

# Against “Fascism” in Korean Liberation Space (1945-1950): Focusing on Kim Kirim’s Writings for Peace

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This article explores how a leading Korean literary critic, Kim Kirim (1908-?), understood the controversial term “fascism” in his writings. If we associate fascism with wartime Japanese totalitarianism, it is difficult to understand why and how he warned against fascism in liberated Korea. By interpreting his use of the term “fascism” from the colonial to the liberation period, we are able to gain a better understanding of the international relations between imperial Japan and colonial Korea, as well as of the internal relations between North and South Korea from 1945 to 1950. Such an approach allows us to see the struggle for mutual respect among Korean writers experiencing the ideological conflict and exclusive sectarianism immediately before the outbreak of the Korean War.

**Keywords** Kim Kirim, Emperor-System fascism, Korean liberation space, Albert Camus, *La Peste*, Andre Gide

## “Emperor-System Fascism” Controversy

To label Japanese totalitarianism following the February 26, 1936 incident (an unsuccessful coup d'état attempt by military officers) as “Emperor-System fascism” (*Chōnhwangje pāsijūm*) assumes that Japan should bear responsibility for World War II in relation to its colonial subjects. Under Emperor-System fascism, the Japanese emperor occupied the top position of Japan, as in Hitler’s Nazism and Mussolini’s fascism. However, the emperor was nothing but a symbolic figure without actual political power, unlike Hitler and Mussolini. Thus, “Emperor-System” and “fascism” may not match well. For example, Katayama Morihide explains the implausibility of the term “Emperor-System fascism” within the context of modern political history (Katayama 2012, 207-8). He insisted that, in opposition to the conventional notion, Japanese totalitarianism did not constitute a form of fascism. Nevertheless, Korea’s modern literature scholars tend to label

the Japanese military expansionism between 1935 and 1945 as “Emperor-System fascism” or “Japanese fascism.” In his criticism of Japanese fascism at the end of Japanese colonialism, Kim Yunsik argued: “Under our present circumstances, no liberal democracy or socialist democracy is more hostile than the Japanese fascism that we will face” (Yunsik Kim 1986, 558). He regarded Japanese imperial rule from the Korean Language Society Incident in October 1942 to the liberation in 1945 as being similar in structure to European fascism (Yunsik Kim 2003, 66).

Earlier, Kim called Japanese imperialism in the transitional period “Japanese Emperor-System imperial fascism” (Yunsik Kim 1976, 210). By referring to *A History of Showa (Shōwashi)* by Tōyama Shigeki (*Showa* referring to the reign of Emperor Hirohito), Kim explained that the February 26 Incident showed Japanese fascism features, because the incident significantly increased the military’s influence over the civilian government. He stated that “Hitler’s Nazism and Mussolini’s fascism were based upon independent mass organizations, whereas Japanese fascism had a feeble mass organization and it focused on the military’s strength, placing the emperor at its summit” (ibid., 211). Without any modification, Kim Yunsik borrowed concepts from *A History of Showa*, which states: “Unlike German Nazism and Italian fascism, the Japanese right-wing military government did not have any independent mass organization and so had no choice but to heavily depend on military forces to attempt a *coup d’état* for the reorganization of Japan” (Tōyama, Imai, and Fujiwara 1967, 129). More specifically, Kim applied the features of Japanese fascism without any clear description of how a contradictory phase of “Emperor-System fascism” was transformed and introduced to colonial Korea.

Unlike Kim Yunsik, who applied the definition of fascism portrayed in *A History of Showa* to colonial Korea, Ku Moryong, in “Essence of Fascism Aesthetics,” referred to the general definition of fascism provided by a political scientist, Robert Paxton. Paxton stated: “The Japanese empire of the period 1932-45 is better understood as an expansionist military dictatorship with a high degree of state-sponsored mobilization than as a fascist regime” (2004, 200). However, Ku Moryong widened the scope of fascism in Japanese imperialism in an exceptional manner. He stated that “the term ‘Emperor-System fascism’ was an aspect of fascism in Southeast Asia, being different from European fascism” (Ku 2009, 18). He shows a rather exceptional application to “Japanese fascism.”

The origin of Japanese fascism supported by Ku was derived from Maruyama Masao’s renowned lecture, “Thought and Behavior of Japanese Fascism,” given in July 1947. In his book with the same title, which modified the contents of his lecture, Maruyama classified fascism according to “fascism as a state organization” and “fascism as one movement,” based on his interpretation of Japanese fascism as “a movement” (Maruyama 1979, 29-30). According to him, Japanese fascism emerged from the upper ranks consisting of the military leaders and government officials, but it did not receive any support from the public. Thus, he endeavored

to elucidate the exact nature of Japanese fascism, as being different from the fascism in Italy or the Nazi Party in Germany that were largely supported by the commoners.

The Korean view of Japanese fascism, a topic that has been frequently debated in Korea, is not much different from Maruyama's view. Kim Yunsik's citation of *A History of Showa's* definition of fascism, i.e., "upper-rank fascism," is one example that reflects Maruyama's viewpoint. However, Maruyama's argument was linked to the continuity of fascism within Japanese society in the later colonial period, and his theory should be regarded as Japan's extremely intrinsic ideology, which cannot explain the issue of fascism discussed in liberated Korea, from 1945 to 1950. Fascism was considered something to be stricken out from liberated Korea by the Korean literary circles. The following excerpt from a lecture entitled "Crisis of Ultra-Nationalism toward Fascism and the Obligation of Writers," given by Pak Ch'i-u in 1946, reflected the Korean writers' fear of fascism:

It cannot be denied that fascist violence in politics is truly rampant in underdeveloped societies. Obviously, liberated Korea is yet to be fully trained for democracy. The old feudalism is still deeply rooted in Korea, and even its capitalism is growing abnormally at best. Since it was under Japanese colonial rule, liberated Korea is ill-prepared for any political training opportunities, let alone democracy. Are Korean people ready to repudiate the temptation of fascism to some degree? Korea is the best soil for fascist proliferation (cited by Pak 2010, 275).

In the above address, Pak took the position of differentiating Japanese imperialism from fascism. Instead of expressing his grudge and hatred against imperial Japan, Pak was worried about political turmoil in the liberated country and feared that Korea might be substantially "fascitized." Pak's apprehension was vividly echoed and shared by his colleague-critic, Kim Kirim. Kim majored in English literature at Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, and was reinstated in his post at the *Chosŏn Daily Newspaper* when he came back to Seoul in 1939. After the newspaper was discontinued by the colonial authorities in 1940, he stayed in his hometown in North Hamgyŏng Province during the Pacific War (see Hanscom, Lew, and Ryu 2013, 154-57). He returned to Seoul in 1945 after the USSR liberated the northern part of the Korean peninsula. While working as a faculty member at universities in Seoul, he spoke against the fascist movement in the post-1945 Liberation Space (*Haebang konggan*).

Brisk discussion of fascism preoccupied liberated Korea. Fujii Takeshi explains the nature of fascism while examining the relationship between nationalism, communism, and the Third Worldism of the period (2010, 125-55). Fujii sees the characteristics of communism as an imperial type, and he distinguishes the Mao-led communist regime in China in 1945-1949 from the Stalin-led imperial communism in the Korean peninsula (ibid., 143-44). Considering that Kim Kirim criticized all kinds of imperialism and colonialism,

including the Stalin-led communist threat, Fujii's observation may guide us to recognize the ideological complexities and conflicts that penetrated liberated Korea (see also Fujii 2012).

In this article I explore how Kim Kirim and his colleagues understood the link between the Japanese military regime and fascism during the colonial period and beyond. Kim satirized Mussolini-led fascist Italy, Franco-led fascist Spain, and Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship and fascist rule over China, and launched the anti-fascism campaign in his poems such as "Africa Capriccio" (*Ap'ürika kwangsanggok*), "The Weather Map" (*Kisangdo*), and "Expelled Jupiter" (*Chyup'it'a ch'ubang*). Kim consistently criticized the rise of fascism in the world and regarded fascism as one of the unintellectual forms taken by political and cultural fanaticism, as argued by Yi Wönjo in "The Significance of Exclusive-nationalism in Culture" (January 1946). Kim's denigration of fascism comes with his critique of sentimental romanticism in literary criticism. He assumes that fascism is the combination of sentimental romanticism and exclusive nationalism in the culture arena (*ibid.*).

This article also seeks to examine how these critics understood the link between European fascism and Japanese imperialism. Now that there is a wider spectrum of fascism, as indicated by Kwön Myöng-a, a question about whether Japanese militarism was fascist or not might be considered irrelevant (2006, 31). Nevertheless, the reason for this inquiry is that it may newly interpret Kim Kirim's understanding of the implications of fascism from the Japanese colonial rule to the Korean liberation period. In this way, we seek to understand Kim's perspective on fascism in the historical topography, such as the international relations between imperial Japan and colonial Korea, as well as the internal relations between North and South Korea during the Korean liberation period.

### "Fascism" In Kim Kirim's Writings during the Colonial Period

In the early 1930s, Japanese mass media postulated that fascism was the ideology opposite to communism. One instance of the ideological reversal occurred in June 1933, when Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika, top figures in the Japanese Communist Party Leadership, renounced their allegiance to the Comintern during their imprisonment, embracing instead a Japan-specific mode of revolutionary change under imperial auspices. The *Yomiuri Daily Newspaper* reported, on June 10, 1933, that the two Japanese socialists "renounced communism and returned to fascism." Later, Kim Kirim expressed his frustration in his poem "Hometown" (1936) about Sano Manabu's conversion, positing that communism and fascism are incompatible with each other. Kim was convinced that the conversion from communism to fascism would cause a Korean writer to write for *National Literature* (*kokumin bungaku*, or *kungmin munhak*), a pro-

Japanese literary magazine advocating exclusive nationalism based on unique "Asian" identity against "the West."

Song Uk, a literary critic in the 1960s, criticized Kim by describing him as "a poet who lacks interiority and traditional consciousness" in *Sihak p'yŏngjŏn* (Critical bibliography of poetics) (Song 1963, 189). However, the implication of "tradition" was quite different in the period between colonial Korea and postwar Korea, in the 1950s and 1960s. At the end of the 1930s tradition implied deeply engaging in establishing East Asian tradition for Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. Japan's doctrine of *naisen ittai* ("Japan and Korea are one body") reinforced a strong exclusivism and ultra-nationalism among citizens of the empire. With an aversion to Italian and Spanish fascism, Kim warned of such Orientalism propaganda (*Tongyangjuŭi*) supported by the Japanese traditionalists and pro-Japanese Korean colonial subjects that was similar to the totalitarian movement in Japan. After the Japanese collapse in 1945, Kim endeavored to firmly establish the tradition of Korean literature, in parallel with his growing interest in Korea's pre-modern literature, such as *sijo* and *kasa*. He began to defend the tradition via his essay "Sijo wa hyŏndae" (Sijo and modern) (June 1950) and by incorporating into the Korean literary canon *Kagok wŏllyu* (Traditional Song Collection), Ham Hwa-jin's revised edition of the original published in 1876. Kim once clarified his stance regarding fascism. In his article "Kwahak kwa pip'yŏng kwa si" (Science, Criticism, and Poetry) in the *Chosŏn ilbo*, he does not connect Japanese militarism with European fascism:

How is order restored?... Impatient people, like Jacques Maritain, suggest that the European medieval revival can be the answer. *Fascism* makes the best use of such historic rupture in a clever manner. Order could be attained from the following process: after any new world image and life attitude, based mainly on an obsolete theological, metaphysical tradition inherited from the prehistoric era, is thrown away, a new science-based world image is established, and then, its adequate life attitude is observed as a new "moral" (K. Kim, 1937, emphasis mine).

In this article Kim argued that fascism arose from the unrestored order due to the economic turmoil after World War I. His assertion was based on the theories proposed by Benjamin Crémieux, Herbert Read, and Jacques Maritain. Kim put up the banner of order restoration by referring to a Japanese version in 1935, entitled *Inventaires; inquiétude et reconstruction*, authored by Crémieux, a French critic of Italian literature.

Moreover, Kim had been referring to Herbert Read's essays in his literary articles: "Esotericism in Modern Poetry" (1935), "Dilemma of Contemporary Criticism" (1935), "Generational Limitation of a Poet" (1940), and "Theory of I. A. Richards" (1948). Jacques Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher, gave a series of lectures in North America, beginning in 1933, in which he argued that science was usurping the role of religion and criticizing its focus on the divine.

However, Kim regarded Maritain's argument as "impetuous" for the restoration of order and classified the assertions made by the three scholars under the banner of "restoration of order." Crémieux turned to Italian culture; Read turned to European culture; and Maritain turned to St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy. In this passage, Kim's criticism on the context of fascism is associated with fascism in Italy, where the Roman Curia is located.

In his literary criticism, "Future of Korean Literature" (*Changnaehal chosŏn munhak ūn*), Kim described Nazism as another European fascism, and he properly pointed out that "German literature under the shout of 'Nazi' is called ultra-nationalism" (K. Kim 1934). At that time, Kim classified fascism as "Mussolini's fascism" and "Mussolini-respecting Hitler's Nazism." In his poem "Fascist," published in the *Chosŏn Daily Newspaper* on September 9, 1933, the expression "fascist not wearing black shirts," pointed to Italian fascism, depicting the loyalty of the obedient Italian masses to Il Duce (leader) Mussolini.

There is blue air comprising a dense layer of stairs on the horizon.  
 Children of tiny water vapor go up, stepping lightly on the layer-upon-layer stairs.  
 Pine trees on the seashore are signaling absolute obedience to the direction of the wind.  
 Therefore, sea-gale is a *fascist* not wearing black shirts  
 (K. Kim 1933, emphasis mine).

"Sea-gale" is reminiscent of the radically violent Italian fascism in 1933. Based on the fact that the all-volunteer militia of the Mussolini-led National Fascist Party was commonly called the Blackshirts, who were distinguished by their black uniform, the poetic speaker associates sea-gale with political violence (see Bosworth 2005, 117). Sea-gale demanding the absolute obedience of pine trees functions as a metaphor for fascists. His description of fascism during the Japanese colonial period was limited to Italian fascism, not Japanese militarism at the time, as we can see. However, his denotation of fascism after the liberation of Korea underwent slight changes, which deserve our attention.

### The Term "Fascism" in Kim Kirim's Post-Liberation Texts

Kim Kirim resumed his literary career in the left-wing camp after liberation. He criticized fascism and defended democracy as poetry chairman of the left-wing Chosŏn Writers Union (*Chosŏn Munhakka Tongmaeng*). His position was quite similar to philosopher Park Ch'iu, and critic-colleague Yi Wŏnjo, as well as other literary alliance commentators who led the Union after 1946. The "democracy" they discussed at the time might come close to people's democracy, or utopian socialism. Unlike left-wing intellectuals, however, Kim Kirim's mention of fascism was somewhat more limited after he dissociated himself from the Union

and joined the nationalistic right-wing Podo League in 1949. Then, his mention of fascism was limited only to cultural aspects, and he often referred to anti-communist writers, such as Gide and Camus, when talking about the solidarity between the North and South.

Kim initially commented about the term "fascism" in the liberation period during his lecture, "Direction of Korean Poetry," at the national convention of writers, on February 8, 1946. In the cited statement, he distinguished fascism from imperialism:

Freedom of the poetic spirit is not a luxurious decoration. Like other types of freedom, such as freedom of speech and publication and freedom of assembly and association, which have been restored in this country, poetic spirit freedom is a bloody legacy of many martyrs and fighters through ceaseless resistance, who endured devilish torture and capital punishment. On top of that, we should bear in mind that our freedom of poetic spirit could only be attained because of the strenuous fight by the democratic warriors of the Allied Forces to overthrow *fascism* and imperialism (K. Kim 1947, 203-04; emphasis mine).

Considering that Kim took the position of separating the three Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) dismantled by the occupying Allied Forces after World War II into "fascism" and "imperialism," we note that Kim excluded Japan from the category of fascism. Germany and Italy were hardly "imperial powers" in this context because Germany had lost all its colonies after World War I, and Italy failed to obtain her desired colonies even as a winning state in World War II. In contrast, Japan was on the winning side in World War I and launched its colonization of Manchuria, so it is classified as an imperial power. Kim did not emphasize the dichotomous thinking that World War II was a confrontation between democratic powers and fascist powers, and he classified Japan as a type of imperialism.

However, in his essay "Opinion on Implementation of the Enlightenment Movement," in June 1946, Kim began to view the definition of fascism more broadly and argued that fascism was an idea opposite to democracy:

To newly set up an independent, democratic government in Korea, the greatest efforts from our intellectuals to briskly launch an illiteracy eradication campaign, make people better understand the transitional period of democracy and its current special processes in Korea, and let them become accustomed to the democratic way of thinking in daily practice, is the most urgent task for Korea today. If this is the case, we can realize the goal of constructing a democratic Korea in a true sense, and thus our intended achievements will create a solid, spiritual barrier to protect all people from any *fascist* threat (cited by Song and Kim 1991, 330; emphasis mine).

Kim's perspective that fascism is an idea opposite to democracy is similar to that of the Comintern, revealing his sympathy with socialism at the time he

joined the Chosŏn Writer's Union right after liberation. In addition, Kim's left-wing inclination opposing fascism was clearly noted in a roundtable meeting held in July 1946 under the theme "Mobilization in Founding a Country and the Intellectual Class." Kim participated in the discussion as a poet, together with a literary critic, Paek Ch'öl, a philosopher of politics, Pak Ch'i-u, and a doctor, Ch'ong Kün-yang. Kim reviewed the fascist characteristics of Japanese imperialism during the discussion:

Indeed, it is true that our freedom was threatened by the harshest police system of *Japanese imperialism*. Japanese police developed their own techniques to oppress the Korean people in a surprisingly skillful manner. In the future, the reappearance of such *fascistic* police will be a matter of concern in liberated Korea (cited by *ibid.*, 109; emphasis mine).

By labeling the "Japanese police" during the late Japanese imperialist period as "fascistic police," Kim linked the period between 1942 and 1945 to the Japanese fascist regime, at a time when he had isolated himself in his native village and was not writing in Korean. Police forces, including the Japanese and even Korean collaborators, were at the forefront in oppressing freedom of writing in the mother tongue. Kim, who could not write in Korean for four years, feared that the harshly censored police system might reappear in liberated Korea. This suggests that fascism could arise from within Korea, not only in Italy and Germany. And Kim probably agreed with Pak Ch'i-u's apprehension that "Korea is the best place for fascists to emerge" as the Fascist party and Nazi party did in Italy and Germany after World War I. Left-wing writers, such as Kim and Pak, were quite sensitive about the emergence of fascism in liberated Korea.

Kim made such worries themes in his poetic works. He clearly showed his antagonism toward fascism in his poem "What a Rugged, Perilous Road it is" that was included in his poetry collection, *New Songs* (1948).

What a rugged, perilous road it is! 1  
Where can we find such a pleasant road?

This road leads to liberty and glorious days.  
How can we find such worthwhile marching?

I tell you "fascist" to the truth. 5  
You are dreaming an unreasonable dream, without doubt.

This road is worthwhile and honorable.  
Everyone smiles silently and marches to the post  
(K. Kim 1948, 45-6).

In view of the situation in 1946, the phrase "a fascist ... dreaming an unreasonable dream" indicates neither already fallen Italian Fascism and German Nazism, nor a disgraced Japanese imperialism. The term "everyone" who is "worthwhile ... marching" toward "the post" signifies the general public that supports a democratic society. Given that the poetic words such as "marching" and "post" allude to Soviet communist theory, the term "fascist" in line five appears to be some domestic faction that opposes Soviet communism. If the faction is opposed to socialist democracy, what comes easily to mind is U.S.-oriented capitalist democracy. However, in another poem, "America," which is included in the same collection, the poetic narrator praises U.S. Independence Day, and this suggests that fascists stand against America. One fact we can note from the poem is that the term "fascism" does not point toward the fall of Japanese militarism, but toward a domestic, anti-democratic faction in liberated Korea. In the midst of intense power struggles in liberated Korea, Kim criticized the factions showing a totalitarian or unfriendly attitude by calling them fascists.

In his poem, "Battlefield Communicating with a Glance," it is understood that Kim evaluated Japan as "obsolete imperialism." The poetic speaker pursues solidarity among colonial subjects under the rule of empire:

When I read Seán O'Casey's *The Plough and The Stars* on that night, 1  
 I met that Irish army in a dream.  
 Young soldiers, with stout necks and rounded eyes,  
 Sat in a huddle at a public hall.  
 I and a commander wearing a white military uniform greeted with eye contact 5  
 As if we were not strangers to each other.

Speechless army  
 Unbending army  
 Chain-resisting army

When I meet the Indian army, 10  
 Grapple them strongly by the hands.  
 When I meet the Vietnamese army,  
 Embrace them, rub their cheeks, and dance to Russian music.  
 ...  
 (ibid., 38-9).

A militant, fighting color is embedded in the poem's title, depicted in the poetic word "battlefield." At night, when the poetic speaker reads O'Casey's play, *The Plough and The Stars*, he meets Irish youths in his dream who launched the Easter Rebellion to end British rule in Ireland. The poetic speaker depicts the uprising Irish rebels, whose neck veins bulged along with glistening eyes, as "young soldiers, with a stout neck and rounded eyes."

The theme of *The Plough and The Stars* is the armed insurrection in Ireland

during Easter Week, April 1916, during which Irish civilians fought against British rule (see O'Casey 2001, xxiv). The poem's title itself refers to the "Starry Plough flag" of the Irish militia. As described by the famous phrase "a terrible beauty is born" in W.B. Yeats's poem "Easter 1916," the Easter Rising offered an opportunity to promote the Irish nationalist movement. The poetic speaker intercrosses the Irish nationalist movement portrayed in Yeats's poem and O'Casey's play with Korea's nationalist movement during the liberation period.

The poetic speaker feels a sense of solidarity between Ireland, a British colony, and Korea, a Japanese colony. The sense of solidarity was expanded to the army of India, a British colony, and the army of Vietnam, a French colony. When the poetic speaker meets the Indian army, he "grapples them strongly by the hands." In the scene where the poetic speaker encounters the Vietnamese army, he will "embrace them, rub their cheeks, and dance to Russian music." As the poem reveals the poetic speaker's solidarity with the armies of Ireland, India, and Vietnam, the battlefield is a place where the ruled people fight against empires. The phrase "dancing to Russian music" implies that the poetic speaker favors the socialist democracy developed in Russia, rather than being inclined toward capitalist democracy. The poetic speaker classified Britain, France, and Japan as obsolete imperial powers, demanding that the colonial nations should shake hands for their mutual cooperation.

Kim Kirim's utopian ideal was shattered in the end. The left-wing Union was broken up by government oppression in late 1947 and most of Kim's colleagues fled to the North. Kim decided to stay in Seoul, and he joined a right-wing organization. He left no comments regarding his conversion, which was closely related to the changing political circumstances surrounding the Korean peninsula. Amidst this, his anti-fascism theory remained unchanged. In his literary criticism "Characteristics of National Culture," published in 1949, Kim separated fascism from imperialism and censured both (*Söul Sinmun*, Nov. 3, 1949). Kim made it clear that Korea's national literature should be centered on "anti-fascist literature" and "anti-imperialist literature." About the latter, he asserted that the aftereffects of Japanese imperialism should be removed as early as possible. He took separate positions on describing the harmful elements of Japanese imperialism and Italian fascism. According to Kim, Korean writers should flatly reject fascism as "basic signs of ultra-nationalism-based culture theories" in the Korean culture, and at the same time stamp out all remnants of Japanese imperialism in "the characteristics of national culture" (K. Kim 1988, 3:156).

Kim began to recognize that fascist elements were clearly present during the late Japanese colonial period, following the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, and this development acted as a catalyst to contaminate liberated Korea. During the liberation period, fascism represented the ultra-nationalistic and chauvinistic elements that were deeply rooted in Korean society, rather than Italian fascism or German Nazism. Kim's negation of fascism was aimed

at settling the political turmoil after liberation, not at denouncing the previous Japanese imperialism.

To date, many Korean scholars researching Japan's doctrine of *naisen ittai* tend to call this period "Emperor-System fascism." However, Kim described contemporary Japan as an imperial nation, without identifying it as European-style fascism. At that time, Kim's perception of the term "fascism" was focused on the totalitarian political system that had public support, as in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In this context, Japanese totalitarianism should be differentiated from European fascism, because the former was based on an emperor, a symbolic figure, touted entirely by Japanese military leaders. By overlooking the directionality of fascist recognition from the upper or lower class and expanding the inseparability of totalitarianism, some unreasonable theories have been asserted, to the effect that Kim's "poetics on totality" (*chönchê siron*), which synthesized the contents and forms of poetics, were derived from the trend of fascism in the 1930s (see Ch'oe 2001, 48). If his theory of total poetics is linked to Japanese totalitarianism, the aesthetic and ideological phases of Japanese militarism should be fully examined beyond ethical judgments of good and evil, as indicated by Kim Yerim. She pinpointed the lack of in-depth study of the aesthetic perspective of fascism: "To date, the major reason why microscopic analyses have not been sufficiently made on the relationship between situations in late Japanese colonialism and literary imagination is that the aesthetic and ideological phases of Japanese militarism could not be fully discussed. This is associated with the work that understands the ideological system of Japanese fascism" (Yerim Kim 2004, 16).

In liberated Korean society, the term "fascism" was used with a rhetorical connotation that warned of exclusive ultra-nationalism beyond the narrow scope of a political system. By expanding the concept of fascism from the narrow scope of a political system to the broad scope of a fascist movement, Kim Kirim was worried about the possibility that liberated Korea might be transformed into a country affected by fascitization. "*Sosöl ūi p'agyŏk*" (Exceptionalism of a novel), published May 1950, one of Kim's last critiques before he disappeared in the turmoil of the Korean War, had a commentary on how to cope with the fascist movement that had sprouted in liberated Korea (K. Kim 1950).

## Overcoming Fascism with Love

In a roundtable meeting on the theme "Discussion of the Direction of New Literature," which was published in the June 1950 issue of *Literature (Munhak)*, just a month before the outbreak of the Korean War, Yi Höngu applauded Kim Kirim for his article "Exceptionalism of a Novel" published in the previous May issue (H. Yi et al. 1950, 108-22). In his article Yi defined existentialism as "a sort

of distressing spirit of how foreign people react to human existence dating from or after World War II,” and asserted that “we, Korean people, have a deep sense of despair that is not to be outdone” (ibid., 119). Then Yi asked: “What is the reason why Korean literature has not had a literary spirit that may contribute to the world soul?” (ibid.). In response to this, Kim asserted that “Our door towards the world was tightly closed during the Japanese colonial rule,” citing the dark reality of Korean literature that was affected by the Japanese colonial assimilation policy between October 1942 and August 1945 (ibid.).

During the liberation period Kim Kirim had a keen interest in French existentialism and Albert Camus’s novel *La Peste* published in 1948. *La Peste* is an allegorical novel that tells the story of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran that has been sealed off (see Camus 1991). Kim asserted that “Oran is an isolated and deserted city, cut off from the outside world and imprisoned by plague, and the townspeople do not escape death from the disease. It is not only a fictional circumstance that Camus proposed but also a symbol of a twofold or even threefold world” (K. Kim 1950, 129). Kim recognized that Camus obtained the motif for *La Peste* while France was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II. He further emphasized that “for the existentialist Camus, his life was affected as completely as plague might seal off the border,” extending the algorithm of plague to the barrier in one’s life. Such an algorithm of plague was equally applicable to liberated Korea (ibid.).

As noted above, the novel *La Peste* describes the city of isolated Oran ravaged by plague. Like the city that is sealed off by disease, in 1945 the Korean peninsula was divided at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, which marked the beginning of Soviet and U.S. trusteeship over the North and South, respectively, and this division helped to make Seoul (south) and P’yŏngyang (north) alone and isolated. At that time, the author, who was residing in Seoul, described the city’s helpless situation in “My Seoul Drawing” (April 1949) as follows: “Besieged by the two superpowers, Seoul is a city that is quite vulnerable to the ferocious winds of international politics—the indescribably poor city that cannot induce any optimism or pessimism” (K. Kim 1988, 5:404).

He was aware that the South Korean government, with its capital in Seoul, was a puppet government without authority. He called it “an interim government,” making it clear that the government was in an extremely precarious situation, depending on the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, there is no difference between the plague-ravaged city of Oran and Seoul influenced heavily by the whirlwind of international politics, since the two cities were isolated and helpless. Just as Camus explained that his country was occupied by German troops as tightly as plague might seal off its border, Kim could not overlook a cloud of war brewing over Seoul, a war which would completely shatter the city. As Kim had predicted, “the ferocious winds of international politics” were transformed into a war in Seoul (ibid.).

Kim was convinced that the conflict could be overcome by mutual love for Korean unity. In an effort to explain how the characters of *La Peste* struggled to find "cheerful, optimistic attitudes," Kim quoted the dialogue between two characters, Raymond Rambert and Dr. Bernard Rieu. Rambert, a newspaper reporter from Paris, visits Oran to report on the sanitary conditions in the Arab population, but the sudden, unexpected total quarantine of Oran traps him in the city. He desperately struggles to find methods of escape from Oran to rejoin his wife in Paris. However, Dr. Rieu refuses to give a certificate that will allow Rambert to leave.

Kim raised the theory of abstract ideals in the confrontation between Rambert and Dr. Rieu, indicating the gap between theory and practice. The following few lines of *La Peste* were quoted by Kim: "'No,' Rambert said bitterly, 'you can't understand. You're using the language of reason, not of the heart; you live in a world of abstractions.'" (K. Kim 1950, 132). As Rambert puts it, Kim's concern was to do away with "the abstract world." Depicting Korean people's imitation of the "abstract world" and principles as deep-seated problems besetting Korea, Kim advocated not only "political liberation" but also "spiritual liberation":

The liberation from Japanese colonial rule is tantamount to the first political liberation, but a spiritual liberation should be followed at the same time, overcoming our biased nationalistic idealism. In situations where all philosophies, trends of the time, and political ideals are inundated immediately after liberation, aren't we recklessly indulging in their intrinsic beauty, so to speak, the superficial value of idealism, without any alertness or consideration in terms of our real life? (ibid.).

As Kim pointed out, diverse philosophies, currents of thought, and political ideas poured into the liberated country. He doubted whether the imported ideas were adequate or effective for Korea's situation, or rather would saddle Korea's reality against its will. Fascism was also one of the spirits that emerged in liberated Korea in the aftermath of Japanese imperialism. As Pak Ch'i-u had warned, "Korea is the best soil for fascist proliferation," since fascism designed to forge national unity under a totalitarian one-party state was especially influential among oppressed people. As demonstrated in the consecutive assassinations of the pacifist political leaders Yō Un-hyōng (1947) and Kim Ku (1949), the country in this period was plagued by political chaos; many violent acts were tolerated for the sake of peace and unification. Amidst the situation where political parties struggled to grasp political power on the Korean peninsula, Kim Kirim mourned the death of these two nationalists in poems published in newspapers, including "We Lost a Million Followers, Mongyang Yō Un-hyōng" (*Chosŏn chungang ilbo*, August 7, 1947) and "Mourning Kim Ku" (*Kukdo sinmun*, June 30, 1949). Although he somewhat sympathized with socialist democracy after the liberation period, Kim keenly sensed the totalitarian elements of that system and decided to join a right-wing group after dissociating himself from the left-wing Chosŏn

Writers Union. Eventually, Kim opted for capitalist democracy, after considering the competing alternatives.

In *La Peste*, Rambert, trapped in Oran, finally decides to stay, although he misses his wife in Paris. After Tarrou tells him that Dr. Rieu is likewise separated from his wife, Rambert feels ashamed to flee. Feeling compassion towards Dr. Rieu, he chooses to stay behind and help fight the epidemic. The novel tells the readers that Camus emphasizes a sense of compassion and unity among those community members who are trapped in the city. When plague strikes, Rambert becomes a member of the new community in the city with which he feels that he has no connection. By the time the plague is in full retreat, Rambert develops a friendship with Dr. Rieu and is reunited with his wife in the long run.

In the political situation that grew more precarious in the face of the imminent Korean War, Kim also sent an appeal letter to his colleague Yi Wŏn-jo, who had defected to North Korea, to the effect that Yi should be at the forefront of anticommunism for the sake of the nation, thus emphasizing “the sense and spirit of national unity” (K. Kim 1988, 6:139). Kim felt a sense of guilt and compassion towards Yi, a colleague in the *Chosŏn Ilbo*, where Kim had worked for about seven years. Kim wrote to Yi: “I have heard that writers get special hospitality in North Korea. However, intellectuals’ desire should be based on the happiness of the whole Korean race instead of seeking one’s own happiness, like Andre Gide’s agony” (ibid., 6:140).

In this comment Kim left an excuse for abandoning his communist friends. Kim, who took part in the Chosŏn Writer’s Union, tried to free himself from the guilt of breaking friendship with Yi, the first chairman of the Union, by clarifying his stay in the South. Indeed, the reference to “Andre Gide’s agony” was a message intended for Yi. Gide, who fought under the banner of anti-fascism during the Spanish Civil War, embraced communism for a brief period, but his ideologies and perception regarding it suffered a severe blow when he was invited by Stalin to tour the Soviet Union. Gide wrote *Return from the USSR* (1936) to reveal the hypocrisy of communism, which became a controversial issue among intellectuals at the time (see Winock 2008, 552-71). Like Gide, Kim openly clarified his change of ideological position (conversion from the pro-communist Chosŏn Writer’s Union to the anti-communist Podo League) in order to seek mutual happiness amidst the civil conflict. Kim explained his change in a public letter to Yi Wŏn-jo. Yi, who had earned a bachelor’s degree by studying Gide at Hosei University in 1935, must have been aware of Gide’s conversion to anti-communism in 1936. In Yi’s public response to Kim Kirim, in 1941, entitled “The Hometown of Poetry,” Yi applied Gide’s short story “The Return of the Prodigal Son” to Kim Kirim’s poetic journey from his imagism poems in the 1930s to lyrical poems such as “A Public Cemetery” (*kongdong myoji*) in early 1940 (W. Yi 1941, 199). The work by Andre Gide was exchanged as a symbol between these two critics in relation to each other. In the last letter between them, Kim defended his withdrawal from

the Union, and justified his defection from North Korea by explicitly addressing Gide's conversion.

It appears that Kim's embrace of anti-communism, which was not linked to a social class but to the whole nation's happiness, was grounded in his cautious attitude toward fascism. Kim probably sensed the odor of fascism in North Korea. Like Gide, who was disillusioned by communism after his visit to the Soviet Union and changed his mind, Kim also changed his political direction after he experienced violent acts committed by Russian forces in the Soviet-occupied area. The reminiscence of Kim Kyudong (1925-2011), a poet-disciple of Kim Kirim, is worth referencing: "Regarding the culture of Soviet forces that loot other people [Kim Kirim]'s glasses, my teacher worries that serious things may happen in the years to come" (see Cho 2007, 376). Kim Kirim's remark in his preface of *New Songs* ("there must be a farewell in art and life, to greet a new future sooner or later") shows his commitment to a new beginning (K. Kim 1948, 126). His resolution might have stemmed from the possible risks of political conversion and mixed feelings of guilt and sorrow after parting from his Union colleagues. Just as Kim converted to the right and followed the agony of Gide, so Gide's anti-fascism is associated with Kim. The following criticism of fascism by Gide is reflected in Kim's clarification of the concepts of nation and patriotism: "The menace to culture comes from fascism, from narrow and artificial nationalisms which have nothing in common with true patriotism, with the deep love of one's country. The menace to culture comes from war, to which all these nationalisms and their hatreds fatally and necessarily lead" (Gide 1937, 66).

Just as Gide groped for the third way between European fascism and Soviet communism, so did Kim. Kim highlighted the power of love and solidarity, and he attempted to overcome factional politics both in the fascist South and in the communist North. He who never criticized the Japanese rule as a colonial subject began to criticize the legacy of Japanese colonialism after liberation. He was concerned about the rise of fascism, particularly the succession of "Japanese Emperor-System imperial fascism" and its transmission to liberated Korea. To overcome the mixed legacy of Japanese colonialism, Soviet Russian imperial communism, and exclusive nationalism, he proposed the virtue of love and solidarity by intertextualizing from Camus and Gide.

## Conclusion

Kim Kirim used the term "fascism" for the political or historical system and denoted the Japanese regime before liberation not as fascism but as imperialism. However, after the Japanese collapse in 1945, he began to include Japanese totalitarianism from 1942 to 1945 as a sort of fascism, and he criticized the legacy of both imperialism and fascism in liberated Korea. He was able to tell the

truth during the liberation period, which he had not dared to utter as a colonial subject. The depth of social discontent of the colonized was revealed in his poetic collection and essays at the time.

Kim found it possible that fascism might grow in liberated Korea. So, in this context, if we only associate “fascism” with wartime Japanese totalitarianism we cannot understand how much Kim warned against fascism in liberated Korea. In the face of fascist totalitarianism, associated with gross violation of human rights, Kim wished that the Korean people would embrace each other through mutual love and solidarity. He also attempted to calm down the antagonism and exclusivism between the fascist South and the communist North by love and altruism, inspired by his reading of *La Peste*.

## Note

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