
Language, power and imperial memory in postcolonial Japanese and South Korean short fiction

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Abstract (in French and English)

This paper explores Japanese and South Korean short fiction from 1953 to the 1960s that deals with the history and effects of Japanese imperialism in Korea. Guiding questions are: How is the memory of the colonial period narrated in both countries? What inferences are drawn from this experience concerning a collective Self and Other? How is imperialism and its aftermath constructed as a national trauma, and which meaning is assigned to the events in regard to a collective identity? The paper seeks to answer those questions in order to explore how the construction of memory created a discourse that shapes Japanese-Korean relations to the present day. Focus will be on the theme of powerlessness and the multi-faceted play of inferiority and superiority with particular regard to language. The paper will investigate how impotence within the colonial power structure is often expressed in lingual terms; as speechlessness in face of the Japanese or Korean lingual Other, or as the need to adapt to the respective hegemonic language. On a broader scale, the paper finds itself in the tradition of an East Asian comparative literature and furthermore attempts to locate the specific Japanese-Korean case within the overall frame of postcolonial studies.

Keywords: imperialism, national identity, collective trauma, lingual powerlessness, zainichi, East Asian comparative literature

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