EVENT TITLE: Collaborating in Korean: The Value of Co-Translating

EVENT DESCRIPTION: The particularities of the Korean language—from the disparities between spoken, written, and poetic Korean to the vast changes the lexicon has undergone within the past few generations—can make translating partnerships invaluable when working from Korean to English. Four co-translators of poetry discuss their process and how having a partner of differing background, age, and familiarity with various versions of the language may lead to more accurate, creative, and engaging translations.

EVENT CATEGORY: Translation

EVENT ORGANIZER: Jeanine Walker

EVENT MODERATOR: Jack Jung

EVENT PARTICIPANTS: Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello, Shim Jaekwan, Jeanine Walker, Michael Joseph Walsh

OPENING REMARKS:

Welcome to Collaborating in Korean: The Value of Co-Translating.

• For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please raise your hand, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
• Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
• Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
• Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Thank you. And thanks for being here with us today to discuss and celebrate Korean poetry, and the process of co-translating poetry from Korean into English in Collaborating in Korean: The Value of Co-Translating.

OPENING WORDS:

A few words to introduce our panel.

The particularities of the Korean language—from the disparities between spoken, written, and poetic Korean to the vast changes the lexicon has undergone within the past few generations—can make translating partnerships invaluable when working from Korean to English. Here today, four co-translators of poetry discuss their process and how having a partner of differing
background, age, and familiarity with various versions of the language may lead to more accurate, creative, and engaging translations.

It's our hope and belief that a panel that looks deeply at the co-translating practices of two pairs working on the same language will provide unique opportunities to illustrate the different shapes of partnerships. Such an exploration can be valuable to translators of other languages, too, who are interested in expanding their own practice or starting one. Maybe some of you are in the audience today. We hope you will be interested in the close focus on Korean and that the discussion will lend itself to be either directly or metaphorically applicable to all.

I'll begin by introducing each panelist, and each will briefly describe their work. I'll then ask questions to the translators, we'll have a conversation, and the last fifteen minutes will be an audience Q&A.

BIOS:

Jack Jung studied at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, where he was a Truman Capote Fellow. He is a co-translator of Yi Sang: Selected Works (Wave Books 2020), the winner of 2021 MLA Prize for a Translation of Literary Work. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Davidson College.

Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello is the author of Hour of the Ox, winner of the Donald Hall Poetry Prize, and co-translator of Yi Won’s The World's Lightest Motorcycle. She has received fellowships from the NEA, Kundiman, and ALTA, and is a program coordinator for Miami Book Fair.

Shim Jaekwan is a Sanskrit scholar and the author of seven books on Buddhism, Indian language and script, and manuscriptology, as well as the translator into Korean of the English textbook, The Hindu Temple. He currently teaches World Cultures and Indian Studies at Sangji University, Korea.


Michael Joseph Walsh is the author of Innocence (CSU Poetry Center) and the co-editor of APARTMENT Poetry. His poems, reviews, and translations from the Korean have appeared in Brooklyn Rail, Denver Quarterly, DIAGRAM, Guernica, Fence, jubilat, and elsewhere.

PARTICIPANTS' INITIAL REMARKS:

Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello discusses how she and E. J. Koh balanced a third perspective—Don Mee Choi’s—when translating Yi Won’s first and third poetry collections. She shares how their different experiences and knowledge of poetic craft and Korean feminism informed
decisions regarding vocabulary, punctuation, and visuals to tackle the ever-present conundrum of what “accuracy” might mean in translation.

Michael Joseph Walsh discusses working with fellow translator Jae Kim to translate two major poetic sequences by Yi Sang (“Divination” and “Critical Condition”). He discusses the logistics of their collaboration, which, with the exception of one phone call, was conducted entirely over email and Google Docs. He also discusses the many potential advantages of a collaborative approach to translation—both in terms of what it makes happen, and what it keeps from happening—and makes a historical case for collaboration as the preferred approach when translating texts deemed to be especially important.

Shim Jaekwan & Jeanine Walker discuss translating the work of Korean contemporary poet Ahn Joo Cheol and his grounded yet surreal imagery that depicts a childhood lived in illness and isolation outside of a small city. The pair talk about nuanced details of their process such as the translation of plural nouns, repetition, mood, the potential problem of pronouns, how they work with double meanings, and the pros and cons of being able to ask the poet his original intention.

MODERATOR QUESTIONS:

1. What are the primary benefits and challenges of co-translating a literary work?
2. How do co-translators navigate differences in their interpretation or understanding of the source text?
3. In what ways does co-translating enrich the representation of cultural nuances and linguistic subtleties?
4. How does the division of labor typically work between co-translators? Do they divide sections of the text, or collaborate on every sentence?
5. Can you cite a specific passage from your co-translation and discuss the unique attributes that the co-translating process added to the final translation?
6. How do co-translators manage issues of consistency and voice to ensure that the translated work feels cohesive and unified?