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**Title : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences in Korea: With
Some Thoughts about Translation in Early Twentieth-
Century Korea1**

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Source : *Trans-Humanities*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (2014), pp. 31-45

Published by : Ewha Womans University Press

URL : <http://eiheng.ewha.ac.kr/page.asp?pageid=book10&pagenum=060600>

Online ISSN : 2383-9899

All articles in *Trans-Humanities* are linked to the Homepage of KCI and
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An Archaeology of the Human Sciences in Korea: With Some Thoughts about Translation in Early Twentieth-Century Korea¹

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I. Introduction

In the history of Korea, and also in the history of various discourses such as those of the sciences and literature, the Japanese occupation in 1910 is a big turning point. There is a contrast between the old and new Korean discourse systems before and after this turn.

There are discourse theories that analyze such pivotal turns in history. The following is an attempt to apply two such theories to Korea – one theory, by Michel Foucault, describes the turn from the age without human sciences to the age with human sciences in Europe, and the other theory, by Friedrich Kittler, describes the turn of German literary and philosophical discourses from the age of books to the age of technology media.

In Korea, after 1910, not only human sciences but also technology media were introduced from the West and Japan. Actually, Western education had already been brought to Korea by Protestant missionaries from as early as the 1880s, though obviously not in a centralized manner. Let us study this critical moment in Korean history with the help of Foucault's and Kittler's theories. To apply their theories entirely would be impossible in one paper. It should be emphasized that only a few aspects can be examined here. Only a few aspects can thus be examined here.

II. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences in Korea

1. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 25370372.

1. The Korean *Order of Things* before the Introduction of Human Sciences

The scientific method with which the history of human sciences can be analyzed is, in my opinion, the “history of science” itself. In this area the French thinker and historian Michel Foucault made a great contribution. In regard to the history of the human sciences, he wrote a monograph entitled *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. However, he wrote about the human sciences in Europe, not about those in East Asia. I would like to see to this oversight. Foucault’s *Order of Things* investigates the establishment of the humanities in Europe and it would therefore seem to be a good model to apply to the situation in Korea. To summarize his thesis roughly, the system of the sciences in Europe was reformed in about 1800, and with that, the humanities were born. Therefore, Europe and Korea share a common feature: the establishment of the humanities through reforming the system of the sciences.

Foucault seldom discusses cultures outside Europe. Nevertheless, his theories can be applied well to the analysis of non-European cultures or to comparative studies. Edward Said’s work, *Orientalism*, is a good, well-known example. But postcolonial studies are not the only potential field of application. Foucault’s method, his so-called “archaeology of knowledge,” can be put to use for investigating the history of the sciences in East Asia without the need to reference postcolonial theories. With this in mind, I previously researched the establishment of the human sciences in Japan by applying Foucault’s *Order of Things* (Nawata, “Kultur-Begriff”). I would now like to extend this application to Korea.

Foucault claimed that the arrangement of knowledge in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries was based on the principle of *tableau* (table), where the world is classified into fields, and knowledge is systemized not according to a time axis but through timeless *tableaux*. However, around 1800 the system of knowledge and the sciences was reformed, and humans took up a central position. In this, the human sciences were born and played a significant role in the new system of the sciences. Humans are born and die – we are beings in time – and the time axis is therefore important in the humanities: the human sciences are historical sciences in principle. Indeed, we call the discipline for the study of art “art history” and the core of literature studies “literary history.”

The human sciences study the cultures that humans have created, the societies that they have built, and how such cultures and societies have changed

throughout history. The opposite of the human sciences are thus the natural sciences, which investigate the eternal laws of nature. In Europe during the first half of the 18th century, the Italian thinker Giambattista Vico divided the world into two spheres: nature, which God created and gave to humans, and culture, which humans themselves created. Vico termed the science that studies culture “scienza nuova.” This “new science” is the origin of our human sciences.

In the European system of the sciences after 1800, not only plants, birds, and animals, but also the bodies of human beings are categorized within nature, because biology and medicine constitute research into the laws of life that time cannot change. The natural sciences, including biology and medical science, were thus in opposition to the human sciences.

Let us now turn our attention to East Asia. The human sciences were introduced into East Asia, including Korea, during the late - 19th to the early - 20th century from Europe, the United States, and Canada. Foucault’s *Order of Things*, which attempts to relativize the central position of the humanities in the scientific system, begins by citing a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” (15). In this, Foucault demonstrates that the modern European system or paradigm of sciences, including the humanities, is not the only one in the world at all. He writes:

In our dream world, is not China precisely this privileged site of space? In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space; we think of it as a civilization of dikes and dams beneath the eternal face of the sky; we see it, spread and frozen, over the entire surface of a continent surrounded by walls. ... There would appear to be, then, at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space. (19)

Foucault mentions the Chinese ordering of knowledge as an arrangement following spatial principles. He says so while citing a fictional encyclopedia imagined by Jorge Luis Borges. Within Foucault’s typically orientalist guesswork, however, we can find a truth: there was indeed, in China, a tradition of understanding the world according to spatial order, namely *tian di ren* (天地人). Above is *tian*, the sky (as Foucault says, “the eternal face of the sky”); beneath is *di*, the earth (“the entire surface of a continent”); and between

them is *ren*, “man,” which includes not only humans but also other creatures and things. This order is clearly shown in *The I Ching* (also called *Yi* and *Book of Changes*), one of the five oldest and most important Chinese scriptures of Confucianism – the principle of governance, education, and knowledge in China from the time of the ancients to the early 20th century. One of the old canonical commentaries to this book says the following: “The *Yi* is a book of wide comprehension and great scope, embracing everything. There are in it the way of heaven, the way of man, and the way of earth” (*The I Ching* 402). Not only was there a spatial ordering of knowledge in China, there was also an encyclopedia employing this order: “三才圖會” (*San Cai Tu Hui, Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Three Elements*) produced during the Ming dynasty. The same can be said about Japan. The spatial ordering of knowledge was also prevalent in Japan, and an encyclopedia employing this order, “和漢三才圖會” (*Wakan Sansai Zue, Japanese-Chinese Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Three Elements*), appeared in 1712, taking the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Three Elements* as its model.

The same claim can be made for Korea, too. I would now like to begin to analyze the Korean case by replacing China with Korea in the passage cited by Foucault: “Is not [Korea] precisely this privileged *site of space*? There would appear to be, then, at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space.”

The Korean scholar An Jeong-Bok (1712–91) compiled the diverse writings of his master Yi Ik (1681–1763) under the title *Seongho Saseol Yuseon*, dividing the texts into five large chapters: 天地 (Sky and Earth), 人事 (Human Matters), 經史 (Canons and Histories), 萬物 (Diverse Things), and 詩文 (Poetry and Prose). The same chapter system was used for the posthumous compilation of the manuscripts that Yi Kyu-Gyeong wrote for his uncompleted encyclopedia *Oju Yeonmun Changjeon San’go* (*Scattered Manuscripts of Glosses and Comments of Oju*)² between the years of around 1809 and 1855. One of the bases of these chapters is the abovementioned traditional three categories of East Asia: *tian di ren*. *Tian* is the sky, to which, for example, the planets belong. *Di* is the

2. In the “DB of Korean Classics” by the Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics, <http://db.itkc.or.kr/>, accessed March 29, 2013. See also an older version without compilation into five chapters: Yi Kyu-Gyeong 1959. For information in English about this encyclopedia see the “Encyclopedia Database” of Heidelberg University, <http://kjc-sv006.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de:8080/exist/apps/matumi/home.html> (accessed March 27, 2013). The English title of the encyclopedia follows this database.

earth, so that geography, for example, is categorized here. These two categories constitute the first chapter. All the things between sky and earth belong to *ren*, the central meaning of which is what is human. Birds, animals, and plants were categorized in the East Asian tradition into *ren*, human. Because the identification of birds or plants with humans was considered a contradiction,³ what belongs to *ren* was divided into two chapters: human-related matters for the second chapter (“Human Matters”), and all things that belong to the space between sky and earth but are not strictly human-related for the fourth chapter (“Diverse Things”). Two chapters then remain: one is for canonical texts (mostly from Confucianism) and history texts, and the other is for poetry and prose, which do not belong to the chapter “Canons and Histories.” Here we see the other basis of these chapters: the traditional four categories of Chinese writings, namely, Confucian canons, history, thought, and literature. The first two correspond to the chapter “Canonical Texts and Histories” and the latter two to the chapter “Poetry and Prose.” History has its position in the chapter “Canonical Texts and Histories,” but it does not play a central role as it does in the modern European order of the sciences.

Let us now compare the European humanities and these chapters. European philosophy would correspond to “prose.” Cultural studies, however, would belong elsewhere, in the chapter “Human Matters.” What constitutes the humanities would have its place spread across various chapters; the unit “human sciences” does not exist in this chapter system. The spatial order, which is one of the principles of this system, resembles rather the principle of *tableau* in the Europe of the 17th and the 18th centuries.

However, this chapter system, which follows the traditional East Asian spatial order, could have been too limited for the rich works of Yi Ik and Yi Kyu-Gyeong with their wide knowledge of Western astronomy, which had an image of heaven and earth very different from that of the East Asian tradition. But in breaking from the traditional East Asian categories on the one hand and not introducing the contemporary European categories of the 19th century on the other hand, Yi Kyu-Gyeong’s manuscripts were indeed originally “scattered,” that is to say, uncategorized.

It is now interesting to compare the spatial order represented in this chapter system with the system of higher education in Korea during the same period. I

3. Cf. Han Yu of the Chinese Tang dynasty states it in his essay “原人” [*Yuan Ren, The Origin of Humans*].

do not mean to say that the encyclopedia was used in the educational institutions and that this use should be investigated now. Rather, the encyclopedia and the educational institutions are two different, but important, examples that can be compared with each other, and together, they throw light on the discourse system of that age. The most important higher school in Korea during the Joseon dynasty was *Sungkyunkwan*⁴ and teaching the canons of Confucianism was the most important part of its educational program. Of both bases of the chapter system in the works by Yi Ik and Yi Kyu-Gyeong – spatial order and Confucianism – it was not the former but the latter that was the principle of contemporary higher education. In other words, this higher education had no interest in the teaching of knowledge systematically according to a spatial order. Rather, it was a system of teaching and learning about the society and culture of ancient China as its ideal.

We can contrast this situation in Korea with that in Europe. The encyclopedia edited by Diderot and d'Alembert and published in 1772 in France is one of Foucault's examples that fits into the *tableau* paradigm. It was also realized in a close relationship with the Académie française, and the encyclopedia became one of the symbols for the Age of Enlightenment.

It should be emphasized that I am saying this without implying any value judgment as to whether Korea or France was the more progressive and therefore better. Foucault would say that such a sense of evaluation, in line with the criterion of progress, is itself a product of the paradigm of the human sciences with its temporal axis – a view that should be relativized.

2. Introduction of Human Sciences to Korea

In the late 19th century, Korea was exposed to the influences of Europe and the United States, and the Western system of higher education was introduced in various forms (Umakoshi). Instead of summarizing the complex history of those introductions, I would like to examine the system of faculties in higher places of learning in Korea in the first half of the 20th century. This is because this system reflects the order of knowledge of that period. An example is Bosung College (now Korea University), established in 1905 by Lee Yong-Ik. After Kim Sung-Soo became president of the college in 1932 he visited Oxford University, Cambridge University, and the Université de Paris, among other universities in the West, and on his return to Korea, he tried to

4. Regarding Sungkyunkwan, cf. Umakoshi 1995, 19–22.

reform the college.⁵ In a paper of 1933 he wrote about his goal of upgrading Bosung College “to a university including not only the now existing faculties of law and of commercial science, but also those of 文 (culture), 理 (nature), medicine, agriculture, and engineering”(Korea University, “Prospectus” 159–60; Umakoshi 93). If we remove the practical sciences, which are connected to concrete occupations, such as the law and medicine, then two faculties remain, 文 and 理. These are the faculty of culture and the faculty of nature, after the modern European system of sciences, which divided the world into historical culture and timeless nature. When we take away “law” and “commerce science” from “culture,” what remains is exactly what should be taught in the faculty of 文, the human sciences.

Kim’s goal was obviously that the faculties system should cover the whole world systematically, including culture as well as nature. We can contrast this parallelism of the order of knowledge and Kim’s reform of higher education with their separation of the Joseon dynasty.

Disrupting the smooth progress of Kim’s reforms, Japan established three faculties at Keijo Imperial University, similarly to the faculty system at Buson College: the faculty of law and culture, the faculty of natural sciences and engineering, and the faculty of medicine (Umakoshi 123–26).⁶ An important model was that of the University of Tokyo, established in 1877, with its four faculties: Law, Culture, Natural Sciences, and Medicine. Here also we find the modern European order of knowledge that divides the world into culture and nature. When we remove law (法) from the faculty of law and culture (法文) we have the human sciences (文). In the list of chairs on the faculty, we find those for the history of philosophy, the history of religions, art history, and the history of Indian philosophy (Umakoshi 130). We can see here clearly that the human sciences, imported from Europe to East Asia, were historical sciences, seeing things according to a time axis.

To summarize the first half of this paper, the modern European view of dividing the world into culture and nature, along with the human sciences, which research culture, were introduced into modern Korea. These human

5. Cf. Umakoshi 1995, 80–96, see also Korea University, “About KU: The KU Spirit: Founding of the University,” Korea University, <http://www.korea.edu/> (accessed April 1, 2013).

6. The faculty of natural sciences and engineering was founded later than the other faculties for financial reasons.

sciences were historical sciences. This paradigm change in Korea also meant that higher education should now cover the order of knowledge systematically. We can see this when we apply Foucault's archaeology of knowledge to Korea.

III. Translation in Early Twentieth-Century Korea

After this analysis of human sciences, let us now examine the literary discourses. The aspect chosen here as an example is that of literary translations. My point is that, according to Foucault, as part of the order of knowledge in Europe during the 17th and the 18th centuries, language was a transparent medium. Language had in itself no density that could be dissolved into meanings. In the 19th century, however, after the reform of the order of knowledge, language obtained a density and was no longer a transparent medium. This occurred parallel to the birth of the human sciences, of which the center – the “subject” in the philosophical sense – was human beings. But I cannot agree with what Foucault says about language in the 19th century. I once criticized Foucault by referring to the German thinker Friedrich Kittler and argued that language in 19th century Europe became even more nonmaterial and transparent, because the subject of language was now the nonmaterial human soul. Translation in 19th century Europe was, in my opinion, a process of reducing the source language into nonmaterial meanings, or the nonmaterial soul of the author, and of representing these meanings, or souls, in the goal language (Nawata, *Vergleichende Mediengeschichte* 110–11).

This paradigm of translation in Europe changed, however, around 1900. This change occurred, above all, because the spread of typewriters emphasized the materiality of language. What Foucault says about the density of language is therefore true not of the 19th century but of the 20th century. In Europe during the 20th century translation was the transfer of one language with its own materiality into another language with its own materiality, transfer from letters to letters. Translation was no longer a transfer via transparent media, but now literary transfer from letters to letters and a confrontation of materiality. The philologist Norbert von Hellingrath, the intellectual Walter Benjamin, and the philosopher Jacques Derrida developed theories about literary translation. In my opinion such theories have in their background the media situation of the 20th century, for example the spread of the typewriter (Nawata, *Vergleichende Mediengeschichte* 104–23).

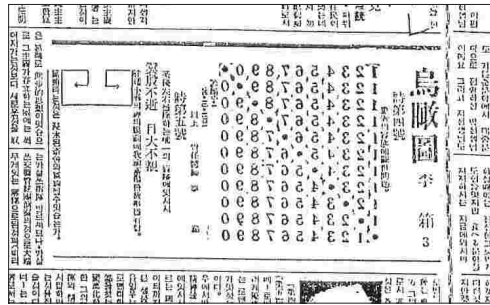
What I have outlined here is the history of the principles of translation in Europe. But what was the case in early modern Korea? According to Theresa Hyun, a paradigm shift in the translation from Western languages into Korean took place in the late 1910s: from indirect translation mostly via Japanese to direct translation, and from free translation incorporating creation by the translators to literary translation (“Refractions from the Horizon” 198–200; “Translation Policy”). This change can be compared to the aforementioned change in Europe. What I want to emphasize is that this change in Korea, too, was perhaps rooted in media, for example, with the spread of modern typography. For example, Japanese characters were printed *en masse* with movable type and must have appeared to Korean eyes as violent forms.

The author Yi Sang (1910 Seoul – 1937 Tokyo) offers a clue. His work, printed with modern movable type in the age of technology media – the telegraph, the telephone, the gramophone, photography, and film – is an excellent example of how the “discourse network 1900” (Kittler) also existed in East Asia. “Discourse network 1900” is a concept created by Friedrich Kittler that describes, in short, the media system born about 1900 in the German-speaking area. According to Kittler, the letters that were transparent media in the 19th century began to insist on their own materiality in the new media system of the 20th century because they now had to compete with technology media. Human beings could not handle these media freely. Rather, the media system consisting of technology media, or modern type, became the *a priori* of society and culture, controlling the unconsciousness of humans and binding their thoughts and activities (Kittler).

Yi Sang published an essay with the title “Lingering Impressions of a Mountain Village: A Few Paragraphs from a Journal of Travels to Sōngch’ōn”⁷ in 1935, shortly before moving to Tokyo. In this work, he compares his own eyes looking at the village to a movie camera, and his essay to a still picture from the movie:

Has my entire round, flat head become a camera, and, albeit through a tired “double lens,” filmed and projected several times over this early-autumn scene of ripening corn? – shallow pathos flowing in through a

7. English translation in: http://www.utoronto.ca/csk/Yi%20Sang%20Toronto%20_2_.pdf (accessed March 23, 2013, Yi Sang 2013), Japanese translation in Yi Sang 2006, 206–218.



(Yi Sang 1934)

When we see movable type itself, we see mirror letters. Yi Sang's concrete poetry using mirror letters can be said to be inspired by his visual impression of movable type (Sugiura 103–05; Nawata, *Vergleichende Mediengeschichte* 230). In any case, the mirror letters here are no longer transparent media transmitting numbers, but opaque materials. In Foucault's words, they are beings with their own density. This is true not only of Yi Sang's concrete poetry, but also of his literature in general.

We can say that the Korean version of the same poem is a translation of the Japanese version by the author himself. This translation was nothing more than a transfer of the ink printed in a Japanese magazine to the ink printed in a Korean newspaper, from normal letters to mirror letters, from material to material.

IV. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to apply Foucault's *Order of Things* to the introduction of the human sciences in Korea, and to apply Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* to the problem of translation in Korea. Only the framework in which the discourses (above all, human sciences and literature) developed in the last few centuries is outlined in this paper. The discourse analysis à la Foucault and the discourse and media analysis à la Kittler with more concrete examples remains a task for the future.

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Abstract

In the history of Korea, and also in the history of various discourses such as those of the sciences and literature, the Japanese occupation in 1910 is a big turning point. The discourse system before this turn and the system after it can be contrasted with each other. The present paper attempts to apply to the Korean scenario two discourse theories for the analysis of historical turns. It should be emphasized that only exemplary insights are given here. The first theory is by Michel Foucault. His *Order of Things* analyzes the pivotal moment about 1800 and contrasts the discourse system of Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries with that of the 19th and 20th centuries. The world was understood in the former through a tabular scheme, as in an encyclopedia, but in the latter, the world was understood according to the time axis, as in human sciences. This contrast can be compared with the contrast of the Korean discourse systems before and after the Japanese occupation. In the former, besides Confucianism, the principle of the spatial comprehension of the world was dominant. However, in the latter, the comprehension of the world was according to the timeline through human sciences, which were introduced from the West and Japan. The second theory is by Friedrich Kittler. His *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* analyzes the historical turn around 1900 and emphasizes the materiality of literary discourses post-1900. The same can also be observed in the literature by the Korean Yi Sang, especially in the translation of his Japanese works into Korean.

Keywords: human sciences, translation, Michel Foucault, Friedrich Kittler, Yi Sang

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Received: 10 September 2013
Reviewed: 20 October 2013
Accepted: 15 January 2014