

## Hö Nam-ki and His Poetry

Son, Jiwon

Korea University of Japan

### Abstract

Hö Nam-ki (1918~88) is one of the most significant poets of the twentieth-century Korean-Japanese literature. Born in Kup'o, South Kyöngsang Province, Hö Nam-ki crossed the Korea Strait and landed in Japan in 1939. After welcoming liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule at the Tachikawa Airfield's repair factory in Tokyo, the poet composed "Hands" in 1946 to express the happiness of liberation and "Children, This Is Our School" in 1948. He also portrayed his unwavering spirit as a poet in "Dagger." In 1959, Hö became the visiting chairman of the Union of Korean Writers and Artists in Japan, an organization established during the same year. In 1975, he visited P'yöngyang for the first time. In works such as *Toward the Motherland* (1962), "Stories Etched in Stones" (1966), "Naktong River" (1978), and *Revering the Sky of My Homeland* (1980), the poet portrayed the hopes and lives of the Koreans living in Japan, and sang of his beloved motherland. In addition to poetry, Hö also wrote plays and film scripts. To educate his Japanese friends on Korean culture, he translated classical Korean literature such as "The Tale of Ch'unhyang" into Japanese and engaged in activities that were meant to encourage friendly relations between Korea and Japan. Until his death at the age of seventy, Hö Nam-ki remained a prolific writer, leaving behind him more than thirty opuses.

Key words: Literature by the Korean Residents of Japan, Lives and Desires of the Korean Resident of Japan, Piercing Longing for the Homeland, The Epic Poem "The Song of a Flintlock," Patriotic Poet, Poet of the People

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Hō Nam-ki (1918~88) is one of the most significant poets of the twentieth-century Korean-Japanese literature. Renowned among not only Koreans living in Japan, but also writers of Japan and South Korea, Hō's work continues to receive the attention of critics. The editors of P'yōngyang Publishers, a company that published a collection of Hō's poetry,<sup>1)</sup> saw Hō as "the first of the poets who transformed life in a strange land, a long-time subject of sorrow and heartbreak, into one of optimism and righteous struggle."

In this article, I aim to examine the characteristics of Hō Nam-ki's poetry with its truthful reflection of the quotidian lives and inclinations of Korean people in the southern half of the Korean peninsula in that most intriguing space in modern Korean history, the Post-Liberation Period.

## 1. The Act of Creation in a Strange Land

### a) Crossing the Korea Strait to Japan

For the half century between his twenties and his death at the age of seventy, Hō Nam-ki lived his creative life in Japan, the land of strong gusts. During the period when Japanese colonizers usurped upon Korean land and clamped down on Koreans, Hō was born in a secluded port called Kup'o on the southern coast of the peninsula on the eve of the March 1st Movement, when anti-Japanese, anti-colonialist sentiments were ablaze. Hō's father was an independence fighter, and the family was impoverished. As a young boy, he would listen to his mother's stories of old times and often seek entertainment by watching traditional Korean exorcist rituals, holding onto a dream even through a childhood that was reduced to penury. After graduating from the Second Commercial High School of Pusan, Hō visited Ch'ōnan, the background for the novel *Hometown*,<sup>2)</sup> to improve his Korean.

1) Hō, Nam-ki, *Choguk e pach'iyō: sijip* (P'yōngyang: P'yōngyang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1992).

2) Serialized in the *Chosōn Ilbo* from November 15, 1933, the writer Ri Kiyōng's novel *Hometown* provoked intense reaction from readers. The novel is set in Ch'ōnan, Ch'ungch'ōng Province.

Numerous writers and poets left the Korean peninsula for foreign land during this time of unbearable hardships for Koreans. Some went to Jiandao, some others to Siberia, and still some others, like Hō, crossed the Korea Strait to Japan.

Hō arrived in Japan in 1939 and put himself through the Nihon University College of Art by delivering newspapers and milk. There, he not only indulged his passion for literature, but also wrote plays and performed them with friends. However, because they were caught putting on plays in Korean, their theater company<sup>3)</sup> was disbanded, and Hō was suspended from school. As the first generation of Korean immigrants to Japan had before him, Hō experienced the mortification of a nation-less individual whose worth was considered lesser than that of a dog without an owner.

At a time when words both spoken and written were stolen, and names long ago given by mothers and fathers were erased, too many poems told of the despondence over the lost country, tears of parting, longing for the homes long since gone, and the sorrows of living as strangers in a strange land.

Not only in the throes of such suffering, but also today, seventy years after liberation from the oppressive Japanese colonial rule, too many poets leave Korea and are living as immigrants, dreaming of their motherland through tears. Today, as was the case in the past, the poems of those poets who have left their motherland address the unbearable loneliness and sorrow of wandering without homes, and the constant ache of anguish. The works in *Windows into the Literature of Overseas Koreans*<sup>4)</sup> published in Seoul clearly demonstrate such tendencies.

However, many among Korean-Japanese poets have transformed the sadness of overseas living into optimism and righteous struggle; Hō Nam-ki is one such poet.

3) The “Hyōngsang’chwa” event took place in December 1939 when the Japanese police arrested the members of the Tokyo Korean Students Theater Troupe for having breached the Maintenance of the Public Order Act.

4) A collection of works that received the Overseas Korean Literature Awards, it was published in November 1999 by the Association of Overseas Koreans in Seoul to encourage the creative works of overseas Koreans. The first contest drew approximately 1,500 entries from twenty-nine countries.

## b) The Poet as the Tentacle of the Times

To understand Hō Nam-ki, the poet who created works not of sorrow and anguish, but of optimism and vigor, one must examine the ways in which the poet thought about and portrayed his time. The poet is the tentacle of the times. Some call the poet a bugler for the epoch. Because poets are always in sync with the times, their movements and aims are the wings for the lyricism of the times.

What were the times allotted to Hō Nam-ki like? Hō met liberation from Japanese colonial rule on the fifteenth of August at the Tachikawa Airfield's repair factory in Tokyo; liberation to him was akin to the cataclysm of the world turned upside down.

One Korean-Japanese poet wrote of the ecstasy of liberation as follows: "The day has come when we liquidate our cursed fate. On this historic day of the fifteenth of August, we have finally met the freedom to create our fate, fate that will enmesh unabashedly with truth. Speak what we may, write what we may; that day has finally come."<sup>5)</sup>

Such were the feelings Hō Nam-ki harbored as he met liberation in a foreign land. In "Hands," he wrote of the sublime happiness of a liberated people.

A pair of hands that mined coal in a Hokkaido mine  
Two hands that mailed letters from a jail in Taechōn  
Even my two haggard hands, helter skelter for Ch  
Twenty-eight years, writing useless poems  
Will gather together as the day breaks, and  
Fisted, will grandly sound their way through the streets of Tokyo.<sup>6)</sup>

In the poem above, Hō borrows "hands" to portray the devastating fate of the oppressed, scorned Korean-Japanese, as well as the helplessness of the poet himself—the lyrical protagonist of "Hands"—whose hands wandered aimlessly

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5) Chōng, Paek-un, "Perspectives on Poetry," *Haebang Sinmun*, January 10, 1948, 2.

6) Hō, Nam-ki, "Hands," *Haebang Sinmun*, September 25, 1946, 2.

writing “useless poems for twenty-eight years.” But above all, the new day bands these “hands” together and marches them forward throughout the streets of Tokyo in hope.

After liberation, Hō visited the Alliance of Koreans Living in Japan<sup>7)</sup> and, with like-minded activists, spearheaded the movement to enlighten his compatriots.

At the Korean Language School,<sup>8)</sup> Hō Nam-ki taught Korean to the children of Korean immigrants. It is during this period that he began to portray in his poems the quotidian lives of the Korean-Japanese surviving like rolling stones in a foreign land. Hō wrote of the ecstasy of reclaiming spoken and written words once lost and of the Korean immigrants in their quest to preserve their heritage through a scene at school.

Miles and miles away from home  
 You grew up, and here,  
 the only school for you to  
 re-learn whence you came.  
 Ah!  
 My young comrades.

From “Children, This Is Our School”

With the subtitle “The Song of the Outgoing Principal of a Training School,” the poem “Children, This Is Our School”<sup>9)</sup> remains popular among the different generations of Koreans who grew up in foreign lands.

In 1955, the Association of Korean Residents in Japan was established, and in 1959, the Union of Korean Writers and Artists in Japan<sup>10)</sup> was formed. As Director

7) The Alliance of Koreans Living in Japan, called “Joryōn,” was established in October 15, 1945.

8) Immediately following liberation, Joryōn established Korean language centers throughout Japan to teach Korean to the children of Korean immigrants. Hō Nam-ki was a teacher at the Totsuka Korean Language School established in October 1945.

9) Hō Nam-ki recited “Children, This Is Our School” at the Parent Conference against Illegal Suppression Koreans held at the Kyobashi civic auditorium in April 1948. The poem portrays the courage of children who learn the Korean language amidst difficult conditions in Japan.

10) Established on June 7, 1959, the Union of Korean Writers and Artists in Japan is a subsidiary of the Association of Koreans Living in Japan. The Union aims to assert an ideology of self-reliant literature and oversees Korean-Japanese artists in the fields of literature, art, music, dance, theater, film, and

of Literature, Hō actively created poems that depict the lives of Koreans living in Japan. In the poem “Stories Etched in Stones” written in 1966 as well as in others, Hō portrayed the diverse lives of the Korean-Japanese people in different stations in life.

In March 1961, Hō presented his article “Enlightenment and Development of Korean Literature” at the Conference of Asian and African Writers. As the DPRK representative at the Seventh Congress on the Prohibition of Atomic and Nuclear Bombs held in Tokyo in August 1961, Hō recited his work “Hear Our Ardent Appeal” to inform the world of the Korean people’s efforts to independently unify the peninsula and express a powerful plea to rid the world of nuclear arsenal, thereby stepping closer to achieving world peace.

It was around this time that Hō, who had become a member of the Alliance of North Korean Writers, published *Toward the Motherland*, his first collection of poems written in Korea, in P’yōngyang in 1962. In 1975, Hō visited P’yōngyang for the first time and expressed the overwhelming emotions of that day when he stepped onto the homeland he had longed for is entire life through “soil.”

Long ago, when we  
Turned away from our home and  
Found ourselves in a strange land,  
Leave we did, not  
Because there wasn’t fertile soil back home  
Or because there wasn’t land to plowshare  
  
Or because the gritty soil of the strange land  
Was richer than the soil back home  
Or because the rough winds that blew over that soil  
Were more fragrant and pleasing  
  
But only that our home was taken, and

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photography. In addition to encouraging literary activities among the Korean-Japanese, the Union seeks to deepen its relationship with the literary artists from all over the world including South Korea and Japan.

some betrayed their own kind,  
 so we had to stand on land  
 whose hills and water were alien, and  
 continue to breathe, though faced with  
 unbearable shame.

...

holding in my two hands  
 the fertile soil of my motherland,  
 the delightful earthiness wafting;  
 this land,  
 this soil  
 is  
 truly Korean land, and  
 honest Korean soil.  
 Upon this truth  
 I ruminate.

After 1976, Hō depicted the realities of workers, farmers, students, and intellectuals participating in the anti-fascist democratization struggle in the latter half of the 1970s in *The Origins of the Birth of Poetry in South Korea*, a sequel to *Stories of Korean Winters*.

In June 1978, the year Hō turned sixty, he published his poetry collection *Naktong River*, and in 1980, his *Revering the Sky of My Homeland* was published in P'yōngyang. Even when he was battling illness in the last years of his life, Hō produced numerous poems including “Dawn on Mt. Paektu” in 1980. He also published a volume of translated poetry that contained the long-cherished wish of the Korean people.

From the time he wrote of the ecstasy of liberation, Hō Nam-ki was the type of poet who never ceased to provide bearings for the times, all the while

persevering through the unfriendly gusts of a foreign land. For half a century from the time the man born on the eve of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Movement left his home and crossed the Korea Strait to arrive in Japan, Hō was constantly engaged in producing poetry. The period coincided with the Korean people's obtainment of freedom from the tragic fate that had befallen them and their pioneering new paths for themselves.

Having cast aside the mortification of a nation-less individual, Hō Nam-ki could live his life as an overseas resident from a liberated, independent nation. In front of him also lay a path to a life of his truth; no Koreans residing in foreign lands had to feel the anguish over their lost motherland any longer. Standing in the middle of this incredible time, Hō Nam-ki extolled the new era as the poet laureate of the Korean people.

In "Dagger," a poem that situates Hō as a poet living through overwhelming times, he wrote:

My poems,  
I do not wish for them  
Existence as roses or peonies.  
I only want their songs  
To be the daggers that  
Pierce the hearts  
Of our enemies.

Then he wrote, "My songs / they are/ the weapons endowed to me." The poem poignantly encapsulates the life of the first-generation immigrant poet Hō Nam-ki, the fervent patriot who gave his life to the causes of his homeland; he never wavered from his insistence that his poetry steer clear of ornate sophistication, instead wishing that it be used as a weapon against the enemies of his beloved nation.

Taking every step of his life along with his nation and his people, Hō Nam-ki contributed to the creation of a new fate for the Korean people through his poetry



and is now among those artists who transformed the imagery of life in a foreign land from one of deep sorrow and anguish to that of optimism and righteous struggle.

## 2. Contemplations on Hō Nam-ki's Poetic Sphere

### a) Representative Works

Hō Nam-ki was a prolific writer, producing not only a plethora of poems and lyrics, but also plays and movie scripts. In fact, Hō's plays have frequently been performed, and one of his movie scripts<sup>11)</sup> was made into a movie, which greatly inspired people.

To share with his Japanese friends the cultural heritage of Korea, Hō translated numerous pieces of classical Korean literature into Japanese and actively involved himself in efforts to establish friendly relations between Korea and Japan.

Hō's works deal with a diverse array of subject matters. However, as a number of critics have pointed out, we tend to focus on the works he produced around the Korean War. Such tendency resulted because Hō Nam-ki realistically portrayed the lives of Koreans on the southern half of the peninsula, a place that signifies the Korean people's ultimate yearnings immediately after liberation. In addition, Hō produced a bulk of his work during this time, much of his work eliciting a sense of identification and sympathy among not only Koreans living in Japan, but also Japanese poets and critics.

His work *Stories of Korean Winters*<sup>12)</sup> and epic poem "The Song of a Flintlock," as well as his later works depicting his hometown and Naktong River

11) In Pyōngyang, Hō Nam-ki's scripts were turned into movies: *We Have Our Motherland* in 1968 and *The Beneficent Sun Also Shines Here* in 1975. Both were shown in Japan.

12) Inspired by Heinrich Heine's "Germany: A Winter's Tale," *Stories of Korean Winters* was published in *Minju Chosōn* from 1946 to spring of 1949. At the time, the series of poems were published under the title *Chosōn pungmulshi*. There were sixty-seven poems in thirteen chapters. In 1949, the Japanese publisher Aoki Shoten published it as a poetry collection.

are representative pieces of his opuses.

- *Stories of Korean Winters*

This work depicts the lives of the Korean people who were suffering at the hands of the invaders and at the weapons of the fascists in the post-liberation period between 1946 and 1948. Published in the enlightenment magazine *Minju Chosŏn* (“Democratic Korea”), *Stories of Korean Winters* reverberated deeply with the readers; the lyrical protagonist who cannot fall asleep at night because of the songs he hears when he listens carefully sings of the hills, fields, cities, and villages of his homeland.

Today, all day  
Daughters of Korea again do the laundry.  
They wet the dirty clothes, pat them,  
Soak them in their tears, and then rinse them.  
Today, all day  
They wash clothes at this river,  
Clothes of their husbands who  
Died not at  
the daggers of people from foreign lands  
but of other Koreans.  
Trousers of their sons who are  
imprisoned because they  
wished to create a better nation for all.  
Rags that tiredly whisper the  
Countless days of  
poverty and misfortune the women had  
Long grown accustomed to.  
Ah, and the clothes,  
They are the only consolation and companions for  
Women of this land who live  
Their lives, lightless.

Those clothes are that poor woman's  
Genealogy and history.

The women of this land are  
washing their salty, cold genealogies.  
They are rinsing  
history soaked in tears.

The above is the entirety of “Yōngsan River” in the seventh chapter of *Stories of Korean Winters* called the “Kwangju Book of Poetry.” A Japanese critic<sup>13</sup>) evaluated the poem as follows:

Hō Nam-ki's collection of poetry arouses a strong sense of sympathy among the conscientious Japanese poets at the time and was lauded as a superb body of work. The poem “Yōngsan River” is a representative work from the collection. Incorporating the image of the Yōngsan River flowing in front of him, the poet expressed his irrepressible lamentation and rage. And no poem that keenly lays bare the mournful heart ever fails to move the readers.

- “The Song of a Flintlock”

Composed in 1950, “The Song of a Flintlock” is an epic poem that delineates the history of unbearable sorrow the Korean people had to endure to realize their independence from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and transforms it into a narrative of three generations of righteous struggle.

The matriarch of the family, who lost her husband in the Tonghak Uprising and her son in the March 1<sup>st</sup> Movement, hands over a flintlock to her grandson, Chun-ho. Chun-ho then takes the flintlock, the only material remnant from his grandfather and his father, and marches onto the field of resistance against foreign powers.

13) Kokai, Eiji, “Sengo no shijintachi,” in *Gendaishi kanshō kōza*, ed. Itō Shinkichi, *et al.* (Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten, 1968-1969).

Chun-ho, you are  
Now polishing your gun. The  
Gun, long ago bought with more money than we could spend, made of  
Birch tree from Mun'gyōng Pass and  
Cast iron from deep within the woods of Ch'ungju, the  
Flintlock that we bought for  
Your grandfather's grandmother  
Only after we sold all the clothes I brought when I got married,  
Silver rings and silver hairpin, too,  
You are now polishing.

My dear Chun,  
You are now polishing  
A gun, the rusty gun that  
in the Tonghak Uprising and in  
the March 1st Movement of the Kimi Year  
Served your grandfather  
And your father.  
The flintlock that was buried under  
Blood, tears, and mounds of dirt,  
That gun  
You are now polishing.

The flintlock is a symbol of the young people of Korea who marched onto the fields of battle with their indomitable, heroic spirits. Through such a symbol, Hō's epic poem truthfully depicts the unstoppable struggle of the Korean people for independence within the framework of the three generations—grandfather, father, and son—of resistance.

In his "On Two Korean Epic Poems," the Japanese Poet Tsuboi Shigeji analyzed "The Song of a Flintlock," asserting that the narrative is meticulously planned and compared it to the epic poems of Cho Kichōn. In addition, Tsuboi discussed the

intimate overlap between the poet Hō Nam-ki and the grandmother, the lyrical protagonist, in terms of the larger composition of the poem. Tsuboi also concluded that through the clear use of reiteration, Hō Nam-ki had thoroughly communicated his intent.<sup>14)</sup>

“The Song of a Flintlock” is also well known in South Korea. The critic Im Hōn-yōng wrote that “The Song of a Flintlock” connects the Tonghak Uprising, resistance to Japanese colonialism, and democratization movement following liberation from Japanese colonial rule through three generations of suffering, a controversial work evocative of “Gūm River” by Sin Tong-yōp.<sup>15)</sup> The poet Yi Ki-hyōng wrote:

As a man of letters, I have always held a deep interest in literature that portrays the history of our people and political problems of our day...I was overwhelmingly moved by Hō Nam-ki’s penetrating view of history that inheres throughout the epic poem. Through the father and the son who charge on battle fields with the flintlock in their hands—the flintlock as the symbol of the vital force and heritage of our people—and the grandmother who sang while bidding farewell to her grandson bear witness to the wretched path of history to which our people were subject...As part of the generation that directly experienced the realities that were depicted in this poem, I, as a writer myself, feel a keen sense of responsibility for the precarious division of the Korean people.<sup>16)</sup>

#### - Songs of the Hometown

Patriotism is not simply an abstract concept; it is the embodiment of one’s love for the land, history, and culture of one’s motherland, expressed in detail through the love for one’s birthplace and its people.

In Hō Nam-ki’s works of art that sang of his motherland and his people, the poetic sentiments expressed not merely the usual rallying cry, but an all-encompassing, endless love for the motherland juxtaposed to the rage and

14) Tsuboi, Shigeji, “Nihen no Chōsenjojishi,” *Shijin kaigi*1 (1967).

15) Im, Hōn-yōng, “The Controversial Epic Poem ‘The Song of a Flintlock,’” *Han’guk munhak* (1991).

16) Yi, Ki-hyōng, “Review of the Epic Poem ‘The Song of a Flintlock,’” *Ch’ulp’an Jō nōl* (1989).

loathing over the foreign imperialists who trampled over his homeland. At times, Hō's aim and wish were expressed as calmly as the Naktong River that flowed through his hometown; at other times, they were conveyed in a dogged, rough fashion.

Hō's poems "My Hometown" written in 1957, "Naktong River," and "Trip to Tsushima Island," both written in 1958, sing of the hills and the streams of his hometown that poet recalled with every-growing fondness as the years passed.

A day from Tokyo to Shimonoseki and  
Only after two days in Shimonoseki  
Could I take a liner  
that in 10 hours brought me here  
so I could climb this mountain.

Here in Hitakatsu  
North of north of Tsushima  
From here my land, my hometown  
- Over there is Kōje Island  
- The fortress over here is Oryuk Island

I feel as though I could see  
Tongnae,  
Where I was born and raised,  
Only if I stand on tiptoe

The miserable seas, why have you become  
an expanse of the coldest ice?  
Why do you stand in my way?

Those mountains and that land  
Over on that horizon  
That's my true home.

Why are you, fog, spreading like  
 Black ink on paper and  
 Hindering my sight.

Twenty years it has already been  
 since I left my home.  
 Though I meant to be the first to return  
 When liberation finally came to my homeland,  
 I am still here on this land,  
 Fretting to death over  
 My motherland so close by.

The protagonist stands atop a mountain ridge on Tsushima Island where he feels as though he could see his hometown if he stood on tiptoes and hear his scream echo back from his homeland. This poem is Hŏ Nam-ki's representative work on the hometown.

When he was a little boy, the poet grew up wading in Naktong River; he portrayed the hills and streams of his hometown that he dreamed about in his poems, writing in a foreign land. Hŏ's collection of poetry *Naktong River*, published in 1978, the year he turned sixty, has a detailed map of Kup'o in Tongnae County on its cover; readers can easily guess the extent to which the poet longed for his hometown.

## b) Characteristics of Hŏ Nam-ki's Poetry

Hŏ Nam-ki's representative works—*Stories of Korean Winters*, “The Song of a Flintlock,” and poems about his hometown and Naktong River—are particularly characterized by the protagonist's creation of certain forms. The protagonists of Hŏ's poems are not always the young, tear-soaked poets who beat their chest in agony over their longing for the hometown. They are people who bravely march onto the battlefield to fight for national independence and to re-claim the homeland and hometown trampled upon by foreign powers. Though the body exists in a

strange land, the protagonist sings of his longing for his homeland and strengthens his resolve to re-claim it; this is the protagonist that the poet Hō Nam-ki created. In the epic poems “The Song of a Flintlock,” that portrayed three generations of a family in resistance, and “Kōje Island,” as well as the poems that depicted Naktong River, Hō shows the form of a protagonist who fights for national independence.

Moreover, Hō depicted the strong-willed Korean women who transformed the pain of colonialism into rage and tears into a fighting spirit. Such women were represented by the grandmother in “The Song of a Flintlock,” the woman in “Yōngsan River,” and in “The Song for Those Who Come at Night” as well as a number of other works.

“The Song of a Flintlock” has the subtitle “For the countless wives, mothers, and daughters of Korea and their sorrow.” The grandmother in “The Song of a Flintlock,” for example, is representative of all Korean women who were witnesses to the suffering of the Korean people and had to send their husbands, sons, and grandsons off to battle without shedding a tear.

The woman in “Yōngsan River” washes her dead husbands’ shirt and imprisoned son’s trousers in the river along with her tears in Tamyang at the foot of the mountains. What is expressed in the poems are not merely sentiments of sadness and lamentation, but the strength of resolve of willful Korean women who had to send her sons and grandsons off to war to ensure that the history soaked in blood would never be repeated.

To Hō Nam-ki, the female protagonists of his poems represented not only his own mother who birthed and raised him, but also the motherland, which was the base of his life as well as life itself. As such, his poems are deeply saturated by sentiments specific to Koreanness. This is yet another characteristic of the literature Hō created. Hō Nam-ki always wrote with Korea firmly rooted in his creative process. Throughout his poems is the unmistakable, ceaseless longing for the hills and streams of his hometown, despite existence in a strange land.

In January of the year he turned forty-seven, the poet wrote:

It has been decades since I began writing poetry, but I believe that throughout those



decades, there is only one subject I have sought after. However, when I re-consider, such single-mindedness doesn't appear so extraordinary for a Korean poet; and I find myself once again strengthening my resolve to continue writing poetry that addresses and aims at only the materialization of the peaceful re-unification of Korea. Peaceful re-unification: this was the subject of the poems I composed in my days of inexperience and youth and will remain the sole subject of my work. It is also my only cherished desire.<sup>17)</sup>

What the poet Hō Nam-ki wrote about, so long as the poetry in his creative storage did not run out, are the songs of the Korean peninsula and the yearning of its people. As such, his works always emanate the sentiments peculiarly Korean.

Hō's poems also bear a peculiar characteristic in their source, for they begin with a meditation on his ceaseless yearnings for the homeland. The poem "Naktong River" written in 1978 is a classic example. The protagonists of Hō Nam-ki's poems always co-exist with the Korean people even as they reside in foreign lands. In addition, Hō's poetry also has its characteristic poetic subject matters, which the poet found in the traditional customs and lives of the Korean people he had seen and heard about as a young boy. In fact, a large number of Hō's poems portray such scenes. For example, the title *Stories of Korean Winters* and its sequel *The Origins of the Birth of Poetry in South Korea* written between 1976 and 1978 clearly reveal their contents through the titles of the poems: "Onset of Spring" and "Praying for Good Luck in the New Spring" for springtime, "The Breeze of Masan" in April, "The Barley Hump" in early summer, "Kimchi for Winter Storage" for late autumn, "Snow Storm in Seoul" and "Last Day of the Lunar Year" for winter, and "Cattle Market" for the fourth day of a lunar month. These poems that sang of Hō's unforgettable longing for his hometown read like a beautiful almanac.

In the 8 provinces of Korea,  
High peaks are outdone by

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17) Hō, Nam-ki, "My Long-Cherished Desire," *Chosŏn sinbo*, January 1, 1964, 6.

even higher peaks, but I know of no passage  
more grueling and steep than  
the Barley Hump.

After we survive the  
Barley Hump at the onset of summer,  
We dig up our potatoes and  
Pick the corn not yet ripe,

And somehow live until  
that time in the fall when  
We harvest ripe barley, but  
Until this time, life is  
Wearing.  
Until then,  
We suffer in anguish.

Hō compared the hardships that farmers could not avoid to rough mountain passages such as Mun'gyōng Pass, and his poetry agonizingly portrays the lives of farmers who had to survive the Barley Hump with nothing but their tears of blood.

Not only in subject matters, but also in the symbols and detailed description, Hō's inclinations are strongly reminiscent of his place as the poet of the Korean people; so many of Hō's poems deal with seas, mountains, rivers, and rocks. The poems "Korea Strait" written in 1968, "The Sea between Korean and Japan" written in 1960, "The Sea" written in 1965, and "The Golden Seashore" written in 1959 serve not to confirm the sea crossed by Koreans tearfully leaving their homeland behind, but to celebrate the sea that Koreans will cross when the long-held wish of the Korean people is realized.

Poems "Yōngsan River" written in 1948, "Naktong River" written in 1969, and "The Imjin River Ferry" written in 1975 all depict rivers overflowing with the ultimate desire of the Korean people. And "Dawn on Mt. Paektu," "The T'aebaek

Mountain Range,” “Mt. Chiri,” and “Mt. Samgak” sing of mountains branching out from Paektu Mountain and reaching the entire peninsula, mountains symbolizing the vigor of the Korean people.

Hō Nam-ki had a deep love of the Korean language, the language of the soul of the Korean people. Consequently, Hō always incorporated the Korean language spoken by the overseas Koreans and portrayed his subject matters simply and accessibly; even his figurative language concerning forms involved common objects and phenomena. The poet also incorporated various modes of expression such as reiteration with a witty twist. In such a way, Hō Nam-ki’s world of poetry is deeply saturated with the characteristics of the Korean people.

At times, Hō would present poetry written in Japanese to draw a truthful picture of Korea in the minds of the Japanese people. And in the waning years of his life, he poured utmost efforts into rendering his Japanese works in Korean.

Hō Nam-ki was a poet of patriotism—a poet of the Korean nation and its people—who left vivid footsteps on the historical trajectory of poetry written by Korean residents of Japan.