



Institute for Korean Studies & Lee Korean Performance Research Program presents

The Wind Speaks: Poetry Reading and Discussion with Mah Chonggi

Thursday, October 25, 2018

3:55pm-5:30pm

Ramseyer Hall, Room 100

29 W. Woodruff Ave.

Chonggi Mah

Poet

“For the past half a century, I have dual lives: one as a Korean poet and the other as an American medical doctor.”

- Mah Chonggi, *Insights on Contemporary Korean Poetry*



Abstract: A critic would conclude that western poetry employs tangible matters and visible objects while Korean verses are rich in such formless or intangible as winds, dewdrops, clouds and water. To a large extent, Korea's modern poetry still harbors the ingredients of *hahn*, “pained soul,” and many practitioners feel that moving out of the *hahn* mode is the way to face new challenges in Korean poetry. The latter part of the nineteenth century was a particularly gloomy spot in Korean history, with the Yi dynasty coming to an end. It was inevitable the west-influenced Japan stepped in to rule Korea with its newly acquired knowledge and technology. Many young Koreans with progressive and bright minds studied in Japan, contributing to the sudden demise of the hieroglyphic Chinese characters which had dominated the Yi dynasty and its feudalistic society, giving a new life to the easier and more practical *Hangul* in daily usage. Aspiring writers were captivated by the new western masterpieces and readily accepted them as their ‘must-read’ textbook. While the result was a hodge-podge mixing bowl of Romanticism, modernism and symbolism and other themes, a few brilliant writers and poets absorbed them like dry sponges, digesting them and applying them to their own works in a short period of time, thus creating their own unique literary style. I take this opportunity to discuss the emergent nature and developmental process of modern and contemporary Korean poetry, its place in Korean society and psyche, and my own modest place in Korean poetry.

Bio: Celebrated transnational Korean poet/doctor, Mah Chonggi was born in Japan in 1939, the first child of Ma Haesong, pioneer of Korean children's literature, and the dancer/choreographer Pak Oesun. Mah started writing poetry since he was little, and did his training in medicine at Yonsei University and Seoul National University. He had resident training (1969-71) at The Ohio State University and practiced radiology in Toledo for over thirty years. Since retiring from his medical profession, Mah has been devoted entirely to poetry writing. His poet-physician duality is inspiration for his unique contribution: bringing humanity and art into the mental space of healing. He has produced dozens of poetry and essay collections including *The Invisible Country of Love* (1980), *The Eyes of the Dew* (1997), *Smelling Tree in the Birds' Dream* (2002), and *The Bare Skin of the Sky* (2010). Many of his poems have been translated into French, German, and English. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards including East-West Literature Award (2001), Modern Literary Award (2009), and Republic of Korea National Academy of Arts Award (2017).

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