

**Commentary**  
**on “Challenges of the Japanese Colonial Power in**  
**Korea” (The Case of Kim So Wol’s Life and Poetry)**  
**by Prof. Dr. Habil. Alexander Fedotoff**

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In his article prof. Fedotoff presents the worldly fate and the creative path of one of the first significant figures in the modern Korean literature – the poet Kim So Wol. The short life of this tragic person was marked by extremely critical events, which influenced the national and the cultural identity of the Korean people – the years of the Japanese colonial ambitions, the so called *Black Umbrella*, which “was hiding, but not protecting, and isolating Korea from the rest of the world for 35 years”. In the dismal atmosphere under this Black Umbrella passed the days of the poet’s broken childhood and his unfinished youth.

Prof. Alexander Fedotoff undertakes a perusal of the life of Kim So Wol precisely in the light of the dramatic events connected with the Japanese oppression. The article gives a lapidary, but comprehensive information about the scales of this oppression – from the forced abdication of the Korean king through the distortion of the ancient Korean history to the order that all instruction in Korean schools be in Japanese and that students not be allowed to speak Korean either inside or outside of school.

Language itself also lives through rebellions. Such rebellions arise in the field of Korean literature by the force of Kim So Wol's poems, which had been published in the period of considerable latitude after The March First Movement events in 1919.

The article mentions the folk song as the only precursor of the poetry of Kim So Wol; there is no information if he was introduced to the literary trends that bloomed in Europe in his lifetime. Because of his brutally cut off stay as a student in 1923 he obviously remained unacquainted with the Western modernistic concept. In this respect Kim So Wol had not the chance of some of the first modern Chinese poets, including Guo Moruo, who as a student in Japan tried the "technical" devices of the modernism. Paradoxically the Chinese writers went east to find the West and probably the road of Kim So Wol would have followed theirs were not the events of 1923.

Therefore the "modernism" of the Korean poet was inspired mainly by his insight into the intrinsic rebellions of language. In fact the dissension about his literary legacy between the Korean and the foreign critics, mentioned by prof. Fedotoff, suggests that the poetry of Kim So Wol might be placed somewhere in the broad field between the modern and the modernistic.

The poems of Kim So Wol have undoubtedly won the hearts of the reading public and have many followers, which means that his experiments with language are deeply founded and also that the Korean language has managed to resist the foreign influences.