This book focuses on the correlations between translation of foreign works into Korean from the early 1900s to the late 1930s and new forms of writing by and about women. The central thesis underlying this research is that at certain times in Korea, when there have been both changes in writing systems and increases in translation activities, there have also been corresponding changes in representations of women in the written works of the period, and these new representations have political and social implications. In order to explore the connections among translation, new forms of writing, and the new representations of women, the study examines the following types of materials and translation activities: (1) shifts in the way translators handled material pertaining to women; (2) the work of women translators of the 1920s and 1930s; and (3) the relationship between translation and the original works of Korean women writers of the period.

The book is divided into chapters that consider phases and aspects of the process of creating feminine ideals through translation. Chapter 1 outlines the cultural background of the Chosôn period (1392–1910), when a vernacular writing system was invented that made it possible to translate texts into Korean. During the Chosôn period the translation of Chinese writings aimed at the education of women reinforced the official ideals of feminine behavior that were considered essential for political and social stabil-
ity. In Chapter 2 I examine legends about the lives of European heroines translated into Korean at the beginning of the twentieth century. These works presented new images of patriotic women that encouraged Korean women to support essentially male-centered goals. Chapter 3 considers the New Woman ideal, which related to educated women of the 1920s and 1930s, some of whom had studied overseas.

One of the important ways of fostering the New Woman ideal was through the translation of foreign literary works. I examine the newspapers and magazines of the 1920s and 1930s that published translations of the works of foreign women authors, as well as those of male authors, such as Ibsen, who presented a new image of emancipated women. Chapter 4 explores the role of women translators, such as Kim Myōng-Sun, who began to be active in the 1920s. I consider the scope of their work and the constraints they faced as translators. Finally, Chapter 5 deals with new forms of writing by three Korean women writers—Kim Myōng-Sun, Pak Hwa-Sŏng, and Mo Yun-Suk—whose work was closely related to new trends imported into Korea through translation. I argue that these women writers and translators deserve recognition for their contributions to Korea’s emerging sense of itself as a modern and independent nation, as well as for their creation of new forms of writing.

This work has several aims: to emphasize the importance of women translators and writers in early twentieth-century Korea, to place Korean literary and cultural activities in the wider perspective of feminist and cross-cultural studies, and to contribute to an understanding of the central role of translation in creating new gender and national identities.

Scholars of Korean literature have written on the development of literary translation in the twentieth century. In addition, women’s studies scholars have begun to take an interest in the Korean women writers of the 1920s and 1930s. However, to date very little has been written about the place of women translators in the Korean literary world. This study attempts to provide insight into the essential connection between the work of women translators and writers and literary/cultural developments in Korea in the 1920s and 1930s.

In recent years interest has been increasing in the connections between nationalist and feminist movements in many societies around the world. Lois West’s collection, Feminist Nationalism (1997); Partha Chatterjee’s The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (1993); and Kumari Jayawardena’s Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (1986) are but a few examples of a growing trend of studies that “examine how academic discourse constructs nationalism as a male enterprise, frequently unconsciously
gendered, and how feminists are struggling to put women at the center of analysis.”

Alice Yun Chai is one of the scholars who has commented on the role of modern education at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in introducing women to literacy, as well as to ideas about freedom and democracy.

The nationalist movement began to develop in Korea in the late nineteenth century, when Korean sovereignty was being threatened by foreign aggression. The struggle for independence continued during the period of Japanese colonial domination from 1910 to 1945. As in many other colonized societies, the raising of the status of women in Korea was seen as an essential step toward modernization. Women were encouraged to become educated in order to contribute to national development, while at the same time fulfilling their traditional roles within the family. Women's political participation in early twentieth-century Korea grew out of the nationalist movement. The new voices of Korean women writers and translators give testimony to the struggles of a people.

However, conspicuously absent from these studies of nationalism is a consideration of the crucial importance of translation in bringing about the cultural confrontations necessary to change views about women and reorganize societies. Since the 1970s certain translation studies scholars have been developing “an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional, and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures.”

Consideration has been given to the connections between gender issues and translation theory and practice by Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow. According to this approach, discussions of translation theory are complemented by examinations of specific corpuses of translations. Both the macro level of overall trends and the micro level of close readings of individual translations are required to develop the discipline of translation studies. Therefore this book considers the work of the Korean translators of the early twentieth century in the light of centuries of cultural change through translation.

I have found it extremely useful to organize my research on translation in Korea according to the principles of the so-called descriptive-explanatory school of translation studies. Considering translation as an essential part of the process of cultural change enables us to take account of a wide range of phenomena that occurred during the early twentieth century in Korea. For many centuries Korean literary activities were carried out on two levels:
“formal” culture, which was promoted through writing in Chinese, was mostly the province of upper-class males, while “informal” culture, which utilized writing in the vernacular script, was considered appropriate for the lower classes and women. During the Chosŏn period translation was pivotal in maintaining gender and class divisions, and in the early twentieth century Korean translators provided one of the keys to modernization. Thus Korea offers us a particularly interesting case for the study of translation as a force in changing gender and national identity.

This book attempts to come a step closer to providing answers to such far-reaching questions as the following: How have women translators contributed to literary and cultural change? How do writing on women and women’s writing relate to changes in national identity? In the process I hope to provide insights into Korea’s place on the map of world literatures and cultures.