

The Review of “Koreans in Japan” Novels Through the Lens of Ethical Literary Criticism: Lee Yangji’s *Nabi T’aryŏng and Other Stories*

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Abstract: This review examines Koreans in Japan literature through Lee Yangji (李良枝)’s works, particularly her collection *Nabi T’aryŏng and Other Stories*, highlighting its educational value in literature studies. Lee Yangji was a second-generation Korean in Japan whose writing reflects the complex identity struggles of Koreans in Japan. Her works explore themes of ethnic and cultural identity, societal discrimination, and the personal conflicts Koreans in Japan experience within both Japanese and Korean contexts. Nie Zhenzhao (聂珍钊)’s “ethical literary criticism” provides a framework here, viewing literature as an “art of ethics” reflecting the moral life of specific historical periods. The review discusses earlier Korean authors in Japan like Kim Saryang and Kim Dalsu, who wrote about ethical conflicts arising from colonial pressures and identity crises. Post-liberation, Koreans in Japan continued to face discrimination, using literature as a platform to assert identity and human rights. For Lee, “ethical limbo” describes her characters’ emotional and psychological conflicts in reconciling Japanese societal norms with Korean heritage. In works like *Nabi T’aŏng* and *Yuhi*, Lee’s protagonists navigate intense personal and social conflicts, exemplifying the ethical dilemmas of Koreans in Japan. By doing so, Lee’s literature portrays their identity struggles as both ethical and existential, resonating with broader themes of displacement, exclusion, and resilience.

Keywords: literature education; Lee Yangji; *Nabi T’aryŏng and Other Stories*; Nie Zhenzhao; ethical literary criticism

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标题: 文学伦理学批评视角下的“在日朝鲜人”小说评论: 以李良枝《纳比·塔里昂及其他故事》为例

内容摘要：本文聚焦李良枝的文学创作，尤其是她的作品集《纳比·塔里昂及其他故事》，对“在日朝鲜人”文学进行研究，并强调其蕴含的伦理教诲价值。李良枝是旅日朝鲜族人的第二代，她的作品反映旅日朝鲜族人复杂的身份认同困境，主要探讨种族和文化身份、社会歧视，以及在日朝鲜人在日本和韩国环境中经历的个人冲突等主题。聂珍钊教授提出的文学伦理学批评为本文提供理论支撑，该理论将文学视为反映特定历史时期道德生活的“伦理艺术”。本文还讨论了早期在日韩国作家，如金史良和金达寿等，他们的作品也描写了殖民压力和身份危机带来的伦理冲突。相比之下李良枝更突出人物在调和日本社会规范与韩国传统时面临的“伦理困境”，比如在《纳比·塔琼》和《于希》等中，主人公经历了激烈的个人和社会冲突。李良枝将人物的身份挣扎描绘成伦理和生存的双重挣扎，从而与流离失所、排斥和复原力等主题产生共鸣。

关键词：文学教育；李良枝；《纳比·塔里昂及其他故事》；聂珍钊；文学伦理学批评

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Lee Yangji (李良枝, 1955-1992) was a Korean in Japan (在日朝鲜人) writer¹ who operated at the crossroads of Japanese and Korean literature. Born in Kyoto, Japan, she was a second-generation Korean in Japan who explored themes of identity and ethnicity in her literary works. Lee is known to construct a fictional world based on her experiences portraying the environment and struggles of Koreans in Japan. Although she wrote in Japanese, Lee Yangji has established herself as a prominent literary figure in both Korea and Japan. In 2022, the English edition of her major works, *Nabi T'aryŏng and Other Stories*², was published, allowing readers worldwide to engage with her literary world.

This review explores the characteristics of literature written by Koreans in Japan through the lens of Lee Yangji's works and examines why Koreans in Japan novels are regarded as ethical art from the perspective of ethical literary criticism. Nie Zhenzhao (聂珍钊) once defined literature as “a unique form of expression of ethical concepts and moral life at a particular historical stage, and literature, in essence, is the art of ethics” (505).

In particular, this review will closely examine how this proposition applies to

1 The term used for Koreans in Japan varies depending on the perspective, such as “Zainichi Kan-kokujin” (在日韩国人), “Zainichi (在日) Korean,” or simply “Zainichi” (在日). Here, the most academically neutral term, “Koreans in Japan” (在日朝鲜人), is used.

2 See Yangji Lee, *Nabi T'aryŏng and Other Stories*, translated by Cindi Textor and Soo Mi Lee, Irvine: Seoul Selection U.S.A., 2022.

Lee Yangji's literary world. Through such analysis, this paper aims to examine how Koreans in Japan literature is distinguished as ethical art. Before diving into Lee Yangji's *Nabi T'aryŏng and Other Stories*, it makes sense to first identify where Lee's work currently fits within the broader flow of Koreans in Japan literature and thereafter, review the trajectory of the author, thus take a further look into the ethical issues in her works.

The roots of Koreans in Japan literature stem from the works of Korean authors who wrote in Japanese during the Japanese colonial period. As Korea entered the era of modernization through Japan, its literary scene developed under the influence of Japanese colonial rule. Among literary figures were those who created works in Japanese while living in Japan, such as Kim Saryang (金史良) and Kim Dalsu (金达寿). These intellectuals of the colonial period depicted characters who wrestled with "ethical choice" (Nie 535), often reflecting on the unconscious internalization of the perceived superiority of the empire overruling their homeland.

Kim Saryang meticulously portrayed the dilemma of a protagonist whose identity, under his Japanese name, is criticized and who eventually reclaims his Korean name, symbolizing a recovery of "ethical status" (*Into the Light*, 1939). The protagonist, a young intellectual, narrates his insecurities as a Korean in Japan who hides his identity, conveying a mix of fear and sorrow rising from his own affects. Here, a colonial intellectual with an "ethical status" as a Japanese would be seen as supporting or endorsing Japanese imperialism, whereas adopting his Korean name would exhibit a spirit of resistance to his annexed homeland. In reality, Kim Saryang sought to escape his pro-Japanese actions towards the end of the colonial era by participating in the independence movement. This exemplifies how the ethical nature of literature can influence the life and the work of the author. Additionally, Kim Dalsu depicted the contradictions of a Korean in Japan writer who, despite harboring anti-Japanese sentiments, found it comfortable to write in Japanese (*The Street of Descendants*, 1948). So to speak, both writers grappled with oppressive ethical conflicts created by the colonial system.

Even after liberation and even after the dissolution of the empire, Koreans in Japan who remained in Japan likewise were not exempt from this ethical dilemma. The Japanese society oppressed the lives of Koreans in Japan through structural discrimination. Therefore, for Koreans in Japan to reveal their identity was the same as entering into this structure of oppression. The only way they could assert the injustice and emphasize human ethics was through the expressive act of literature. This was because Koreans in Japan were stripped of political rights in Japan, and it was nearly impossible for them to enter the upper echelons of society, or have

access to public office or professional careers. The only way they could secure a space in public discourse as opinion leaders of society was through creative activity. This demonstrates the truth of the statement that literature mirrors ethics, serving as a final bastion for human rights.

Koreans in Japan writers were able to make ethical appeals to Japanese society through their creative activities in the Japanese language. However, conveying their intense feelings to the public in their homeland required translation. In other words, the fact that Koreans in Japan authors were unable to express themselves in their native language contained the potential to lead to another ethical aversion to contamination or impurity. Nevertheless, Koreans in Japan literature written in Japanese can be seen as a “unique form of expression” shaped by “the ethical concepts and moral life of a specific historical era” (Nie 505). Furthermore, when delving deeper by period and by individual writer, we can encounter numerous works that engage in the confusion of national identity within the context of “specific historical developments” (Nie 505).¹

Second-generation Koreans in Japan writers, while writing their works in Japanese, tend to delve deeply into the historical legacy of the colonial period and the dual identity between Korea and Japan. Lee Yangji, the author discussed in this paper, is one such writer who adopts this literary approach, but we will look at Lee in more detail later. First, the paper first refers to the example of from Lee Hoesung’s (李恢成) *Watershed* (1992).

This novel intricately depicts the complex entanglement of a father’s choice to live as a Japanese and the son’s ensuing guilt, providing a profound exploration of the ethics of Koreans in Japan identity. Their choice to abandon their relatives and flee to Japan from Sakhalin after the Japanese surrender saved their lives. Tormented by guilt, the protagonist later visits his relatives in Sakhalin and kneels for forgiveness. This guilt-laden narrative continues through other episodes, interlinking one after another. Here, two points are worth noting. First, the issue of identity becomes a significant factor in the ethical concepts and moral life of Koreans in Japan. Second, the literary expression of conflicts such as guilt serves as a form of ethical atonement. Readers, by following the narrative of these conflicts and the revelation of ethical dilemmas, are prompted to reflect on their own ethics and moral lives.

From this perspective, Koreans in Japan literature could exist as a form of

1 Koreans in Japan have a diverse spectrum of identities depending on where they associate themselves—whether with Korea before the division between South and North Korea, or Japan, the country where they reside—as well as the strength of their sense of belonging to these places.

border literature, neither Japanese nor Korean, due to the significant issue of ethics serving as its foundation. In this sense, Lee Yangji's literature that dealt with the issue of national identity at its inception, in particular, can be evaluated as having expanded the horizons of Koreans in Japan literature while pursuing the self as a boundary person. Lee Yangji's literature, while expressing identity conflicts in a literary manner, particularly places her characters in a state of "ethical limbo." Introducing this unfamiliar concept of "ethical limbo" can be helpful in interpreting her works, as she often depicts characters whose ethical conflicts become so intense that they function as trauma. This is because she primarily portrays characters who suffer from trauma due to extreme ethical conflicts.

In this context, "ethical limbo" is defined as a state of psychological turmoil caused by the conflict between the self that seeks to establish a proper sense of identity and the self that negates its own existence. For example, in her works, characters are often anticipated with eagerness to establish their Korean identity as Koreans in Japan, but are also faced with the reality of not being accepted as Koreans. At this moment, the characters emit negative energy of denial and fall into ethical limbo. Through these characters in a state of ethical limbo, the reader recognizes the fictional world of literature as one dominated by "the ethical concepts and moral lives of a specific historical stage" (Nie 505). By expressing ethical emotions such as anxiety, anger, sympathy, criticism, and support, readers can reconstruct this world. Having this theme at the heart of her consciousness, the writer works to figure out how to artistically sublimate this topic through literature.

In this context, the act of writing becomes a means to escape ethical limbo, while readers empathize with the characters' ethical turmoil, participating in the art of ethics through empathy and evaluation. This represents a cycle of creation and interpretation that meets the definition of literature as an art grounded in ethics.

Lee Yangji was born in 1955 in a typical rural village at the northeastern foot of Mount Fuji in Japan as a second-generation Korean in Japan. A brief overview (*Collected Works of Yangji Lee* 684-688) of her life can be gathered from her biography. Her father migrated to Japan from Jeju Island as a laborer in 1940, at the young age of 15. When Lee Yangji was nine years old, she acquired Japanese citizenship when her family naturalized to Japan. Since she grew up outside of the Koreans in Japan community and lived integrated into Japanese society, her childhood was more assimilated to Japan compared to the first generation or other second-generation Koreans in Japan.

Her life took a complete turn after she became fully aware of her identity as a Korean in Japan. In her essay "I'm a Korean in Japan" (1977), she recounts that

she discovered her family’s Korean lineage when she issued certified copy of her family register to take a test for studying in the US. Although she had vaguely felt something was different as she grew up, she unconsciously went along with her parents’ intention to raise her as a Japanese.

My parents did not speak Korean in front of the children, nor did they eat kimchi. Moreover, living in the countryside where everyone around me was Japanese, there was practically nothing in my life that made me feel “Korean.” I had never been scorned by friends for being Korean either. My parents, based on their own life experiences, raised me as a Japanese so I wouldn’t endure the same hardships they had faced, and I never questioned this. In fact, I took lessons in Japanese dance, flower arranging, and koto (a traditional Japanese harp), and had genuinely dreamed of becoming a certified master of Japanese dance. Occasionally, I visited relatives in Osaka, but the feelings I experienced there were only those of “backwardness,” “dirtiness,” or “barbarism.” My rejection toward “Koreans” and denial was of my own subconscious. (*Collected Works of Yangji Lee* 585)

The quotation stated above is a form of ethical writing in which the author confesses her internalization of the negative view of Koreans as “unclean and savage barbaric” (*Collected Works of Yangji Lee* 584), a perspective held by Japanese people at the time. In other words, because she, living as Tanaka Yoshiye (田中淑枝), defined her own identity as a second-generation Korean in Japan, she was able to express her former self, who had denied her Korean identity. In a sense, the author was able to achieve moral redemption or overcoming through self-sabotage. Her confession continues. As tensions between her parents worsened, leading to separation and a divorce lawsuit, she ran away from home several times, eventually dropping out of school in her senior year and moving to Kyoto to work at a tourist inn. It was the owner of the inn, once depicted as an unfavorable character in her book titled *Nabi T’aōng*, who helped her join the senior year of high school where her Japanese history teacher encouraged her to awaken her ethnic identity. In 1975, Lee Yangji entered Waseda University, where she started to learn more about Korea by interacting with other student Koreans in Japan. However, she dropped out after just one semester and embarked on a path as a Koto player. Despite her participation in the nationalist movements, she began to feel disgusted by what she saw as the hypocrisy of her actions. Nonetheless, it was also during this time that she aspired to become a writer.

In 1980, she visited Korea for the first time and began to learn the “gayageum”

(Korean traditional musical instrument) and pansori (a form of Korean narrative singing) as well as getting exposure to traditional shamanic dance. That same year, her eldest brother suddenly passed away, followed by the death of her second brother the following year. In 1982, she enrolled at Seoul National University but soon took a leave of absence and returned to Japan. While her older brothers passed away one after another and her parents' divorce proceedings were finalized, Lee Yangji published *Nabi T'aōng* that was written during her staying at a boarding house in Seoul. The following year, in 1983, she published *The Diver and My Brother, Gone Before Me*. Lee Yangji experienced a turning point in her career in 1988 when she won the Akutagawa Prize for her work *Yuhi*. This achievement not only brought her recognition in the Koreans in Japan literary scene but also propelled her to prominence in the Japanese literary world, garnering attention from critics and readers alike. During this period, she graduated from Seoul National University's Korean Literature department and studied dance at Ewha Womans University, continuing her academic and literary work while traveling between Korea and Japan. She tragically passed away at the young age of 37 in 1992 due to acute myocarditis.

In *Nabi T'aryōng and Other Stories*, the four works mentioned above are included. In order of importance, the title story *Nabi T'aōng* (1982) portrays the conflict that arises from the clash between the negative energy of self-denial, which comes from being a Korean in Japan, and the rational desire to escape from it. The story is built around the family history of a girl who has naturalized as Japanese, the discrimination she faces as a Korean in Japan, her awakening to ethnic identity, her journey of trying to reclaim her national identity by living in Korea, and frustration.

Unlike other Korean-Japanese writers, Lee Yangji built her literary world simultaneously observing both Korea and Japan through her experiences in Korea. This novel, which casts a dark tone throughout, leads readers to reflect on the story of the protagonist's 'ethical limbo' through their own ethical perspectives. The fictional world in the novel is based on the author's experiences, and while readers familiar with Lee Yangji or Koreans in Japan may feel a sense of realism. However, even without this contextual knowledge, the work can still be appreciated.

The novel begins with Aiko (愛子, who goes by her Japanese name at this point), a runaway and high school drop-out, who works odd jobs at an inn in Kyoto for two years, meeting her older brother who heard about her return and came to pick her up. The two enter a bar and begin drinking, but their conversation is somber. In their parents' divorce lawsuit, Aiko sides with their mother as a witness, while the eldest brother supports their father. Their parents, who migrated from Jeju

Island to Japan, became enemies, locked in bitter conflict. Although the specific reasons for their hatred toward each other is left out of the novel, Aiko seems to harbor ill feelings toward her father for the sin of naturalizing as Japanese citizen. Some readers may interpret this as a metaphor for the division of the Korean peninsula into North and South, while others may depict the negative legacy passed down from the first generation of immigrants to the second generation. Another layer worth exploring lies in the ethical criticism of having to choose one side of the family while honoring filial duty.

Despite the fact that Aiko sided with her mother due to the resentment of her father, the writer delves much deeper into the complex emotions of hatred and love Aiko feels towards her father. Although Aiko's sympathy for her mother is also portrayed in the novel, it is her father's paternal love, being at a loss in the face of his children's misfortune, that truly resonates with readers. Upon returning from Kyoto, the protagonist reminisces about her time working at the inn in Kyoto. The writer employs a “flashback narrative” to depict the people she met and the events that unfolded during her time in Kyoto. The protagonist, who conceals her identity as a Korean in Japan and lives in constant fear of being exposed, reveals her endlessly pitiful self without filter. According the remaining record of the writer, It was the owner of the inn helped her join high school. Thus, the conflicts involving the people she met at the inn can be seen as a literary device used to illustrate how tense living as a Korean in Japan is.

However, rather than focusing on criticizing the unethical discrimination of Japanese people, her novel, *Nabi T'aōng*, centers around the protagonist's personal journey of ethical growth and the pain she endures in the process. Aiko, the protagonist of the novel, exposes her own life of moral transgression, including multiple suicide attempts, rebellion against her father, and having an affair with a married man. To save herself from self-destructive despair, the novel portrays her rational will to reconnect with Korea by learning traditional Korean arts such as the “gayageum,” “pansori,” and “salpuri” dance (a Korean traditional shamanistic dance). She describes her rational desire to connect with Korea as a crucial element in her journey towards salvation. At one point, she asks her Japanese lover to call her by her Korean name, Ae-ja (爱子), and leaves Japan for Korea. In the final scene of the novel, she writes a letter to her Japanese lover, breaking off their relationship, demonstrating the unwavering strength of her rational will. Despite her strong rational will, the formidable barrier illustrated as the “motherland” is too high and too exclusive of an obstacle to overcome. Confronting the exclusivity of Korean society toward Koreans in Japan, she ends up wandering the streets in a state of ethical limbo as the novel draws to

a close. By examining the protagonist's descent into ethical panic from an ethical criticism perspective, readers may discover a variety of avenues for critical analysis in this deeply complex narrative that go beyond the question of identity. These may be issues of the relationship between ethical concepts and the body, ethical ethos, and the ethical writing as an act of salvation.

Yuhi (1988) is a novel that portrays the Koreans in Japan's experience, as a marginalized figure within both societies as outsiders, reflecting a broader narrative of social exclusion and displacement across national borders. It can be read as a continuation of *Nabi T'aŏng*, where the protagonist, Ae-ja (爱子), struggles to live as herself, ending the novel with a sense of determination to overcome her ethical conflicts. The central characters in this novel is also named Yuhi, the same as the title who is studying at S University in Korea to learn more about her homeland, referred to as "I" as the story is told from the first-person perspective of the boarding house owner's niece. The novel begins with the scene of Yuhi fleeing back to Japan after failing to adapt to life in Korea. Interestingly, this first-person narrative is from the niece who feels both sympathy and resentment toward Yuhi while trying to support her during her time in Korea. On the day Yuhi leaves Korea, "I" could have gone to her aunt's house to see her off, but, for some reason, arrives after Yuhi has left. The intentional mismatch, narrated by "I," foreshadows the inevitable disconnection and misalignment in Yuhi's life, where she can never fully belong in either Japan or Korea.

In fact, Yuhi's struggle to adapt in her motherland could be seen as anticipated by Ae-ja's staggering walk through the streets of Seoul in *Nabi T'aŏng*, where the seeds of this theme were planted. Yuhi's decision to enroll in the Korean language department at Korea's prestigious S University highlights the depth of her inferiority complex regarding the Korean language. On the one hand, Koreans in Japan are treated as outsiders, referred to as "Koreans" and segregated, while in Korea, they are criticized for not being able to speak proper Korean. Moreover, the novel's 1980s Seoul setting amplifies this tension. Yuhi voices her frustrations to "I," lamenting the perceived dirtiness, noise, rudeness, and the harsh tones of the Korean language heard in the streets of Seoul. In response, "I" critiques Yuhi for her inability to grasp Korean culture and for her persistent attachment to her Japanese identity.

It is worth noting that the first-person narrator in this context is not Yuhi herself, but "I," offering a distinct narrative perspective. The novel is narrated by "I," who reconstructs the events of Yuhi's time in Korea through a reflective lens, chronicling her struggles with what she saw, heard, and experienced. Readers can

imagine a state similar to what modern medicine calls panic disorder as they follow Yuhi’s emotions. The narrative strategy of employing “I” as the first-person narrator, who critically observes and contrasts Yuhi’s behavior, positions the narrator as an extension of the author’s rational will.

“I” recounts episodes with Yuhi in a calm and detached manner, empathizing with her emotions while reconstructing their conversations and her actions, attempting to fill in the gaps left by Yuhi’s fragmented experiences. Ultimately, this narration serves to bridge the disconnect, revealing why Yuhi felt compelled to leave so abruptly and why “I” was hesitant to see her off. The author examines the Korean gaze directed at Koreans in Japan, and by situating herself within that gaze, engages in self-reflection and critique of her own position. Thus, Yuhi poses an ethical question concerning the state of disconnection introduced at the novel’s outset. Through “I’s” narration, readers vicariously experience Yuhi’s descent into what can be interpreted as an “ethical limbo,” inviting them to engage in understanding how she navigates her frustration and despair.

In *Nabi T’aryŏng and Other Stories*, one of the two additional works included is *The Diver* (1983), a deeply troubling and painful narrative. Although the title may evoke images of a diver, possibly a Haenyeo (Jeju female diver), the story bears no relation to these figures. Instead, the title refers to the protagonist’s final moments of suicide, where she hears the hallucination, “Dive in. Dive into the water!” (*Nabi T’aryŏng and Other Stories* 218) as she sinks into the bathtub, finding a sense of peace in the water, which symbolizes her death. The plot centers on the violence inflicted on the protagonist’s body and mind after her Jeju-born mother remarries a Japanese stepfather, forcing her into a Japanese household. As a Korean in Japan, the protagonist endures daily physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from her stepbrothers, leaving her profoundly traumatized. Following her mother’s death, she escapes, surviving on alcohol and prostitution, but eventually spirals into hallucinations of torture and fears of being massacred by the Japanese, before ultimately taking her own life.

This tragic narrative depicts the protagonist in a state of ethical limbo, as her perspective alternates between terror and shame. The story intertwines with the voice of her Japanese stepsister, Keiko, who reconstructs the protagonist’s life. The mixed narration style leaves the protagonist’s ethical status unresolved, mirroring the confusion and chaos of her existence. Keiko, who visits her stepsister’s home by chance, discovers the tragic scene and attempts to piece together the protagonist’s movements from her disappearance to her death. In doing so, Keiko uncovers unsettling details about her life. The protagonist’s mind and body bear the scars

of trauma that extend beyond domestic violence, resembling the trauma inflicted upon an entire nation. For instance, the protagonist lives in constant fear of being killed by Japanese people while recalling the massacre during the Great Kanto Earthquake. Even before she could fully assert her own ethical identity, she is already overwhelmed by the throes of ethical panic, unable to escape the weight of her historical and personal trauma. It is worth considering how ethical criticism can interpret the intertwining of personal narrative with historical trauma in this case. Another issue to examine is how the Japanese stepsister, Keiko perceives her stepsister's troubled life and eventual suicide. However, in this novel, Keiko remains consistently a bystander, refusing to engage with the serious events that unfold. Of course, in the realm of literary fiction, multiple interpretations are always possible.

My Brother, Gone Before Me (1983) is written in the form of a letter from the younger sister, Tamiko (民子), to her deceased brother, Hideo (秀男). The central theme that Tamiko conveys to her late brother revolves around their older sister, Kazuko (和子). The narrative unfolds through episodes highlighting Kazuko's awakening to ethnic consciousness and her conflicts with Tamiko, who is more passive and willing to compromise, particularly on issues of national identity. Kazuko leads an unstable life, searching for her identity through a variety of pursuits: political activism, participation in labor movements for ideological change, rigorous study of the Korean language, and a desire to become a singer in Korea—only to later abandon that goal in favor of studying abroad. Her yearning to reinvent herself reflects a deeper desire for personal liberation and a reimagined way of living. However, her relationship with a married Japanese man links her back to the themes of *Nabi T'aŏng*.

Tamiko, the letter's narrator, leads a more passive life, supporting her radical older sister in a gentle manner. She plans to marry a Japanese man but is hurt when her lover deceives her and has an affair. Since the deceased brother cannot read the letter, no answer can be expected. The incomplete communication between the letter's writer and recipient reflects the confusion and unformed identity that are central to the story, asking how one should live as a Korean in Japan. However, in comparison to the other two works, Tamiko's decision to forgive and accept her unfaithful Japanese lover results in a significantly lower density in terms of ethical expression. In this sense, the author fails to fully explore the meaning behind writing a letter to an absent recipient.

So to speak, the dead cannot be the recipient of a letter. Therefore, the reader becomes the one to fill the absence, reading the message intended for the brother.

By engaging in the communication between the sister and her deceased brother, the reader becomes acutely aware of the inherent incompleteness of the letter's message due to the absence of its recipient. This narrative strategy seems designed to emphasize the unresolved quest for the ethical identity of Koreans in Japan. If the brother's absence had been given more ethical clarity, or if the tension between the need to return to Korea and the choice to remain in Japan had been portrayed with clearer, more defined boundaries, the ethical complexity of the story might have been further deepened.

The next generation of Koreans in Japan writers, such as Kaneshiro Kazuki (金城一紀), a third-generation Korean in Japan, advocates for living as a Korean in Japan, distinct from both Korean and Japanese identities. Authoer Yu Miri (柳美里) similarly operates beyond the confines of concepts such as homeland or colonial power. In this context, the literature of Lee Yangji, which centers on literary ethics, may represent the pinnacle of Koreans in Japan literature. Lee Yangji will be remembered in literary history as a writer who profoundly explored the ethical complexities inscribed in the individual bodies of Koreans in Japan people.

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