nationalistic agenda to her reading of Yi. She goes on to write that Yi was born and lived in the hellish world of the modern [sic] Korea, [and that he] expressed his agony of shattered dream [sic] [the dream of a utopian Korean noted above] in his short story Wings. Like other Korean intellectuals under the Japanese rule [sic], he was keenly aware of the woe of the colonized people and suffered from the dilemma of self-imposed slavery. (22)

The idea here is that Yi represents the voice of colonized Korean subjects, but as we will see, this is a dubious claim. Experiences of the Empire were uneven; Yi was one of only two ethnic Koreans in his graduating class, meaning his experience of colonization differed from nearly every other Korean. There is also no indication in Yi’s biography or writings that “he was keenly aware of the woe of the colonized people.”

More recently, however, Christopher P. Hanscom and Janet Poole have made attempts to approach Korean modernism from a less nationalistic angle. In doing so, they manage to distance themselves from earlier, more explicitly nationalistic scholarship, but their focus remains the specificity and uniqueness of Korean modernism, which in turn reinforces nationalistic understandings of modernism. For example, Hanscom argues that “1930s [Korean] modernism, far from immersing itself in the pursuit of a purely nonreferential linguistic pleasure, strove for the presentation of…a realer real in attempting to overcome [a] crisis of representation” (6). Hanscom holds that this difficulty of representation in colonial Korea is a feature unique to Korean modernism,
but thus elides the fact that this crisis of representation, as well as colonial situations, are both traits shared by a multiplicity of modernisms.

As the debate currently exists, then, besides Frankl, the criticism is primarily focused on Yi as a nationalistic, anti-colonial intellectual. Consequently, the discussion concerning Yi’s significance has changed little over the years. Frankl’s recent publications successfully demonstrate that Yi was no simple nationalist, and that he more likely identified as a resident of cosmopolitan Seoul than he did as a Korean per se (“Distance as Anti-Nostalgia” 58). But, since Frankl’s “Distance as Anti-Nostalgia” (2012) and “Leveling the Metropole” (2012), noted earlier, the Yi debate has been lying dormant, despite new translations of poetry in the past two years.

Yet, questions of Yi’s significance are far from exhausted. It is my view that Yi can be more fully understood cross-culturally than nationally, meaning that it is time for a less nation-based, postcolonial reading of his work. I see four reasons for undertaking such a reassessment. First, as Gardner argues,

Yi Sang’s poetry both appropriates and subverts the dominant paradigms of modernity that were contested between Korean nationalists and Japanese imperialists. Thus his work could be seen as a threat to orthodox visions of Korean nationalism, and yet it has also been recognized by many Korean intellectuals as an eloquent challenge to Japanese imperialism in its withering and absurdist presentations of the conditions of Korean modernity and subjectivity. (77)

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12 Frankl points out Yi’s non-national tendencies by focusing on his “fastidious use of ‘I’ and ‘they,’ but never ‘we,’” (“Distance as Anti-Nostalgia” 58), as well as “his relentless insistence on cities over countries,” (58) demonstrating that “the nation meant little or nothing to him” (58).
That is, Yi’s relationships to Korea and Japan, as well as to modernity and tradition, were ambivalent and paradoxical; this is a trait I will argue connects him to modernists all over the globe. Furthermore, Yi was an aesthetic extremist, not a political one. Therefore, reading him through a political lens—whether the lens is nationalistic or postcolonial—restricts an understanding of his work because such lenses assume a kind of political engagement that does not actually correspond to his work or life.

Second, Yi lived and wrote in Seoul, primarily in the 1930s, and it must be acknowledged that between 1910 and 1945 Seoul was part of the Japanese Empire. Thus, Yi, though considered ethnically inferior by colonial authorities, was technically a resident of Japan, not the South Korean nation-state, which only came into being after the Korean War (1950-1953), sixteen years after his death. Yi was composing under the umbrella of the Japanese Empire and not the Korean nation. The view that Yi is an advocate for the Korean nation is further paradoxical because since 1953, Korea has been divided into North and South, raising the question: which “Korea” is he an advocate for? However, these issues can be avoided if we acknowledge Yi’s connection to Japanese modernism, and see how his work can be understood as part of the globalizing moment of modernism, as engaged with modernist concerns that extend beyond strictly colonial Korean issues. It is because his work addresses modernity with a modernist sensibility, in other words, that Yi is relevant to the global modernist canon. If we look at Korean modernism from a more international perspective, it can be more effectively understood as an integral part of global modernism, and as making a valuable contribution to the modernist period.
Third, internationalism was scarcely absent from Korean discourse prior to Japanese invasion. Korea was not exempt from the forces of modernity and subsequent pressure (both internal and external, both forced and desired) to internationalize and engage with a globalizing world. Japan colonized Korea in 1910 and had been involved in Korean affairs for some five years prior. By this point, Japan had already made urgent attempts to modernize after experiencing extended contact with Western powers in the mid-nineteenth century. As Hong Yung Lee explains, “[t]hat Japan did end up colonizing Korea [can] be largely attributed to the fact that Japan was the first of the two to successfully transform itself from a centralized, feudal, political system into a modern nation-state after opening up to the West” (5). However, at the turn of the century, Korea was already undergoing similar processes of modernization, industrialization, and the construction of a unifying national identity. The short-lived Great Korean Empire (1897-1910) speaks to these conditions. It was during this period, explains Kyung Moon Hwang, that “the Choson kingdom became an ‘empire’ in line with the foreign powers that surrounded the country” (139). Along with these modernizing advancements came new technological developments as well. These were technologies coming from Japan, and to Japan from the West. In Korea, as in Japan, both modernity and industrialization

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13 Japan’s process of securing Korea “took place in two stages: the first saw the establishment of a Japanese protectorate, 1905-1910, during which a civilian Resident General, the Meiji oligarch Ito Hirobumi, attempted a series of well-intentioned reforms while at the same time systematically liquidating Korean political institutions and substituting Japanese ones; the second phase take place in 1910 when Korea, with the helpless acquiescence of the Korean monarch, was formally annexed as a colony…under the… rule of General Terauchi Masatake, its first governor-general” (Peattie 17).
14 It was also at this time, writes Hwang, that “[t]he first and most advanced electrical generation system in East Asia had been installed in the royal palace in Seoul in the mid-1880s and built by the Edison Electrical Company” (142). Further, “[b]y May of 1899, four months before the opening of the Seoul-Inch’on railway, the Seoul Electrical Company unveiled… the first electric streetcar line, connecting the city’s East Gate to a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city” (142).
were perceived as foreign and alien.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, as was the case in Meiji era Japan, “the West loomed large over the intellectual landscape of Korean writers at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Schmid 9), with nationalist intellectuals defining themselves “as the bearers of ‘civilization and enlightenment,’ accepting…Western notions of civilization, with their vision of historical progress” (9).\textsuperscript{16} While Japan largely had a control over the pace and trajectory of its modernization that colonized Korea did not, it would be wrong to assume that pre-colonial Korea was “pure” in the sense of not having any international affiliations; clearly, these affiliations existed, making it less surprising that they appear in Yi’s work as well, despite Japanese colonial intervention.

Moreover, H. Lee writes that it “is absolutely necessary to make distinctions between Japanese colonialism per se, and the inspiration exerted by Japanese political, economic, and intellectual successes vis-à-vis the modernized West” (15). He suggests we consider the “shared characteristics of late industrializing countries [and] the many shared cultural traits of Japan and Korea, rather than attributing all of Korea’s modernization to the specific legacy of colonialism” (15). I agree with H. Lee, and argue further that we should also look beyond colonialism as the primary catalyst for Korean

\textsuperscript{15} Starks points out that, in Japan, modernity was initially “associated with the importation of a foreign and fundamentally alien civilization” (\textit{Modernism} 6). Additionally, Lee Yil, speaking more specifically to modern visual art, argues that in Korea, “‘modernity’ in our art started with the introduction and accommodation of so-called ‘Western art’” (12). And finally, Ku In Mo explains that “[t]he concept of ‘culture’ was thus an ideology of Japan’s modern nation-state on the one hand and the core of an Empire-building ideology on the other, with an underlying criticism of Western civilization centering on Britain and France” (157). The notion of culture was also coming to Japan, and then to Korea, through the West, specifically in terms of philosophical work of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), whose thinking on culture was espoused by “the main conduit of late-Meiji Japan of Romantic 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Herderian cultural nationalism” (Starrs, \textit{Modernism} 70), Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904).

\textsuperscript{16} Schmid is likely referring to the Meiji intellectual Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901), “the intellectual father of modern Japan” (Starrs, \textit{Modernism} 23), and his notion of \textit{bunmei kaika}, or “civilization and enlightenment”’ (13), which he coined in his \textit{An Outline of a Theory of Civilization} (1875). In brief, Fukuzawa “adopt[ed] a linear, evolutionary view of the development of civilization, and accept[ed] Western civilization as the endpoint and highpoint of that evolution” (\textit{Modernism} 28). As Schmid indicates, Korean intellectuals of the late-nineteenth century were thinking in similar modernizing terms as their Meiji Japanese contemporaries.
modernism.\(^\text{17}\) By focusing on Korea and Japan as late industrializing countries and as two countries with shared cultural characteristics, we can begin to see that Korean and Japanese modernisms need not be as distinct as nationalist models suggest. As well, colonialism cannot be the sole cause for modernism, in Korea or elsewhere; if that were the case, then only places that were colonized would have a modernist tradition to show for it. This is not the case. Besides, despite being colonized by Japan, Korean modernism, as I will show, is “modernist” in much the same way that other, non-Japanese modernisms are “modernist.”\(^\text{18}\) Yi’s significance as a modernist is not a product solely of Korean nationalism or colonial experience, but of his ability to articulate conditions and anxieties associated with modernity that resonate beyond the context of colonial Korea.

My last reason for moving away from nationalistic interpretations of Yi’s work is that they tacitly assume that Yi’s experience speaks for the entirety of the colonized Korean populace, and this is inaccurate. With the near conflation of colonialism and modernity comes a tendency to generalize the experience and historical specificities of the colonial period in Korea as well. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the experiences of colonial rule were not uniform for Koreans. The poor suffered more than the rich, and women and leftists were more disenfranchised than men and those who

\(^{17}\) Saying that colonialism is the sole catalyst of a modernist movement is like saying modernism is only about industrialization. It is not wrong to recognize the colonial situation in Korea and to acknowledge its relation to modernity, but once we are aware that colonialism played a part in Korea’s modernization, we then need to start looking at the responses to that modernity, and not only focus on colonialism.

\(^{18}\) We must acknowledge that the relationship between colonialism and modernism is not exclusively an issue for Korean modernism. W.B. Yeats and James Joyce wrote under British rule, and certainly their works are conscious of this fact. For instance, Seamus Deane claims that Irish modernism “attempt[s] to overcome and replace the colonial experience by something other, something that would be ‘native’ and yet not provincial” (Nationalism 3). However, no one argues that the Irish modernist’ sole intentions were to protest against the British Empire in the way Korean nationalist scholars describe Yi’s intentions.
were either apolitical or sympathetic to the Empire.\textsuperscript{19} If we look at education statistics in colonized Korea and consider that Yi had a university education and was an architect who worked for the Japanese government, we can also see how his experience of the Empire would be different from many other Koreans at the time, especially the poor, women, and leftists.\textsuperscript{20} Yi, a male, and not a leftist, was part of an elite group of highly trained Koreans, which further problematizes the notion that his variety of modernism is necessarily nationalistic and anti-colonial. He was much more enfranchised than many of his fellow Koreans, and more privileged than even a poor Japanese, especially if she were a woman. What this means is that it is time to move away from strictly nationalistic, postcolonial readings of Yi and to start looking at how his long recognized modernism ties him to modernism as a global phenomenon. I contend, in short, that Yi’s significance as a modernist is more fully realized when we look at him in conjunction with other modernists, and that Korean modernism is itself ultimately better understood as an international movement.

To do this, I have structured my thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter, I draw attention to how Yi was essentially writing in the context of the Japanese Empire, and by extension, in the context of Japanese modernism. By showing that Japanese modernism was itself an international movement, and by demonstrating that Yi was working within and in relation to that movement, I am able to establish that Korean

\textsuperscript{19} Todd A. Henry explains that the way “officials left most Koreans (as well as women, leftists, the lower classes, and other peripheral members off Japan’s Empire) uncomfortably suspended between the duties of subordinated subjects and the right of enfranchised citizens lies at the very crux of assimilation—a ruling strategy that offered them the lure of modernity’s rewards alongside their bewildering deferment” (6).

\textsuperscript{20} H. Lee points out that “[a]ccording to 1938 records, there were only 360 Korean experts in the field of science and technology, less than 10 percent of the total number of scientists and technicians in Korea; among those 360, only ninety-five had graduated from college—mostly from colleges in Japan—and the rest were graduates of specialized high schools” (9).
modernism was similarly international (through its connection to Japanese modernism). To do this, I highlight similarities between Japanese modernism and Western modernism, and then highlight the similarities between Japanese and Korean modernism as well, particularly by focusing on similar aesthetic movements shared between the two.

By making the connection between Japanese and Korean modernism clear, I am then able in the second chapter to follow through with a comparative analysis of Yi, Yasunari Kawabata, and Chika Sagawa. By looking at Yi in relation to these two Japanese modernists, I demonstrate both why we should call him a modernist and why his works are relevant not only to Korean modernism, but to Japanese and Western modernisms as well. In the process, I seek to demonstrate clearly Yi’s status as an international modernist. This establishes that Yi is significant outside the context of colonial Korea, and that he is relevant to discussions of global modernism.

In chapter three, I take this further and demonstrate that Yi is also relevant to twentieth-century Japanese literature in general, largely because he was tightly affiliated, in matters of style and content to the Japanese modernist movement that played a part in the development of post-war Japanese literature. To make this case, I use Yi as a lens to read works by Kōbō Abe and Osamu Dazai. Doing so drastically transforms our understanding of Yi, changing him from a victimized subject of the Japanese Empire to a modernist figure who may very well have been influential for post-war Japanese writers. This means Yi’s works provide an effective lens to interpret content and imagery beyond the colonial Korean context.

I proceed with the following in mind. The Japanese Empire was East Asia’s centre of modern, cosmopolitan culture in the early twentieth century, largely as a result
of their extended engagement with Western nations. So this study takes the Japanese Empire as an entry point into alternative ways of reading Yi. Korean modernism occurred within the Empire, which means we need to understand the Empire in order to understand what was happening on the peninsula. Because the Empire was international, Korea was as well. Consequently, the varieties of modernisms that emerged in Japan and Korea were also part of—and responding to—such internationalization, which means we need to understand how these movements fit into broader narratives of global modernism as well. This further elevates the status of Yi and Korean modernism as matters of international concern, and contributes a Korean modernist to the emerging narrative of global modernism.
Chapter 1: Yi Sang, Korea, and the Japanese Empire

The first step of this thesis is to provide the literary historical context that is required before moving on with a comparative and contrastive look at Yi’s works in relation to his Japanese modernist contemporaries. I will provide a brief outline of the Empire, an account of Japanese modernism, and then look at similar aesthetic movements that appeared in Japan, Korea, and the West. Such context allows me to relate Yi to Japanese modernism, itself a movement of self-consciously international character, so that Yi and Korean modernism can be connected to global modernism. I hope to demonstrate how Yi was not only writing under colonial rule, but also more generally in the context of the Japanese Empire, not only as a colonial force, but as an immensely powerful transnational cultural and ideological force as well. Colonialism is a crucial aspect of the Japanese Empire’s legacy, but I wish to stress additional features of the Empire and how they are related to modernism in both East Asia and the West. Yi was writing in a similar historical climate to his Japanese modernist counterparts. Much of this modern climate, particularly in regards to issues associated with rapid technological and industrial development and increased urbanization, was shared by Western modernists as well. As a result, we see similar aesthetic responses to these rising conditions of modernity, regardless of nationality.

The relationship between Yi and Japan extends beyond the issues of colonialism that have been typically addressed in nationalistic and postcolonial scholarship on the subject (as seen in Em and the others noted in the Introduction). Yi was not simply responding to colonial oppression in 1930s Korea, but to the subsequent rapid

21 “At the height of its wartime expansion in early 1942,” writes Eri Hotto, “Japan claimed for itself an extensive area of land in the Asian-Pacific, reaching far north to the Aleutian Islands and south to the European colonies of Southeast Asia” (1).
modernization that followed Japanese occupation. Even if Korea was already modernizing when they were colonized, the historical reality is that Japan had a great deal of agency over Korea’s modernization in the early twentieth century. As Poole points out, “[b]y the end of the colonial era, Japan had built 53,000 kilometers of road in Korea, roughly half that in all of China at the time. The fact of colonial rule thus structured [or, expedited] Korea’s industrial trajectory” (“Late Colonial Modernism” 188). Yi was responding to conditions of modernization, especially urbanization and rapid technological and industrial development, which occurred in Korea largely as a result of Japanese occupation, but that were similar to emerging modern conditions around the globe. However, the tendency—demonstrated in postcolonial and nationalist readings of Yi—is too often to apply a strict binary upon Japanese-Korean relations, which implies that Korea is the “good guy” who has been victimized by Japan, the “bad guy.” On many levels, this binary accurately captures the way the Japanese Empire manifested itself. It is generally and justly understood, with the exception of highly conservative interpretations of the Empire’s history, that Japan was misguided in its imperialist, Pan-Asianist, expansionist pursuits.

Pan-Asianism was central to the Empire’s imperialistic expansion and deserves attention here. Hotta explains that it refers to “an ideology that highlights the fundamental self-awareness of Asia as a cohesive whole, be this whole determined geographically, linguistically, racially or culturally” (3). It assumes “Asia is weak, and that something must be done to make it stronger so that it may achieve recognition by the West” (3). “[M]any Japanese Pan-Asianists” (3), Hotta continues, “[also] came to believe that Japan had a special mission to save weak Asia from Western domination”
(3), which led certain hardcore Japanese conservatives to “insist that Japan, essentially a peace-loving power, was encircled and pushed into war by Western imperialists” (4). Hotta rightly disagrees with this conservative interpretation of history, and instead stresses Pan-Asianism’s “overwhelmingly negative consequences” (3):

it is essential to recognize that there was undoubtedly an underlying tendency in the Japanese forces…to regard the occupied populations as less than human, even though they were the very Asian brothers and sisters the Japanese were claiming to liberate. (152)

This tendency was explicitly present at Nanking, for example, and systematically apparent in the Empire’s “institution of sex slavery in the name of ‘military comfort women’ from early 1938 onwards” (152), achieved through the “exploitation of powerless women, many of whom were Koreans, and other Asians, confirming that there were apparent hypocrisies in the Japanese claim of Pan-Asianist liberation” (152). These atrocities and the subsequent historical and personal traumas of which they are a part cannot altogether be ignored when we discuss Korean modernism; yet, at the same time, we should not simply connect Yi to reactions against the Empire, because as stated in the Introduction, not every experience of the Empire was the same. If we attribute Yi solely to reactions against Japan, we overlook literary features and aesthetic contributions that he made within Korea and that he shares with a number of modernists worldwide, and how these developments are significant outside of the peninsula.

Thus, when the discussion of Japanese-Korean relations moves into the realm of literature, I argue the “victim vs. victimizer” model breaks down, specifically in the way that it is unable to articulate the kinds of literary nuances and similarities that exist
between Yi and his Japanese modernist contemporaries. It also seems counterproductive to view relationships between artists, or shared affinities between their works, in the framework of victims and victimizers. The connection between Japanese and Korean modernists is not one-sided and cannot be easily pigeonholed into a narrow binary, and this is particularly the case with Yi, who wrote and published a fair number of his works in Japanese. Frankl, for example, observes that “twenty-four out of fifty-six” of Yi’s works “were originally written and published in Japanese,” meaning that approximately half of Yi’s corpus is “available to many Koreans only in translation” (“Making Territory” 347). Yi was also writing in what was essentially the Japanese Empire (Korea was part of Japan from 1910 until liberation in 1945); specifically, Korea was part of the “‘Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere’ (as the imperial government euphemistically called its ‘utopian’ Empire)” (Starrs, Modernism 28). And from a legal perspective, Edward I-te Chen explains that “the people of Taiwan, Korea, and Karafuto [i.e., Sakhalin] were regarded as Japanese nationals by virtue of the annexation of their homelands” (243). The Korea Yi wrote in was not an insular nation, but rather part of Japan. This is not to assert that Yi was a Japanese modernist in any strict national or ethnic sense, but rather that his relationship to Japanese modernism was concrete in that he was writing in the Japanese Empire, was aware of other Japanese modernists, and that the significance of his work, especially for an international readership, comes to light more in the context of other East Asian modernists than it does in the framework of nationalistic or postcolonial interpretations.

Indeed, the force of the Japanese Empire was great enough even to have had an influence on Western powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not just
politically and militaristically (e.g. the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5), but also aesthetically (as with Ezra Pound and the imagists, Yeats’ interest in noh theatre, as well as movements such as Japonism and Orientalism). Rupert Richard Arrowsmith writes that “[i]n the early years of the twentieth century, traditional Japanese culture…not only extended its influence beyond the nation’s borders, but fundamentally affected the character of global modernism as it was beginning to emerge” (27). Consider, for instance, the degree to which the haiku became influential to modernist techniques and aesthetics in the West, or the way noh theatre became influential for minimalism in modernist theatre. Yoshinobu Hakutani points out that Yeats and Pound were both heavily influenced by Japanese aesthetics (59); Yeats took inspiration from noh theatre in terms of “structure…technique…[and] style” (62), and for Pound, the haiku “provided a structural model for [his] version of imagism” (83). As examples, first consider Yeats’ play The Dream of the Bones (1919). The stage setting is telling of its noh models: “The stage is any bare place in a room close to the wall. A screen, with a pattern of mountain and sky, can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang upon it” (Yeats 307). Musicians then enter and “sit down against the wall by their instruments…a drum, a zither and a flute” (307); this is similar to the makeup of a noh musical ensemble, or hayashi, which “consists of one flute and two or three drums—taiko, kotsuzumi, or o-otsuzumi” (Vardaman 497). The play also displays its noh inspiration in the sparseness of its opening lines: “Why does my heart beat? Did not a shadow pass? It passed but a moment ago” (Yeats 307). Secondly, we can see the influence of haiku in Pound’s imagist poetry, such as “In a Station of the Metro” (1913): “The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough” (Selected Poems 35). By looking at
these two examples, we can see how the aesthetics of Western modernism are indebted to the Japanese tradition.

Yeats and Pound can also be seen as being part of a group of other Western thinkers and artists influenced by Japanese culture, such as “Lafcadio Hearn [1850-1904], disheartened by the onslaught of modern civilization, [who] was inspired by the mysticism of Japanese Buddhism” (Hakutani 67), and “Ernest Fenollosa [1853-1908], originally interested in Japanese visual arts, [who] was the first to interpret the noh play for the West” (67). Arrowsmith explains that another reason for the sudden perceived relevance of Japanese culture to avant-garde undertakings [in the West]…was the rapidly changing view of the country in Europe during the years leading up to the First World War. The idea of Japan as a forward-looking civic society and industrial powerhouse…had been acknowledged by the West only since the crushing defeat of Russia by the Japanese armed forces in Manchuria in 1905. (34)

Indeed, Japan is still a strong cultural force in the contemporary world, in terms of industry, visual culture, and entertainment; consider, for example: Nintendo, Sony, manga, anime, numerous automobile manufacturers (Honda, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, etc.), Haruki Murakami (1949—), as well as iconic and influential adaptations of

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22 Hearn, an Anglo-Irish writer of Greek descent, is perhaps better known in the West for his collection of supernatural stories *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* (1904), which were later adapted into the film *Kwaidan* (1964) by Masaki Kobayashi. Fenollosa, an American art historian, is also known for his promotion of traditional Japanese aesthetics and culture (as is Hearn) both in Japan and abroad (Starrs, *Modernism* 36).

23 Murakami is the author of such notable works as *Norwegian Wood* (1987), *The Windup Bird Chronicles* (1994-5), and more recently, *IQ84* (2009-10), all of which are internationally acclaimed. *Norwegian Wood* also having been adapted into a film by Tran Anh Hung in 2010. Roy Starrs refers to Murakami as “the major contemporary Japanese writer” (*Modernism* 151, emphasis added).
Japanese horror films such as Gore Verbinski’s *The Ring* (2002), an adaptation of Hideo Nakata’s *Ring* (1998), and Takashi Shimizu’s *The Grudge* (2004), an American adaptation of Shimizu’s *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002). My purpose in emphasizing these influential cultural texts is to point out that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are not simply the product of a unidirectional hegemonic relationship between the West and the rest of the world. For example, in the same way Western modernism took on a Japanese character, Gennifer Weisenfeld points out that “Western-style painting [yōga] had been gradually naturalized in Japan since the mid-1870s. By the 1920s it had become a domesticated and legitimate mode of native self-expression by Japanese artists, no longer perceived as problematic of foreign” (3). As such, the way modernism emerged and developed was a process of complex cross-cultural interactions and negotiations that continue to take place today. Japan has been globally influential in a variety of ways. Because Yi was technically writing in Japan, and because Korean modernism occurred within the Japanese Empire, we need to look at Korean modernism’s involvement in these processes of transnational influence.

If the Japanese Empire was able to have an effect on other nations’ modernisms on the other side of the globe, then certainly its own colonial territories also felt this influence. My focus here is on the way these cultural and modernizing ramifications played out in the work of Yi. In order to analyze these influences, however, an overview of Japanese modernism is necessary. By providing a general overview of Japanese modernism,24 as well as some of its and Korea’s particular modernist movements and

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their relation to Western modernism, we can see that Japanese and Korean modernisms were part of the internationalizing moment of global modernity.

**Japanese Modernism**

Modernism in Japan, or “Modanizumu, as the term ‘modernism’ was rendered into Japanese in the late 1920s” (Tyler 19), can be viewed as one of the consequences of the Meiji era (1968-1912), which can itself be understood as a political and cultural initiative to modernize Japan after it had been opened to the West in 1853, and through the West, to the international community more generally. Modernism was a highly influential “intellectual idea, mode of artistic expression, and source of popular fashion in Japan from approximately 1910 to 1940, a period that coincides with the emergence of other modernisms across the globe” (19). Explaining the conditions leading up to Japanese modernism in more detail, Starrs writes that in the context of late nineteenth-century Japan, modernization meant transforming Japan from an isolated, divided, technologically and economically backward country with a tradition-bound, feudalistic sociopolitical structure into a unified modern nation-state open to the world and able to compete on equal terms with the Western powers—culturally...economically and militarily. *(Modernism* 13)

In this way, embedded in the Meiji notion of modernization is also the idea of internationalization; in order to become modern, Japan also had to become

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internationally affiliated with other nations, which were already international, or well on their way to becoming more so. Recall Yukichi Fukuzawa and his idea of *bunmei kaika*, or “‘civilization and enlightenment’” (Starrs, *Modernism* 13) noted in the Introduction. Fukuzawa thought that in order to modernize, Japan had to become more Westernized. By incorporating Western culture, ideas, and aesthetics into notions of a modernized nation, the conception of a modern Japan was international from the outset. As an example, consider Meiji Japan’s relationship to Germany, which had by the second half of the nineteenth century become attractive as an advanced workshop for Japan’s modernization. In 1872 the first two German *oyatoi gaikokujin* (foreign experts hired by the Meiji government) were employed at the Tokyo Medical School (*igakujo*). By the end of the 1870s the idea of taking Germany as a model for modernization was gaining ground among Japan’s ruling elite. (Spang and Wippich 1-2)

In addition, although they withdrew in 1933, it is noteworthy that Japan was part of the League of Nations (130), indicating the degree to which Japan strove to be both a rival and equal to its Western counterparts. From here, one can assert that Japan was not simply emulating the West in order to idolize it, but rather, competing with them in order to become an international power, something Japan achieved with grave consequences leading up to and during the Pacific War.

These kinds of international relations between Japan and the West are not simply the result of theorizing; they exist materially, and as a result, the global character of modernism is material as well. The materiality of these relationships come to light when
considering how these relationship were built through actual, lived interactions. Starrs explains how “Japanese students were dispatched abroad and foreign teachers brought to Japan so that ‘modern knowledge’ could be quickly acquired in all fields, from science, medicine, and engineering to music, literature, and painting” (Modernism 14). As an example, Starrs cites the Iwakura Mission (1871-1873), the goal of which was to “travel through the West for about a year and half in search of ‘enlightenment’ [likely in the framework of Fukuzawa’s theory of bunmei kaika] about the modern world” (16). Spang and Wippich also note that “[i]n such fields as education, military, law and science the German influence prevailed and German experts were hired continuously” (2). Thus, at least at the beginning of Japan’s process of modernization, one of its chief goals was to become Westernized in such a way as to be able to engage effectively in international affairs, and to become a nation among nations, a feat which would be realized with both positive (aesthetic developments, for example) and negative consequences (Japan’s imperial expansion and the atrocities that were committed before and during the Second World War). Again, a large part of what it meant to be modern in this instance, then, was to become more globalized.

Modernism is part of this globalizing moment and vice versa. As a result, it must be noted that modernization and modernism for Japan were not simply incorporations of Western culture, but also adaptations of and bi-directional dialogues with it. Sawako Nakayasu, for instance, points out that although Japanese modernism shared a number of traits and values with its Western counterparts, [it] was not so much an offshoot of European art movements, but rather its own complex web of
developments that evolved on its own terms. Though the Western European influence was most notable, there was a general interest in everything outside of Japan. (iii)

Specifically, “[t]he 1929 ‘Poets of the Worlds’ feature in Issue 4 of Shi to Shiron [Poetry and Poetics] feature[d] poetry from France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, US, England, Ireland, Germany, and the Netherlands” (iii), in addition to “the poetries of 15 other countries in Western and Eastern Europe, and China” (iii). This culturally and linguistically diverse collection in the fourth issue of Shi to Shiron also speaks to the international character of Japanese modernism, and of modernism more generally, in the way various modernisms from around the world were being disseminated outside of their original locales. Yi was a reader of Shi to Shiron, so it is likely that he also had a chance to read, in addition to Japanese modernists, modernists from all over the globe.25 An awareness of this internationalization in Japanese conceptions of modernity finds clear articulation in Jun’ichiro Tanizaki’s novel Naomi (1924) when he writes that

[a]s Japan grows increasingly cosmopolitan, Japanese and foreigners are eagerly mingling with one another; all sorts of new doctrines and philosophies are being introduced; and both men and women are adopting up-to-date Western fashions. No doubt, the times being what they are, the sort of marital relationship that we’ve had, unheard of until now, will begin to turn up on all sides. (3)

This passage appears on the first page of Naomi, which speaks to the directness and transparency with which Tanizaki approaches the issue of globalization. The

25 More research and archival work is needed to better understand the ways modernist texts and journals circulated throughout the Empire and how this allowed for cross-cultural interaction and influence. I discuss this in more detail in chapter three.
international character of Japanese modernism, in other words, is not only a feature that appears by projecting the idea back onto a historical moment, but instead finds expression in the very moment itself.

The self-consciously international cast of Japanese modernism is contextualized by considering how following the Meiji era there came another period of significant cultural change known as the Taishō Democracy, or Taishō era (1912-1926). Nakayasu explains that during this period

[...]

modes of dress shifted from traditional Japanese kimonos to Western-style clothing and the most fashionable people were referred to as moga or mobo, abbreviations for ‘modern girl’ and ‘modern boy.’ Restaurants served Western food and jazz was playing in the clubs. (ii)

Gardner more concisely notes that the Taishō era was a time of liberalization and a period of urban, metropolitan transformation (5). A key incident of the Taishō era was the Great Kantō Earthquake “that levelled much of Tokyo and Yokohama on September 1, 1923” (Tyler 21), causing over a hundred thousand deaths. As a result of this destruction, Tokyo had to be substantially rebuilt. The reconstruction of Tokyo in the 1920s also meant that the newly emerging cityscape was definitively modern, industrial, and technological.26

This modern urban renewal thus emerges from profound destruction; indeed, the Kantō catastrophe “is invariably cited as the metaphorical marker for the eruption of a modernist consciousness in Japan” (21). As such, the earthquake also resonates with Western understandings of the emergence of modernist aesthetics. Starrs points out that

“as in the West, the progress of modernity in Japan was marked by a number of major traumatic events (like the First World War in Europe)” (*Modernism* 132), the “Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923” (132) being one of them, as well as “the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, the increasing incidence of popular riots in the 1910s…and the rise of militarism and of a fascist ‘police state’ in the 1930s and ‘40s” (132). Gardner also makes note of this trend, writing that “the social and political chaos that followed [the earthquake]” (6) can be compared to “the upheaval and trauma…experienced by Europeans in the Great War” (6).

Such upheaval also brought to the forefront of Japanese society a number of prejudices and anxieties that would find further expression during the fascism of the 1930s and 1940s. In the chaotic aftermath of the disaster, “police murdered numerous prominent dissidents and labor organizers, and bands of vigilantes lynched thousands of Koreans, Chinese, and suspected communists” (6). These acts of violence and suppression speak to some of the contradictory aspects of the liberal Taishō Democracy, as well as to the rising political tensions that would find further expression in fascism closer to the middle of the twentieth-century. To highlight these contradictions, Gardner notes “the High Treason Trial of 1910-11, in which twelve anarchists and socialists were executed for their alleged participation in a plot to assassinate the emperor” (Gardner 6), as well as “the massive roundup of Communist Party activists and other dissidents in 1927 under the newly inaugurated Peace Preservation Law” (6).27 Thus, “liberal democracy [was] but one part” (7), of the Taishō era, and it may instead be more useful to understand the period as a time of “diverse political developments” (7). Pointing out

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27 The Peace Preservation Law gave “authorities sweeping powers to crack down on thought offenders deemed to threaten the emperor-centred ‘national polity’ (*kokutai*)” (Gardner 7).
this social upheaval in Japan demonstrates that turmoil existed at the heart of the Empire, as well as at its margins (Korea, for instance), especially for those who disagreed with the Empire’s agenda (as we will see with the aesthetic movement Mavo in Japan and the group of leftist writers, the Korea Artista Proleta Federacio, on the peninsula).

Of course, the First World War and the Great Kantō Earthquake are not definite, concrete demarcations of modernism, because modernist trends appear in both hemispheres before 1914 and 1923 respectively. But these two catastrophes do provide a general framework to understand the emergence and development of the Eastern and Western movements, especially in relation to one another, given the similar narrative of disaster, break down of society and civilization, and then an intense emergence of modernist aesthetics and techniques in response. The Great Kantō Earthquake and the First World War were two catastrophic events that greatly shifted cultural consciousness and seemed to break nations away from their more traditional pasts. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, speaking to Western manifestations of modernism, explain this shift in more detail when they argue that modernism “is the art consequent of Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty principle’” (27), a result of

28 As Mao and Walkowitz argue, literary modernism refers to a body of texts which are considered generally to belong to “the core period of about 1890 to 1945” (738). Within this timeframe, for example, one can also see modernist traits, specifically experimental usages of narrative and language, in Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Ford Madox Ford. As well, Gardner argues that “the earthquake could more accurately be seen as accelerating changes already under way in such fields as architecture, transportation, and media enterprises, including the print industry” (6). And Starrs proposes a more radical hypothesis, suggesting that “[f]rom the more global perspective of the 21st century… we may well want to ‘rewrite’ the much-rehearsed art-historical account and argue that modernism actually began in the early 1690s with Moronobu’s Beauty Looking Backwards—or, more generally, with the brilliant popular culture of the Genroku period of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The Genroku period produced not only ukiyo-e but all haiku poetry, so influential on Western modernist poets, especially the imagists, and it also produced the first masterpieces of kabuki and of the bunraku puppet theatre, and many other popular art forms” (Modernism 126). Considering these perspectives, it is clear that the margins of modernism are continually in flux.
the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the
world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of
capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to
meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the literature of
technology...Modernism is then that art of modernization. (27)
In other words, modernism “is an art of a rapidly modernizing world” (57). Tokyo was
thus an apt site for modernism, given that it was a rapidly reconstructed city in the
modern era. Another important consequence of this modernization, according to
Bradbury and McFarlane, was the way “mass forms of traditional certainties had
departed, and a certain sort of…confidence…in the onward progress of
mankind…evaporated” (57). We can see this in Western modernists (which I will
demonstrate shortly), and also in the fragmentary and experimental style of Yi and
Sagawa. T.S. Eliot’s quintessential modernist poem The Waste Land (1922), as a
Western example, attests to these growing modern anxieties, with lines such as “Unreal
City,/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,/A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so
many,/I had not thought death had undone so many” (line 60-3), which can be framed
well by the poem’s opening lines: “April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of
the dead land, mixing/Memory and desire, stirring/Dull roots with spring rain” (line 1-4).
The notion here, I argue, is anxiety regarding death and renewal, specifically the way
renewal seems to be unable to foster progress, and instead, only more meaningless death.

A similar disillusionment with modernity occurred in Japan, meaning these
anxieties can be mapped on to East Asian concerns as well, especially in regards to the
paradoxical notions of renewal and escape (from tradition, for instance), the conditions
of modernity more generally, and concerns associated with the destruction and reconstruction of Tokyo. Following the initial excitement and enthusiasm for modernization in Japan, explains Starrs, modernism “became more complex and started to fracture—to divide against itself” (*Modernism* 18). As Starrs puts it, “after the first period of an innocent and frenetic ‘cult of modernity,’” the socio-cultural costs gradually became apparent to more thoughtful Japanese” (18). He continues: “the breakdown of traditional social bonds and of traditional values had the potential to cause a profound sense of social and psychological alienation or ‘anomie’” (18). In one of her fragments, “Finale,” Sagawa comments on this phenomenon, specifically on the way traditions have changed as a result of modernization, when she writes that “[a]ll earthly marriage ceremonies have come to an end” (65). Furthermore, a sense of being detached from prior aesthetic traditions is also noted in “Crystal Night,” when she writes: “[t]he Secret within the multifaceted glass is indeed the dawn where 19th-century poems get crushed in the palm of the hand” (111). In terms of “the dawn” of the new century, the poetic techniques, as well as the aesthetics more generally, of the past century have become obsolete, or at least are unable to articulate the emerging modern condition in Japan.

Thus, on the one hand we see anxieties about renewal, but also apprehensions about how tradition may not have an answer to the crisis of modernity either. In chapter two, I will focus on the tension between the traditional and modern in more detail.

Lastly, the destruction of Tokyo in 1923 is also often considered a breaking point with the prior aesthetic tradition, or at least, an event that significantly increased developments that were already taking place. Gardner argues that “the earthquake could

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29 Unfortunately, Nakayasu’s *The Collected Poems of Chika Sagawa* (2015), the only English translation of Sagawa’s works, does not include specific publication dates for her writings, but given Sagawa’s young age and premature death, we can assume most of them were published in the 1930s.
more accurately be seen as accelerating changes already under way in such fields as architecture, transportation, and media enterprises, including the print industry” (6). The earthquake can also be understood both literally and metaphorically as an abolition of the past and a break with tradition. Yet, this was not necessarily a clean break, especially in the way the Japanese nationalists and the fascist movement longed for a time before ‘Western’ modernity came to Japan. Despite this fascist nostalgia, however, the Tokyo that was rebuilt was a quintessentially modern city and a product of the modernist moment, its architects employing modern technology and materials in the process of reconstruction. Gardner further elucidates that “Tokyo’s residents…witnessed the appearance of a new cityscape and infrastructure above the ashes and rubble” (6), and that “[d]iverse groups of Tokoites participated in the city’s reconstruction, including artists’ groups who painted temporary buildings with expressionistic designs and submitted competing plans for the new city (6). Along with this new environment came further aesthetic experimentation, at least in part due to artists trying to make sense of their rapidly transforming space. As Nakayasu points out, post-earthquake, “avant-garde tendencies included a heightened relationship to visual art, as well as scepticism toward ‘meaning’ in language” (iii), all traits we see in Yi and Sagawa. In chapter two I will discuss in more detail how we can also see these aesthetic trends outside of Japan in Yi’s work, particularly in his challenging use of language and the experimental architecture of his poems, which provides a visually experimental quality to his output as well.

The “scepticism toward ‘meaning’ in language” (Nakayasu iii) is of particular interest here; it not only appears Japanese modernism, but Korean modernism too, as we

30 Starrs writes: “feelings of nostalgia for the beauties and virtues of ‘old Japan’ would feed into the anti-modernist rhetoric among nationalists and fascists in the 1920s and ‘30s, playing the same important political role that similar such feelings played in European fascism at the time” (Modernism 85).
will see in Yi’s work. However, I would not argue that modernists necessarily strove for a meaningless use of language, but rather hoped to use language in innovative ways to achieve new strategies of negotiating meaning, and avenues for making it, in a modern world that was perceived by many modernists as being otherwise meaningless. One can see this tendency in Sagawa’s work in her vignette, “Dark Summer:”

Everything loses its gravitational center and flees from the interior to the bright outdoors. There, they spin at great speeds. I feel myself gradually getting lighter. My weight was on the tree in the garden. I wonder if that powder on the leaves is dust. The leaves are blown and swaying in the wind, as if unable to withstand their weight on earth. Rubbing the palms of their hands together. (45)

The language here is difficult, but not meaningless; rather, it carries with it a high degree of imagination and emotional intensity. There is a sense of urgency that comes along with the idea of things losing their gravitational center and being pulled apart and away from a unifying focus, a notion that also finds expression in Yi’s “Poem No. VI” from his collection of poetry “Crow’s-Eye View” (1934): “My body had so lost its central axis that it was heading off in every direction, and so I shed my minor tears” (11). Indeed, this pulling-apart can also be read as the fragmentation that ensues as a consequence of rapid modernization. A similar kind of fragmentation is also illustrated in the following excerpt from Yi’s “Poem No. VIII: Anatomy:”

First, holding the front side of an anesthetised three-dimensional subject up to the reflection of the whole in the plane mirror. In the plane mirror, transferring the application of mercury to the side opposite the present.

31 Unless otherwise specified, all of Yi’s poems cited in this thesis are found in “Crow’s-Eye View.”
(With care not to let the light slip in) gradually neutralizing the anaesthesia. Providing a pen and piece of paper. (The examiner absolutely avoiding the embrace of the examinee.) Releasing the examinee from the operation room, accordingly. The next. Cutting the plane mirror in half, penetrating its vertical axis…At this time, taking away the vacuum from the revolution and rotation of the earth. (13)

There are a few things to note between this and the passage from Sagawa’s “Dark Summer” mentioned previously. First: the emphasis on scientific language and geometrical space; specifically, Chika employs the conceptual and linguistic vocabulary of physics, namely relativity, when she refers to the loss of gravitational centre, and the way everything “flees” (45), no longer held in place by gravity, “from the interior to the bright outdoors” (45). Indeed, it is bright outdoors because light has also been scattered, but more precisely, drawn outward, no longer being bent or directed by gravity, the result of which is a “Dark Summer.” In his “Poem No. VIII: Anatomy,” as well, Yi focuses on a scientific vocabulary, with an emphasis on medicine and geometry. In the above passage alone, for example, we see anaesthesia repeated, as well as examiner, examinee, and operating room (13). Geometrical and spatial disorientation is also elicited by such lines as “holding the front side of an anesthetised three-dimensional subject up to the reflection of the whole in the plane mirror” (13) and “Cutting the plane mirror in half, penetrating its vertical axis” (13). This fragmentation, I argue, operates similarly to the way it does in the Chika passage; it captures a sense of fractured unity and the ensuing difficulties of representation that arise from trying to articulate the complexity of modernity.
Not only is this modernist problematic of representation brought to attention in Yi’s emphasis on mirrors, but also in the way he and Sagawa are both concerned with light. Specifically, the absence of light, and anxieties concerning it, are metaphors for problematized representation. Light is drawn from the interior to the exterior in “Dark Summer” as a result of gravity no longer functioning ordinarily, and in “Poem No. VIII: Anatomy,” the speaker notes, “(With care not to let the light slip in) gradually neutralizing the anaesthesia. Providing a pen and piece of paper” (13). Here, it appears that keeping the light out is a way to avoid being anaesthetized, or numbed, by certain kinds of representation, possibly more traditional varieties. By shutting light out, there is darkness, and in the darkness the imagination, and specifically language, become the sole means of representation. This is related to the sceptical attitude toward language noted by Nakayasu earlier (iii), but also to new and innovative ways to deal with and negotiate meaning. Hence, taking care to keep the light out is equated with “Providing a pen and piece of paper” (13). Another point of similarity between these two passages is how both poets mention the earth: “The leaves are blown and swaying in the wind, as if unable to withstand their weight on earth” (Chika 45), and “At this time, taking away the vacuum from the revolution and rotation of the earth” (Yi 13). The recognition of this broad perspective—a terrestrial one, specifically—further acknowledges that these two modernists were aware of themselves on a globe—a globe, I am emphasizing, they shared with other artists, cultures, and nations, which speaks to the global character of modernism.

32 Gravity is a physical law that acts in predictable, quantifiable ways; thus, its malfunctioning is possibly a way for Chika to put into question other “laws” that were taken to be unchangeable: notions of teleological history, progress, tradition, gender, class, and race, all of which were destabilized during the modernist period, willfully or not.
In terms of recurrent aesthetic traits, Western and Japanese modernism also share much in common, which again stresses modernism as a global movement. Tyler provides a general overview of recurring modernist techniques that appear over a broad spectrum of aesthetic forms, and they include:

- juxtaposition, elliptical apposition, parataxis, the play within the play,
- synaesthesia, metafiction, disjunction, interruption, flatness, spatiality versus linearity, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, free association, automatic writing, unconsciousness, primitivism, montage,
- atonality, epiphany, and certainly most emblematic of all, the ubiquitous catalog. (Tyler 20)

Tyler’s definition, though considering modernism generally (i.e., beyond Japanese borders), is taken from his study on Japanese modernism, *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan 1913-1938* (2008). As such, I think it is useful to compare his definition with another description of modernism that is focused more specifically on Western manifestations of the movement in order to elucidate recurring trends and parallels between Western and Japanese modernisms. For example, Michael Levenson writes that, despite the difficulty of pinpointing what exact features make a work modernist or not, within works so labelled, “there can still be found certain common devices and general preoccupations” (3). These include “recurrent acts of fragmenting unities…the use of mythic paradigms, the refusal of norms of beauty, [and]…radical linguistic experiment” (3), often with the intent to “startle and disturb the public” (3). What Tyler and Levenson’s descriptions of modernism share in common is an emphasis
on literal, semantic, and structural fragmentation, and on the seemingly deliberate
difficulty of modernist texts.

Though it is an unreasonable assertion to claim all individual modernist texts
have all the same characteristics, it is nevertheless useful to have these kinds of general
definitions, because they enable a discussion about a large and sometimes disparate body
of texts which appear at different times and places over a period of approximately sixty
years. Thus, here I am employing these definitions of modernism as a way of drawing
attention to how the features that are by now conventionally considered “modernist” are
able to bring texts from different (though not mutually exclusive) historical and cultural
backgrounds into the same discussion in meaningful ways. The definitions of modernism
that appear in discussions of Japanese modernism are able to speak effectively to
definitions of Anglo-American and European modernism and vice versa, because they
identify similar aesthetic markers as modernist. And as will be shown in chapter two,
these traits extend to Korean modernism as well.

In the field of Japanese literature, the idea that Japanese modernism is both an
appropriation of, and an addition to, a multiplicity of modernisms is no longer a
controversial concept (recall Tyler, Gardner, and Starrs); however, my purpose here is to
further highlight the interconnections between Japanese and Western modernism in order
to demonstrate that through Japan, Korean modernism can also be effectively understood
as an international movement, and not simply a response to Japanese colonization.
Korean modernism can thus be understood as being as much a part of the globalizing and
modernizing initiatives and ramifications of the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries as Japanese and Western modernism. This will in turn free discussions of
Korean modernism and modernists, such as Yi, from being overly reliant on colonial or nationalistic conceptions of the modernist movement on the peninsula, and instead allow Korean modernism to be viewed as part of a larger historical moment, specifically global modernity. In order to bring these connections into focus, however, a discussion of similar aesthetic movements in Japan, Korea, and the West is necessary.

**Modernist Aesthetic Movements in Japan, Korea, and the West**

The way these modernist features, mentioned earlier, create a bridge between Japanese and Western modernism is more effectively understood when we consider certain aesthetic movements in Japan that drew heavily from Western ones, specifically Mavo and the Shinkankakuha (Neo-Sensory Group or New Sensation Group). First, Mavo was a Japanese avant-garde movement that manifested itself in the arts and architecture, especially after the Great Kantō Earthquake. The Mavo movement was led by a young artist, (an almost Poundian figure), named Tomoyoshi Murayama (1901-1977). He had a forceful and charismatic personality, which enabled him to mobilize the group…With a wealth of artistic and intellectual experiences gained from study in Germany that would give him significant cachet among young Japanese artists, he returned to Tokyo in 1923, where he asserted himself as the leader of Mavo…An ardent believer in the socially transformative potential of innovative aesthetics, Murayama played a crucial role in the Japanese art world as a cultural interpreter, arbiter, rebel, and personality. (Weisenfeld 2-3)
As such, Mavo was inspired by such Western innovations as anarchism, Marxism, futurism, expressionism, Dadaism, and constructivism. The movement, writes Starrs, engaged “in a wide range of artistic activity, everything from magazine publication and poster design to performance art, installations and even architecture” (*Modernism* 104). Speaking to similar movements between Japan and the West, Tyler further states that “[a]nalogous movements in the West are far better known” (Tyler 19), such as: “Symbolisme, Successionism, Futurismo, Fauvism, Cubism, Constructivism, Imagism, Vorticism, Expressionism, Dada, Modern Art, the Abstract, die neue Sachlichkeit” (19). Making use of emerging forms of mass media, writes Starrs, the Mavoists also spoke to “the new middle-class consumers of culture of the 1920s” (*Modernism* 104-5), proving “themselves to be radical artists by offending public taste and conventionality” (105). For example, they challenged normative gender-roles by “cross-dressing, and generally insisted on their right to personal pleasure in open opposition to the Imperial state’s stern demands on citizens for a Spartan, self-sacrificing lifestyle in service to the emperor” (105). These artists were thus subversive of the Japanese Empire’s mission, and not because they were Korean artists (they were Japanese). What this means is that aesthetic developments in Japan and Korea, even oppositional ones, in the early twentieth century did not simply have to do with nationality or “race,” but with a myriad of other complex factors including desires to assert individual (as opposed to national) autonomy under an increasingly suppressive regime.

Another Japanese modernist group I wish to focus on is the Shinkankakuha, who often presented themselves as “apolitical, pure aesthetes” (Starrs, *Modernism* 105). Or, as Tyler puts it, these writers, Kawabata being one of them, were “seen as exemplary of
a pure or high modernism committed not only to formalistic priorities, but also to disengagement from commercial and ideological issues” (Tyler 16). This political disinterestedness involves some ambiguities, however; as Starrs explains, “like some of the European modernist contemporaries, they were also cultural nationalists whose ‘aesthetics’ turned out to be quite user-friendly to the rising fascist ideology of the day” (Modernism 105). In this regard, they were unlike the Mavoists, who tended to lean left politically, and who often made a point of combining their aesthetics with politics (105). The pattern that emerges here between these two movements is that of “art of the right” and “art of the left,” a narrative that also exists in discussions of the Korean modernist movement. This parallel speaks against notions of Korean modernism being specific to the peninsula, as well as being primarily a reaction against Japanese occupation, because it draws further attention to the similarities between Japanese and Korean modernism.

We can see an example of this parallel in Hanscom’s The Real Modern: Literary Modernism and the Crisis of Representation in Colonial Korea (2013), in which he explains that the Korean Kuinhoe (Group of Nine) occupied “the stylistic, apolitical, or ‘art for art’s sake’ pole in debates around colonial period literature” (9), whereas the Korea Artista Proleta Federacio (KAPF) were a collection of “proletarian or leftist artists known as realists and disbanded in 1935 by colonial authorities” (9). Yi was a member of the Group of Nine, and was thus part of a literary elite comprising other prominent modernists, such as Pak T’aewŏn (1909-1986), Kim Yujŏng (1908-1937), and Yi T’aejun (1904-1970) (9). As Hanscom explains, being formed in August 1933 around the time of the first mass arrest of KAPF members, the [Kuinhoe’s] self-stated objective was ‘to form a group of
literary men with the goal of extensive reading and writing and critique of each other’s works from a position of forthright investigation.’ (9)

This speaks to how the group’s concerns were literary, rather than political. In addition, it is also crucial to point out that there were mass arrests of left leaning artists and groups in Japan around this time. Five years earlier, in 1928, the March 15 Incident occurred, the “[f]irst mass arrest of suspected Communists under the 1925 Peace Preservation Law” (Huffman 139). On this day, “thousands of agents began a raid of 120 leftist centers…by evening they had arrested 1,600 individuals and seized thousands of documents and membership lists” (139). Under the Peace Preservation Law, “additional mass arrests were carried out, including those of another 600 or 700 suspected Communists on April 16, 1929” (139). Thus, the Japanese Empire was intent on suppressing dissent both on and off the island, but this is not to make a qualifying claim about who was suppressed more or less. Instead, I draw attention to these mass arrests to dismantle the binary that is often applied to Japanese and Korean individuals, when in certain cases (when looking at leftist groups, for example), both parties disagreed with the Empire’s imperial-capitalist ambitions.

Unfortunately, to date, there is minimal material available translated into English on either the KAPF or the Group of Nine, especially when considering the much greater wealth of scholarship on Mavo and other Japanese movements. What we can conclude from what is available, however, is that the same dynamic noted earlier exists between them: the narrative of “art of the right” and “art of the left,” which appears in both Japanese and Korean discussions of modernism. The KAPF and Mavo can be equated on the grounds that both had leftist politics and made a point of combining their aesthetic
and socio-political goals. Similarly, the Group of Nine and the Shinkankakuha can be seen as similar movements, especially in regards to the “art for art’s sake” mentality and concern for a pure, non-ideological literature. Of course, the specific details of these movements, as well as the specifics of the Western movements mentioned above, would likely reveal striking and meaningful differences; however, my purpose here is more to outline how a similar narrative and framework is at play in both Japanese and Korean discussions of modernism. Likely, the use of a similar narrative to account for both Japanese and Korean modernism occurs because the two movements are so inextricably tied to one another.

One way to approach an understanding of these affinities is to consider certain similar conditions that existed in Japan and Korea during the colonial period, at least for artists of the avant-garde such as Yi. This is not to comment on the everyday lived experiences of Japanese and Korean citizens of the Japanese Empire, but to look at the way artists who were experimenting with modernist forms and techniques were subject to similar oppression and obstruction, regardless of nationality. Specifically, consider the Japanese imperialist authorities’ treatment of the Japanese avant-garde Mavoist movement and their treatment of the KAPF. Both were disbanded, not because they were nationalist Korean movements, but because they were leftist, subversive groups that were incongruent with rising Japanese fascist-imperialist ideology.

In addition, I argue that a substantial reason for the aesthetic similarities between movements lies in the fact that both Tokyo and Keijō (Seoul), the imperial capital on the peninsula, were modern cities. Thus, modernists living in these cities were faced with similar concerns. These modern conditions in Seoul, where Yi lived and wrote, were
similar to conditions in Tokyo, where many of Yi’s Japanese contemporaries were composing. Yi voices anxieties about the metropolis in his essay “Tokyo,” published posthumously in 1939, when he writes that if people keep living the way they do in modern cities, so close to machines, they will themselves always smell like gasoline and machinery:

“[t]his city reeks of ‘gasoline!’” is my first impression of Tokyo…Whether closed or opened, my mouth is immediately permeated with the smell of “gasoline,” so no matter what food I am eating I cannot avoid at least some taste of “gasoline.” Therefore, the body odor of Tokyo’s citizens shall come to resemble that of automobiles. (339)

Yi’s work shows an awareness of the way modern Tokyo (and Seoul) living can dehumanize and mechanize a person. Likewise, in a piece entitled “Flowers Between the Fingers,” Sagawa describes a similar impression of Tokyo when she writes that “[t]he sound of the engine and smell of the oil fill the city with a buoyant air, rattling windows on both sides” (92). More specifically, in her vignette “Chamber Music,” she expresses similar concerns regarding the dehumanizing aspect of modernity: “[a]nd when you grow tired of staring out at the suburban scenery as you’re jostled on the bus or train, and the people seated across from you all seem as boring as robots, please feel free to take a peek at this journal called Esprit” (109). The emphasis here is on the way Sagawa identifies her fellow commuters as robots. This indicates an awareness of, or at least an apprehension about, the way modernity and modern styles of living have the capacity to dehumanize an individual. It is also noteworthy that Sagawa is recommending that these
seemingly spiritless “robots” read a journal called Esprit, which draws further attention to issues of alienation common in modernist literature. In this case, the notion is that these people, as a result of modern living, have become alienated from their sense of being human. When looking at the similar way Yi and Sagawa describe the metropolis, we can see how, as Starrs explains, “modernist art is far more cosmopolitan or cross-cultural than it is ‘national’ or uni-cultural…modernist culture is better seen as the culture of Tokyo as well as Berlin, Shanghai as well London, rather than as the culture of any single nation-state” (Modernism 119). This notion is echoed in “Tokyo” when Yi writes: “If I go to New York’s ‘Broadway,’ I might suffer the same disillusionment” (339). Likely noting the similarities between Seoul and Tokyo, Yi is inferring that New York would also be similar. On these grounds, one can suggest that the differences between Tokyo and Seoul in the 1930s were less apparent than, say, the differences between Tokyo and a rural village in Japan at that time, or between Seoul and rural Korea. As a result, the modernisms of Tokyo and Seoul bear striking similarities that will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

As noted, Japanese modernism was an international movement, and I can further point this out in the way Sagawa directly invokes the Western canon in her poem “Song of the Sun” when she writes: “Because Dante’s Inferno does not exist there” (78). We also see this in “Wind is Blowing” when she makes a clear allusion to Marcel Proust in the poem’s final stanza, writing: “The people wait for spring,/In search of lost time./They will wish for the seagull/To once again return to their eyes” (100, emphasis added). We will see similar references to the Western tradition in Yi in chapter two as well. Thus,

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33 Esprit is a journal that Sagawa edited in conjunction with another Japanese modernist poet, Kitasono Katue (1902-1978). Given the attention on matters of internationalization, it is also significant that Sagawa’s journal is titled in French.
Japanese modernism is an international movement; Korean modernism is entwined with that movement; therefore, reading Yi alongside Japanese modernists who have been acknowledged as international provides an effective lens to foreground the international quality of Yi’s modernism as well. Doing this demonstrates that Korean modernism was not an insular phenomenon.

One way to highlight how these similarities manifest is to read Yi alongside his Japanese contemporaries, specifically Sagawa and Yasunari Kawabata, because, like Yi, they were also writers in pursuit of a pure, non-ideological literature. By looking at these authors in conjunction with one another, I will be able to demonstrate how facets of Yi’s work that are overlooked through nationalist and postcolonial readings come to light in relation to Japanese modernism, a movement which he is related to, and a movement that is also related to Korean modernism. And from an even broader perspective, by doing so, what also comes to attention is how Korean modernism, through its connection to the Japanese Empire, is also related to Western, and consequently, global modernism. This will be the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter 2: Yi Sang and his Japanese Modernist Contemporaries

Yi’s status as a modernist is made clear if we consider that his works were not produced in isolation, but rather, contemporaneously alongside other Japanese modernists (and, from the perspective of global modernism, modernists all over the world). Therefore, in this chapter, I will present Yi’s work in comparison and contrast to two Japanese modernists, the novelist Yasunari Kawabata, and the poet Chika Sagawa, in order to demonstrate that Korean and Japanese modernisms are not fundamentally different from one another. By doing so, I am able to further discuss the connection between East Asian modernism and modernism as a global phenomenon. This is the pattern I wish to draw attention to: Japanese and Western varieties of modernism are understood as informing one another to significant degrees. Korean modernism is typically not included in this debate. However, because of the close, albeit fraught, relationship between Korea and Japan during the modernist period, we also have to acknowledge Korean modernism’s link to the global modernist movement via the Japanese Empire. Instead of conceiving Korean modernism as a reaction against Japanese imperialism, I argue that modernism on the peninsula was itself a product and consequence of Japan’s Empire. The Empire, destructive and perverse in the way it unfolded historically, was nonetheless also Korea’s window to the globalizing community of the early twentieth century.

Because Japan and Korea were so inextricably connected with one another in the early twentieth-century, drawing these national boundaries to the point of seeing their modernisms as entirely distinct inhibits a productive discussion regarding how artists in Japan and artists on the peninsula in fact informed one another. It is not productive, in
other words, to treat Japanese and Korean modernisms as entirely exclusive movements. The similarities and differences that do exist should instead be understood as similarities and differences between individual artists working within an artistic milieu (i.e., modernism) that was unfolding on an international scale. To differentiate Korean and Japanese modernists on the grounds of either nationalism or postcolonialism by-passes the intricate similarities that do exist between these two movements. By ignoring these similarities, and limiting discussions to Japan’s brief but deeply felt colonial legacy, we also risk ignoring the larger historical and cultural ramifications of Japan’s widespread Empire in the early twentieth century.\(^{34}\)

As indicated in the first chapter, certain modernist aesthetics came to Japan via the West, but they were reimagined and integrated into an existing aesthetic system through Japanese development (just as certain Japanese aesthetics were integrated into Western modernism). A similar phenomenon was taking place in Korea as well. This would have mainly been seen as an incorporation and adaptation of Western aesthetics, as was the case in Japan. Dada and surrealism, for instance, would not have been conceived of as Japanese, but more fundamentally foreign and Western. My reasoning behind this claim has to do with the shared culture and history of East Asia. Prior to Japanese imperial interference, writes Hong Yung Lee, Japan, Korea, and China “shared similar cultural and institutional heritages” (29). Despite the formation of modern nation-

\(^{34}\) Todd A. Henry also highlights this issue when he writes how “Koreans began to refashion Keijô’s [i.e., Seoul’s] most symbolic spaces after 1945” (21). A more recent incident of this reconstruction occurred in 1995, with the demolition of the Government-General building, a “powerful reminder of the colonial period…In its place today stands a semirestored version of Kyongbok Palace” (21), which aims “to remind domestic and international visitors of the imagined glory of the Choson dynasty (1392-1910)” (21). Henry’s concern is that by romanticizing the past, South Korea is bypassing “the period when Japanese officials violently remade the royal/imperial capital into a showcase for Japanese modernity” (21). Similarly, Korean modernism should not simply be understood as a success story in its “rebellion” against Japanese colonization because it was in fact a part and consequence of the Empire’s violent and destructive legacy.
states, Japan and Korea share cultural similarities as a result of their geography. This makes it less surprising that the “neighbourhood” of Korean and Japanese writing and aesthetics was not simply undone by modernization. As such, I argue that Japanese culture would not have been perceived as alien in the same way Western culture was, even though Japanese culture in the early twentieth century, for Koreans, turned out to be much more invasive. What is crucial to draw from this dynamic is that because Korea was part of Japan at the time, when we talk about Japan, we are also indirectly talking about Korea. Hence, at the same time that Japanese artists were defining their own version of modernism, Korean modernists were as well, but these versions were not entirely distinct from one another.

The tendency to view Korean modernism as a response to Japanese colonialism, as seen in the nationalistic and postcolonial scholarship discussed in the Introduction, is political and a way of asserting Korea’s historical autonomy. By claiming that Korean modernism arose as a result of artists’ rebellion against Japanese influence, Koreans are able to claim a modernist canon of their own (as we saw in Choi and Shin, for example). It is understandable that Koreans desire to take possession of their twentieth century literary tradition, but a paradox can appear in the process of their doing so: during the first half of the twentieth century, notions of modernism and tradition were in conflict with one another. Japan and Korea do have shared, though long and distinct historical traditions, but modernity (as a concept in opposition to notions of tradition), and modernism (a movement that is understood here as dealing in part with the conflict between the modern and traditional) are not exactly part of those traditions. They are part

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35 This does not mean that Koreans were entirely yielding to Japanese rule. The March First Movement of 1919 is a case example, when “upwards of one million [Korean] participants” (Hwang 163) protested colonial rule and were violently suppressed (163).
of these literary and cultural traditions to the degree that they engage with and develop them through their literary and aesthetic experimentation; however, I argue that modernity had a tendency to homogenize disparate traditions, in the way, as discussed in the previous chapter, modern cities had more in common with each other than they did with the rural areas of the nations in which they were located. The fact that prior to the twentieth century Japan and Korea were somewhat disparate, then, does not mean twentieth century Japan and Korea were also dissimilar to the same degree. Differences exist between Korean and Japanese modernists, but we have to keep in mind that differences also always exist between individual artists, regardless of nationality.

Looking at Yi in this way allows me to address the following paradox: why should Yi, an internationally recognized modernist, be discussed in restrictive, nationalistic terms? Yi is internationally significant as a modernist, but not for nationalistic reasons. He is not significant, in other words, because he somehow speaks to contemporary notions South Korean national identity, as some criticism discussed in the Introduction suggests; in fact, Yi died before a division between North and South Korea existed. He needs to be understood, at least in part, as a modernist because his works make perceptive and innovative observations about modernity, and bring to this task the kinds of representational tools found in other modernists that were necessary to represent those conditions, conditions such as rapid scientific and technological development, industrialization, and a centeredness in metropolitan space. The traits that are used to designate Yi as a modernist are essentially the same ones that can be employed to describe Kawabata and Sagawa, as well as other Western artists as modernist, especially in the previously named “recurrent acts of fragmenting unities
(unities of character or plot or pictorial space or lyric form)...refusal of norms of beauty, [and] willingness to make radical linguistic experiment” (Levenson 3). These are very general aesthetic features to note, however, and hardly need to be pointed out in a modernist work. It is not an argument, for example, to point out that Yi’s work is fragmentary—it is, and a reader only needs to see it on the page to acknowledge this feature (see “Poem No. IV,” Appendix A). In view of “Poem No. IV,” which adequately displays Yi’s challenging style, it is also not controversial to assert that his works complicate standard conventions of beauty, or that his works are highly experimental.

A similar argument can be made considering Kawabata and Sagawa. Tyler, pointing to the experimentalism of early Kawabata, explains how Kawabata’s early works are “characterized by minimalism, surrealism, and a cinematic, almost frame-by-frame presentation of visual images” (92). Take “Pages of Madness” (1926), a scenario that the film director Teinosuke Kinugasa (1896–1972) asked Kawabata to write, as an example of Kawabata’s literary experimentation.36 The following passage, for instance, illustrates a diversion from standard, linear narrative technique:

  - A showy dancer dancing on a showy stage. In front of the stage, iron bars appear. Prison bars. The showy stage gradually changes into a cell at the insane asylum. The showy costume of the dancer gradually changes into the uniform of a mad person.

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36 Tyler explains that “[t]heir collaborative effort is an early and excellent example of avant-gardism in the Japanese pure film movement (jun eiga-geki eiga undō). Long thought lost or destroyed, the negative and positive prints were rediscovered in 1971. Made during the age of silent pictures, the film was shown in theaters to musical and narrative accompaniment provided by a benshi, or live narrator” (92).
Madman C in Cell 3. (93)\textsuperscript{37}

Part of the deviation from straightforward narrative here lies in the fact that cinema was a new way of telling a story. Here we see the use of juxtaposition as the image of the stage merges with that of the prison, which simultaneously creates a visually smooth but semantically jarring transition between settings, invoking the modernist trait of fragmentation. What I want to emphasize is that film as a new medium of artistic expression called for renovation of and experimentation with existing narrative techniques, both of which are on display here in Kawabata’s “Page of Madness.”\textsuperscript{38}

I also wish to extend this argument to Sagawa. Arai Toyomi explains that Sagawa was stylistically innovative as a poet, standing “out for the pristine newness of her sensual expression” (n.p.). In addition, she was also innovative simply by her being a woman poet in Japan at that time. As Toshiko Ellis writes, Sagawa is an example of a “wom[a]n who [broke] away from the conventions of ‘women’s poetry’” (93) by “subvert[ing] the image of femininity which ha[d] been traditionally portrayed in poems written by Japanese women” (93). In this way, we can see that Sagawa was not only trying to represent the fragmentation she perceived in the modern world, she was also trying to fragment certain notions of representational beauty. Consider her poem “1.2.3.4.5.,” which is among her most experimental works, in terms of its title, brevity, and surreal content: “Under a row of trees a young girl raises her green hand. Surprised by her plant-like skin, she looks, and eventually removes her silk gloves” (84). The reader will quickly notice the peculiarities of this poem, particularly the Dada-esque numerical title (which shares an affinity with the use of numbers in Yi’s “Poem No. IV,”

\textsuperscript{37} The bullet points are part of the original text.
\textsuperscript{38} This cinematic quality will also be mentioned later in the chapter when I discuss Kawabata’s \textit{Snow Country} (1956).
mentioned above) and the surreal confusion of reality and imagination. While the title at first seems arbitrary, it is likely related to the poem in its connection to the five (1,2,3,4,5) fingers of the green-skinned/silk-gloved hand. In any case, the poem is modernist, like the Yi and Kawabata examples, particularly in its willingness to experiment with and subvert ordinary usages of language and conceptions of beauty. This does not mean representing ugliness per se, but rather, representing beauty in new and non-conventional ways.

These are modernist features that appear so clearly on the surface of these writers’ works that I do not need to point them out further. Instead, I want to draw attention to additional content I see as being central to the modernist period, both in Korean and Japanese modernisms, but also in Western modernism as well. I wish to focus on a preoccupation with mirrors, as a device that both addresses and complicates internal and external representations of the modern; on attitudes of ambivalence towards modernity and tradition; and on medical imagery, particularly in the context of anxieties about a hygienic, sterile modernity. In order to achieve these ends, I will read Yi, Kawabata, and Sagawa next to each other. An analysis of these latter two Japanese modernists provides a lens to better interpret Yi’s work, which allows me to clearly establish his relationship to Japanese modernism.

To begin, consider Kawabata’s novel Snow Country (1936). Snow Country is not a modernist text because it is set in Japan or because it is full of imagery and symbolism that elicits a sense of “Japanese-ness” (though these are features of the text); it is modernist from a conceptual and formal point of view: in the way it treats its subject matter, the way it confronts the schism between the traditional and modern, and the way
it employs certain modernist strategies of juxtaposition. Consider the following passage.

In this scene, which occurs early in the novel, Shimamura is waiting on a train, observing the couple sitting in front of him. Shimamura

quickly drew a line across the misted-over window. A woman’s eye
floated up before him… But he had been dreaming, and when he came to himself he saw that it was only the reflection in the window of the girl opposite. Outside it was growing dark, and the lights had been turned on in the train, transforming the window into a mirror. The mirror had been clouded over with steam until he drew that line across it. (7)

As a metaphor for representation, the “strange mirror” (9) as employed here by Kawabata is significant in the way the glass of the train window is both a means of seeing through to outer phenomena, and a way of reflecting internal processes as well.

The window, opaque when steamed, and reflective when cleared, acts as a device of representational juxtaposition (of competing or non-intuitively connected images), in much the same way that early, experimental cinema overlaid separate strips of film to give the illusion of two images blurring into one. For example,

[in the depths of the mirror the evening landscape moved by, the mirror and the reflected figures like motion pictures superimposed one on the other. The figures and the background were unrelated, and yet the figures, transparent and intangible, and the background, dim in the gathering darkness, melted together into a sort of symbolic world not of this world. Particularly when a light out in the mountains shone in the center of the girl’s face, Shimamura felt his chest rise at the inexpressible beauty of
it…Since there was no glare, Shimamura came to forget that it was a
mirror he was looking at. The girl’s face seemed to be out in the flow of
the evening mountains. (9-10)

Not only is cinema’s influence on modernist aesthetics evident in these passages;
Kawabata is also drawing attention to the way artistic representation is a matter of
bringing internal and external phenomenon into juxtaposed focus.39 That is, in Snow
Country, Kawabata is depicting the way the modern psyche, symbolized here by the train
and its windows, is subject to a kind of mirroring that simultaneously lets certain
information in, and projects certain information out, the result of which is the kind of
juxtaposed scene described above. Therefore, what Shimamura sees out the window is
also partially what he sees within (a projection of his desires and imagination).

Oddly, however, Shimamura cannot see himself in this juxtaposed scene, and
instead maintains a voyeuristic perspective on the girl and the snowy countryside.
Shimamura’s seeming absence from this two-way reflection implies his presence at its
centre, specifically in the way it is his mind and imagination that perceive the floating
eye and the girl’s face in the mountain landscape. It is here that we can also see the
emergence of such modernist techniques as stream-of-consciousness, psychological
realism, and surrealism, in addition to modernist concerns about literature, narrative, and

39 This is a technique that also finds expression in the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique of
James Joyce, for instance, if we consider how in Ulysses (1922), Leopold Bloom’s inner life is presented
in tandem with his external reality (the streets of Dublin). In “Lotus-Eaters,” for example, when Bloom
walks by the “Oriental Tea Company” (86), he imagines “[t]he far east…the garden of the world, big lazy
leaves to float about on, cactuses, flowery meads, snaky lianas they call them…Waterlilies…Imagine
trying to eat tripe and cowheel” (86-7). The external reality of the tea store exists simultaneously with
Bloom’s internal reverie. From the perspective of Global Modernism, it is also significant to note how this
tea store in Dublin is able to evoke Asia in a similar way to how the West was evoked within the Japanese
modernist imaginary. In Sagawa’s “Winter Diary,” for example, she writes: “I stay up late reading
biographies of Western musicians. All these great people. It’s fascinating, like reading fairy tales” (108).
The West as fairy tale and Bloom’s escapist daydream further demonstrate the cross-cultural dialogue that
was occurring between Japanese and Western modernists.
representation being heavily mediated by the one writing and creating. The scene further calls into question how we perceive reality. Indeed, an eye is not actually floating out in the mountains, but at the same time, it is in the way that it is phenomenologically experienced as such, meaning Shimamura’s imagination blurs with reality (as we see in Sagawa’s “1.2.3.4.5.”).

Thus, Kawabata’s Snow Country is modernist in the way it posits imaginative and irrational approaches to representing reality in literature in ways that get closer to more fluid, unstable psychological perception. A Western cognate of this kind of literary treatment of perception occurs in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (1925), especially when the narrative is told through Septimus, who says he hears people “talking behind the bedroom walls” (97), and who once saw “an old woman’s head in the middle of a fern” (97). When he is at home with Rezia, he claims to see “faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen” (98), despite he and his wife being “quite alone” (98). From an empirical perspective, what Septimus perceives is not actually happening, but as far as his experience of reality is concerned, it is. The notable difference between Septimus and Shimamura, however, is that Septimus is shell-shocked and Shimamura is not. The similarity lies in how Woolf and Kawabata both allow for the imagination and surreal psychological occurrences to infringe upon stable accounts of reality. Again, we see this in Sagawa’s “1.2.3.4.5.” in the way the speaker confuses her silk gloves for green skin.

Moreover, as with Snow Country, mirrors are also a significant and recurring theme in Yi’s work. For instance, in his collection of poetry “Crow’s-Eye View,” mirrors
are mentioned twenty-four times (12, 13, 14, 21, 22). In “Poem No. XV,” for example, Yi writes:

I am in the main room, which has no mirror. The I which I left in the mirror is also absent. Now, I am shaking for fear of my I in the mirror. I wonder whether the I in the mirror is weaving a plot to hurt me while he is somewhere else. (21)

A high degree of anxiety is expressed here, particularly a mistrust regarding representation, to the degree that Yi feels his mirrored image may even cause him bodily harm. As we will see, however, like Shimamura in *Snow Country*, Yi tends to choose aesthetic representation over lived experience. Given Yi’s frail health, it is understandable why he chose representation over reality: likely, to escape the realities of tuberculosis. When Yi sees himself in the mirror as someone who will hurt him, this may in part be a result of the reflection of himself being a reminder of his physical suffering, his body’s conspiring against him. The mirror also makes an appearance in “Wings,” but in contrast to how it is used in “Poem No. XV.” Yi writes: “I take out my wife’s hand mirror and play with it in various ways. A mirror is of practical use only when it reflects one’s face. At all other times it is nothing but a toy” (69). In “Poem No. XV,” the mirror is depicted as a threatening, even possibly physically harmful device, but in “Wings,” Yi posits the mirror as a toy, though Yi is likely being sardonic. Consider the magnifying glass in “Wings” instead. A magnifying glass is not a mirror per se, but it is similarly a representational device in the way it can take a small object and re-present it in a larger, magnified format:
I take out a tiny magnifying glass and play with fire, scorching the sheets of *chirigami*\(^{40}\) that only my wife uses. I refract the sun’s parallel rays and gather them at a focal point until it heats up, singeing the paper and giving off wisps of smoke. It’s only a matter of seconds before a hole appears in the burning paper, but the suspense is so pleasurable that it almost kills me. (69)

Yi uses the magnifying glass, a device of representation, to destroy cosmetic tissues, which are themselves accessories of beauty. Thus, here we see how Yi’s aesthetic project has embedded within it the idea of dismantling and problematizing conventional notions of beauty.

Sagawa also demonstrates a preoccupation with mirrors. In her essay, “When Passing Between Trees,” she writes:

> But to think that everyone must gaze into a single mirror and distinguish black from white is foolish. It is not so much about searching for boundaries, but rather the precise snapping together of the infinite allusions on either side of that single line, with the cross-sections of a leaping field of vision. (124)

Sagawa speaks to the way representation ought to dismantle dichotomies. Rather than being didactic, pointing to simple conclusions, works of art should encourage the “snapping together” (124) of disparate and competing ideas, the consequence of which is a “leaping field of vision.” (124). This refers to the ability to see further, more clearly, and the ability to move forward historically. Of course, Sagawa’s idea here is also instrumental to the project of Global Modernism more generally, as well. Rather than

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\(^{40}\) A translator’s note explains that *chirigami* is “the Japanese word for facial or cosmetic tissue” (69).
drawing strict national lines between modernists, it is more effective to see how their works “snap” together in ways that invite further discussion regarding they ways modernism and modernity developed in the twentieth century. Not only does this kind of questioning help us make sense of what occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, it can also help us understand how the conditions of our contemporary modernity (or postmodernity) came to be, particularly in the way such speculation allows us to track and revise essentialized versions of twentieth century history. Thus, while these three authors employ mirrors in their own ways, what we can gather from this is that the mirror is a recurring theme in East Asian modernism that is not limited to ethnic or cultural boundaries. Instead, these authors employ the mirror in their own individualistic ways to address anxieties regarding representation that they see as being part of the modern condition.

To refocus on Snow Country, I would also like to draw attention to the relationship between Yoko (the girl on the train) and the mountain landscape. In this scene, the beauty of the snow country and Yoko blur into one. The traditional beauty of the Japanese countryside blurring with that of Yoko results in a kind of eroticized aestheticism, which in turn functions as a means to overcome the ugliness and fragmentation of modernity. Shimamura sees Yoko as “a character out of an old, romantic tale” (11). It should be further noted, as well, that this blurring is enabled by modernity (i.e., the train), and that it is the representation of Yoko in the train window that takes precedence over her actual presence insofar as Shimamura’s perception of her beauty and its ability to address his modern anxiety are concerned:
The window was dark by the time they came to the signal stop. The charm of the mirror faded with the fading landscape. Yoko’s face was still there, but for all the warmth of her ministrations, Shimamura had found in her a transparent coldness. He did not clear the window as it clouded over again. (11)

It is in Yoko’s reflection that one would think Shimamura would see a cold transparency, but as a result of his aestheticism, this relationship is inverted. The romance of the scene recedes as the traditional, romantic landscape passes out of sight.

Of particular interest here is how Yoko’s beauty is also meant to be synonymous with notions of a pure and ideal traditional Japan. After Yoko shows potential romantic interest in Shimamura, however, she is rejected on the following grounds: Shimamura feels that “something like that evening mirror was no doubt at work” (23), and he dislikes “the thought of drawn-out complications from an affair with a woman whose position was so ambiguous…beyond that he saw her as somehow unreal, like the woman’s face in that evening mirror” (23-4). He wants her to remain unattainable and separate from him. Complications arise from Yoko’s ambiguous status as traditional or modern, Japanese or Western, but the “evening mirror,” for Shimamura, is able to create a comfortable and detached distance between the two of them. In other words, Shimamura would rather relate to Yoko on aesthetic and idealist terms than on more intimate human terms. This is similar to Shimamura’s fascination with the Western ballet and the fact that he has never seen one in person. As with Yoko, “[h]is taste for the western dance had much the same air of unreality about it” (24), in the sense that “[n]othing could be more comfortable than writing about the ballet from books” (25).
For Shimamura, it is “an unrivaled armchair reverie…and yet is [is] also possible that, hardly knowing, he [is] treating [Yoko] exactly as he treat[s] the western dance” (25). Thus, Shimamura’s attraction to the unreality of Yoko, who is a real woman, leads to feelings of ambivalence.

Shimamura’s ambivalence toward Yoko is also indicative of his ambivalence regarding both tradition and modernity. Yoko is not a geisha, but her presence at the hot spring brings her very close to that role: “[t]here was something about her manner of dress that suggested the geisha, but she did not have the trailing geisha skirts. On the contrary, she wore her soft, unlined summer kimono with an emphasis on careful propriety” (18). Later, we read: “Yoko worked only in the kitchen, apparently. She was not yet serving at parties” (127). Her social status as traditional or modern remains ambiguous, and too real for Shimamura’s idealism. He is thus unable, or at least reluctant, to engage in a real, human relationship with her. This may explain why Shimamura pursues his relationship with Komako, the hot spring geisha with whom he is entangled in a fraught and unresolved love affair.

Even though Komako was once a geisha in Tokyo, she is more indicative of the pure, romantic notion of tradition Shimamura desires. Her social status as a geisha means she dresses, acts, and looks in a way that, compared to Yoko, better signifies tradition, even if this notion of tradition is an aspect of Shimamura’s idealistic tendencies. Unlike Yoko, who can only satisfy Shimamura’s idealism in his imagination, Komako’s engagement in a traditional role in the Japanese countryside allows her, intentionally or not, to better enact Shimamura’s desires. This idea is also present in how Komako seems to see herself in opposition to the modern condition. In conversation with Shimamura,
she says: “Tokyo people are complicated. They live in such noise and confusion that
their feelings are broken to little bits” (118). In light of her feelings about urban
modernity, it is possible that Komako’s reason for leaving Tokyo is similar to
Shimamura’s; in order to escape the fragmentary chaos of modernity, both of them flee
to the snow country, a traditional space that promises a remedial, unifying solution to the
fragmentation experienced in Tokyo.\footnote{I posit this reading in addition to the fact that Komako has also returned to the snow country to become a
geisha in order to pay the medical bills of a man she was engaged with who is suffering from “intestinal tuberculosis” (Kawabata 55).}

Similarly, Alan Tansman claims that \textit{Snow Country} “paint[s] the world in its
own colors and transform[s] it into a space that provides a solution to fractured modern
consciousness—a space of merging and wholeness, a space that is white” (115). As such,\textit{ Snow Country} is also modernist in its treatment of modernity: the stark division between
the spa and Tokyo, as exemplified by the train tunnel that creates a separation between
the snow country and modern Japan, speaks directly to the sense of discomfort and
ambivalence expressed in modernist works regarding the confrontation between tradition
and modernity. Starrs further elucidates how Shimamura arrives in the snow country
“through a long tunnel as if travelling Alice-like to a separate world or fantasyland, to
escape if not to overcome modernity—it is a tunnel into the past or into an idyllic ‘pure
Japan’ still relatively unspoiled by modernity” (\textit{Modernism} 173). Starrs further contends
that Shimamura “reemerges from the tunnel back into the ‘modern world’ on his way
back to Tokyo—to his obvious displeasure” (173). Thus, as Nina Cornyetz explains,
\textit{ Snow Country} can be seen as a text “that move[s] forward while gazing backward”
(330). In its “quest for innovation and originality” (330) it makes a “\textit{return} to tradition”
(330, emphasis original), which is also why Starrs considers Kawabata an “‘anti-modern’
modernist” (Modernism 178). I would further suggest that this paradox is adequately represented by the train, which is itself emblematic of modernity: the train returns to the romanticized and traditional past of the snow country, but it is the train’s modern technology itself that allows this to happen. Even though Snow Country is set in a traditional landscape, its engagement with that landscape is discernably modernist in the ambivalent relationship expressed regarding tradition and modernity.

Thus, in the case of Snow Country, the simple quality of being Japanese does not of itself equate with being modern or modernist. The same can be said of a Korean work. A text to consider in relation to Kawabata’s Snow Country is Yi’s very brief short story “A Discontinued Knot” (1936-7), which shares a number of plot similarities with Snow Country, namely, a trip to a hot spring resort and a romantic relationship with one of the women employed there. As Yi writes, at twenty-three he “depart[s] for B, a quiet newly-opened hot spring resort” (22), where he meets Kŭmhong, a kisaeng (a Korean courtesan and entertainer whose social status was similar to a geisha’s), who is “twenty-one years old” (22), a year older than Komako during the events of Snow Country. Again, the fact that the story is set in Korea, that instead of meeting a geisha, Yi meets a kisaeng—that is, these features of national locale—do not make “A Discontinued Knot” a modernist text; it is modernist in its sensibility, like Snow Country, particularly in its ambivalent

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42 The translation of this story appears in the 1968 issue of Korea Journal; however, a publication date for Yi’s story is not provided. It is likely, however, that the story was written sometime in the late 1930s, probably 1936 or ‘37. This can be inferred from the following lines: “I too became stricken with age without quite realizing it, for now I had put on as many years as twenty-seven” (24), and “[t]o every one whom I met, I said proudly that I was going to Tokyo” (24). Yi was almost 27 (approximately 26 and a half) when he died in Tokyo in 1937.

43 Ruth Barraclough explains that kisaeng “were traditionally part of the caste economy of Chosŏn Dynasty Korea (1392–1910)” (n.p.). They were “members of the lowest caste...yet their accomplishments brought them into intimate contact with the highest echelons of Chosŏn society” (n.p.). As with geisha, there were “many varieties of kisaeng labour—musical performance, dance, conversation, singing, poetry recitation and improvisation, flirting, soothing, flattering, and sexual labour” (n.p.).
treatment of both modernity and tradition. This modernist trait, in other words, transcends specific national demarcation.

This ambivalence is evident in the relationship between Yi and Kŭmhong. On the one hand, he prostitutes her out to his friends:

I did not pay Kŭmhong any fee for her service…Instead, I recommended to her Wu, a prodigal who had studied in France. Obeying me, she went accompanied by him to a private bath…I also recommended Kŭmhong to C, my next-door lodger and a lawyer by trade. C, moved by my enthusiasm, accepted my offer to ruin her. But my beloved Kŭmhong was always at my side, displaying with a childish boast the ten won notes she had received from Wu, C and others. (22-3)

On the other hand, in contradiction to the blatant chauvinism exhibited above, Yi marries Kŭmhong and then, after the two separate and Kŭmhong asks if he is going to remarry, Yi remains reticent, explaining that “[e]ven if you let a woman leave you once and for all, you should send her away with sympathetic words; with this good sense, I parted from Kŭmhong” (24). Yi’s empathy for Kŭmhong here seems to be at odds with how he pimps her out earlier in their relationship. However, the reason the couple’s marriage fails is because “a nostalgia for her old life came to Kŭmhong” (23), and she starts selling herself again (remember Kŭmhong was somewhat of a prostitute when Yi met her). Yi struggles to accept this: “I confess I personally was of the opinion that a wife should prize her chastity…but it was, I concluded, a mere slip for Kŭmhong to pretend to be the kind of mannerly, lawful wife you saw everywhere” (23). Yet, again, later in the story, Yi’s overt chauvinism reemerges: “I held a firm, personal belief that under a thin
veneer every woman is something of a prostitute, though it never occurred to me that anyone who received my silver coins was entirely such” (24). The conflict that is depicted in Yi’s contradictory statements about Kŭmhong and women in general is also related to his ambivalence regarding tradition and modernity. His more traditional, conservative values are in conflict with his modern ones. He simultaneously desires a chaste, modest wife, but also the sexually liberated traits he sees in Kŭmhong.

The troubled relationship between these two lovers can also be read as the troubled relationship between tradition and modernity, and I maintain that this fraught relationship was not exclusive to the peninsula. Hyeshin Kim, for example, examines the relationship between the Korean “‘New Woman” (sinyosong) and the courtesan (kisaeng)” (97). The sinyosong (New Woman) of 1920s and 1930s Korea occupied a similar position to Japan’s moga (Modern Girl), both commanding attention as “timely symbol[s] of modernity” (97) and “beautiful ornaments of modern urban space” (97). Yet, “the newness of their appearance and behavior threatened the elite male status quo (97). In contrast, however, images of the kisaeng “reminded the Korean male elite of their dynastic past and signified ‘tradition,’ which was considered to be lost in the New Woman, who was Westernized” (97). Similarly, Jan Bardsley focuses on a particular incident in 1912 when “a small group of New Women known as the Bluestockings ignited public scandal by visiting a teahouse in [Tokyo’s] Yoshiwara pleasure quarters” (n.p.), where they interacted with geisha. The “incident provoked more outrage than laughter” (n.p.), and “[f]or three days after the story was published in the newspaper, people passing by the most famous Bluestockings’ family home threw stones day and night” (n.p.). For these New Women, it “was a rude awakening to the borders of gender,
sexuality and class, but it was no doubt a reminder to geisha, too, of their marginalised and circumscribed place in Japan” (n.p). This demonstrates how at times strict measures were taken to draw a line between tradition and modernity in Japan and Korea. It also points to a paradox in Kǔmhong’s character and in Yi’s attraction to her. He is attracted to her on the grounds that she reminds him of a romantic past, one in which his masculinity could be firmly intact, but in actuality, her actions turn out to emasculate him. The lawful, modest wives Yi sees, though they may appear modern on the surface, may in fact be more traditional than Kǔmhong. In this way, we can see how Yi is a modernist in his dismantling and problematizing of dualistic understandings of tradition and modernity.

A similar pattern also finds expression in the relationships between Shimamura, Komako, and Yoko, particularly in the way that Shimamura is torn between a traditional idealism as represented by Komako, and a more fragmentary, ambiguous modernity as depicted in Yoko’s character. Starrs also draws attention to this when he writes that, ironically, despite Shimamura finding “exactly the kind of woman he is looking for [i.e., Yoko], he is incapable of forming any deep or lasting relationship with her, because he himself is too ‘corrupted’ by modernity” (Modernism 174). Shimamura “is unable to ‘overcome’ the modernity within himself: the profoundly alienated state of a modern intellectual, his own narcissism and emotional sterility” (174). One interpretation of this corruption and alienation, I argue, is offered when considering Brian Phillips’s position that Kawabata’s works are often “intensely unsettling” (420) in their portrayal of “the psychic cost of aesthetic pleasure, the deadening of sympathy and sense in minds highly susceptible to beauty” (420). “For Kawabata’s characters” (420), writes Phillips, “beauty
is a force that draws them out of the real world and into their own minds; it shines so fiercely in their imaginations that it blinds them to the reality around them” (420). The more these characters “perceive the beauty of the world…the less they are able to extend love or understanding to the people in their lives, [and] the less they are able to act” (421). Thus, in Kawabata, beauty corrupts and further alienates in the way it paralyzes, and we see this in *Snow Country*: instead of Yoko, Shimamura pursues Komako (though it remains unclear whether he actually stays with her), and Yoko either dies or is seriously injured by what may be a suicide attempt at the end of the novel. This tragedy is possibly a result of Shimamura’s inability to act upon his and Yoko’s unspoken relationship. Yet, the notion of paralysis is in conflict with the forward progression of modernity. It is not beauty itself that is paralysing necessarily, but rather the escapist tendencies that come along with a life fixated upon aesthetic experience.

Yi exhibits a similarly conflicted idyllic aestheticism in his poem “Girl,” from the collection “Paradise Lost,” published posthumously in 1939, in which the speaker describes a photograph of an unnamed woman: “The girl is certainly a photograph of someone. She always remains silent” (341). In the translator’s note to the collection of poems, Jack Saebyok Jung explains that the girl “is not physically real, but only as real as an imagined thing…she behaves like a kind of muse, giving birth to something inside of him, which the author must bring out of himself in turn” (337). It is the idea of the girl that stands in for the real thing (like how Shimamura reads about ballet and does not wish to see one). This is similar to the desire for the idea of tradition or an idyllic past, a trait that has been noted in Yi and Kawabata earlier. In the way beauty allows an individual to escape the ugliness and suffering of reality, so to do these romantic ideas of
tradition allow one to escape the perceived ugliness of modernity. In Kawabata, Komako is the object of beauty herself, and the idyllic, traditional snow country is the locale in which that kind of beauty resides; this allows Shimamura to escape his corrupt, alienated modern condition.

This escapist tendency also appears in “Wings,” in which imaginative proxies of reality are devised in order to escape the discomfort of real, lived modernity. When his wife is away, Yi goes through her things, and in the process pieces together various aspects of her physical being:

When the exotically sensual fragrances pervade my lungs, I feel the soft, autonomic shutting of my eyes. The perfume is definitely a fragment of my wife’s scent…Which part of my wife’s body gave off this smell?... Her scent is most likely the sum of all the different fragrances arrayed here. (69)

These “parts” of his wife come to represent a physical wholeness and presence; the fragmentation into parts is itself a commentary on the dissolution of Yi’s marriage to his wife, and on how her roles as woman and wife have been fragmented by modernity as well. The skirts and blouses hung in his wife’s room act similarly to her perfumes and cosmetics: “[t]he varied patterns are pleasing to the eye. From snatches of her skirts I conjure again and again the whole of my wife’s body and the various poses it can strike, and then my heart always misbehaves” (69). Like Shimamura, then, Yi suffers from a deeply alienated and corrupted psychological state that inhibits enriching or real relationships with others, which furthers the notion of Yi’s work being significantly
entrenched in a state of ambivalence over the modern condition. It will also be demonstrated shortly that Yi is in a similar state of paralysis.

First, however, I wish to point out that Yi was aware of his ambivalence towards modernity and tradition. In “Tokyo,” for example, he writes that his morality “reek[s] of the musty stench of the 19th century” (340), and in “Wings” he writes: “[t]he 19th century—block it off, if you can. Dostoyevsky’s vaunted mind is about to go to waste, it seems. Calling Hugo a chunk of French bread, who said that?—I think it a well-made remark” (66). Further, in “Poem No. XIV,” Yi refers to “[t]he dolorous sound of history moving in reverse along the parabola” (20). Looking down from a turret, Yi sees a beggar, whom he thinks may be “the long departed ghost of history in toto” (20). On the one hand, tradition reeks, is dolorous, and ghostly, but on the other, Yi struggles to embrace modernity as a solution to tradition as well. In the past, Yi’s inability to embrace modernity has been read as his unwillingness to embrace his Japanese colonizers (as critics such as Em and Thornber argue), and I agree to an extent, but not primarily from the vantage point of postcolonialism. Rather, Yi’s reluctance to embrace Japan has much to do with his reluctance to embrace modernity itself. Yi is struggling with the same modernist problematic that Japanese modernists and modernists all over the world were dealing with: the tension between tradition and modernity.

This conflict finds further expression in Yi’s seeming confusion in “Wings” over how to spend money and how his wife is making it. As with “A Discontinued Knot,” Yi’s wife in “Wings” is also a prostitute: “[a]t night my wife slips on nicer, neater clothes than what she wears during the day. She goes out during the day and also at night...Not only does she go out, she also has many visitors” (71). Yet, Yi struggles to
guess her profession: “[h]as my wife been holding down a job? I have no idea what it is. At such times I [investigate] why my wife always has money, why she has so much of it” (71). These visitors are her clientele, and when they leave, she takes the money she makes and puts it beside Yi’s head; eventually she gives him a piggy bank, presumably so he can save up some money. However, the piggy bank is “utterly meaningless” (73) to Yi, so he decides to “toss it into the latrine” (73). One way to read Yi’s inability to understand finance is to see how it is meant to signify his struggle to understand the modern, imperial-capitalist system. For example,

During one of my wife’s outings, I snuck outside. Once out, I exchanged the silver coins, which I had made sure to bring with me, for paper bills. It amounted to a whole 5 wŏn. I put the money in my pocket and wandered around and around just to forget what I was after…As the night wore on, I drifted aimlessly through street after street, forgetting my objective. As for the money, of course, I did not spend a single chŏn. (73)

The paradox here is that Yi—the modernist writer—someone with keen insights into the conditions of modernity, describes himself as someone who struggles to operate within those conditions, which as indicated earlier, demonstrates his ambivalent feelings towards tradition and modernity, and by extension, the Japanese Empire as the catalyst of this schism. Yet, Yi is neither pro- nor anti- Japan/Korea; rather, his works suggest a deep ambivalence towards tradition, modernity, the Japanese Empire, as well as his place as a Korean within the context of a Korea prior to ostensibly concrete notions of contemporary Koreanness. As Frankl rightly claims, Yi wrote “not as a Korean, or as a Japanese…but as an individual” (“Marking Territory” 350).
We can also see how Yi’s desire to escape the ambivalence he experiences regarding tradition and modernity also leads to paralysis, specifically in his inability to spend money and act upon his wife’s infidelity, whether this means confronting her or leaving her. He is unable to act. Rather than confront his wife, he spends his time alone conjuring fantasies of her by fetishizing objects that represent her (clothes, perfume, make-up). Likewise, instead of developing a meaningful relationship with Yoko, Shimamura chooses Komako and the fantasy of a traditional, unspoiled Japan she represents to him.

Like Kawabata and Yi, Sagawa’s work also addresses the ambivalent relationship between tradition and modernity. Nakayasu explains how Sagawa was “sceptical of her peers and their tendency to get consumed by the trends of the moment” (vi), but also, “[w]hile many Japanese people were struggling with their complex feelings about the way Western culture was rushing into Japan, [she] seem[ed] to have embraced it” (vi). This conflicting engagement with tradition and modernity is eloquently expressed in Sagawa’s essay, “Prelude:”

If the past is to be thrown away like a worn-out piece of air, I wonder what kind of conversation would be the most comforting to the aged. The reason why people look back into the fading distance until their scars shine with brilliance is because we hold in our hearts the belief that our youthful adolescence lies in the direction where the flowers are blooming.

(71)

As in Snow Country, with its train taking Shimamura into the past, and in Yi’s “A Discontinued Knot,” with its attraction to the ambiguously traditional Kŭmhong, Sagawa
discusses a similar “forward-by-moving-backwards” kind of motion, by voicing the way people look to the past as if somewhere in that romanticized and ideal landscape they will encounter a spring in which flowers bloom, where futurity and the ability to overcome and remedy the conditions of modernity can be found. Hence, the way Yi treats the relationship between tradition and modernity is not exclusive to Korea, and the way Kawabata and Sagawa treat the relationship between tradition and modernity is not exclusive to Japan.

Another way to break away from this kind of national exclusivity is to focus on medical imagery and anxieties concerning a sterile modernity in these three writers. Todd. A Henry explains that part of the Japanese Empire’s process of modernization were policies for the promotion of a specifically hygienic modernity:

Like their counterparts in Meiji Japan, the leaders of Korea’s sanitation cooperatives focused on promoting household and personal hygiene as well as conveying basic notions of public health. They also worked closely with the police to ensure that residents participated in semiannual clean-ups, and they subjected symptoms of contagious disease to biomedical inspection and treatment…this regulatory system allowed itinerant doctors and police officers to turn an outside, medical gaze upon potentially uncooperative residents…it also facilitated a popular, inside gaze by relying on local leaders to monitor the sanitary practices of uncooperative neighbors. (132)

As noted in the previous chapter, part of the Empire’s modernizing initiative was to become more global, and these policies of hygiene were part of that initiative. Thus,
these hygienic practices are not simply an extension of traditional Japanese means of hygiene, but also the result of internationalization, particularly the incorporation of Western medicine and science. With this in mind, the anxieties expressed by these authors concerning a hygienic modernity come into focus as a result of their writing in a time and geographical region in which notions of a hygienic modernity were part of the dominant ideology. The significance of this kind of medical and scientific imagery also becomes clear when we consider that institutions like the modern hospital were perceived as novel, modern spaces, and likely, this was especially true in Japan and Korea. As such, Western medicine for these authors is not only alienating in terms of its objective methods, but also in itself as a foreign, alien institution. Its newness would likely have been experienced more intensely than in the West, where such institutions originated, and I think this may account for the prevalence of such imagery in these East Asian writers (though we will see that medical concerns exist within Western modernism as well).

For Yi and Sagawa, who both suffered from physical illness and died young, these medical anxieties would also likely have been amplified. In Kawabata, cleanliness comes to represent a refreshing escape from the dirtiness of modern life, whereas in Yi and Sagawa, due to their health predicaments, hygiene and medical imagery has much a

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44 As Laurinda Abreu and Sally Sheard explain, in the late nineteenth century, modern hospitals came into being as a result of “scientific advances, especially through the development of anesthesia and antisepsis, new imaging techniques and pharmaceutical treatments” (1). Further, Kiyoshi Iwasa explains that while Japan has a long history of hospitals as well, primarily Buddhist institutions, the hospital as the modern institution we recognize today only came into being after the Meiji Restoration (341). I argue this logic extends to Korea as well as a result of Japan’s colonial and modernizing mission there, in addition to Yi’s preoccupation with medical imagery and anxieties about hygiene that relate strongly with Kawabata and Sagawa.

45 As noted in the Introduction, Yi died of tuberculosis when he was 26. Sagawa died of stomach cancer when she was 24 (Nakayasu i).
more visceral and immediate significance in the way the modern is treated in their work. For example, in *Snow Country*, we get the following description of Komako:

She wore no powder, and the polish of the city geisha had over it a layer of mountain color. Her skin, suggesting the newness of a freshly peeled onion or perhaps a lily bulb, was flushed faintly, even to the throat. More than anything, it was clean. (73)  

Shimamura is also obsessed with *chijimi*, a type of fabric, specifically a “grass-linen of [the] snow country” (150). The thread is “spun in the snow, and the cloth woven in the snow, washed in the snow, and bleached in the snow” (150). For Shimamura, the snow has a purifying effect, and the fact that *chijimi* weaving is traditional labour adds to its purity.

Yet, this obsession with hygiene raises questions about whether this is a kind of traditional hygiene, or a more modern one. Japan has a long history of bathing culture; thus, concerns over hygiene are not a distinctly modern phenomenon in Japan, but in *Snow Country* I think Kawabata evokes hygiene and the spa in a particularly modernist kind of way. On the one hand, the past is dirty because a lack of modern sanitation and medical knowledge means certain diseases can flourish to a greater degree. On the other hand, modernity itself is also filthy as a result of industrialization, pollution, and overcrowding. In *Snow Country*, though, the past is idealized, and so the cleanliness that

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46 Shimamura’s obsession with the cleanliness of both Komako and Yoko is further mentioned on pages 18, 23, 31, 32, 54, 131, 132, and 150 of *Snow Country*.
47 See Lee Butler’s “Washing off the Dust”: Baths and Bathing in Late Medieval Japan” in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring, 2005).
is fetishized by Shimamura has more to do with a desire to escape his contemporaneous, modern present than it does with articulating a historically accurate depiction of Japan’s bathing traditions.

Shimamura’s obsession with cleanliness can also be read in terms of his fixation on beauty more generally and his desire to be outside the ugliness and discomfort of embodied experience. This is a kind of hygiene that borders on the clinical, referred to earlier by Henry as the “medical gaze” (132), which I take to reflect the emotional sterility and detachment that characterizes Shimamura’s relationships with others.

Shimamura’s aestheticized, hygiene-orientated gaze is emphasized right at the outset of *Snow Country* when he sees the disembodied eye floating out in the mountains as reflected in his strange, train-window mirror. To be precise, the distinction I draw here is between hygiene for hygiene’s sake, and a hygiene that is clinical for the purpose of sterilization. Of course, in actual medical settings, this latter kind of hygiene is crucial, but in the emotional and psychological realms, it can be damaging in how it dehumanizes and objectifies self and others.

This is the kind of hygiene, or medical gaze, that also characterizes modernity in Yi’s work. Recall “Poem No. IV,” which was discussed earlier in this chapter (Appendix A). Regarding the disoriented array of reversed numbers presented in the middle of the poem, Yi writes: “[t]he problem regarding the patient’s disposition” (9), and then at the bottom of the poem, “[t]he above diagnosis by the doctor in charge Yi Sang” (9). The medical terminology, particularly “patient” and “diagnosis,” point to health anxieties. In addition, consider the sterile, “operation room” (13) setting of “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy,” which was briefly discussed in the first chapter. This poem focuses on what
may be some form of surgery or dissection, the end goal of which remains unclear, heightening the sense of anxiety: “[r]eleasing the examinee from the operation room, accordingly. The next day…Not having yet acquired the satisfactory anatomical result” (13), the examinee is called back: Choosing the vacuum of open air. First, attaching the hand-ends of two anesthetised arms to the surface of the mirror…Up to the shoulder-end of the two arms…(Disposal of the two arms) (or reduction of the two arms) and continue…Future steps not being known. (14)

Unlike Kawabata, one can see in the above examples of Yi’s work that the notion of a hygienic modernity, and what that signified to him, finds expression in feelings of fear of being a patient, a patient of both the self and of others. Rather than hygiene being associated with beauty and escape as it is in Snow Country, here the clinically hygienic setting of the operating room signifies anxieties regarding objectification and dissociation of and from the self. Because Yi was ill, there are obviously fears of being rendered the patient, and hence objectified. We can also get a sense of the fear more generally of becoming a dehumanized component of the mechanized, industrial landscape of modernity. In the previous chapter, I pointed out that we also see these anxieties in Yi’s “Tokyo” and Sagawa’s “Flowers Between the Fingers,” when they express concern over the possible fusion of humans and machines as a result of living in such close proximity (Yi 399, Sagawa 92), and in Sagawa’s “Chamber Music” when she refers to her fellow train commuters as “boring robots” (109).

Dehumanizing objectification is also expressed by Sagawa when considering the following passage from “Dark Summer,” in which she describes her time at a hospital:
The ophthalmologist peered into my inflamed eye from above a single layer of skin. Scalpel and scissors. Shot of cocaine. I feel the pleasure of these things stimulating me from afar. I am sure that the doctor will remove only the blue part from my retina…I hear a cane tapping the floor boards one by one. There is a tedious loneliness here, ravaged like an abandoned house. (46)

While Sagawa expresses more trust here toward her doctor and medicine than we see in Yi’s work (though the pleasure inducing shot of cocaine may be a factor), she still describes the hospital as an alienating, lonely place, “ravaged like an abandoned house” (46). Later, we also get a description of a boy who was confined in an insane asylum:

I knew a young boy named Midori. He seemed frail…Because he had just come out of the isolation ward…He is running into the dim orchard…bare white feet floating in space. In the end the boy never came back. (47)

Sagawa is possibly making an identification with this boy, herself also knowing what it is to be confined and trapped as a result of her poor health; the “tedious loneliness” (47) she experiences in the hospital allows her to identify with the boy and his confinement. In the end, the boy runs away and never comes back, which likely becomes a reminder for Sagawa of her impending death (she was diagnosed with stomach cancer at age twenty-four and died soon afterward). Again, by becoming the object of the medical gaze, a certain degree of humanity is stripped away.

These anxieties are not specific to the Japanese Empire nor Korea, however; similar anxieties are expressed by Western modernists such as T.S. Eliot, whose “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915) includes such lines as: “Like a patient etherised
upon a table” (13) and “And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,/When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,/Then how should I begin” (14). In each of these lines, Prufrock is an objectified patient, specifically dehumanized when considering him “pinned and wriggling on the wall” (14) like a specimen in an entomologist’s bug collection. We also see these anxieties expressed in Mrs. Dalloway regarding Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw’s treatment of Septimus. Both doctors are, from their contemporaneous medical perspectives, dismissive of Septimus’ suffering, itself a direct consequence of modern, mechanized warfare. As Septimus puts it, “[o]nce you fall…human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you” (Woolf 124). What this means is that such concerns are not nation-specific, but more generally related to conditions and consequences of modernity as they emerged on a global scale.

Thus, regarding the themes discussed in this chapter (mirrors, tradition vs. modernity, and hygienic modernity), each writer brings to these topics their own individualistic style and their own intent. Yet, it has also been demonstrated that they share much in common, despite nationality (and even gender), on the level of the content they deal with and how this allows us to call these writers modernists. It is not because of their nationality, but their modernist sensibility in terms of the content they deal with, and how they deal with it, that we can speak of their modernism. By focusing on these similarities, it is clear that Yi is not exclusively a Korean modernist, and that the content of his works is not exclusive to the peninsula either. Rather, he shares much in common with his Japanese modernist contemporaries, and both through and with them, to modernism as a global phenomenon.
Indeed, as Kawabata and Sagawa were contemporaries of Yi’s, he was a contemporary of theirs as well. However, as the debate exists, it would be unlikely for someone to argue that a Japanese modernist looks like a Korean modernist. It is one thing to say the opposite, but it becomes more difficult to invert the paradigm. The idea seems to be that Korean modernism is a derivative of, if not only a reaction, to Japanese modernism. What I have been arguing instead is that Korean and Japanese modernism are both part of the same artistic and historical climate, and thus have to be understood in terms of each other, and not simply on their own nationalistic terms. Modernism was a global phenomenon, and Japan and Korea were part of that moment. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will demonstrate how certain modernist characteristics found in Yi’s oeuvre also appear in post-war Japanese literature. By doing so, I wish to draw attention to the importance of breaking down hegemonic understandings of the East Asian modernist canon and its relationship to the global modernist canon more generally.
Chapter 3: Yi Sang and Post-War Japanese Literature

I argue that Korean modernism is not understood as being linked to Japanese modernism because a cultural power dynamic exists within the existing critical debate in which writers of Japanese national origin are considered to be better than Korean writers. This hierarchy may not be spoken of outright, but it tacitly exists in discussions of the Korean modernists’ victimization by the Japanese. As victims, Korean modernists are always secondary to their (supposed) victimizers (the Japanese modernists) because the logic of victimization necessitates that a victim is below his or her victimizer. This hierarchy is a problem, especially in the context of a writer like Yi, who shares such strong stylistic and thematic similarities with his Japanese modernist contemporaries. As demonstrated in chapter one, Japanese and Korean modernism developed simultaneously and within the same historical context, so when it is implied that one is the original and the other an imitation, we are also implying an inaccurate hierarchy. While a person can prefer Japanese modernism over Korean modernism and vice versa, this remains a matter of personal taste.

To dismantle this misleading hierarchy, I am now going to show how Yi’s works provide an effective lens through which we can interpret themes that carry over from the modernist period to appear also in post-war Japanese literature. His affinity with Japanese modernist writers extends to those post-war Japanese writers that emerged from the Japanese modernist movement. To demonstrate this, I will be looking at Yi in relation to Kōbō Abe’s novels The Box Man (1973) and Secret Rendezvous (1977), and Osamu Dazai’s novel No Longer Human (1948).48 Doing so allows me to demonstrate a

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48 For reasons of scope, I am looking at Abe and Dazai in relation to the modernist movement, and not in relation to the specific historical terms of post-war Japan.
new interpretation of Korean modernism vis-à-vis Yi’s relationship with twentieth-century Japanese literature. His works were a part of Japanese modernism to the extent that we can see similar themes and content being treated in similar ways in post-war Japanese writers: fragmentation, alienation, fetishization, and medical imagery and concerns regarding a hygienic, sterile modernity. We will see that Yi treats these subjects similarly to how Abe and Dazai treat them. This does not necessarily indicate that Abe or Dazai were familiar with Yi’s work, but it does mean a Korean modernist’s modernism is significant outside of a specifically Korean, colonial context.

So far, my interpretation of the relationship between Korean modernism and twentieth-century Japanese literature has allowed me to speak against Korean modernism as a nation-specific movement. Instead, I have been arguing that Korean modernism was not simply imitative of Japanese modernism, but itself a generative aesthetic and cultural movement, relevant to current understandings of Japanese, East Asian, and global modernisms. Conceptualizations of Korean modernism in the framework of victimization, on the other hand, indirectly lead to an understanding of Korean modernism as having lesser cultural and aesthetic value in comparison to Japanese modernism. When a Korean modernist is a victim, the logic of victimization implies that the Korean modernist is below his or her victimizer, the Japanese modernist (or Japan in general), which inadvertently supports the cultural superiority of Japanese modernism. Koreans were in fact victims of Japanese colonialism, but as I argue, modernism in Korea is not simply a reaction against colonial victimization (if that were the case, modernism would only have appeared in colonized settings, which is not the case). Korean modernism, like other modernisms, is concerned with modernity. Thus, when
Korean modernists are concerned with colonial victimization, they are more effectively understood as being concerned with it as an aspect of their experience of modernity more broadly. In terms of cross-cultural exchange, this is another reason to move away from downplaying the connections between Korean and Japanese modernists. It is more productive to speak of these movements as interacting with one another, because the continued adherence to strict interpretations of Korean modernism as a result of colonial victimization only serves to strengthen the assumption that Korean modernism emerged as a direct response to Japanese colonization (which also supports the victimized modernist narrative).

Before proceeding, I would like to highlight that the focus of this chapter is not to provide in-depth textual analyses of Abe or Dazai. Instead, I will demonstrate how Yi, a Korean author of the modernist period (who died in 1937, before the Second World War), could have influenced post-war Japanese writers. I can show how such influence is possible given the striking similarities between Yi, Abe, and Dazai. In particular, Yi and Abe share in common their treatment of alienation, fetishization, and medical anxiety. Yi and Dazai also share a concern with alienation and medical anxieties; though, fetishization is not a shared theme. They do, however, share an exploration of emasculation and failures to integrate into modern society. It is not unreasonable to assume that similarities like these exist as a result of modernist texts, journals, and the names of artists being circulated throughout the Empire during the early twentieth-century. Even if modernists in Japan were not specifically familiar with Yi, it is likely they at least had some idea of what was going on in Korean modernist circles. I pointed to this idea in the first chapter by highlighting the similarities between the Japanese
Shinkankakuha (Neo-Sensory Group or New Sensation Group) and Mavo, and the Korean Kuinhoe (Group of Nine) and the Korea Artista Proleta Federacio (KAPF). For instance, while the Shinkankakuha and Kuinhoe are often regarded as apolitical art movements of the right, Mavo and the KAPF are often considered political art movements of the left. Chinese modernists were also familiar with Japanese modernist movements, so it is understandable that Korean modernists were as well. The Japanese modernists were also likely aware of other East Asian, non-Japanese aesthetic movements, even if they were occurring in the outer regions of the Empire. Thus, Yi, and Korean modernism in general, can be seen as being part of the historical moment and cultural context in which Japanese modernism occurred, and from which post-war Japanese literature emerged.

Abe and Dazai emerged from this context as well, which is why we can see similarities between their work and Yi’s. Dazai in particular comes out of this context because he was also publishing in the 1930s, meaning he experienced Japanese modernism first hand, and the vast majority of *No Longer Human* is set in 1930s Tokyo. *No Longer Human* was published in 1948, but Yōzō’s (the protagonist’s) notebooks, which make up the bulk of the frame narrative, date to some time during the 1930s. It is indicated that “[t]he events described in the notebooks seem to relate mainly to the Tokyo of 1930 or so” (Dazai 173). At one point, Yōzō is even involved with a leftist modernist group, not entirely unlike Mavo (though these individuals do not seem to be artists) with his malicious friend Horiki:

49 Kirk A. Denton explains that, in the 1920s and ‘30s in China, “[a] small groups of writers associated with the journal *Les Contemporains* (Xiandae) promoted and wrote literary works that were self-consciously at odds with those demanded by the proponents of revolutionary literature. These writers have been referred to as the New Sensationalists, after the Japanese modernist school (the Shinkankakuha, usually translated as ‘New Sensationalists’)” (294).
To show off his ‘modernity’ (I can’t think of any other reason) Horiki also took me one day to a secret Communist meeting. (I don’t remember exactly what it was called—a ‘Reading Society,’ I think.) A secret Communist meeting may have been for Horiki just one more of the sights of Tokyo. I was introduced to the ‘comrades’ and obliged to buy a pamphlet. (65)

This leftist meeting occurs in the same Tokyo to which Yi travelled in the late 1930s, the same Tokyo in which he died in a prison hospital. That is, the Tokyo that Dazai depicts through Yōzō’s notebooks in *No Longer Human* provides a window into understanding the modernist landscape that Yi was also a part of. The reason a post-war Japanese text is able to shed light on a pre-war Korean modernist text is because, as I have argued throughout this thesis, Japanese and Korean modernisms were inextricably tied to one another: under the umbrella of Empire, on the one hand, and within the context of emerging global modernity, on the other.

Later in this chapter, I will be looking at Yi’s short story “Wings” in comparison to Dazai’s *No Longer Human*. These two texts in particular share much in common, in content and even in plot, but a comparative reading of these works has never occurred within English-language scholarship. This further justifies the need to look at the relationship between these two East Asian modernists. I will also be looking at Yi and Abe, but in this case will be focusing more on Yi’s poetry, particularly “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy.”

Although the Abe works I am looking at in relation to Yi’s poetry in this chapter are published some forty years later, reading Yi and Abe together can be sensibly
justified. Abe was much younger than Yi during the 1930s, but by the later part of that
decade, and into the 1940s, he would have been old enough to be have been influenced
by an exposure to modernist literature and culture. Even though Abe did not publish in
the modernist period, he is still connected to that period when we consider the thematic
content of his works, and how he treats that content. This is particularly the case in
regards to medical anxieties.

However, before looking at the content and thematic similarities shared by Yi
and Abe, there are also a few other reasons to draw a correlation between these two
writers. Although they were born fourteen years apart, Yi and Abe both grew up in
Japanese colonies. Christopher Bolton explains that, although Abe was born in Japan in
1924 (Yi was born in 1910), he was raised in Japanese-occupied Mukden, Manchuria
(194), present day Shenyang, China. This means that, growing up, Abe was
geographically closer to Korea than he was to his native Japan (though this entire area
was technically Japan at the time). There were many Korean immigrants that came to
Manchuria in the 1920s and 1930s, as well, especially “following Korea’s transformation
into a base for Japanese expansion into the Asian mainland” (Hwang 186). As such, from
a young age, Abe would have been in close proximity to Korean culture, and possibly
news of artistic movements occurring on the peninsula as well.

This awareness would have been possible because Japanese censorship was not
so strict as to make such information unavailable. Hwang explains that Korean
newspapers in the late colonial period even “included reports about the anti-Japanese
Korean guerrilla groups operating [in Manchuria]” (174). Furthermore, in Korea, “the
newspapers and magazines that grew in circulation and influence served to transmit the
Korean colonial experience” (174) and “stood as the authoritative forums for debates on the entire range of issues concerning life in colonial Korea” (174). Hwang further makes it clear that, “Koreans, including the elites of the publishing world…were not brutalized for thought crimes” (175). Thus, if politically sensitive information was able to circulate throughout the Empire, then certainly less politically charged news of apolitical modernists such as Yi could easily have circulated as well.

Abe eventually returned to Japan and graduated from the Tokyo Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo) Medical School (Bolton 194), and although he never practiced medicine (194), his experience of the medical profession is very likely a factor in the prevalence of medical imagery in his work. Christopher Bolton explains that Japan’s defeat in 1945 also meant “the end of the Japanese empire in China and the radical reconstruction of the Japanese state—the disappearance, in effect, of Abe’s two homes” (194). In Abe’s own words, he was “‘a person with no homeland’” (qtd. on 194). Thus, Abe’s literature “probes the issues of homeland and homelessness, frontier and empire, belonging and escape” (194). Specifically, “the ambiguous status of homeland…makes Abe’s life and work ‘international’” (194). I agree with Bolton, and further argue that such ambivalence regarding homeland and national identity also connects Abe with Yi, who was also deeply ambivalent about his status as Korean or Japanese, and about his status as traditional or modern. This means Yi and Abe both had complicated and ambivalent relationships with modern Japan. This ambivalence helps us understand Yi and Abe in relation to one another as modernists, because ambivalence about modernity is central to modernism more generally.
Yi and Kōbō Abe

In chapter two, I highlighted how hospital and medical imagery figure heavily in Yi’s work and that of two other Japanese modernists, Kawabata and Sagawa. This medical imagery operates in a similar way in Abe’s fiction as it does in Yi’s work; it highlights issues of emotional and psychological sterility and the objectification of the individual by processes of modernity (modern medicine being only one of these processes). Here I will again highlight the prevalence of this imagery in Yi’s work and in Abe’s work as well, particularly the hospital scenes in *The Box Man* and *Secret Rendezvous*, the latter of which is entirely set in a hospital.

*The Box Man* is a highly experimental and fragmented novel told largely through the perspective of a narrator (the box man) who decides to wear a cardboard box over the upper half of his torso (he cuts a slot through which he can see). The box man then decides to shoot another box man (who may be himself), and it becomes increasingly unclear whether the box man has perpetrated this crime, or whether he is in fact the victim. As a result of this wound, the box man (or perhaps, men) end up being hospitalized. The subjectivity, or point-of-view, of the narration continues to shift throughout the novel from the perspectives of the two box men, to that of a charlatan doctor, and then a nurse. This stream of consciousness technique is more disorienting here than it is in some other modernist texts. In *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Ulysses*, for example, each character has enough of a plot or back-story tied to them to allow the reader to discern from which characters’ point-of-view the story is being told. This is not the case in *The Box Man*, which makes it difficult to tell at times who the narrator is. Consequently, the narrator is a deeply estranged figure, because he or she is unable to
tell who he or she is, and he or she is unable to discern a difference between self and other. Andrew Hock Soon Ng argues that The Box Man “reflects the author’s fearful vision of modernity and modernization, and their effects on individuals” (316), and deals with the “terrifying objectification of self by rapid modernism...claustrophobia, and alienation, which, for Abe, characterize the terrifying effects of the modern on the self” (318). I concur with Ng, and would further maintain that these are themes which help tie Abe to the modernist movement in Japan and internationally as well. It is particularly the dissolution of the self, a process that is often depicted as violence towards the body and psyche, which ties Yi and Abe’s work together thematically.

This “terrifying objectification,” in Ng’s words, is an idea that finds clear expression in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy,” the poem which most poignantly addresses Yi’s concerns regarding the dehumanizing capacity of modernity, particularly vis-à-vis the modern medical institution. Set in an operating room, this poem depicts a terrifying, arbitrary medical operation that is unable to yield a “satisfactory anatomical result” (13). This place is cold and clinical, “(The examiner absolutely avoiding the embrace of the examinee)” (13). The relationship here between the patient (examinee) and the doctor (examiner) holds none of the warmth or concern one would expect for a suffering patient. In fact, this kind of caring relationship is “absolutely” (13) avoided. It is also not perfectly clear why this operation is occurring, but the examiner seems to be dismembering the patient, as indicated in the following lines: “Until taking in the two pairs of arms without exception…(Disposal of the two arms) (or reduction of the two arms) and continue” (14). Such a sinister operation seems to translate into an interpretation of the dismembering qualities of modernity; that is, this poem points to the
violence that is done to the human bodies and minds placed within mechanized institutions in a mechanized society.

This violence is largely metaphorical, but I argue that medical imagery in Japanese and Korean modernist texts stands in as metaphor for a cold, clinical, and bureaucratic modern society; this is a society that is efficient and hygienic to the point of being hostile to human life, and hence the violent scene we see in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy.” There is some irony here as well. Efficiency and hygiene are both good for human beings, but people are only so efficient and hygienic. When an institution like a hospital (which here stands in for a metaphor for modern society) becomes too efficient and hygienic, humans become more like patients, or diseases, that need to be “treated.” In Yi’s poem, being treated means being dismembered and then re-membered in order to better fit a blindly hygienic and efficient modern world.

As noted, within Yi’s oeuvre, “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy” is really the only place we see such a direct expression of these modern medical anxieties, but they are carried over in Abe, who also depicts hostile scenes set in similarly absurd hospitals. Specifically, we see this “terrifying objectification” in Abe’s works in representations of cold, clinical medical objects and environments, as depicted in following passage from *The Box Man*:

The bicycle girl holding a hypodermic needle and the air-rifle man grasping a scalpel were waiting for me…After a while I awake in a bed;
the bicycle girl was peering at me and there was a heavy smell of disinfectant and vitamins. (Abe 27) 50

Again, violence to the body is indicated in this passage. The hypodermic needle and the scalpel are both medical instruments with necessarily practical purposes, but within the context of this passage they seem to elicit more a fear of the exquisite pain they can cause (tiny holes in the flesh and precise lacerations of the skin), rather than recognition of their healing potential. The box man’s waking up in a hospital bed heightens this sense of fear as well. In a hospital bed, one is a patient, not an agent, and thus limited in terms of action. Thus, the painful thoughts conjured by the hypodermic needle and scalpel become more terrifying, because should these devices be used to improper ends, it will be more difficult for the box man to escape. As with Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy,” being a patient in The Box Man is rendered as a horrifying prospect. What is horrifying about being a patient, I argue, is the idea of having little or no agency within modern society, and of existing at the whim of a bureaucratic, mechanized system that pays no heed to the individual. This is the logic of patient-hood that underlies the idea of terrifying objectification; I will soon explain this in more detail when discussing Secret Rendezvous, in which such ideas are more succinctly expressed.

Before exploring the logic of patient-hood further, however, there is another scene in The Box Man that deserves attention in terms of medical anxieties:

There were a glass case and lines of sterile instruments. A very narrow examination couch. An enamel washbasin supported by slender, curved, metal legs. And then a weird mechanical seat that resembled a dentist’s

50 The bicycle girl turns out to be the nurse and the air-rifle man turns out to be the charlatan doctor, but at other times the air-rifle man is one of the various box men as well. This is an example of the destabilized and shifting narrative perspective of The Box Man.
chair, but that somehow had a different feeling. That was what made it interesting. There was an eroticism in this assortment as in pictures of hell. (92)

The “hypodermic needle” (27), the “scalpel” (27), and the smell of “disinfectant and vitamins” (27) in the first passage easily attest to a medical atmosphere, and the same can be said of the second passage with the “lines of sterile instruments” (92), the “examination couch” (92), the “enamel washbasin” (92), and the “weird mechanical seat that resemble[s] a dentist’s chair” (92). The context of the second passage is particularly important. It is essentially a sex scene between the box man and the nurse, but this human act of intimacy is taking place in this sterile, clinical environment. This speaks to concerns regarding the way modern society (metaphorically elicited as a hospital) has the capacity to dehumanize otherwise very human interactions, replacing the messiness of emotional and psychological human experience with inhuman, clinical hygiene and precision.

However, this replacement is not so simple. Sex is not an entirely hygienic act, as it involves a variety of bodily fluids, and bodies are not perfectly hygienic entities. The box man takes a fetishistic pleasure in the taboo of sullying this sterile environment with the messiness of human intercourse. The result of this act is “an eroticism” (92) the box man likens to “pictures of hell” (92). Again, this picture of hell is not unlike the depiction of the abstract, nonsensical surgery depicted in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy” with its emphasis on medicine, anaesthetics, examiners, examinees, and operating rooms (13). These medical environments come to seem hellish because they pervert their intended purpose, which is caregiving. Instead of being institutions of care,
these hospitals are institutions that strip individuals of their autonomy and agency. But, the hospital is meant to be a metaphor for modern society, so what this means is that modern society has become something other than what it promised to be. Therefore, modernity has an undercurrent of violence towards the individual at the same time that it promotes individualism. On the one hand, modernity offers advancement and technological development, but on the other, it advances so rapidly as to become a hellish place to inhabit as a modern individual.

To refocus specifically on medical imagery, we will see that it is even more prevalent in Abe’s *Secret Rendezvous*, given that it is set in a labyrinthine hospital. *Secret Rendezvous* involves an unnamed narrator who wakes one night to find that an emergency crew is taking his wife—who is in perfectly good health—away in an ambulance. The narrator then tracks her to a labyrinthine hospital in which strange, erotic experiments are conducted, though in the end he never finds her and ends up getting lost himself. Bolton writes that *Secret Rendezvous* represents “Abe’s ideas about language, technology, community, and meaning” (196), and I argue this is particularly true in the way Abe uses a medical setting for the novel, which highlights anxieties regarding a modern society that functions like an absurd, bureaucratic hospital. For instance, we are told by the horse man (who turns out to be one of the central doctors of the plot—he happens to believe he is a horse) that “[i]mproving the medical care system and streamlining the administration are two goals that aren’t always compatible…but as things stand it’s a necessary evil” (Abe 57). That is, the efficiency of the organization is

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51 For example, “[t]his was not just some secret rendezvous; he sensed that his wife’s very life was in danger. If this was still part of the hospital, they might even be conducting experiments on living creatures. Obscene experiments, so horrible that not even the nurses were allowed in” (Abe 42).
more important than the well-being of the individuals said organization reportedly serves.

As with Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy” and Abe’s *The Box Man, Secret Rendezvous* also includes striking descriptions of a hyper-hygienic medical environment that speaks to concerns regarding the objectifying force of modern society. Such an environment is described in the following passage:

A young nurse ran by from the green sign toward the orange one, scuffling her feet along the floor as she carried some sort of steaming wide-mouthed jar. A muttering mechanical noise beat ceaselessly against the floor; a tall, wheeled cage containing aluminum breakfast trays scraped against the ceiling as it went by. For a few seconds he thought he heard from somewhere a woman’s stifled sobbing. (35)

The first two sentences of this passage serve to set up the hospital setting. The third sentence, however, sets up a similar tone of fear as we saw with the hypodermic needle and scalpel in *The Box Man* and the dismembering in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy.” This woman’s “stifled sobbing” (Abe 35) creates an atmosphere of fear and anxiety: Is this the narrator’s wife? Where is she? Why is she crying? Who or what is stifling her sobs? The idea seems to be that this woman is in pain, and likely as a result of some form of experimentation. This would make the woman a patient in this strange hospital, which again stresses the anxiety of being caught up in a system that does not recognize one’s humanity.

Abe maintains this fearful and anxious environment by frequently bringing the reader’s attention back to the pain and discomfort the modern medical institution can
cause. For example, “[t]he odor of disinfectant stung [the narrator’s] nostrils” (86, emphasis added). The narrator also notices “all manner of painful-looking equipment…scattered across a…a nurses’ station” (88, emphasis added). Again, as in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy,” the prevalence of such medical imagery in Abe’s fiction also speaks to conditions of a clinical, hygienic modernity, particularly the violence it can visit upon human bodies. This violence is psychological as well; the narrator “shrank before so much whiteness. The impersonality of the color had the violent effect of freezing all emotion. It seemed as though his wife had slipped even farther away” (25). Like the sterility of the relationship between the examiner and examinee in Yi’s “Poem No.VIII: Anatomy,” the whiteness and sterility of this modern, hospital environment in Secret Rendezvous is enough to cause a state of emotional and psychological paralysis for the narrator.

Of course, the breakthroughs of modern medicine can overall be categorized as positive developments, as they have saved many lives, and Abe is not criticizing modern medicine itself. Rather, he is using the sterile, clinical environment of the modern, bureaucratic hospital to comment on conditions of modern society. This is a society in which the individual is dehumanized and reduced simply to the position of patient. In Yi’s “Poem No. IV,” for instance, he writes of “The problem regarding the patient’s disposition” (9) and then proceeds to list a sequence of numbers (0, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1), but the numbers are themselves reversed. The problem with the patient, essentially, is that he or she has been reduced to a number, thereby stripped of his or her individual humanity. This theme is well articulated in Secret Rendezvous. Consider the
Horse/Doctor’s philosophy regarding the ideal relationship between a doctor and patient:

You have to treat the injured person not like a human being with a wound, but like a human wound. For a doctor who’s used to such relationships, nothing is more maddening than a patient who acts like a goddamn human being. To keep from arousing his doctor’s anger, the patient tries to stop being human. The doctor becomes more and more alone, his nerves go on edge, and he drifts farther and farther from humanity. I guess you could even say a prejudice against patients is one requirement for a great doctor.

(Abe 127)

An autonomous patient is a contradiction, and so the doctor needs to work to strip a patient of his or her agency. In Secret Rendezvous, this extends even to the idea that “our modern age is an age ‘of the patient, by the patient, and for the patient’” (127). As demonstrated, we see similar concerns in Yi, particularly feelings of fear over being rendered a patient, both of the self and of others, the result of which is being reduced to a dehumanized component of an impersonal, mechanized society.

This theme of dehumanization is also related to fixation on and fetishization of parts of women that appear in both Yi and Abe as well. We see this in Yi’s “Wings” when his wife’s clothes, perfume, and cosmetics stand in for her physical presence. The wife is objectified by the objects that make up her identity. Recall the scene in “Wings,” for example, when Yi remarks that “[t]he perfume is definitely a fragment of [his] wife’s scent” (69), and that “[h]er scent is most likely the sum of all the different fragrances arrayed here” (69). The perfume, an inhuman substance, comes to stand in for the wife’s

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52 As noted earlier, the doctor in Secret Rendezvous is also a man who is convinced he is a horse.
human presence. We also see this in how from “snatches of her skirts [he] conjure[s] again and again the whole of [his] wife’s body and the various poses it can strike” (69). Yi is alienated from his wife as a real person, and feels safer interacting with the objects that reflect an objectified idea of her instead. Similar fetishism plays a part in Abe’s work as well. We see this in The Box Man with the box man’s fixation on the nurse’s legs, and in Secret Rendezvous with the narrator’s fixation on the secretary’s legs as well. Such objectifying fetishism is apparent in the following passages from The Box Man:

Her legs especially were as delicate and graceful as the rails of a railroad seen from an eminence, stretching away into the distance…It was as if, without realizing it, I had been completely disarmed by her legs. (Abe 16)

In the box man’s mind, the nurse’s legs are divorced from her body to the extent that they remind him of a railroad, not the female body. In the same way that modern society objectifies the modern individual, here the box man’s fixation on the nurse’s legs objectifies her (to the degree that he sees her legs as simply material objects: rails). The box man also takes note of the nurses “slender transparent, ephemeral neck” (17), further objectifying her.

The same kind of fetishism appears in Secret Rendezvous as well:

Without attempting to fix the hem of her uniform, although [the secretary] must have been aware of his stare, she tapped out a light rhythm with her bare toes, legs stretched out. He felt a sudden urge to put his fingers in the dimples in her kneecaps. (76)

Again, the narrator here specifically fixates on the woman’s legs. What this means is that the modern gaze, like the absurd surgery in Yi’s “Poem No. VIII: Anatomy,” has the
Ng offers a convincing interpretation of fetishism, this time specifically in *The Box Man*, explaining that although “[t]here are many references to various forms of ‘seeing’ in the narrative,” (320), which range “from direct voyeurism to photographically mediated ones” (320), “the box man has really very limited vision: merely a tiny slit in the box through which he witnesses the outside world (320). Moreover, “this form of seeing is also necessarily abstract and fetishistic. Because things can be seen only piecemeal, wholeness is eschewed to privilege parts, such as in the way the box man finds erotic pleasure in a nurse’s legs” (320). I hold that this argument extends to an interpretation of fetishism in *Secret Rendezvous* as well. In *Secret Rendezvous*, the entire hospital is rigged with an elaborate surveillance system and wiretaps. This surveillance system is intrusive and voyeuristic, like the box man’s gaze; it is also like the box man’s gaze in that it can only provide limited fragments of events in the hospital. Regardless of how many fragments the narrator pieces together, a complete image or overview of the hospital is never formed. Unable to navigate this fragmented labyrinth, the narrator is unable to retrieve his wife or himself as well. Like Yi unsuccessfully amassing items and smells in order to “capture” his wife (their relationship remains torn), the narrator in *Secret Rendezvous* is similarly unable to fully capture his wife as well. The narrator’s failure in this regard allows me to briefly gesture forward to the discussion of emasculation that occurs in the Yi and Dazai section of this chapter. The narrator’s inability to find his wife or himself is a commentary on his emasculation. He wakes up
one night, men in medical uniforms take his wife away, and then he never finds her again. His unsuccessful quest through the labyrinth of the hospital, in other words, is also meant to signify his failed attempt to navigate his internal, damaged masculine identity.53

What I have shown is that Yi and Abe share an emphasis on medical imagery, concerns over objectifying the individual, and an exploration of fetishism and emasculation. Yi, while being inextricably a part of the Korean modernist movement, can also be seen as being embedded within the Japanese and international modernist movements to the degree that themes in his work carry over into Abe’s post-war fiction. We will see a similar pattern emerge when looking at Yi and Osamu Dazai.

Yi and Osamu Dazai

To be specific, Yi’s place within Japanese and global modernism is further established when reading “Wings” alongside Dazai’s No Longer Human. Although “Wings” is a short story and No Longer Human a novel, and although they were published twelve years apart, these two narratives share too much in common with one another not to compare them. Both of these stories are set in a 1930s East Asian modernist context, “Wings” in Seoul and No Longer Human in Tokyo. As well, both of these texts are pseudo-autobiographical. Jack Saebyok Jung explains that Yi “blur[s] the lines between the commonly received characteristics of memoir, fiction, and poetry with his writing” (336), and Robert Rolf claims that Dazai’s “No Longer Human is an autobiographical story in that most of the facts of Yōzō’s life apply to that of Dazai” (44). These two writers are able to narrativize their lives in similar ways because they were part of the

53 Notions of emasculations can be traced back to how gender roles started to, and continued to, shift in the beginning and throughout the twentieth century.
same historical moment, and thus subscribed to similar cultural narratives. Even if Yi was Korean and Dazai Japanese, they still both subscribed to modernists identities, and as we will see, to contemporaneous narratives of alienation and emasculation. Again, these parallels exist because Yi and Dazai were not from mutually exclusive cultural contexts.

These two stories share much in common on the level of basic plot. Both narratives feature deeply alienated and socially isolated narrators; both narrators are highly degenerate and emasculated men who have very troubled relationship with women; and both narratives deal with these narrators’ inability to constructively integrate into modern society. Apart from the modernist context from which these stories are told, they also share a formal affinity. Both can be considered shishōsetsu, or “I-novels,” a form of writing characterized by first person, confessional narration (Orbaugh 139). Shishōsetsu is form of Japanese modernist writing, but we also see Yi working in this genre. The reason for this is because Yi was writing under the umbrella of the Japanese Empire, and by extension, Japanese modernism as well. From this historical perspective, there is nothing odd about Yi (technically a Japanese citizen when he was writing) working within a Japanese modernist literary genre.

Although the main points of comparison I wish to focus on are alienation, emasculation, and the failure to integrate into modern society, there are a number of other plot similarities these texts share that I wish to briefly address before moving on. Medical imagery also features in No Longer Human (in its hospital, its sanatorium, its pharmacist, and the hypodermic needle with which Yōzō administers his morphine). Yōzō is “confined in a hospital on the coast” (88) after surviving a failed double-suicide
attempt with an older, married women. He is later sent to an insane asylum, described as a “large hospital in the woods” (165) that Yōzō believes “must be a sanatorium” (165). Yōzō also has “what might literally be called a very ugly affair with the crippled woman from the pharmacy” (163). This is the same pharmacist who gives Yōzō a hypodermic needle and morphine to help him quit drinking (160). As with the other texts discussed through all three chapters, medical imagery and medical institutions in No Longer Human are also depicted as hostile, threatening, and dehumanizing. The hospital and sanatorium are places of confinement, not healing. Yōzō’s relationship with his pharmacist leads to an “ugly affair” (16) that eventually ends with Yōzō’s alcoholism being supplanted by a severe morphine addiction. The pharmacist does provide Yōzō with a remedy to his suffering, only the medicine she provides—morphine—leads to further misery. As with the Yi and Abe texts discussed earlier, modern medicine and its associated institutions are also meant to represent modern, impersonal bureaucratic society in No Longer Human as well.

The ineffectiveness, even destructiveness, of modern clinical medicine for Yōzō, then, can also be read in terms of how society resists him. In Yōzō’s words, he is “[a] reject, exactly” (Dazai 168). Rolf further explains that Ningen shikkaku, the original Japanese title for No Longer Human (43), can more accurately be rendered as translating to “‘disqualified as a human being’” (44). Although a less appealing title, Rolf claims it more effectively “refers to the process of dehumanization and desocialization that Yōzō describes” (44) throughout the novel. I agree with Rolf, and further maintain that one way in which this process of dehumanization and desocialization is depicted in the novel is through the processes by which modern medicine and medical institutions reject Yōzō,
exacerbating the degeneration of his physical and mental health. In other words, modern society and its mechanistic processes contribute to the dehumanization of Yōzō, leading to violence against his body as evidenced in his suicide attempts, alcoholism, and morphine addiction.

Also related to issues of medicine and health is the misuse of sleeping pills that figures in “Wings” as well as No Longer Human. Although sleeping pills may not immediately be associated with medical imagery, they are largely a product of modern medicine. In “Wings,” for instance, after catching a cold, Yi’s wife gives him some pills, claiming they are aspirin, when they are in fact “Adalin sleeping pills” (80). He is shocked to find the box of pills under his “wife’s vanity stand” (80), and it strikes him that they look “just like aspirin” (80). Despite his cold being gone, his wife continues to deceptively sedate Yi with Adalin “for an entire month” (81). It is never made entirely clear why his prostitute wife has been drugging him, but it may be a result of his accidently walking in on her and a patron earlier in the story. This drugging can also be read in terms of suspicion towards caregiving in general. Yi’s wife’s “help,” as with the pharmacist’s noted above, turns out to be a deception in the same way that modern society and its associated institutions also lead to disappointment and dissolution for Yi, as well as for Yōzō. This is particularly evident at the end of “Wings,” which I will discuss shortly.

First, however, a very similar sleeping pill incident occurs in No Longer Human.

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54 Tuberculosis is also a recurring issue in these two texts. At the end of No Longer Human, Yōzō is twenty seven (Dazai 170), only a year old than Yi was when he died of tuberculosis in Japan in 1937. In No Longer Human, Yōzō also suffers from tuberculosis. “Wings” was published in 1936, meaning we can assume that the Yi of that particular narrative is likely twenty-five or twenty six years old. This creates another parallel between “Wings” and No Longer Human: Yi and Yōzō are both young, consumptive male modernists (in their mid-twenties) telling their stories from the vantage point of 1930s East Asian modernism. This striking parallel is just one more reason why these texts need to be read together.
After being released from the insane asylum, Yōzō is encouraged to leave Tokyo. He then takes up lodging “at a hot spring on the coast... The house, a thatch-covered rather ancient-looking structure, stood on the outskirts of the village” (168). Once settled, Yōzō sends “Tetsu (the old servant) off to the village drugstore to buy some sleeping pills” (169). However, likely aware of another one of Yōzō’s previous suicide attempts involving Dial sleeping pills (153-4), Tetsu comes back with a different kind of pill:

She came back with a box rather different in shape from the one I’m accustomed to, but I paid it no particular attention. I took ten pills before I went to bed but was surprised not to be able to sleep at all. Presently I was seized with a cramp in my stomach. I rushed to the toilet three times in succession with terrible diarrhoea [sic]. My suspicions were aroused. I examined the box of medicine carefully—it was a laxative. (169)

As with Yi in “Wings,” Yōzō is also deceived by his caregiver—although, in this case, it is probably for the best. Again, what we see is an object of the medical world—sleeping pills—essentially not serving its intended purpose (curing insomnia). This is also the case with the medical imagery and medical institutions discussed in the other texts in this chapter: hospitals and mental institutions that confine and lack healing potential; medical instruments that cause pain; environments that are hygienic to the point of being hostile to humans (almost as if we were bacteria); and medicine that fails to cure, and rather exacerbates misery and suffering. All of this once again points to the idea that the medical world and its institutions are depicted in these texts as analogues for modern society and its dehumanizing, hostile properties.

55 Like Shimamura in Snow Country, Yōzō’s departure from Tokyo to a more traditional setting also signifies an escape from the exasperating qualities of modernity.
In chapter two, I showed how this medical trend appears in Western modernists as well, particular in Eliot’s “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock” and Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. While Japanese and Korean modernists may highlight these medical issues more explicitly in some cases than Western modernists, we can still draw at least two concrete conclusions from this. First, an emphasis on medical imagery and associated anxieties is neither strictly Japanese nor Korean; it is not a reflection of purely national concerns, in other words. Modern medicine is an aspect of modernity, a global phenomenon that transcends borders. This leads to the second conclusion: the emphasis on these images and anxieties is not strictly a concern for East Asian modernists, but for Western modernists as well. Thus, looking at the way the medical world is represented in modernist texts is another way of revealing the interrelatedness of modernists all over the globe.

To look further at the way Yi and Dazai are interrelated, I want finally to consider how these two authors treat issues of alienation, emasculation, and the failure to integrate into modern society. As discussed in the first and second chapters, alienation is a key theme in much modernist writing. In “Wings,” for instance, Yi writes that he does not “mix with any of the people” (68) in his neighbourhood. In fact, he avoids “even say[ing] hello” (68) to the extent that he has “no desire to greet anyone except [his] wife” (68). He feels “estranged from human society” (70) and “estranged from life. Everything simply discomfit[s] [him]” (70). Like Yōzō, Yi is also a “reject” (Dazai 168) who similarly feels that he is “[d]isqualified as a human being” (167). One way to understand this estrangement and rejection from society is to think about the idea of dismembering discussed earlier in this chapter. This is the idea that modern society does a kind of
violence to the individual, that it dismembers, fragmenting the body by asking it to conform to inhuman systems, and fragmenting the psyche by overloading the mind with information and stimuli. What else is dismembered is a sense of community and relationship, and this is what we see in Yi’s sense of estrangement and Yōzō’s feeling of rejection and disqualification. They have been dismembered from, have ceased to be, members of their communities, and this is not a condition exclusive to them, but a condition of the modern individual more generally.

These issues of alienation and dismemberment also lead to difficulties in communication. We see this in “Wings,” for instance, with Yi’s struggle to communicate with his wife. His inability to figure out that his wife is a prostitute is also related to this. Because he cannot communicate with her, he is unable to ask directly what is going on. In fact, the couple share virtually no dialogue through the entire short story. This inability to communicate is expressed well in the following passage. One night, after one of her guests leaves, she “violently” (75) shakes Yi awake:

> My wife, back from sending off her guest, had latched onto me and was shaking me. My eyes popped open and I stared into her face. There was no smile on it. I rubbed my eyes a little and examined it more closely. Anger flashed in the corners of her eyes and her delicate lips were trembling. I could tell that it was the kind of anger that would not easily subside. (75)

Yet, instead of trying to communicate with his wife, or trying to console her, Yi “turn[s] over again, pull[s] the quilt over [his] head, and crouche[s] there like a frog” (75). Even though he recognizes the urgency of his wife’s shaking him awake, that his wife is not
smiling, and that there is anger in her face, he does nothing. This relationship has been
dismembered as well, a condition that is also indicated by the couples’ house being
divided into two separate rooms (68-9).

No Longer Human explores this issue of failed communication even further. As
Rolf explains, Yōzō “believes in the inability of individuals to communicate their
feelings to one another” (28). We see this in lines such as: “[t]he incomprehensibility of
society is the incomprehensibility of the individual” (Dazai 125). This
incomprehensibility breeds a fear of people so deep that before Yōzō can “meet even the
customers in the bar [he] ha[s] to fortify [himself] by gulping down a glass of liquor”
(127-8). Such intense alienation thus underpins Yōzō’s sentiment that the world is “a
place of bottomless horror” (133). Again, this profound sense of estrangement is also
voiced in Yōzō’s notion that because “[p]eople do not communicate their dissatisfaction
with their lives to one another…he is the only one who does not understand society”
(Rolf 28). As modernity dismembers the self, it also dismembers the relationships
between that self and others. For Yōzō, this dismembered, fragmented social condition is
“a place of bottomless horror” (133), one in which he feels so isolated that he is quite
literally alienated. He feels he is not recognized as a human being because he cannot
meaningfully communicate or connect with other people. This is similar to the isolation
Yi feels, which very likely relates to his inability to communicate with his wife and
neighbours, or even to confront the men who pay to sleep with his wife.

This leads to the next point of discussion, which is the emasculated, paralysed
men that figure in Yi and Dazai’s works. I argue that emasculation becomes a relevant
theme for these authors as a result of shifts in gender roles that accompanied the
emergence of modernity, as discussed in chapter two (see H. Kim and Bardsley). We see this in the emergence of the *moga* (Modern Girl) and Korean *sinyosong* (New Woman), both “timely symbol[s] of modernity” (H. Kim 97), but also threats to “the elite male status quo (97) in the way they challenged traditional modes of femininity. Such threatened masculinity leads to a sense of emasculation, which we see in Yi’s “A Discontinued Knot” and “Wings,” mainly with Yi’s inability (or lack of desire) to prevent his wife’s prostitution. In “A Discontinued Knot,” for example, despite apparently being in love with Kŭmhong—“almost every night, day in and day out, either she was in my room or I in hers” (Yi 22)—Yi encourages a friend of his to pay to sleep with her. However, this does “not make [him] feel bad” (23). On the one hand, he may not feel bad because it was his idea, but on the other hand, and I argue, more likely, Yi lacks a sense of masculine agency; he is apathetic and feels neither need nor desire to preserve his or Kŭmhong’s honour. This apathy leads to a paralysis that finds more direct expression in “Wings,” as we see in the following scene in which Yi is just returning from a night wandering the streets of Seoul:

This time I encountered my wife and her man talking together by the front gate. Pretending not to notice, I slipped past the pair and entered my room. My wife followed me in…When I heard her lie down a short while later, I slid the door open again, went into her room, and thrust the 2 wŏn into her hand. She darted several glances at me as if it were truly strange that I had once again returned home without spending money, but let me sleep in her room without protest. (77)

One would typically expect a different reaction from a man running into his wife and the
man paying her for sex, but Yi is emasculated and does not react. He merely slips by without making a scene. The act of paying his wife to sleep with her emasculates him further. Although they are a couple, he is put into a position that is no different than the other men who come to visit his wife. The act of paying his wife to sleep with her is also a commentary on the breakdown, or dismembering, of relationships in modern society more generally. The relationship between this couple has been reduced to a monetary transaction; love and companionship is an act that is depicted as a commodity that can be bought and sold.

Emasculation is also prevalent in Dazai’s *No Longer Human*, particularly in Yoko’s paralysis as he passively looks on as his malicious friend, Horiki, violates his wife (148). Although one of the most pivotal points in the narrative, it is also one of the most anti-climatic. Yōzō and Horiki are on the rooftop of Yōzō’s apartment building getting blind drunk on gin, and then Horiki goes back downstairs and rapes Yoshiko, Yōzō’s wife. Yōzō does not know this is going to happen, though. He goes downstairs and looks into his and Yoshiko’s bedroom: “[a] small window opened over my room, through which I could see the interior. The light was lit and two animals were visible” (148). The two animals are Horiki and Yoshiko. Shocked, Yōzō stands “petrified on the staircase, not even thinking to help Yoshiko…[he] [runs] back up to the roof to escape and collapse[s] there” (148). His bearing witness to this horrific scene, coupled with his inability to stop or prevent this crime, are obvious blows to Yōzō’s sense of masculinity. In this case the husband was without authority, and when I thought things over, I came to feel that everything was my fault. Far from becoming enraged, I
could not utter a word of complaint; it was on account of that rare virtue she possessed that my wife was violated, a virtue I long had prized, the unbearably pitiful one called immaculate trustfulness. (152)

Not only is Yōzō’s masculinity damaged by this act (an act even more directly traumatizing for Yoshiko), but his faith in humanity in general is further corrupted as well. Like Yi, Yōzō is also unable to act in ways that would uphold ideas of masculinity and humanity. The way modernity affects notions of manhood, then, is not nation-specific either. Yi and Yōzō react to these traumatic, emasculating scenarios because they were part of a similar cultural milieu.56

However, as much as Yi and Yōzō are products of their time and place, they are also both figures that struggle, and ultimately fail, to integrate into that very same modern society. We have seen this in Yi with his confusion regarding the navigation of modern, commercial life, and in his inability to communicate with his neighbours and wife, but it is also very apparent at the end of “Wings.” After being kicked out by his wife, Yi is frantically wandering around Seoul: “Everything began to spin around me. All I could do was stand around somewhere in listless confusion. Like a walking corpse, I paced back and forth, this way and that….” (82). He eventually finds himself “on the roof of Mitsukoshi” (82), a major Japanese department store. Looking down he sees “the turbid streets…Weary lives sway[ing] languidly…Tangled in a sticky, invisible web” (83). I argue that this tangled, sticky, invisible web is meant to be the labyrinth of

56 This cultural milieu was global as well. We see similar ideas of emasculation explored in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for example, particularly in Bloom’s knowledge of his wife’s infidelity. Like the narrator in *Secret Rendezvous*, who is aware that his wife is very likely being subjected to bizarre erotic experiments, Bloom also knows his wife is having an affair. Both of these emasculated male figures struggle with how to resolve this dilemma. Yi and Yōzō similarly lack male agency. What this means is that emasculation is also an issue for modernists outside of an East Asian context.
modernity itself—an abstract concept (modernity is not a single tangible thing)—but one that nonetheless has concrete and wide-ranging consequences. Unable to integrate into modern society, Yi feels defeated by modernity and wishes to escape. In order to overcome modernity, he wishes to grow wings: “Wings! Grow again! Let’s fly! Let’s fly! Let’s fly just one more time. Let’s fly once again!” (84). This is perhaps a reference to the Icarus myth. Yi’s own modernism is itself an attempt to overcome modernity, but in this hubristic striving is also his collapse.57

It is not clear whether his wings grow back, or whether he is able to overcome modernity. However, given the bleak outlook on display throughout “Wings”—involving the breakdown of relationships, a broken marriage, as well as profound alienation and confusion—I argue that Yi’s wings do not grow back. This is a story about a man being overcome by modernity, not the other way around. If he jumps, he is defeated (his suicide would be an acknowledgment of his complete surrender to the chaos he perceives in the modern world). If he does not jump, he is also defeated because his wings do not grow back, and hence he is unable to overcome modernity. In this way, “Wings” provides a very pessimistic vision. This pessimistic vision is present in No Longer Human, in Yōzō’s inability to successfully integrate into society, as well. Like Yi, he is overcome; he is rejected by the modern world, and in the end finds himself living in a rural village. However, while Yi and Yōzō can physically escape the fragmentation of the metropolis, they will likely not overcome their internally

57 That Yi finds himself atop a Japanese department store, defeated by modernity, contemplating suicide lends itself to an interpretation of the scene in which it is the Empire (that has made such modernity possible) that defeats him. In this case, Yi may have been familiar with this relationship between the Empire and modernity, but at the same time, it is not clear whether he felt a specifically Korean modernity would be any different. Therefore, Yi is better understood as being defeated by modernity more generally than he is by the Empire specifically.
fragmented psyches. What Komako says to Shimamura in *Snow Country* also applies to Yi and Yōzō: dwellers of the modern metropolis “live in such noise and confusion that their feelings are broken to little bits” (Kawabata 118).

Paying close attention to the similarities between these texts clearly demonstrates that Yi is a modernist writer who deals with content and themes that ramify to a high degree outside of a strictly Korean, colonial context. It is one thing for Yi to bear a strong resemblance to modernists texts published in the 1930s, but it is crucial that we acknowledge the significance of his work being relevant to post-war Japanese literature. This necessitates a change in how we understand the relationship between Japanese and Korean modernism and twentieth century literature in general. Coming at Yi from a strictly national perspective is highly limiting. That he is relevant to nationalistic scholars is sensible, but we also have to acknowledge that his significance as a writer carries much further than 1930s Korea. I have shown that he is relevant to Japanese literature of the 1930s, and in this chapter, that he effectively provides a lens to better understand content in post-war Japanese literature as well. As such, moving away from these national narratives of literature helps us get closer to a better understanding of how East Asian modernism fits in to the global emergence of modernism in the early twentieth century.
Conclusion

This thesis opened with two questions: what does it mean that we call Yi a modernist, and how does conceiving him as such change our conception of where he and Korean modernism fit into our understandings of East Asian and global modernism? I hope I have answered these questions by demonstrating that Yi’s relationship to Japanese modernism connects him, and Korean modernism more broadly, to modernism as an aesthetic and cultural movement that occurred all over the world at relatively the same time. Having shown his involvement in this transnational movement, I hope to have opened the door to understanding Korean modernism as a more international movement. Yi’s modernism was not simply an anti-colonial or nationalistic project, and not just about one version of Korea or about the Japanese Empire. It moved beyond these categories and addressed concerns and anxieties we see in modernist texts from a variety of East Asian and non-East Asian locales. My interpretation of Yi as a global modernist allows us to more accurately understand Korean modernism as a movement that made a significant contribution to the East Asian and global modernist canons. In pursuing these questions, I have aimed to establish the value of furthering an international perspective on Yi’s work and Korean modernism that relates them to global narratives of modernism.

To be precise, the narratives we tell ourselves about the globe’s various modernisms tend to share the following two components: a cataclysmic or traumatic break with the past followed by frantic attempts at reordering and renewing of all aspects of society. Here, we have focused primarily on how this is expressed in literature. In the West, we have the First World War, in Japan we have the Kantō earthquake, and in
Korea we have Japan’s colonization of the peninsula. In general, these three modernisms share in common the general narrative structure I just mentioned (as well as style, content, and treatment of that content). This is why we can see such striking similarities between these movements. Global Modernism is not simply a movement or theoretical perspective; it is also the story we have come to tell ourselves about how modernisms came to be and what aspects of modernity contributed to such modernist expressions. Because modernity is not necessarily a national concept, the responses to it are not necessarily nationalistic either. Rather, internationalism has been established as being integral to notions of modernity and modernization in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and this is what can make modernists like Yi similarly global in the scope of their literary significance.

Yi is still a Korean modernist, but what I hope I have shown is that he is more than that as well. I have shown that a Korean modernist was not simply a victim of Japanese colonization and that he in fact exercised a considerable degree of privilege and agency, that he wrote in ways that were as innovative and relevant to the time period as his Japanese and Western modernist contemporaries, and that his relevance extends beyond the 1930s into post-war literature as well. I was able to do this by distancing myself from nationalistic models of Korean modernism and by accepting Yi’s ties to both Japanese and Western modernisms. It was precisely by acknowledging such ties that I was able to reread how he could very well have had an influence (even if indirectly) on the formation of post-war Japanese literature. If anything, Yi’s significance outside of the colonial Korean context has been established by showing that his works provide a lens to effectively interpret content in later Japanese writers.
To pursue the work done in this thesis further would be to shift contemporary understandings of the dynamic between Japanese and Korean modernisms, to show that these movements developed contemporaneously, alongside one another, and without one being necessarily more significant than the other. The Japanese initiatives of modernization that spurred modernism in Korea were the same ones that contributed to the rise of modernism in Japan itself. Japanese modernism did not cause Korean modernism; instead, the conditions of modernity that were emerging as a result of modernization—greatly expedited by the Empire—created the modern climate that these East Asian modernists were responding to. Because they were responding to similar conditions, we see similar responses. To better understand these responses would necessitate the inclusion of other Korean and non-Japanese modernists into this global conception of modernism.

Thus, pursuing this research would involve an engagement with other peripheral modernists affected by the Japanese Empire from other regions of Asia. This would bring these writers into the discussion of East Asian modernism’s place in modernism as a global event. This would hopefully also lead to an uncovering of lesser known modernists, and female modernists in particular who—like Chika Sagawa—have received significantly less scholarly attention than their male modernist contemporaries. Ideally, such research would also stimulate increased interest in the fields of global and East Asian modernisms, and by extension, create a demand for further translations of source and critical materials.

Likely, taking a project like this forward will also involve a great deal of archival work. It will be crucial to be aware of which modernist journals and texts Japanese and
Korean modernists were reading. If—as a hypothetical example—we could prove that Yi was reading a Japanese modernist journal in which Sagawa’s work was published, or that Sagawa and other Japanese modernists had access to journals in which Yi was published, this could drastically change how we view the dynamic between Japanese and Korean modernism. We know Yi read *Shi to Shiron*, but knowing which issues he was reading, and who was published in each would greatly enhance our understanding of his oeuvre and his place within East Asian modernism. Any potential correspondence between Japanese and Korean modernists would also be vital to furthering our understanding of the time period. From an even broader perspective, it would be resourceful to try to track the circulation of modernist journals and texts throughout and at boundaries of the Japanese Empire. This could aid in achieving a more complete picture of how modernist literatures and aesthetics developed in East Asia. Such work would further help generate innovative ways of understanding East Asian modernism and its place within the global modernist canon.

Yi’s oeuvre contains more than is available in English translation, but I hope that by pursuing a continuation of my research I can work, ideally with other interested scholars, to encourage further translations of his writings. Yi’s works speak to modern, global concerns, many of which are still relevant to an international readership today. Thus, it is my hope that the present project might help to promote the contributions Yi has made to Korean, East Asian, and global modernisms, and to raise awareness of Korean modernism as an international movement that is crucial to contemporary understandings of global modernism.
Works Cited


Hung, Tran Anh, dir. *Norwegian Wood*. Toho. DVD.


Appendix A

Figure 1. Yi Sang’s “Poem No. IV” (9).

Poem No. IV

The problem regarding the patient’s disposition

\[ \begin{align*}
0 & \cdot 0 8 \backslash a & \cdot 5 I \\
0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 8 \backslash a & \cdot 5 I \\
0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 8 \backslash a & \cdot 5 I \\
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0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 & \cdot 0 8 \backslash a & \cdot 5 I \\
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\end{align*} \]

Diagnosis 0:1

26.10.1931

The above diagnosis by the doctor in charge Yi Sang