

# Article

## Romantic Colonialism:

### Yasuda Yojūrō and the Korean Peninsula as the "Japanese Bridge"

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Literary critic Yasuda Yojūrō (保田與重郎 1910-1981) was the leading figure of *Nihon rōmanha* or Japanese Romantics. *Nihon rōmanha* was the title of a journal published by a group of young writers and critics who were influenced by German Romanticism. *Nihon rōmanha* was their Athenaeum, that is, a Japanese analogue of the late-eighteenth century journal of the early German Romantics. The members included Yasuda and former proletarian writers such as Kamei Katsuichirō and Hayashi Fusao. These writers, especially Yasuda, appealed to young readers in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, who, after the demise of the leftist movements, found themselves in the desperate situation of total war and mobilization that began with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

Yasuda studied German literature, especially Friedrich Hölderlin and the early German Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel at the Tokyo Imperial University. While he wrote several pieces of novels at the beginning of his career, his major field was literary criticism. From early on, his essays were characterized by his use of *romantische Ironie* or romantic irony. Yasuda became well-known for his award-winning 1936 essays, *Nihon no hashi* (Japanese bridges). In particular, the essay with the same title reflected upon the artifice of Japanese bridges both in actual history and in literary representation, and discussed their symbolic cultural meaning by comparing them with foreign bridges. It tends to be interpreted as a work that pursues the aesthetic authenticity of Japanese culture. In the wartime period he became one of Japan's most popular writers as he, in a way reminiscent of Hölderlin, became more obsessed with Japanese classical literature in *Man'yōshū no seishin* (the spirit of *Man'yōshū*, 1942).

In the postwar period, his wartime literary activity naturally created much controversy because Yasuda was regarded as having justified and supported Japan's Asia-Pacific War. Some commentators critically examine his implication with cultural nationalism and even with fascism, pointing out that the ideology of aesthetic authenticity promoted the wartime regime. Others argue that Yasuda was an aesthete immersed in Japan's cultural traditions and therefore was essentially anti-political; his use of romantic irony should be regarded as a rhetorical resistance to the dominant discourse at the time. Although these

views are diametrically opposed, both camps seem to agree on one basic point, i.e., Yasuda as an aesthetic, cultural, and ethnic nationalist.

In this paper, I will challenge the received view by showing that far from being an ethnic nationalist, Yasuda was indeed committed to an imperial project of "world history," which informed his romantic colonialism. I will especially examine his 1938 travelogues on Korea under Japanese rule. By locating him in the historical context of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45 and the colonial policies by the Government General of Korea, I will demonstrate how Yasuda's romantic irony was involved in and served Japanese empire.

Throughout the paper, I will suggest that Yasuda's emblematic figure of *hashi* or "bridge" is an illuminating trope for his romantic colonialism. In his essay "Japanese Bridges," Yasuda plays on the Japanese word *hashi*, which has many homonyms such as "boat" (or "intermediary"), "chopstick," "ladder," and "end" (or "periphery"). According to his etymology, these words all mean "connect[ing] two things, allowing movement back and forth across a flat surface and also movement up and down."<sup>1</sup> I will show that these polysemic elements - especially "boat," "ladder," and "periphery" - help explicate the movement of Yasuda's imperial project.

## "World History," Irony, and Bridge - Yasuda's 1938 Imperial Journey

From May 1 to June 12, 1938, with the backdrop of the China Incident, the critic Yasuda Yojūrō traveled to the continent, starting from the Korean Peninsula through Manchuria to North China and Mongolia. Yasuda was sent to the continent as a reporter for the journal *Cogito*, publishing his accounts of the trip in the media. Yasuda compiled these essays into a book entitled *Mōkyō* (蒙疆).<sup>2</sup> This title is indicative of the political nature of his journey: *Mōkyō*, or Mengjiang, was the name of the puppet government created by Japan in the area of Inner Mongolia, showing that his travel was deeply imbricated with both Japan's war efforts and the wartime media discourse.

Before his departure, Yasuda wrote an essay entitled "Shōwa no seishin" (the spirit of Shōwa). He did not hide his excitement here. Declaring that the present was the time of "transformation," he emphasized the idea of "world history." He insisted on the significance of the current warfare.

The spiritual atmosphere (*kifū*) of our time has already transcended the spiritual history of our country. As the sole will to our mythical world history, it is now being practiced. All the conventional ethical systems and international laws have become impotent before this act. The fact of this act represents nothing but transformation of the existing world, its order, and logic.<sup>3</sup>

Obviously he meant by the "act" Japan's decision to go to war with China. It is important

to notice that he explicitly stated that the current developments "transcended" the confines of Japan's national history. The warfare, he claimed, had a "world historical" significance that would transform the existing world system. More specifically, he claimed,

A step forward is now being made from Japan's independence to independence of Asia. In terms of cultural history, this represents reconstruction of world culture. It is new Japan's mission to assert the culture, spirit and wisdom of Asia, which has been excluded from the old world culture.<sup>4</sup>

As I will show later, Yasuda undermined this notion of "independence of Asia" by his irony; but for now, it is necessary to note that he had this quite problematic view of the war not as Japan's invasion, but the liberation of Asia. He also regarded Japan as the "sole defender of Asia" that had fought against "the European invasion" since Japan opened the country.<sup>5</sup> He completely ignores the fact that Japan was fighting a war with China, not with Europe. Here one has to see his deeply self-deceptive pride in Japan's hegemony in Asia, which echoes jingoistic ideology of the prewar Pan-Asianism. At the same time, one might also need to examine what kind of literary imagination motivated his imperialism and what kind of effects it produced in his experience and writing.

In this regard, it is important to note the fact that he clearly connected this "world historical" warfare and the notion of "romantic irony" as his defining theme. Irony, Yasuda argues, is essentially transformative. It does not represent "stasis" (*jōtai*), but "action" (*kōi*) and "transformation" (*henkaku*). If the present time, i.e., the era of Shōwa, is the time of transformation, it is the time of irony. He speaks of war in this context,

If we seek a spiritual symbol of our time, it is peace and war as irony. They are nothing but identical. Today's war correspondent does not have time to think of a word that would sublimate (*shiyō*) them.<sup>6</sup>

"Peace and war as irony" - this typical phrasing of Yasuda might also be rendered as "peace as an irony of war," and vice versa. While he says these two things are "identical," he is not trying to conflate both. The point is that the one cannot exist without the other. Or rather, he is saying that the one cannot remain itself, but becomes its opposite. In other words, he is negating the static identity and distinction of each. To be sure, this sort of rhetoric might seem indistinguishable from a rather banal justification of war that insists that a war is waged for peace. But his point is not necessarily to use irony to justify the war. He is not saying, at least literally, that a war is an ultimate form of transformation. But what he means by transformation is a meta-level necessity of "peace" and "war" constantly turning into each other. Moreover, Yasuda took irony not only as a linguistic form in the narrow sense, but explicitly as a form of actual conduct, which means that he understood action and feeling as dimensions of signification and textuality. Therefore, for Yasuda, "despair and conviction," "decadence and construction," "boldness and calmness," and "destruction and

defense" are all ironies.<sup>7</sup> "Today," he says, "our romantic irony is most explicitly expressed."<sup>8</sup>

Yasuda's conception of romantic irony derives largely from the early German Romantics, especially Friedrich Schlegel. Yasuda had written numerous essays on Schlegel and Hölderlin since he was a student of German literature at the Tokyo Imperial University. In his early essay, Yasuda paraphrases Schlegel's famous description of romantic irony as "an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts."<sup>9</sup> Obviously, Yasuda shares this insight when he says "peace and war as irony." In Schlegel, romantic irony first and foremost represents a constant and reciprocal alternation of two poles that undermines binary oppositions. At the same time, this reciprocal alternation as a constant self-reflection means self-ironizing commentary that divides and doubles the subject itself. Schlegel calls this structure of romantic irony "permanent parabasis." (I will return to this point later.) As recent interpretations show, the early German Romantics were radical anti-foundationalists who rejected the absolute, first principle or any fixed meaning and identity. This line of reading, which was first proposed by Walter Benjamin's doctoral thesis on *Frühromantik* or the early German Romantics, undermines the established image of German Romanticism as a reaction to modernity and a yearning for the tradition of a national culture.<sup>10</sup>

In this respect, it is quite significant that Yasuda clearly maintains that the distinction of the "West and the East" (*ryōyō*) is also this sort of irony. "The differentiation of the West and the East needs to appear as an irony of unity of both. In fact, this is the nature of the West and the East."<sup>11</sup> In other words, he did not conceive of these terms as a binary opposition or essential difference at all. This remark is all the more important, because many commentators on Yasuda still tend to presuppose such a fixed, reified and essentialized dichotomy.<sup>12</sup> Then, what about Japan? Where is Japan's place in the world? "The cultural exchange of the West and the East," he continues, "was the idea of the twentieth century culture. And the only achiever (*jitsugensha*) of this idea is Japan in the East."<sup>13</sup> (By 1940, Yasuda would name such an ambiguous place in the world "Japan as irony.") What is quite perplexing is that he immediately goes on to talk about Japan as the "defender of Asia" against "European invasion."

It is important to remember, however, the fact that the so-called China Incident broke out just nine months prior to his trip. Although the Chinese capital was occupied by the Japanese army, the intense battle was being fought at Xuzhou (*Joshū*), and it was during Yasuda's stay in Beijing, on May 19, that the place fell to the Japanese army. This event was believed to represent a major turning point in the Incident, which was, however, going to be a long, protracted war resulting in Japan's defeat in 1945.

In this connection, I would like to take a look at his travelogue on Beijing. It was precisely under such circumstances filled with uncertain hope and anxiety that he visited

### Marco Polo Bridge:

As the bridge Marco Polo once visited, the name *Rokōkyō* has long given me romantic feelings and is one of the foreign bridges I especially mentioned a few years ago in my essay "Japanese Bridges." The fact that the epoch-making gunfire was launched on July 7, the twelfth year of Showa [1937], along with Marco Polo's journey that I introduced there, makes us feel even more romantic. When you think of it, Japan, whose dim presence far in the distance invited the white man's period of exploration, has finally appeared as the main actor of this century. The signal fire of its beginning was lit at this bridge, which keeps its ancient name.<sup>14</sup>

Such a sense of excitement might have been an ironizing of anxiety for the unknown future. This passage suggests how the figure of bridge gathered Yasuda's motifs, i.e., romanticism, world history, and irony. What made him feel romantic was a certain exoticism associated with a foreign trip and the accompanying legend of Marco Polo's monumental journey, which represents the first encounter of the "West" and the "East." Moreover, the very enterprise of war was deemed romantic, which he framed in the world historical meaning. At the same time, the bridge also symbolized romantic irony in Yasuda's sense as the conflictive unity in difference between the East and the West, as well as Japan and China. In this way, it is the symbolic register of the bridge that ties together all these aspects.

### The Discourse of "World History" and the Peninsula as a "Road of Intercourse"

The notion of "world history" played a central role for Yasuda's imperial journey from the outset. In *Keishū* (Kyongju), an old capital of Korea, where Yasuda visited as the first place on his trip, he expressed his ambitions for the travel as follows:

We are about to travel to the North, in which Japan now dares to mark the world history of this century and engages in a great enterprise to transform the history of our nation. And the path I am now taking will lay the initial 'road of intercourse' (*kōtsūro*) for a new world culture. This road will for the first time be opened by a romantic Japan.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike his established image as an anti-civilizational thinker, Yasuda was involved in the discourse of universal "world history." Of particular importance is the phrase "road of intercourse." In fact, Yasuda not only observed but found it significant that the conditions of transportation in Korea had been much improved, with automobiles increased and roads widened in comparison to 1932, when he made his first trip to Korea and Manchukuo after the Manchurian Incident. Thus, the romantic Japan that Yasuda celebrated was based on and legitimized by the narrative of world history and therefore was not opposed to, nor entirely different from, the regime of economic development and modernization under Japan's

colonial rule. In fact, his journey this time was imperialistic in nature, that is to say, he took its route around the sphere of Japanese influence. Yasuda explained why he and his fellow travelers chose this route.

Our route begins with Korea, through the axis line of Manchuria to North China and reaches Inner Mongolia, with our return trip through Nekka (Rehe), which, again, belongs to the new Manchuria. This route seemed to be a very rational way to look at our Japan of today and to think of its tomorrow... In order to learn from and think of the past and future of today's romantic Japan, I decided upon this path through which we can trace two thousand years of the long history of Japan's management of the continent (tairiku keiei).<sup>16</sup>

"Two thousand years of the long history of Japan's management of the continent" - one has to say it is an extraordinarily wild, romantic fantasy, but it was hardly divergent from some of the contemporary Pan-Asianist discourse. What can clearly be seen here is that the so-called romantic Japan in essence conforms to the expansion of the Japanese empire. Therefore, this travel route was immediately geopolitical, corresponding to the historical traces and destiny of imperial Japan: Korea in this configuration would be taken as representing Japan's past, while both Manchukuo and Mōkyō are made to point to its future.

In this way, his journey to the continent through the peninsula was motivated and driven by the notion of "world history." The received interpretation of Yasuda and the Japanese Romantics, however, tended to focus on the aspects of an anti-modern, particularistic and ethnic nationalism that rejects the rational, progressive, linear conceptions of time and history. To be sure, as Hashikawa Bunzō pointed out, the Romantic movement in Japan historically originated from the deepening crisis of modernity in the early 1930s, and was formed under the influence of German Romanticism, the demise of Marxism, and the heritage of National Studies (kokugaku); its essential element lies in the radical conception and practice of romantic irony.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot emphasize too much the fact that the Romantics retained the idea of world history. In fact, the Manchurian Incident was considered an epoch-making, quasi-revolutionary event in contemporary world history, one that would radically transform the desperate situation in an analogous way to the French Revolution. Therefore, they regarded the China Incident as a development of this transformative project.

It is also important to recognize that Yasuda's notion of romantic world history is motivated by a certain tropic structure. At this point, we can discern two distinct moments in Yasuda's conception of world history specifically. First, world history per se, while inciting the sublime feeling of "romanticism," is nevertheless still conceived of in terms of the civilizing mission that is vertical or hierarchical in nature. The second, closely related aspect is the figure of *kōtsūro*, or "the road of intercourse," as the horizontal expansion of this world

historical project. To illustrate these two moments, I will invoke in the next section his emblematic figure, i.e., hashi or the "bridge" in its polysemic elements. First, the figure of world history signifies a hashi as the civilizational "ladder" (hashigo). Second, as the road of intercourse represents another hashi as the means and route - "bridge" or "boat" - for imperial expansion. These tropic figures, as I will show, serve as analytical frameworks to characterize Yasuda's imperial project.

These two aspects of Yasuda's world history are also reflected in the figure of hantō or "the peninsula." In his essay, "Impressions of Korea," Yasuda provides his most comprehensive view on Korea.<sup>18</sup> Here he begins with his reflection on the past history and culture of Korea and then goes on to talk about the current situation in which the so-called Nihonshugi or Japanist movements emerged.

What are Korea's cultural undercurrents? My shallow impressions are not sufficient, but leaving aside the Gija legend and Tan'gun legend for now, I am interested in the national character (kunigara) that survived in spite of the neighboring Chinese dynasties of the Mongols, Ming, and Qing, forming a semi-independent country since the unification by Silla.<sup>19</sup>

As is clearly seen in his tendentious choice of the word, "semi-independence," Yasuda downplays the historical significance of the unification and state-formation of Korea by Silla.

But the enterprise of the unification by Silla, which is said to have marked the very beginning of "Korean" history, was independence not so much by Koreans as by the T'ang dynasty. Korea was able to establish a state in its subsequent history because Japan's check has always been effective against the continent.<sup>20</sup>

Yasuda seems to have forgotten the 663 Battle of Hakesukinoe (Baekgang) in which Japan's intervention into the peninsula completely failed. Yasuda does however, mention this historical fact of the defeat of Japan and its ally Baekje vis-a-vis Silla elsewhere, but he strictly narrates its positive outcome, emphasizing the artistic and technical contributions of Baekje's refugees to the Japanese court. In this account, he implies that the ancient Japanese state was internationally open and even multicultural.<sup>21</sup>

In such a narrative, Yasuda describes Korea primarily in terms of its geographical location between Japan and China, heavily relying upon the figure of hantō or the "peninsula." In other words, this geographical feature serves as a trope for Korea's cultural and political place in the East Asian world. It is important to notice that this figure of "han-tō" is closely connected to another description, i.e., "han-dokuritsu" ("semi-independence"), in its insufficient or imperfect quality of "han," that is, "half" or "semi-." For now, it will suffice to point out that the trope of hantō has two different, somewhat contradictory effects. First, it works to deprive Koreans of any autonomous agency, because the people tend to be reduced to a mere natural geography. Second, however, it also helps talk about the historical present in



such a way to incorporate "hantōjin" or the "peninsular people" into the "world historical" project led by imperial Japan; the peninsula would provide an essential link or "bridge" to the continent. These aspects, I argue, correspond to the double meaning of hashi I mentioned above. That is to say, the hierarchical character of the first hashi as a "ladder" is implied in the subordinate status of the "han," whereas the second hashi in the sense of a "bridge" or "intermediary" can easily serve as a metaphor for the spatial figure of the hantō, at least from the perspective of the Japanese archipelago towards the continent. I will call this tropic structure of Yasuda's imperial project a "peninsula-bridge" regime.

### The New Colonial Policies: "Japan and Korea as One Body"

In early May 1938, Yasuda Yojūrō arrived in the city of Keijō (the Japanese name of Seoul during the colonial period) at a critical historical moment when the Government General of Korea (GGK) implemented a new policy called "kōminka" or imperialization. This policy aimed at making colonial populations into loyal imperial subjects of the Japanese emperor. In Keijo, Yasuda witnessed the rise of Nihonshugi or Japanism, advocated by a number of Korean intellectuals supporting the official kōminka policy. Yasuda is quite impressed by their movement and asserts that today's Korea is not what it used to be:

Thanks to our great enterprise of today, the peninsular path as the old route of intercourse has changed drastically. The peninsular problem, which is coming up on seventy years since its emergence in the Meiji, now seventy years later, faces the possibility of a solution such that Japan and Korea would become as one (naisen ichinyo).<sup>22</sup>

He continues,

They [the people in the peninsula] read the "oath of imperial subjects" every day. They see off soldiers to the battlefield, make constant donations, and assist families in the home front. Some of them even have come to participate in the imperial army for the first time. No one could have forced this spirit of service on the home front.<sup>23</sup>

What he describes here with excitement is a newly emerged political trend since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. By the end of 1937, it became increasingly an all-out war. It was now an urgent task for the Japanese government to mobilize both human and material resources in colonial Korea, as well as mainland Japan, for the sake of the war with China. The government desperately needed to include Korea, because it constituted one fourth of the entire population of the empire. Under the banner of naisen ittai or "Japan and Korea as one body," Governor-General Minami Jirō sought to obtain the support and involvement of the colonial subjects in Japan's war efforts. The GGK decided to open up



military careers to Koreans, first by a volunteer soldier system in 1938 and then in the form of a draft system implemented in 1943. The first volunteer soldiers were gathered in April 1938 right before Yasuda's visit to Korea. Furthermore, the government planned to make Korea into a "military and logistic base for the continent" (*tairiku heitan kichi*), which aimed to transform Korea into a military base for Japan's war efforts. In exchange, the GGK promised to realize certain equality with the Japanese citizens. Specifically, the government purported to guarantee certain social and political rights, such as compulsory education and universal suffrage.

The *kōminka* policy has usually been described in terms of coercive Japanization, including imposition of Japanese names and language, as well as emperor worship. Therefore, it has been heavily criticized for seeking to obliterate Korean ethnic and cultural identity. Yet, as the historian Takashi Fujitani argues in his comparative study on Japanese and American wartime mobilization of minority populations, this conventional emphasis on the repressive nature of Japanese rule cannot explain the major shift in the mode of colonial power during the total war period. Instead, he makes a powerful case that the introduction of new colonial policies, such as the volunteer soldier system, needs to be understood as a shift from repressive to productive, from exclusionary to inclusionary practices, which Michel Foucault called "bio-power" that seeks to govern a population as its target. The wartime governments were more and more concerned with the general welfare of colonial and minority populations. Fujitani calls this inclusionary policy towards minority populations "polite racism" as opposed to "vulgar racism."<sup>24</sup> Although vulgar racism never disappears in practice, it was crucial for the governments to disavow racism, because otherwise, it would not be able to manage the minority populations it sought to mobilize. Yasuda Yojūrō, too, denies racism on the part of the Japanese colonizer.

### The Rise of "Japanism" among Korean Intellectuals

Therefore, it is important to look at Yasuda's encounter with Koreans in the context of bio-political, polite racism of Japanese colonialism. What sort of hidden tensions and ambivalence were buried in their relationship? In this respect, Yasuda mentions various attempts at pro-Japanese collaboration among Korean intellectuals, which was called *Nihonshugi* or "Japanism." One group is *Kōkoku jinmin undō* (the "people of the imperial nation movement") led by Jung Nam Soo (鄭南水), who studied in the United States and was a Christian. Another is a group called *Daidō minyūkai* (大同民友会) organized by the statist Cha Jae Jung (車載貞).<sup>25</sup> Significantly, as Yasuda notes, "many of these people converted from nationalism (which is not that of Japan), socialism, anarchism and communism."<sup>26</sup> According to Yasuda, the reason for the conversion is that "they have a far wider

recognition of the world than narrow-minded nationalists (*minzoku shugi*).” Quite paradoxically, these proponents believed that Japanism represented a much more “broad-minded” standpoint than the other modern ideologies, including Korean anti-colonial nationalism. The term nationalism in this specific context was regarded as a backward, unenlightened attitude clinging to a particularistic principle that is *minzoku* or *ethnos*. On the contrary, for these colonial intellectuals, the *kōminka* project represented a more universalistic standpoint of “world history.” According to their account, this was the reason why they converted to Japanism. This suggests that Japanese colonial power was “productive,” rather than repressive, insofar as it guided and converted the stray colonial subjects towards what Foucault called a “regime of truth” represented by the universal nation.

At the same time, the contact between the colonizer and the colonized was filled with tensions. Yasuda notes:

These peninsular Japanists, I heard, discuss questions such as whether or not Japanese nationalists (*kokka shugi*) argue for the Nazi type purity of blood. Rather, I know well that Japanese rightists embrace emotionally, or almost sentimentally, their international love for spreading the imperial way (*kōdō*). Surprisingly, this Japanism in the peninsular people advocates even the abolition of the Korean language.<sup>27</sup>

It is highly dubious if the mainstream Japanese nationalists were so philanthropic, as Yasuda supposes. Indeed, these colonial intellectuals were concerned about the tendency of essentialism among Japanese nationalists. Behind the seemingly pious attitude were the implicit critical stakes of resisting the notion of racial purity as found in German National Socialism. The Japanists committed themselves to the universalistic standpoint in order to go beyond such ethnocentrism. In this way, the Korean intellectuals were opposed to *minzoku shugi* on the two fronts: while repressing anti-colonial nationalism within Korea, they intended to counter ethnocentrism on the part of the colonizers.

Of particular interest is Yasuda's meeting with Hyun Yong Sup (玄永燮) through the introduction by Professor Takagi Ichinosuke at Keijō Imperial University.<sup>28</sup> One of the representative pro-Japanese collaborators (*chinilpa*), Hyun converted from anarchism after the outbreak of the China Incident. He began collaborating with the Japanist organization called *Ryokki renmei* (the green flag league) founded by the Japanese inhabitants in Korea such as Tsuda Katashi, the professor at the preparatory school for Keijō Imperial University, and others. In July 1938, when *Kokumin seishin sōdōin Chōsen renmei* (the Korean league for the total mobilization of national spirit) was created on the first anniversary of the Incident, Hyun became the chief of this organization. Moreover, what made him most infamous was the fact that he enthusiastically advocated the abolition of the Korean language.<sup>29</sup> Quite naturally, after the collapse of the Japanese empire and the liberation in

August 1945, he was denounced for collaborating with the colonial rule and, in particular, attempting to annihilate cultural identity of the Korean people or *minzoku*. Nevertheless, his influence in the *kōminka* period is indicated by the fact that Hyun's book, *Chōsenjin no susumu beki michi* (The Path that Koreans Should Take), was a bestseller with nearly twenty thousand copies.<sup>30</sup> As Yasuda admitted, however, this fact was not well known in the metropole of Japanese empire. Yasuda never relented in celebrating this work. "Here the Japanist stance among the peninsular intelligentsias under the Incident is explained with clarity and vivid expressions."<sup>31</sup> Yasuda provided a succinct summary for his reader. "The conclusion of this interesting book states that, in order to exercise their personal capacities and engage in a universal mission (*sekai teki ninmu*), Koreans must first become Japanese *kokumin* and have the awareness as Japanese."<sup>32</sup> If the colonial government's imperialization policy sought to mobilize and integrate the colonial population into the empire, it did so by making them Japanese *kokumin*. In other words, *kōminka* (imperialization) practically meant *kokumin-ka* (nationalization). Which amounts to saying that *kokumin* is imperial subjects in the dual sense of the word. In the meantime, some Korean Japanists like Hyun read it as a symbol for achieving an equal status with the native Japanese.<sup>33</sup>

As Yasuda rightly points out, Hyun's take on *kokumin* was distinctive in his orientation towards its "universal dimension." If Hyun tried to radically identify with the colonizer through even abandoning his own language, he was driven by a desire for "world historical" universality. This also meant he was critical of the Korean ethnic nationalists. Yasuda recognizes Hyun's claim as serious and genuine, making a significant remark: "If Japan does not know how to answer this essential something, if it ignores this enthusiastic spiritual effort to become one with 'Japan', it will be Japan's failure" (*italics mine*).<sup>34</sup> Here he is far from ironic or cynical because he was aware that the attempt of these imperial subjects to become "real" Japanese implicitly questioned whether or not "Japan" was fully qualified as the leader for this "universal mission."

## Japanese Colonialism and Yasuda's Romantic World History

Back in Japan, Yasuda continued his keen interest in what was going on in colonial Korea. His essay entitled "Ruins of Asia,"<sup>35</sup> a recollection of his trip published in January 1940, most clearly shows how Yasuda's rhetoric of irony is at work in his romantic colonialism. Yasuda mentions the new developments in colonial Korea:

I heard that it was around September 1939 that the governor-general in Korea began to speak of "the military and logistic base for the continent" and "the simultaneous development of agriculture and industry" (*nōkō heishin*), with "Japan and Korea as one body" as its ground.<sup>36</sup>

Yasuda does not hide his admiration for these policies.

I realized that something like one's country and its independence, as Korean nationalists considered it, was nothing but a mere theoretical notion associated with the former old regime. Today the historical thought of Japan has brought home to me that history will transform the basic system of the world, just as it did for the people at the time of the French Revolution.<sup>37</sup>

In this way, he insists that "Japan and Korea as one body" and "the military and logistic base on the continent" meant nothing less than a final rejection of Korean ethnic nationalism and the anti-colonial movement. If he dismissed Koreans' struggle for independence, he did so from a putatively higher instance of a regional order that went beyond the Wilsonian principle of the self-determination of peoples. In his view, the Japanese colonial regime represented something new in history. Yasuda justified these projects through a narrative of world history identifying the current engagements of the Japanese empire within the genealogy of world historical events, such as the French Revolution. In the twentieth century, the Manchurian Incident, he claimed, represented a historical break that began a whole new process.

There may be various comments on the concept of "the military and logistic base for the continent." But, frankly, this is a pleasant thing to hear. In spite of some criticism against the cognition of the colonial government, both Japanese and Koreans can be proud of this, in that neither Britain nor the Soviet Union could take up such a world policy.<sup>38</sup>

In making this sort of "frank" comment, he is affectively identifying himself with the positionality of the metropole, without any hint of irony. Undoubtedly, this whole narrative of world history is based on his imperial conceit that Japan represented something new in history, which neither capitalist Britain nor communist Russia could ever realize. By the same token, he believed that the Japanese empire had finally made ethnic nationalism an obsolete idea, a remnant of the nineteenth century. But what provided a ground for such seemingly wild assertions?

The legitimation of the military and logistic base in the continent has been made possible through the formation of kokumin. I was very moved, reflecting upon the status of Korea in history. When in its two thousand years was there ever a day when Korea became a truly independent country? Or, was there ever a day in which the land and people of Korea emerged as a road of world historical intercourse such as we see in the current form of the military and logistic base? <sup>39</sup> (*italics mine.*)

Although he celebrates kokumin as if the population in colonial Korea had become equal members of the community, Yasuda's passage above does not conceal his deeply rooted imperial unconscious. It is crucial to analyze his rhetoric of irony, a hallmark of Yasuda

Yojūrō's style. This sort of ambiguous rhetoric represents his version of "romantic irony."

### Yasuda's Romantic Irony and Ambivalence of Empire

As I have mentioned, Yasuda adopted the notion of romantic irony first and foremost from German romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Here I will critically employ Paul de Man's discussion of romantic irony, because it represents one of the most lucid analyses of this intricate trope. Pointing out that Schlegel described romantic irony as "permanent parabasis," de Man explained it as "the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register."<sup>40</sup> It is a form of self-reflection in which the writer doubles itself as the main narrator and a "buffo" who interrupts and undoes what the former is saying. In practice, it can take a number of forms. For instance, de Man also relates it to another rhetoric called "anacoluthon," which means "a break in the syntactical expectations of the pattern."<sup>41</sup> Yet, this does not mean that romantic irony is a form of conventional rhetoric. As de Man, along with Schlegel, pointed out, it is not a rhetoric in the limited sense of a sentence pattern, but a deep tropic structure. Nevertheless, as long as it is a form of writing, it would still need to be practiced in a manner that is identifiable as such. How, then, is romantic irony as parabasis identifiable in Yasuda's specific passage? How is it disrupting the main narrative line?

Here is Yasuda's problematic sentence again: "When in its two thousand years was there ever a day when Korea became a truly independent country?" As a rhetorical question, this quote naturally anticipates a negative answer. Therefore, it says that there was no independence of Korea. Yet, the sentence only negates independence in a past history. In fact, the passage prior to this quote suggests that the "status of Korea" has improved. This may be said to represent a sort of "anacoluthon," i.e., "a break in the syntactical expectations of the pattern." If this is the case, Yasuda does imply as a second meaning, that the present Korea has now become an independent country. However, this would contradict what he has just said in the previous paragraph: independence was "nothing but a mere theoretical notion based on the past old regime." Here we can see a profound ambivalence, if not a contradiction. This is precisely why he has to say "Or," to rephrase his sentence. He says: "Or, was there ever a day in which the land and people of Korea emerged as a road of world historical intercourse such as we see in the current form of military and logistic base?" This is the very moment in which Yasuda the "buffo" intervenes in his main narrative. While he may seem to be just paraphrasing the previous sentence, he is actually saying something completely different. Now he insists as if the "military and logistic base" would mean real "independence." This is the modified new meaning of "independence." After all, he is saying that Korea can be a "truly independent country," only by being incorporated into Japanese

empire - this is nothing but "semi-independence," "independent but not quite."

In this way, Yasuda as the main narrator in his rhetorical question gives rise to the expectation that he negates the "independence," but he does imply a present independence, albeit implicitly. Yet Yasuda the buffo further undoes this evocation by saying "Or." In so doing, however, his rhetoric not only suspends the phrase "independence," but splits its literal meaning to create its simulacrum. The "independence" he implies in the passage turns out to be no more than "semi-independence," which he in fact employed in the essay, "Impressions of Korea." Nonetheless, he cannot negate independence outright, precisely because without evoking some sense of "independence," the empire cannot mobilize the colonized.

Furthermore, however, the almost scandalous ambivalence would be concealed, rather than overcome, by the movement of the uneven oneness of kokumin towards the continent. I claim this represents the romantic moment in his rhetoric that points to certain quasi-universal open-endedness. Although de Man claimed that irony as permanent parabasis destroys a system of narrative or history, Yasuda's version, I argue, serves for romantic world history. This is because it enables a history in which the empire emerges out of constant negation of particularities, i.e., ethnic nationalisms.<sup>42</sup> What Schlegel called "romantic poetry" as "progressive, universal poetry" (Athenaeum Fragment 121), should be taken at its face value as something that has affinities with empire.<sup>43</sup>

## The Genesis of Kokumin as a Hybrid Signifier

At the same time, however, Yasuda's encounter with the colonial intellectuals in Keijō inevitably affected his own national identification. Although he sought to contain the ambivalence inherent in this relationship by appealing to the imperial temporality of world history and the trope of the peninsula, he could not ignore what he called the "essential something" in Hyun Yong Sup's interrogating address to the colonizer. Precisely because Hyun reflected and repeated the universalistic claim of the Japanese empire, Yasuda was forced to alter the signification of what is called "Japan." In other words, the ambivalence of "independent but not quite" is not confined to the colonized, but also inevitably comes back to haunt the colonizers.

Here let us return to the 1938 essay, "Impressions of Korea." The key question I am asking here is what happens to the colonizer when the colonized seeks to identify with the colonizer or, better yet, its nation as the ultimate object of identification. To this end, it is important to see how Yasuda described the Japanism of Hyun and others who had converted from leftist movements as follows:

After all modern thought had lost its ideals and faced disillusionment, the sole thing that appeared as ideal was Japanism, that is to say, the "national polity" (kokutai) as

such of "Japan."<sup>44</sup>

Significantly enough, Yasuda put quotation marks around "Japan" and the "national polity." Obviously, he was not unaware that these signs, by being used by those new kokumin, were now no longer the same as what they used to signify. The designation of "Japan" was different in its extension from what most Japanists in Japan proper meant. This was the actual reality of the "world historical," multi-ethnic empire, as he described:

...it was finally demonstrated that the culture that Japan transferred to the peninsula was not only the Western clothing and buildings, but indeed Japanese spiritual culture. Its appearance might be minute yet. It must be nurtured further. This will mean a challenge to the universal (sekai teki) Japanese spirit.<sup>45</sup>

This new "Japan" has now become worldly and universalized with its spirit and culture transmitted to its colonies. In this context, Yasuda asserts: "many of the people of the peninsula have understood the world and Japan in world history, apparently obtaining their self-awareness of being Japanese from that of having been Japanese."<sup>46</sup> That is to say, Koreans could not only become Japanese, but had always already been Japanese. This would amount to saying that "Japanese-ness" is not the exclusive monopoly of the so-called "Japanese."

Thus, not only "Japan," but also the "Japanese" must be put in quotation marks.<sup>47</sup> The latter could never be ethnically determined. Significantly enough, the sovereign figure of Japanese nationality, i.e., Tennō or the emperor was not exempted from the effect of de-ethnicization. Yasuda tells a story circulating among the common people, suggesting that the anecdote was somehow empowering for them. "A driver from the peninsula wanted to tell us the legend that the Japanese imperial household has a blood relation with the kings who first developed Korea...This is what we believe, too."<sup>48</sup> Yasuda elsewhere also acknowledges that the mother of the emperor Kanmu, who inaugurated the Heian court, was a descendant from Baekje's monarchical family.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Yasuda never subscribed to the "pure blood" theory of Japanese nation, but rather supported the "mixed nation" theory, which continued into the postwar period.<sup>50</sup>

Yasuda's use of the signs as put in quotation marks - "Japan," "Japanese," the "national polity" - suggests that "kokumin" or the people, as articulated in the contact zone, does not refer to any fixed entity that is determined by the past history. Instead, they are exposed to the continual process and movement of signification as the "performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign."<sup>51</sup> In other words, a national identification as based on the agency of the subject of enunciation is susceptible to the play of difference in signification and always already split between the double time of the narrative and the performative. At the same time, the figure of kokumin would have been impossible without the desperate yet disrupting practice of mimicry by the



"Japanists" in Korea. Through their discursive strategy, they sought to generalize and de-ethnicize the "Japanese." If this is the case, this articulation of the national signs - Nihon, kokumin, minzoku, and so forth - was made possible through the colonial encounter in the periphery - hashi - between Yasuda and the Koreans. That is to say, the people constitutes itself as a hybrid and heterogeneous nation at the boundary. This is what the genesis of kokumin at the periphery suggests.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed Yasuda Yojūrō's colonial romanticism, focusing on his narrative of "world history" in his travelogues on colonial Korea. I demonstrated how his romanticism was inherently motivated by the idea of world history. In this narrative, the rhetoric of romantic irony played a central role. By negating, or better yet suspending, "independence" or separation of Koreans, it worked to integrate this colonial population into universal but uneven kokumin thereby creating continuity with empire. That is to say, irony proved to be constitutive of imperial world history, rather than destroy its narrative.

In this way, the Korean peninsula became Japan's "bridge" to the continent in this rhetorical scheme of romantic colonialism. I am not merely using the term "bridge" as a simple metaphor in a spatial and physical sense. Rather, the figure of "bridge" in Yasuda is deeply associated with romantic irony, because irony not only suspends meaning, but always intends towards somewhere else or the beyond as the reverse side of the negation. This is why in Yasuda, the "bridge" served as a privileged figure that symbolizes the romantic irony in the first place. Thus, the polysemic trope of hashi motivated his romantic empire at a profound level.

## Notes

- 1 Yasuda Yojūrō, "Japanese Bridges," trans. Alan Tansman, *Journal of Japanese Studies* (34:2, 2008), 265. The first version of the essay was written in 1936. Tansman's translation is based on the second version published in 1939. Yasuda Yojūrō, "Nihon no hashi," in Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū [Collected works of Yasuda Yojūrō], vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 164-5.
- 2 Yasuda Yojūrō, *Mōkyō* in Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 7-193.
- 3 Yasuda Yojūrō, "Shōwa no seishin" [The spirit of Shōwa] in Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 14.
- 4 Ibid., 10.
- 5 Ibid., 14.
- 6 Yasuda, "Shōwa no seishin," 12.
- 7 Ibid.

- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 176; Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1964), 38. See also Yasuda Yojūrō, "Rutsuinde no hankō to boku no naka no gunshū" [Lucinde's revolt and the crowd within me] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 181.
- 10 The recent developments in the field have put into question this paradigm that is based upon a series of binary oppositions between modernity vs. tradition, reason vs. emotion, and so forth, thereby revealing surprisingly "modern" or even "postmodern" aspects of this literary movement. See Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 116-200; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); Winfried Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung: Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* (infinite doubling: the early Romantic foundation of theory of art in the concept of absolute self-reflection) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 163-184; Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004); Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 11 Yasuda, "Shōwa no seishin," 13.
- 12 See, for instance, Alan Tansman, "The Beauty of Violence: Yasuda Yojūrō's 'Japanese Bridges,'" in *Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 49-104.
- 13 Yasuda, *ibid.*, 13-4.
- 14 Yasuda Yojūrō, "Pekin," in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 84.
- 15 Yasuda, "Keishū made" [Until Kyongju] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 19.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 17 Hashikawa Bunzō, *Nihon roman ha hihan josetsu* [Introduction to the critique of Japanese romantics] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1995 [1960]), 28-35.
- 18 Yasuda Yojūrō, "Chōsen no inshō" [Impressions of Korea] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 45-57.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 See Yasuda Yojūrō, "Fuyo" [Puyo] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 16, 38-42.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during*

- World War II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 26.
- 25 According to Tobe Hideaki, Cha was a converted activist who had participated in the 1929 Kwanju student incident. He was one of the founders of the organization for Korean former leftists. See Tobe, "Shiryō to shōgen I. Nitchū sensō ki Chōsen chishikijin no Tōa kyōdōtai ron. Shiryō kaidai" [Materials and testimonies I. The discussions of the East Asian Cooperative Community by Korean intellectuals in the Sino-Japanese War period. Introduction] in Quadrante no. 6 (March 2004), 344. Cha's essay, "Tōa shin chitsujo to kakushin" [The East Asian new order and reform] is available in Choi Jinseok's Japanese translation for the journal. See *ibid.*, 368-72.
- 26 Yasuda, "Chōsen no inshō," 51.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 28 See *ibid.*, 51-3. A scholar of kokubungaku (national literature), Takagi was involved in the colonial policy of *kōminka* along with his colleague Tokieda Motoki, a major theorist of kokugo (national language). See Kawamura Minato, *Umi wo watatta nihongo* [The Japanese language that crossed the sea] (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1994), 133-9; Yasuda Toshiaki, *Kokugo no kindai shi* [A modern history of the national language] (Tokyo: Chūōkōron, 2006), 90-132; Fukuma Yoshiaki, *Henkyō ni utsuru nihon* [Japan mirrored in the periphery] (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō, 2003), 230-259.
- 29 For Hyun and Ryokki renmei, see Takasaki Sōji, "Chōsen no shinnichi ha" [Pro-Japanese collaborators in Korea] in *Kindai nihon to shokuminchi* [Modern Japan and the colonies], vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993), 123-147.
- 30 Yasuda, "Chōsen no inshō," 51.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 33 In contrast with Hyun's *tettei naisen ittai* or "Japan and Korea as a complete single body," other Korean intellectuals, including converted Marxists such as In Jeong Sik and Kim Ming Sik, advocated "Japan and Korea as a cooperative single body" (*kyōwa teki naisen ittai*). They pursued to intervene into the discourse of the "East Asian Cooperative Community" (*Tōa kyōdōtai*), trying to retain their ethnic language and culture as a step towards greater autonomy and possible decolonization in the future. For more detailed accounts, see Hong Jeong-uk, "Sen kyū hyaku sanjūnen dai ni okeru shokuminchi Chōsenjin no shisō teki mosaku" [Intellectual search by colonial Koreans in the 1930s], in *Chōsen shi kenkyūkai ronbun shū* [Essays in the studies of the Korean history] no. 42, 2004; Tobe Hideaki, "Tenkō ron no senji to sengo" [The wartime and postwar theories of conversion], in *Dōin teikō yokusan* [Mobilization, resistance, and collaboration] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006), 315-322; Yonetani Masafumi, *Ajia/Nihon* [Asia/Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006) 114-152.
- 34 Yasuda, *ibid.*
- 35 Yasuda Yojūrō, "Ajia no haikyo" [Ruins of Asia] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), 141-158.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 144.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 145.

- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid., 145-6.
- 40 Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony" in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 See De Man, "The Concept of Irony," 184.
- 43 Schlegel, *ibid.*, 175.
- 44 Yasuda, "Chōsen no inshō," 52.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 50-1.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Yasuda, "Fuyo [Puyo]," 42.
- 50 Oguma Eiji mentions Yasuda's remark, situating it within the wartime debate between the pure blood theory and the mixed nation theory. See Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of 'Japanese' Self-Images*, trans. David Askew (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002), 213. In his 1969 memoir on the Japanese Romantic movement, Yasuda makes the following statement, citing Korea, China and India for the sources of Japanese culture: "While Japan created 'Japanese' by mixing several heterogeneous minzoku, it inherited and preserved every culture and civilization (bunka bunbutsu) at the time it was generated." Yasuda Yojūrō, *Nihon romanha no jidai* [The time of the Japanese Romantics] in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshu*, vol. 36 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988), 171. Consistently enough, he puts quotation marks to the "Japanese."
- 51 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 211.

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