

Foreword

We revisit these poems with heavy hearts, because Paik Kwan Soo wrote them as an anthology titled “Dong U Rok”, in 1919 while in a Tokyo prison. He served a little over a year after he was sentenced for organizing, participating, and reading of the declaration of Korean Independence from Japanese colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula at the Tokyo YMCA on February 8, 1919. Dong U Rok will finally see the sunlight again on the occasion of the centennial commemoration of the event.

Paik Kwan Soo wrote these poems under the pen name Geunchon in Chinese. He played many leadership roles in the fight against the Japanese occupation of Korea. He became more politically active after Korea was liberated in 1945. He assumed a leadership position in the first Korean National Assembly, and as a first judiciary committee chairman initiated the most celebrated drafting of the first Constitution of the young republic in 1948. Tragically, he was abducted by North Korean soldiers during the Korean War and passed away while in captivity in the North Korea.

He left his poetry book as his lasting legacy. Through his poetry, we all realize his patriotism for his motherland and most of all, his earnest desire to have peace in the land. To him, the pen was truly mightier than the sword. This poetry book will be a symbolic literary treasure to commemorate our struggle to regain our independence from Japanese occupation.

Three weeks after the Tokyo students Declaration of Independence in February 1919, the famous March First Independence Movement erupted all over the Korean Peninsula. These two events had triggered the foundation of the Korean Provisional government in Shanghai, China, in April 1919.

To commemorate the Tokyo students movement, a centennial symposium will take place at the Tokyo YMCA in 2019. During the symposium Dr. Paik Soon, Paik Kwan Soo's surviving son, will present a paper on Dong U Rok along with a new edition of this poetry book.

Now he has done his most precious duty to his beloved father, who might be watching us go about our activities commemorating the events of a century ago. I believe he is proud of his son. I also admire Dr. Paik Soon's courage in producing the centennial poetry book. As time goes by, this poetry book will be perfected. I also admire Dr. Unchul Lee who reviewed the translation from Chinese to Korean and then to English as homage to the late Paik Kwan Soo, the great Korean Patriot.

---Yearn Hong Choi, Founding President of the Korean-American Poets' Group