

“Calling the Wind: Reading ‘the Wind’ in Tankas of Lee JungJa, Korean Poet in Japan”

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Zainichi (Koreans in Japan) literature has been much more discussed in terms of hybridity, diaspora, and language in the post-colonial studies, in the US and South Korea as well as in Japan. What I am concerned here is the description of places, homeland and Japan, by those who were forced to live in Japan and have been politically deprived of their rights. The Japanese language literature by Zainichi leads us to the theme of place and space referred to in the pastoral study of environmental literature. Their thoughts about place and space, a homeland and a strange place, take Zainichi writers through the sequence of imaginary dialogues about sense of belonging, sense of place, and then the planet earth.

The second-generation Zainichi tanka (a Japanese short poem) poet and essay writer, Lee JungJa has published *Song of Balsam* (1984)\*, *Looking Back to Japan* (1994), *Cherry Tree in Leaf* (1997) since 1984, and her latest book of tankas, *Headwind in the Hill* was published in 2004. Korean word, ‘Mapparam’ means headwinds, and the hill, one of the title words is considered to be the place where she lives, Iga Ueno, Mie Prefecture. In this ‘windy hill,’ she can feel the wind convey light particles, flower seeds, and Korean songs ‘Balsam,’ ‘Arirang.’ As the headwind confronts the wind reversal, the sense of a homeland and the sense of a foreign land are being felt simultaneously in this hill.

Lee tries to show plural realities, ages, and places in this hill, using allegory of ‘the wind.’ Her tankas on the wind, not only lyrical but also factual ones, focus on the landscape, which consists of different places and languages and people from different backgrounds. In this paper, I would like to observe in what process a diasporic Zainichi poet who is possessed by plural places (Japan, South Korea, and North Korea), can be equipped with the planetary, environmental thoughts.

#### 1. A sense of place in *Song of Balsam* (1984)

In one tanka of ‘Song of Arirang,’ *Song of Balsam* (Gan shobo), Lee considers why 60-year-old father stopped singing ‘Tahyansari.’ She defines Tahyansari as one’s life in a foreign place.

My bent-back father stopped singing 'Tahyansari' as if he felt his death approaching in Japan (27)

To compensate for the shortage of Japanese laborers before the WWII, Lee's father came to Japan in about 1919, met her mother after working all over the country, and Lee was born in Ueno, Mie Prefecture in 1947. In the front yard of the coffee shop she runs, her father planted the flower 'Traji' (white Korean bellflower). In the above tanka, silence due to the song being unsung prevails over her residence. Her father felt himself destined to die in Japan. Another tanka in 'Song of Arirang' tells of a lone but full-bloomed balsam in an unoccupied tenement house for Korean laborers. Lee brings out the contrast between her reticent father and a shabby tenement. This implies that many Zainichi people returned to North Korea in the repatriation program starting at the end of 1950s. This tenement tanka leads us to a grasp of her father's bent back. Lee found his back bent on account of his decision not to repatriate, but at the same time she pays respect to his decision to live in Japan, as she does to a beautiful balsam in the tenement yard, which is acclaimed for its vitality. Lee explains in the author's note that the balsam appears a fragile flower, but that it has the ability to survive in any place to which the wind carries its seed.

To sum up, the wind (headwind) and seeds can be taken as allegories of Japanese colonization and Korean residents in Japan, but these allegories do not fully apply to the descendants of the first-generation. They have come to feel more distant from their homeland, or to feel more attachment to the place which they live in. Lee, the second-generation Zainichi, senses a slight but clear estrangement from her mother in the light of the attachment to homeland Korea.

Mother's deep wrinkled hands smelled like Korean waters and winds by my touch

The moment I laid my hands on my mother's, it smelled like Japanese dirt (31)

The fragrance of Korean winds in her mother's hands is dissipating by Lee's touch, so Lee guesses that her estrangement from Korea may have prevented her parents' return to their country. As is written in 'Nationality' and 'Blood,' Lee is worried about her

aloofness about her parents' country and culture, so she starts to wear Korean clothing, sing the traditional songs and learn Korean language. But she gave up on the way, due to her own childbirth. She became a mother, not knowing 'either her country or language.' (45) Her gradual acceptance of life in Japan, she feels, may estrange her from her family and people in her country.

While Lee strongly wishes to acquire the sense of belonging to her country, her enthusiasm is diluted by her affinity for the place she lives in. (55) This in-betweenness also comes from her realization that 'there are fictive nations behind' the repatriation policies: North and South Korea as well as Japan. (54) Losing their interest in repatriation, her parents 'call their homeland a lost country.' (60) They also have had difficulty acquiring the sense of belonging to their country, let alone Lee's sister-in-law and her mother who had leprosy and were doubly isolated in Japan.

Wandering father and mother, and I live like alien plants en masse in Japan (108)

Like an air plant, she is rooted in a certain place where she feels herself out of place. Even her name doesn't make her sure who she is.

Lee JungJa, Ri Masako or Kayama, which is your true name, my son asked (137)

Her sorrow over *déraciné*, however, coexists with her repulsion toward 'natural' affinity for the place to live, as her parents' isolation does with the appraisal of a balsam in a strange place. As Kim ShiJong put it, this double consciousness comes from Zainichi's resistance to "the fertile soil for emotive nationalism," which cultivated and is still cultivating a sense of place through the so-called Japanese traditional sensitivity to recognizing aspects of nature. (270)

## 2. Headwind and wind reversal in *Headwind in the Hill* (2004)

In 2004, *Headwind in the Hill* was published. 'Mapparam' means headwinds, which Lee feels blowing on the green hill (Midoriga oka) in Ueno-city. One wind here functions as a leap into the past, connecting, say, the green hill in Ueno with 'hills wildfire' in Jinju where Lee's father was born. This 'memory of winds' goes far back to

reach the battleground in Jinju where the Japanese General Hideyoshi invaded twice in 16<sup>th</sup> century. (13) Another wind, personified as the carrier of messages, links one place with another for the future. Lee's elder sister gave her the seeds of white lilies, which were planted in a patch of ground in front of Lee's coffee shop. Then, 'winds and flowers fly across the sky' toward the first-generation Zainichi poet, Kayama Matsuko, Japanified name of Kim MalCha. (20) Kim had leprosy a few years after her daughter was born, and she was forced to live in an isolated hospital in Kusatsu, Gumma Prefecture. Until 1995, Lee and her sister didn't know that they had different mothers. The poet of *Kusatsu Arirang* was the mother of Lee's sister. Lee's parents didn't tell their children anything about Kim.

When Lee found that her tanakas in the Japanese school textbook helped her sister to meet her mother, she was so delighted and at the same time desperately wanted to ask her father about his former wife, but he had already passed away.

Kusatsu Arirang and Father's Arirang passed away, and gave clouds, winds, and thunders a shake (126)

In the winter of 1981, Kim MalCha was interviewed by a Zainich photographer, Chou KonJe. (Kim MalCha *The Human Magazine Quarterly* 9) Her life full of sorrows and pains was told with heart-rending roars but often with tender humor. Her simple and yet sensitive poems as well as this interview hadn't reached her daughter for about 50 years. In 1996, she died half a year after her reunion. Lee calls the wind to envision what was lost.

Give my eyes and fingers back, winds be my hands, moon be my eyes for the dead (122)

Lee discovers the power of words that (re)connects people, ages and places in an unpredicted way, while she feels her inability to represent those who were lost in a strange country. Lee as a 'nagune' (a wanderer in Korean) living in the former suzerain, orders winds to strike back headwinds, in order to help people feel affinity for their places to live. Kim MalCha who were doubly isolated, makes her realize that not only colonization but also modernization gives rise to nagunes. As Sonia Ryang says,

referring to Anthony Giddens, “space is being increasingly dislocated from place.” (Ryang, 49) Lee’s tanka is considered a protest poem against the process of modernization.

The first-generation writer, Kim SokPom was born in Cheju in South Korea. He says that “it may well be that Cheju, my home town, can be simply called ‘my original landscape,’ but this expression implies ‘nostalgia,’ romantic and shallow sense of belonging. Cheju, my ‘home town’ can’t be described in such feelings.” (Kim SokPom, 228) In contrast, the second-generation Zainichi, Lee wonders whether her mind has been saturated with things Japanese through her ‘love of tanaka.’ (Lee *Song of Balsam* [Revised], 34) She may be possessed by ‘wabi-sabi,’ Japanese traditional aesthetic sense of place, but she is aware of Japanese lack of concern over those who dare to reject that sense of place. To disentangle herself from the double bind, Lee summons the prehistoric land which was not linguistically divided into ‘Ainu, Korea, and Japan.’ (Lee *Headwind in the Hill*, 108) This summons to the land originates from her strong wish to become a planet earth citizen and her experience in the seashore where she can feel akin to flotsam and jetsam. (108-09) In the modernization process where place is being displaced by space, Lee’s dislocated sense of belonging and place paradoxically equips her with the environmental thinking, such as listening to “the cry of earth” in winds. (116)

\*All Japanese titles are written in English, including the below.

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