



Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures
Polish Academy of Sciences



ACTA ASIATICA
VARSOVIENSIA
No. 31

Warsaw 2018

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*Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia no. 31 was granted a financial support of the
Ministry of Science and Higher Education, grant no. 772/P-DUN/2017.*

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Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2018
PL ISSN 0860-6102
eISSN 2449-8653
ISBN 978-83-7452-091-1

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA is abstracted in
The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Index Copernicus, ProQuest Database

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Visualising Poetry in Urban Space: The Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard

Abstract

Literature in general and poetry in particular play a key role in the preservation and transmission of the cultural code. In turn, the cultural code can act to unify a nation. This potential is sometimes used by commercial organisations in socially oriented advertising. A very interesting example of such advertising is the Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard, which originated in 1991 and is located on the Kyobo Life Building in Seoul, Republic of Korea (RK). At the beginning of each season, new poetic lines appear on the placard. These poetic lines are selected by a special committee as the most consistent with the spirit of the time and to meet the socio-psychological needs of the South Korean people. Using a comparative approach, the author analyses poetic stanzas from the Gwanghwamun Placard, which are remarkable in terms of their implicit content and design, to reveal the “isotopic lines” of the project and contribute to a better understanding of the cultural code of the society toward which the project is oriented.

Keywords: Cultural code, Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard, Korean poetry, social advertising, urban space.

Literature in general and poetry in particular play a key role in the preservation and transmission of the cultural code. In turn, the cultural code can act to unify a nation. Maybe that is why during difficult socio-political times, people – caught in a whirlpool of uncertain reality trying to find solid ground – often turn their attention to literature, specifically to classic literature because it is the bearer of eternal values. This potential is knowingly used by authorities and public organisations in various projects (i.e. reading of famous texts by people on the streets for TV broadcasts) and, sometimes, by the commercial organisations in socially oriented advertising.

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A very interesting example of such advertising is the Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard on the Kyobo Life Building in Seoul, Republic of Korea (RK). This Placard, which originated in 1991, was initially designed to enhance the company's image. However, soon it acquired a social significance on a national scale. For more than a quarter of a century, at the beginning of each season, new poetic lines, which are selected by a special committee as most consistent with the spirit of time and meeting the socio-psychological needs of the South Korean people, appear on this Placard. The ideas, which are concentrated in these highly metaphorical lines from various poems that are well known in the RK, are not always clear to representatives of other cultures, who may only understand Korea superficially.

Why did this project become so important to the Korean people, men and women, young and old? We can assume that the reason lies in the dual visual-verbal nature of the Placard. It is commonplace to talk about "the predominance of visual forms of media, communication, and information in the postmodern world".¹ N. Mirzoeff writes: "Work and leisure are increasingly centered on visual media, from computers to Digital Video Disks. Human experience is now more visual and visualised than ever before..."² Has there been a cultural shift from the verbal and textual to the visual in the postmodern era, or are the written, textual, and visual systems just undergoing a reconfiguration? We see that visual culture is becoming "all-inclusive". W.J.T. Mitchell writes about "the erasure of boundaries between art and non-art, or visual and verbal media"³ in the postmodern era. He states: "Visual culture implies that the difference between a literary text and a painting is a non-problem. Words and images dissolve into undifferentiated representation."⁴

However, for many Asians, such an attitude towards this matter could be likened to reinventing the wheel. In the country where for centuries calligraphy, the art of writing, was the visual art form prized

¹ N. Balkir, 'Visual Culture in Art Teacher Education: A Turkish Case', *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2010, p. 609.

² N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, London & New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 1.

³ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: a Critique of Visual Culture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2002, p. 165.

⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: a Critique of Visual Culture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2002, p. 169.

above all others, the Poetry Placard project can be considered as an attempt to revive the role of the “written word” in the postmodern society, now focusing on Hangul texts. Maybe this very (post)modern and at the same time very traditional visual-verbal unity of the placards was the main element that fascinated the bearers of the Korean cultural code.

First, we should say that the concept of “cultural code” itself is open to discussion. The term “code”, as used in semiotics, evinces a fundamental ambiguity that is inherited from the lexical meaning of the word.⁵ In Collins English Dictionary, we see the following definitions of the word “code”: 1) “a set of rules (laws)...” (as it is used in jurisprudence), 2) “a system of replacing the words in a message with other words or symbols...” (for example, “Morse code”), 3) “a group of numbers or letters which is used to identify something”, 4) “any system of signs and symbols that has meanings”, and also 5) “genetic code, the information, which determines the structure and function of cells, and characteristics of all living things”. However, none of the above-mentioned definitions fully describe the phenomenon that the semioticians are talking about.

R. Jakobson was one of the first semioticians to adopt the term “code” from communication theory. In 1953, after reflecting on the correlation between culture and language, he declared: “The most essential problem for speech analysis is that of the code common to both sender and receiver and underlying the exchange of messages”.⁶ Developing this thought, U. Eco stated that communication, including the processes of “signification” and “interpretation”,⁷ is made possible by the existence of codes. For Y. Lotman, the term “code” carried a less all-encompassing idea of “a system without memory”.⁸

⁵ Winfried Nöth, ‘Human Communication from the Semiotic Perspective’ in *Theories of Information, Communication and Knowledge: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, F. Ibecwe SanJuan, T.M. Dousa (eds.), Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer, 2014, p. 106.

⁶ Roman Jakobson, ‘Results of a Joint Conference of Anthropologists and Linguists’ in *Selected Writings: Word and Language, Vol.2*, Roman Jakobson. Hague: Mouton, 1971, p. 558-559.

⁷ See Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976; Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

⁸ See Yuri M. Lotman, *Culture and Explosion* (Tr. by W. Clark), Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 2009.

These speculations cannot completely satisfy working interpreters (translators) and language teachers, like myself, for whom it would be more logical to understand “cultural code” as a multilevel dynamic system. This system lets us see, interpret and translate into other languages the meaning that is inherent in the message addressed to the carrier of such a code. The levels that are available for familiarisation to the non-carriers of the code can be identified as the following: 1) a common knowledge about the world, including natural objects and cultural objects, 2) a mentality as a way of perceiving the world and ourselves in it based on some values and anything else, 3) a linguistic picture of the world that implies existence of certain “concepts”, 4) an involvement in various discourses, 5) collective memory, 6) steady symbols, etc. Thus, it becomes clear that to more or less completely understand the text of a foreign cultural code, it is necessary for the interpreter to sufficiently widen his/her “semantic horizon” (the term by G. Gadamer) so that it can “fuse” with the “semantic horizon” of the text.⁹

The identification of the above-mentioned levels and connections between them is a task that is no less intricate than revealing of the South Koreans’ cultural code.

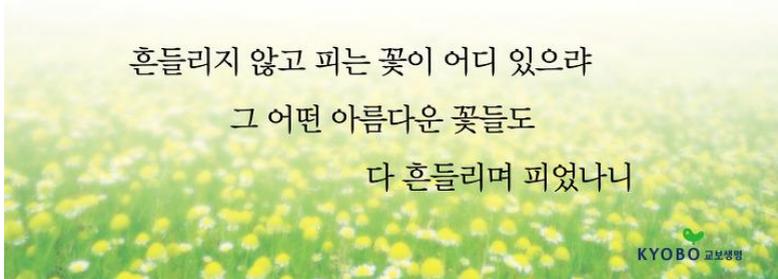
From 1991 to 1997, the Gwanhwamun Poetry Placard mainly featured instructive slogans of a socio-economic character that are not of particular interest in the context of this research. Their design was very simple. However, when the Asian financial crisis (1997-1998) swept through Korea, it was decided in Kyobo Life to use the Placard not only for company promotion but also for giving people moral support. That is when the Placard featured the lines from a poem by Ko Un “*낯선 곳*” “*떠나라 / 낯선 곳으로 / 그대 하루하루의 반복으로부터* [Leave / For an unknown place. / Away from your repeated daily routines]”.

The approximate meaning of these lines is not so difficult for foreigners to understand. However, Koreans also know the last stanza of the poem, where there are the words “*재생*” [rebirth] and “*탄생*” [birth]. These words imply, in particular, religious allusions and a hint that suffering will be rewarded in another life. Even more interesting is the fact that South Korea, due to the consolidated efforts of the nation, successfully overcame the crisis, but the perception of the present as a

⁹ See Claude Mangion, *Philosophical Approaches to Communication*, Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2011, pp.147-181.

difficult time, which should be followed by easier times after the achievement of certain results, is constantly actualised even at a trivial level in the form of an unwillingness to admit that life has become better or in the form of constant complaints about various “고생” [difficulties]. In different years, on the Gwanghwamun Placard, we see lines saying that people can move forward and make progress only through ordeals.

It is not a coincidence that the representatives of the Company and the famous people who participated in the selection of lines for the Placard use the words “위로”, “위안” [consolation] and “희망” [hope] when stating the aims of the project. Citizens use the same words when describing their emotional reactions after reading the featured lines. In the article in “The Korea Financial Times” dedicated to the new edition of the book “광화문에서 읽다 거닐다 느끼다” [Read, walk, feel on the Gwanghwamun Square], we read that the Placard “시민들에게 때로는 희망을, 때로는 사랑을, 또 위로를 건네고 있다¹⁰ [gives to the people sometimes hope, sometimes love, sometimes consolation]”.



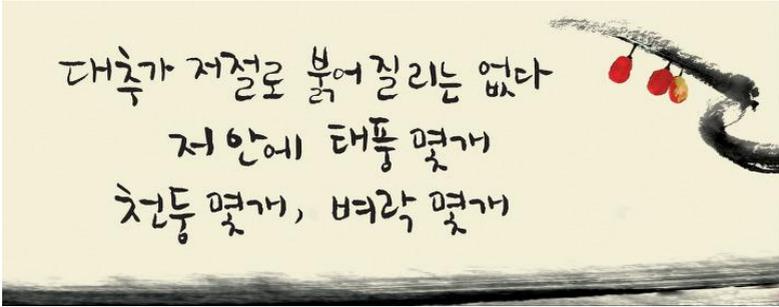
[Where is the flower that blooms without being shaken? / Even the most beautiful flowers / All bloomed while being shaken.]

도종환 [Do Jong-hwan]. “흔들리며 피는 꽃” [“Flower That Blooms When Shaken”]. 2004, Spring.

Although these lines are about difficulties that any flower (i.e., person) experiences in life, a field of flowers in the picture is completely

¹⁰ 서효문 [Seo Hyo-mun], ‘광화문글판’의 잔잔한 울림, 책으로 만나다 [The Gentle Voice of the Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard, Hear it in the Book], *Hanguk keumyung*, August 19, 2015: <http://www.ftimes.com/paper/view.aspx?num=140607&kind=43> (accessed 15.05.2018).

tranquil. Thus, the design of the picture continues and develops in some way the idea expressed by the words, as though saying: “One day, the difficult times will pass”.



[The jujube fruit could not have become red by itself. / In each one, there are a few storms, / A few bolts of thunder and lightning.]

장석주 [Jang Seok-ju]. “대추 한 알” [“One jujube fruit”]. 2009, Autumn.

On this placard, the picture and the text of the same black colour look a bit gloomy, only the bright fruits do not. Does this design suggest that the fruits are always the result of hard work, something gloomy and joyless? For Europeans, this idea may not seem very comforting.

Another isotopic line (the term by A. Greimas) that can be traced through the stanzas from the Gwanghwamun Placard is collectivism. In the autumn of 1998, for example, the following lines by Ko Un were printed on the Placard with almost no design:

모여서 숲이 된다 [Together, we are becoming a forest / grove.]

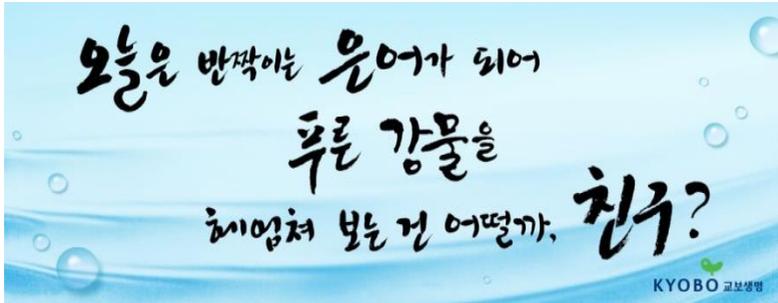
나무 하나하나 죽이지 않고 숲이 된다 [We do not kill a single tree and are becoming a forest / grove.]

그 숲의 시절로 우리는 간다 [We are coming back to the era of the forest.]

For Europeans, the forest is an element of nature that opposes the city (in Korea, it is rather a “산” [“mountain / forest”] than a “숲” [“forest / grove”]). The picture of, for example, rows of

tree trunks might help foreigners understand the text correctly. From childhood, Europeans read in books variations of the story about a father who teaches his sons about unity by offering first to break the bundle of sticks and then easily breaking the sticks one at a time. In the summer of 2015, the lines from the poem by 정희성 [Jeong Hui-seong] “숲” [“Forest”] “제가끔 서 있어도 나무들은 숲이었어 / 그대와 나는 왜 숲이 아닌가 [The trees standing separately are still the forest, / Why are not you and I?” were printed on the Placard against the background of the green forest. However, those bright dark green leaves make us (Western people) think about the chaos of nature, not about unity.

More interesting is the next example:



[To become a sparkling Ayu fish, / To swim through the blue river water / Are you ready, my friend?]

신해욱 [Sin Hae-uk]. “푸른 강물” [“Blue River Water”]. 2006, Summer.

This stanza appeared on the Gwanghwamun Placard on the eve of the World Cup in Germany, which followed one that had taken place in South Korea and Japan in 2002 and was very significant for Koreans. The country hoped that the Korean players would build on the success they had achieved at their home stadium. However, it was rather a hope than a firm belief. It is worth noting that the following lines from the poem “파도” [“Waves”] by 이명수 [Lee Myeong-su] competed with the chosen stanza during the last round of stanza selection:

쓰러지는 사람이 바다를 보아라 [If you are falling, look at the sea!]
 일어서는 사람이 바다를 보아라 [If you are rising up, look at the sea!]
 쓰러지기 위해 일어서는 [Falling to rise up]
 일어서기 위해 쓰러지는 [Rising up to fall]

The stanza about Ayu fish is not an excerpt but the entire poem. Nevertheless, we cannot understand it without having any knowledge about the behaviour of this fish. It should be noted that Russians, as well as Europeans, do not know much about nature if they are not involved in some way in activities connected with it. This contrasts with the Koreans and other Asian nations. Therefore, we should admit that the area of common non-professional knowledge is an important component of the cultural code. “은어” *Plecoglossus altivelis* – or the Ayu fish – lives in the coastal strip of the northwestern part of the Pacific Ocean, where it swims in shoals. For spawning, it enters the rivers and stubbornly swims against the current.

A simple image of a shoal of fish may have contributed to the understanding of the text. The absence of such an image confirms that the project is oriented exclusively towards the national audience. Thirty, twenty years ago, almost no foreigners in the Republic of Korea spoke Korean, but that has been changing in recent years. There is a certain number of people (university professors, students, well-educated employees that have been living in Korea for many years, Hallyu fans) who can read Hangul texts and are interested in Korean culture.

Anyway, we again see the declaration of such values as collectivism and hard work for the common good, as well as a closeness to nature, which is expressed through the comparison of a human with an element of nature. This closeness to nature is one more isotopic line of the project.

In the verses from different years, we see plants, fish, birds, insects, etc. that live in harmony with nature surviving the hardships of winter and welcoming spring. At first glance, the lines by Yu Jong-ho that appeared on the Placard in autumn of 2004 seem to be of this type:



[Grasshopper, / In the thickets of grass / Keeping awake all the night, / Regain your strength! / Autumn has come, / Spring will come too.]

유종호[Yu Jong-ho]. “시는 죽었다” [“The Poetry is Dead”]. 2004, Autumn.

The picture of a man instead of a grasshopper, where grass and bushes are a part of the urban jungle, supports the comparison of the human world with the world of nature.

In fact, the poem, from which the quotation was allegedly taken, is presented below:

시는 죽었다 [Poetry is Dead]

유종호 [Yu Jong-ho]

詩는 죽었다. [poetry is dead.]

神은 죽었다. [God is dead.]

함부로 허락되고 백죄 [And now whatever can]

아무렇게나 시가 되나니. [Become poetry.]

여치야 [Grasshopper,]

번지 없는 풀밭에서 [In the thickets of grass]

밤을 새는 여치야 [Keeping awake all the night.]

인마 [Hey!]

인제 너희 죽었다! [Now you are dead,]

인제 우린 죽었다! [And we are dead.]

The true meaning of the lines on the Placard becomes clear only after figuring out that the poem by Korean poet is a response to

a poem by English poet John Keats (1791-1821). Moreover, the second line includes a hidden quote from Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Thus, what we have here is not just a result of traditional thinking. It is a manifestation of the inclusiveness of Korean culture in world culture.

The Grasshopper and Cricket

John Keats

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's – he takes the lead
In summer luxury, – he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

Native English speakers, in theory, should grasp the allusions concealed in the poem by Yu Jong-ho quite easily, because the title of the cited work of Nietzsche (“God is Dead”) echoes with the words of Keats “Poetry is never dead”. For comparison, in various Russian translations of “The Grasshopper and Cricket” (made by S.J. Marshak, by B.L. Pasternak and others less famous), we cannot find at all a passage that resembles the title of Nietzsche's work and that is suitable for our purposes.

Alteration of lines and not choosing consequent lines from poems are common for this project. On the following Placard, we also see the alteration of lines and replacement of the explicit appeal to the collective memory about the Korean War with the implicit one:



[Let everybody, who has gone, come back. / Let's welcome the snow. / Under the snow let's love!]

고은 [Ko Un]. “강설” [“Snowfall”]. 2004, Winter.

On the web page of Kyobo Insurance Company that is dedicated to the Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard, these lines are commented as follows: “마음 떠난 사람들, 역경에 빠진 사람들 모두 돌아와 새해에는 분열을 멈추고 한마음으로 화합하자는 메시지를 담고 있음. 또한 사람들이 역경을 극복할 수 있도록 북돋아주고 격려해주어 용기를 얻을 수 있도록 한다는 의미임. 십장생인 학과 새롭고 따뜻함을 상징하는 눈을 통하여 신년의 망과 상서로움을 표현하며 한방향으로 무리지어 날아가는 학의 모습 화합하고 새시대를 개척해 나가자는 의미의 표현임 [They carry a call to the return of those who are to separate or are in difficult circumstances, to putting an end to the controversy in the new year and to unification. The idea is that people should find the strength to overcome circumstances. The crane is one of ten traditional Korean symbols of longevity. Here, cranes along with the snow that symbolises renewal and warmth appear as good omens for the new year. A flock of cranes flying together seems to offer people unity and the start of a new era].”¹¹The relations between South and North are not mentioned anywhere. However, the lines on the Placard are a modified quotation from the poem by Ko Un “강설” [“Snowfall”].

¹¹ Kyobo official site: <https://www.kyobo.co.kr/ci/gb/gb/SCIGBNLM003R01.form#> (accessed 10.02.18).

강설 [Snowfall]

고은 [Ko Un]

폐허(廢墟)에 눈 내린다. [Snow is falling on the ruins.]

적(敵)도 동지(同志)도 [Enemies and friends,]

함께 모아자. [Let's get together!]

함께 눈을 맞자. [Let's welcome the snow!]

눈 맞으며 껴안고 울자. [Under the snow, let's hug and cry!]

폐허(廢墟)에 눈 내린다. [Snow is falling on the ruins.]

우리가 1950년대(年代)에 깨달은 것은 [In 1950s we comprehended]
인산인해(人山人海)의 죽음이 아니라 사랑이다. [Not the death of a
myriad but love.]

눈이 내린다. [Snow is falling.]

눈이 내린다. [Snow is falling.]

모든 죽은 사람들까지도 살아나서 [All dead people, revive!]

함께 눈을 맞자. [Let's welcome the snow!]

눈 맞으며 울자. [Under the snow, let's cry!]

우리는 분명 죄(罪)의 족속(族屬)이다. [We are a clan of criminals.]

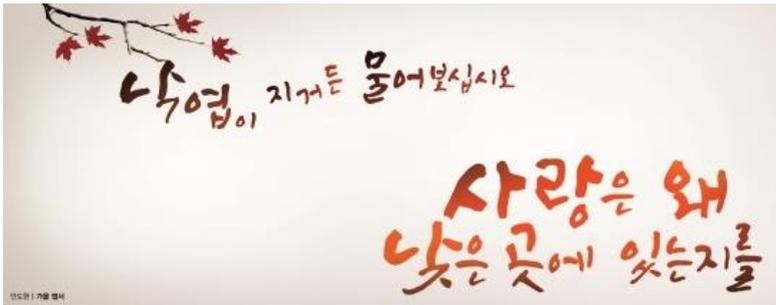
눈을 맞자. [Let's welcome the snow!]

눈 맞으며 사랑하자. [Under the snow, let's love!]

Clearly, the poet talks about the people who have gone to another world not just somewhere else. Moreover, he uses the verb “죽다” [“die”] instead of the euphemistic phrase “세상을 떠나다” [“leave this world”]. In 2004, South Korea was governed by President Roh Moo-hyun who conducted the Policy of Peace and Prosperity with regard to North Korea. In general, this was a continuation of Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine Policy. Negotiations on the meetings of separated families moved very actively. However, in the book “The History of Korea: from Antiquity to the Beginning of the XXI Century”, S.O. Kurbanov writes: “in <...> the programmes of two South Korean presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Rho Moo-hyun, North Korea was presented as a *passive* object, which should be provided with support and *be led* in the direction of South Korea’s policy on inter-Korean

relations”.¹² However, Ko Un in his poem uses propositive final endings, which suggests a meeting of equals. He writes: “enemies and friends... we are a clan of criminals”. In addition, the collective memory of the South Koreans about the war as a disaster, from which everybody suffered and for which everybody is to blame, allows them to see deep philosophical and political meaning in the poetic lines. The design of the Placard is very important. The crane is a symbol of longevity, which makes readers think about life and death, not just about separation.

Unfortunately, at that time, the hopes of many people in the South for rapprochement with the North did not come true for various reasons. However, life went on. When South Korea acquired economic and social stability, the Gwanghwamun Placard began to more frequently feature stanzas about love and paying attention to each other. These stanzas were usually easy to understand without explanations. Nevertheless, among them we can find very interesting examples:



[As the leaves are falling, ask / Why love / Prefers lowly places.]
안도현 [An Do-hyeon]. “가을 엽서” [“Autumn postcard”]. 2012,
Autumn.

Even after reading the entire poem, the meaning of the lines remains not obvious for the foreigners.

¹² Сергей О. Курбанов, [Sergei O. Kurbanov], *История Кореи: с древности до начала XXI в.* [History of Korea: from Antiquity to the Beginning of the XXI Century], Saint-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg State University Press, 2009, p. 626-627.

가을 엽서[Autumn Postcard]¹³

안도현 [An Do-hyeon]

한 잎 두 잎 나뭇잎이 [One by one leaves]

낮은 곳으로

자꾸 내려앉습니다 [Keep falling, settling]

[In lowly places.]

세상에 나누어 줄 것이 많다는 듯이 [They seem to be saying there's
plenty to share in life.]나도 그대에게 무엇을 좀 나눠주고 싶습니다 [And I long to share
something with you.]내가 가진 게 너무 없다 할지라도 [I have very little to offer, but still]
그대여

가을 저녁 한때 [One autumn evening]

낙엽이 지거든 물어보십시오 [As the leaves are falling, I want]

[You]

사랑은 왜 [To ask why love]

낮은 곳에 있는지를 [Prefers lowly places.]

On the Placard, we do not see the key word of the poem “share”. The tree shares the leaves with the ground. These leaves rot and fertilise the ground on which the tree grows. This image is closely related to the idea of involvement of a human being as part of the nature in the endless cycle, where willingness to donate results in obtaining much more. Therefore, the theme of love in some way echoes the theme of the common good of the collective. It is noteworthy that when explaining the choice of these lines, the representative of Kyobo Life said: “저마다 자신의 욕망을 추구하는데 바쁜 세태를 경험하지만 낙엽을 통해 사랑과 희생의 진정한 의미를 생각해 보자는 뜻에서 광화문글판 가을편의 문구를 선정했다 [Vanity reigns in this world, where everyone is realising his/her ambitions; we have chosen these lines for the autumn placard so that people, when looking at the falling leaves, would think about the importance of love and sacrifice]”.¹⁴

¹³ The translation was taken from the Internet (unknown translator): <http://kari-ohaayoo.tumblr.com/post/40452846546/autumn-postcard-by-ahn-do-hyun-one-by-one-leaves> (accessed 23.05.2016).

¹⁴ 박기주[Park Gi-ju], “교보생명 광화문글판, 안도현 시인의 ‘가을엽서’로 새 단장 [The Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard on the Kyobo Life Building, The New Stanza is from the

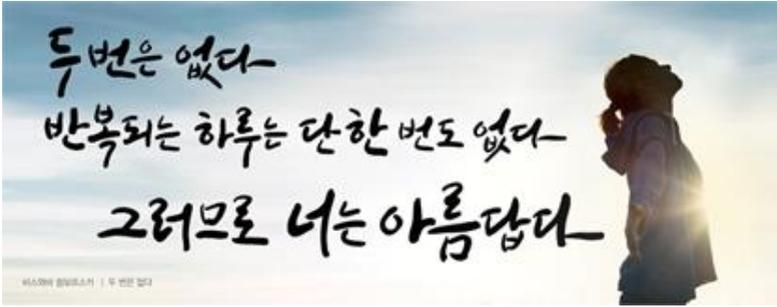
Korean society is changing and becoming involved in global processes. Maybe now, people need to be reminded even about these conceptual ideas.

From the above-mentioned examples, it can be seen that the most important isotopic lines of the project for many years were:

- 1) non-accidental attainment of the good as a result of daily efforts and overcoming difficulties,
 - 2) collectivism,
 - 3) closeness to the nature,
 - 4) love as attention, care about each other.
- Later, another line started becoming more and more distinct:
- 5) non-conspicuous uniqueness of each person and each day lived by him/her.

It is not a mere coincidence that during voting (2011) among Korean Internet users on the Gwanghwamun Placard, first place was taken by the line “사람이 온다는 건 / 실은 어마어마한 일이다. / 한 사람의 인생이 오기 때문이다 [Coming of a man / Is a great event / Because a whole life comes with him]”. 정현종 [Jeong Hyeon-jong]. “방문객” [“The Visitor”]. 2011, Summer. The design of the placards dedicated to this topic usually supports the text very effectively. For example, the design can be a simple delicate flower that a person is compared to, such as on the placard (2012, Spring) with the lines by 나태주 [Na Tae-ju] “풀꽃” [“Wildflower”]: “자세히 보아야 예쁘다. / 오래 보아야 사랑스럽다. / 너도 그렇다 [You have to look closely to see that it is pretty. / You have to look for a long time to see that it is lovely. / You are the same]”.

In winter of 2015, the following lines by Polish poetess Wislawa Szymborska, who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1996, were presented on the Placard with a photo of a woman meeting a new day:

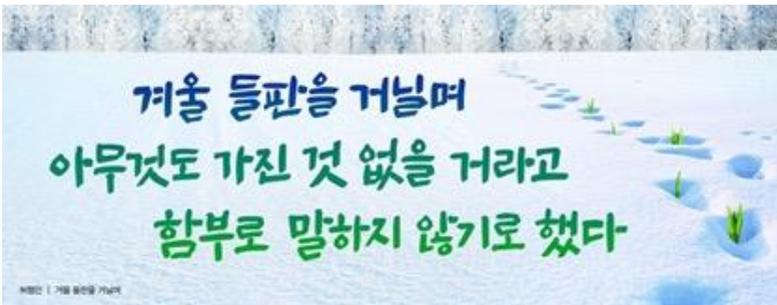


[Nothing can ever happen twice / No day copies yesterday / So you are beautiful.]¹⁵

Wisława Szymborska. “Nic Dwa Razy” [“Nothing twice”]. 2015, Winter.

Since the end of 2017, the idea of 6) hope / readiness for a better future came to the forefront. In reality, this idea is not completely new for this project. For example, it was presented in the above-mentioned lines by 유종호 [Yu Jong-ho] from “시는 죽었다” [“Poetry is Dead”].

The picture helps understand the message of the stanza on the 2017, Winter Placard. Here, green sprouts are growing through the snow as if telling us: “It is winter (hard times) now, but spring (better times) is ahead”.



[Walking through the winter field / I decided not to rush to say / That there is nothing special here.]

¹⁵ Translation of the first two lines was taken from Wisława Szymborska, *Poems new and collected: 1957-1997* (Tr. by S.Baranczak & C. Cavanagh), Orlando, etc.: A Harvest Book Harcourt Inc., 1998, p. 20.

허형만 [Heo Hyeong-man]. “겨울 들판을 거닐며” [“Walking through the winter field”]. 2017, Winter.

On the next Placard, there is a poem by 김광규 [Kim Gwang-gyu], “오래된 물음” [“Old question”].



[Children's buoyant spirit, / Bodies full of life, inexhaustible energy / Where do [they] come from?]

김광규 [Kim Gwang-gyu], “오래된 물음” [“Old question”]. 2018, Spring.

Maybe this hope for new, better life, readiness to start with new energy from the beginning are now the most needed things for South Koreans who have lived through political crisis and impeachment of the President, Park Geun-hye, and are now looking forward to improvement of inter-Korean relations.

Conclusion

The Gwanghwamun Poetry Placard has evolved throughout its history in terms of both content and design. New isotopic lines were added to those which were distinct from the beginning. There has been to some extent a shift in emphasis from collective toward individual perspectives. Design has become increasingly important. However, it is still impossible to say that in most cases the picture contributes to a better understanding of the message that the Placard carries; more often it simply supports the text. This is probably due to the fact that the project is oriented exclusively towards the national audience, which is presupposed to possess the common cultural background.

Foreigners who more or less understand the Korean face difficulties when trying to comprehend, firstly, the meaning of the lines taken out of context, and secondly, the message that the Placard carried in a particular time. An analysis of these difficulties helps reveal several levels of the cultural code as such and realise how great the cultural differences between nations are. Despite the emergence of a global culture, these differences do not lose their significance. This should be kept in mind when building cross-cultural communication.