Kim So-oon *Ten no hate ni ikuru tomo (Even Though I Live at the End of the Sky)* (1968)

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Kim So-oon. (Source: Shōichi Saeki & Tōru Haga, Eds., *Gaikokujin ni yoru Nihonron no meicho - Goncharov kara Pinguet made*, Chuokoron-Shinsha Inc., 1987, p. 255)

Kim So-oon was born in Jeoryeondo, Busan in 1908. The following year, his father, an official of the Ministry of Finance, was assassinated because he was considered pro-Japanese. In 1920, at 12 years of age, he moved to Osaka. The following year, he moved to Tokyo and studied hard while working at various jobs such as a newspaper stand salesman. In 1927, he wrote a series of "Farmers' Songs of Korea" for the Terrestrial Paradise magazine, and began collecting oral folk tales. In 1928, he visited Kitahara Hakushū with his manuscript of translations of Korean folk songs. The following year, 1929, he published a Japanese translation of *Collection of Korean Folk Songs* from Taibunkan Publishing, and his *Selection of Korean Nursery Rhymes* and *Selection of Korean Folk Songs* were published by Iwanami Bunko

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in 1933. In the same year, he returned to Korea to establish the Korean Association for Children's Education, and to publish children's magazines, such as "Mokuba" (Wooden Horse). In 1940, he published *Milky Clouds*, a collection of translations of modern Korean poetry. In 1942, he published a historical tale, *Old Stories of Three Han States* and the collections of children's stories, *Stone Bells* and *Blue Leaves*. In 1945 Kim So-oon returned to Korea. In 1952 he made a gaffe in a newspaper interview in Tokyo that forced him to stay in Japan for the next thirteen years. In 1953, he published the children's story *The King with Donkey Ears* and a collection of folktales, *The Man Who Planted Green Onions*. In 1965 he returned to Korea to pursue his writing career, mainly in the field of essay writing. In 1976, he completed the five-volume *Selected Modern Korean Literature*. He was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit of the Republic of Korea in 1980. He died at his home in Seoul the following year at 73 years of age.

In September 1952, Kim So-oon's interview in Tokyo, where he had stopped by on his way to attend an international artists' conference in Venice, caused a slip of the tongue incident. On his way back from Venice in December, his passport was confiscated in Tokyo by the Korean Mission to Japan, and for the following thirteen years he was unable to set foot on the soil of his native country.

In the summer of 1965, after receiving his long-awaited passport, he swore to himself that he would never say a thing about Japan again and planned to land at Gimpo Airport in secret, but from that night on, he was pursued by the media. He wrote his memoir *Gekiryo-ki* ("gekiryo" means guesthouse or inn) as a serial in the Seoul Newspaper. *Even Though I Live at the End of the Sky*, which could be called an autobiographical essay, was a modified version of *Gekiryo-ki*.

Kim So-oon who was recognized in the Japanese literary world for his excellent translations of *Selection of Korean Folk Songs*, *Selection of Korean Nursery Rhymes*, and *Collection of Korean Poems*, also developed deep friendships with Korean writers and artists during his years as a newspaper reporter and as manager of a children's magazine in Seoul. His dramatic encounter with Kitahara Hakushū, who helped push him into the Japanese literary world, is one of the most moving scenes in the book, which also captures the appearance and personality of Iwanami Shigeo, the president of Iwanami Shoten publishers, who continued to provide him with warm support and encouragement. We cannot help but be amazed at the impressive list of Japanese artists and scholars who met, befriended, assisted, and worked with him in Japan.

In August 1928 (Shōwa 3), an "Evening to Introduce Kim So-oon" was held under the auspices of Kitahara Hakushū, and among those in attendance were Hagiwara Sakutarō, Murō Saisei, Yamada Kōsaku, and Orikuchi Shinobu. In 1940 (Shōwa 15), *Milky Clouds*, a collection of translations of contemporary Korean poetry, was published, with a foreword by Satō Haruo and illustrations by Kishida Ryūsei.

Rather than a mere observer of the Japanese culture of the Taishō and Shōwa periods represented by such a gorgeous line-up, Kim So-oon literally jumped into the vortex of that huge cultural movement and lived out his own life as one of its members. Meanwhile, during the 1920s and 1930s, Korea entered the golden age of modern poetry, and his autobiography gives us a vivid sketch of each one of its

poets. This book provides an intriguing look at the backstage history of the literary world, describing the clean-cut personality of O Sang-Sun (Ku Sang), who refused to get involved in worldly affairs; the dignified behavior of Cho Myung-hee (Poseok); the uncommon parsimony and decadent lifestyle of Yi Sang, a genius in painting and poetry; the boisterous drinking of Byeon Yeong-ro (Suju); the growing creativity in the arts and letters amid political oppression; and the way of life of the literati during the academic and artistic flourishing.

The personal life of Kim So-oon, a literary figure, was also full of ups and downs. His first fiancée, Yoni, married a Japanese man who had helped her father with a land dispute, and his first partner, Ogawa Shizuko, was nine years his senior. Not only did his life and literary achievements cross the borders of Japan and Korea, but his own itinerant love life also bounced back and forth between the two countries: the betrayal of a fellow Korean, H, to whom he was engaged; his loveless marriage to her sister, J; and his relationship with a woman from Gunma named T, whom he met when he was in huge debt from his failed children's literature magazine business.

During a period of his youth, he had wandered all over Japan without money. Just like Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depth*, this autobiography describes the dubious and shabby way of life of the people who live in rented lodges and includes the pathetically funny story of a man obsessed with gold mining in a teahouse deep in the Ashio Mountains, who mistakenly believes he is the son of a wealthy man. His companionship extends from the best intellectuals of Japan, with their elegant city life, to the poor in the countryside and the lowest of the low, the fallen of the world.

Kim So-oon writes that this wandering gave him some understanding of the unique customs and dialects of various regions in Japan, which greatly aided his later use of dialects when translating *Selection of Korean Folk Songs* into Japanese. His command of the Japanese language, which impressed even Hakushū, was nurtured by intrepid walking tours of Japan, in which he ventured into every part of the country to see everything he could.

The vivid images of people from all walks of life in Japan, projected onto the passionate mind of a young man from the colonies with an extraordinary gift for languages, and living in his mind like flesh and blood, form the basis of Kim So-oon's view of Japan and the Japanese people.

As a bridge between Japan and Korea, Kim So-oon's portrait of his own life reveals how the two countries and ethnic cultures that nurtured his life touched and influenced each other, despite the unfortunate circumstances of colonial rule of one side by the other. Son Chin-t'ae, who worked with him to collect Korean oral folk songs, is the Korean heir to Yanagita's folklore studies. So-oon's management of children's magazines is inconceivable without the existence of Japanese children's magazines from the preceding period, such as *Akai Tori* (*Red Bird*). The cultural exchange represented by his translations, which would have occurred even if the two countries had been independent of each other, can still serve as a good example of the good past and be a subject for positive retrospection.

At the same time, his autobiography also conveys the distortion of various cultural phenomena caused by the relationship between two countries where one is dominant and the other dominated. A Korean child singing "Saijō-san wa kiri

fukashi" (Mt. Saijō is veiled in mist) in Japanese, assumes that the "Saijō-san" (Mt. Saijō) in the lyrics must be a person named Saijō. This misconception, he says, was the direct motivation that inspired Kim So-oon to publish a children's magazine. Kim So-oon was a poet in the essential sense of the word, a man with a special sense of 'smell,' who could perceive the whole from such a trivial detail.

What amplified the intensity of his passion as a poet was the self-righteousness of Japanese colonial rule, which he witnessed, the arrogance of the Japanese, and the misery of his own life.

> In this rootless, floating weed-like life, only my love for oral folk songs, which were bound up with my hometown and my country's feelings, ignited like a will-o'-the-wisp.

The more one's country is oppressed by a foreign country, and the more miserable the people's lives are, the more intensely pride and attachment to one's native culture and traditions grows. This was the driving force behind Kim So-oon's brilliant translation work.

He does not attempt a mere ideological denunciation of Japanese brutality under colonial rule, but rather—by vividly depicting small incidents—he emphasizes how colonial rule distorts human nature at its very core.

There was discrimination between the Japanese staff of the Keijo Nippo (Japanese edition) and the Korean staff of the Mae-il Sinbo (Korean edition), although both were official newspapers of the Japanese Governor-General's Office. Medals for readers were available in the former while missing in the latter. In Kim So-oon's autobiography, he vividly recounts how such a trivial incident offended the Korean staff and how the Japanese responded in a haughty manner when dealing with the issue. This passage from his autobiography, more than any major thesis, lets us understand the original of the Korean people's hard feelings against Japan.

His autobiography paints us a picture of two kinds of Japanese people. One is the crude, arrogant, and insensitive people who hurt the hearts of the Korean people but do not realize the seriousness of their actions and do not reflect on them at all; the other is people like Kitahara Hakushū, who know and love the existence of excellent art and poetry that expresses the soul of the nation in Korea, and who are willing to help and cooperate with Kim So-oon when he is struggling to get his translations published. There are also the unknown people who, as human beings, extend their warm humanity across ethnic boundaries, to So-oon a wandering boy from another country.

Kim So-oon spent almost half of his 73-year life in Japan and the other half in Korea, achieving much in both countries. This may suggest that he was at once repulsed by and drawn towards Japan. Here lies a vivid image of Japan and the Japanese depicted by a Korean who knew Japan only too well and risked his own life to acquire it.