

Refereed article

The Politics of Remembrance and the Remembrance of Politics in Yisang’s Poetry

Marion Eggert

Abstract: Yisang (1910–1937), one of the most renowned and best-studied poets of Korea’s colonial period, is usually remembered as a bohemian, as an intoxicated master of modernist language games. But a close reading of the poetologically charged poems with which Yisang introduced himself to his audience as a Korean-language poet in July 1933 reveals that the engagement with Korean history and identity took center place in his own view of his poetical endeavors. However, different from more simple-minded nationalist authors, Yisang recognized the double-edged quality of “history” and “nation” — constituting both a treasure and a burden. It is argued that this complication of the “love for the nation” instigated by his poetry has been one of the reasons why the political layer of Yisang’s poetry has kept being forgotten — notwithstanding repeated rediscoveries — in the scholarship in recent decades. More than anything, it is his distrust of a celebratory politics of remembrance that makes a celebratory remembrance of Yisang’s politics so difficult.

Keywords: politics of remembrance, Yisang, political implications in avantgarde poetry, forgetfulness in scholarship

Marion Eggert is professor of Korean Studies at Ruhr University Bochum. Her main fields of inquiry are the intellectual and literary history of Late Chosŏn and early modern Korea.

marion.eggert@rub.de, ORCID: 0000-0003-0802-2725