

Disorderly Emotions: Medical Discourse and Literary Madness in Colonial Korea

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This paper examines a group of Korean fictional narratives published between the late 1910s and the early 1920s—including Kim Tongin “The Sorrow of the Frail” (1919), Yom Sangsop’s “A Green Frog in the Specimen Room” (1921), and Kim Myöngsun’s “A Seven-Faced Bird” (1921)—investigating how modern Korean literary representations of emotions were informed by contemporary medical discourses. These stories appropriate the language of biomedicine to identify disorderly emotions as medical conditions, including those routinely associated with the questions of gender and sexuality: nervous temperament (*sin’gyöngjil*), neurasthenia (*sin’gyöng soeyak*), and hysteria (*hisut’eri*). In order to examine what roles the encounter between literature and medicine played in the changing landscape of emotions in the early twentieth century, I will address questions such as: How did these writers distinguish possibly unpleasant yet normal human emotions from pathological symptoms? For what reason did they choose to obscure the differences between the former and the latter? To what extent did the colonial condition of Korea complicate their attempt to depict modern emotions with the help of medical discourse? And what changes did early-twentieth-century medical discourses bring to the traditional understandings of emotions?

Short Bio:

Yoon Sun Yang is Associate Professor of Korean & Comparative Literature, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Boston University. Her research interests include Korean literature, gender studies, medicine in literature, and Transpacific Studies. She is the author of *From Domestic Women to Sensitive Young Men: Translating the Individual in Early Colonial Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017) and the editor of the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean Literature*. Her work has appeared in *positions: asia critique*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, and *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Her latest essay is “Madness, Medicine, and Masculinity: Kim Tongin’s ‘Oh, the Frail-Hearted!’ (1919–1920)” in *The Journal of Korean Studies* (October 2018). She is currently working on a book-length study tentatively titled “Under the Medical Gaze: Illness, Gender, and Colonialism in Korean Literature” while translating early colonial Korean short stories and essays published between 1907 and 1918 into English.