



(UH PhD student Jiyoong Lee, middle, with Korean poets/translators Jake Levine and Kim Kyung Ju at the Menil Collection, 2015)

**UH Creative Writing Program  
PhD Student Profile**

**JI YOON LEE, PhD class of 2022**

Ji yoon Lee, a first-year PhD student, recently published *Poems of Kim Yideum, Kim Haengsook, and Kim Minjeong*, a collection of contemporary Korean poetry, for which she collaborated with Jake Levine, Don Mee Choi, and Johannes Göransson.



**Can you describe American reception to Korean poetry at the moment?**

American readers' reception to Korean poetry has been delightfully positive, and I feel invigorated by the enthusiastic response.

During AWP '16 in Los Angeles, the Korean poetry reading series I attended were crowding the room (there was so much diversity in the room too!), and there were several panel discussions regarding Korean feminist poetry. During ALTA '16 where I worked as an interpreter I've received numerous questions about what's behind the success of Korean literature in the American literary community.

The concept of literary translation--where the translator takes a more active, creative role--is evolving, and it is a great time to be a writer-translator who tries to work between multiple languages.

**What was it like to collaborate on your recent publication?**

At last year's University of Houston Translation Conference I gave a talk titled "Anxiety of Translation." I said that translation often feels crushingly difficult, because you are trying to translate someone else's work with your private lexicon and interpretation of each language. It feels like a huge responsibility to be making creative decisions for someone else's work.

So it was a huge relief to be working with other translators--I collaborated with Jake Levine, Johannes Göransson, Don Mee Choi on our most recent project, *Poems of Kim Yideum, Kim Haengsook, & Kim Minjeong*, published by Vagabond Press.

Being able to openly discuss the creative choices we were making and negotiating back and forth (which isn't always easy: we had our own visions, and we turned out to be more stubborn than we thought) made the process feel communal and energizing. Since language is always in negotiation and is a communal resource, that process felt right.

**I know you had several choices. Why did you choose UH for our PhD in CWP?**

When I visited Houston for the first time, it felt electric. The city felt fully charged with multi-directional energy, and I could envision so many different potentials I could explore here. The University of Houston also carried that vibrance: It was really encouraging to see how active and collaborative the UH academic community was.

I feel drawn to interdisciplinary thinking myself, and I am excited by all the different routes that the UH program offers, like the Global Energy Development and Sustainability program and the Translation certificate. There are so many choices available here!

**An excerpt from *Foreigner's Folly*:**

**Dialogue Exercise 1: Hello, my name is □ □ □ □ □**

Hello, I am from a foreign country and my english came from a cassette tape in a wrapper that makes crinkling noises. My concentration is on unsuccessful repeating and my parents were born in a photo booth. My parents haven't developed yet, but they can make phone calls. My English is limited but not limited to xylophone noises. I only speak a little but that doesn't have anything to do with my lack of speech organs. My tiny mouth can steadfastly chew what is fed and will not bite the feeding hand. I am a student, and I will learn to love you.

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In addition to her most recent collaborative publication, Ji yoon Lee translated Korean feminist poet Kim Yideum's poetry with Don mee Choi and Johannes Göransson, the collection of which was published as *Cheer Up, Femme Fatale* (Action Books, 2015). She is also the author of *Foreigner's Folly* (Coconut Books, 2014), *Funsized/Bitesized* (Birds of Lace, 2013), and *IMMA* (Radioactive Moat, 2012). She is the winner of the Joanna Cargill prize (2014). Excerpts from her new manuscript *Baby Visa Denied* is forthcoming in *Fence*. She was born in South Korea, and immigrated to a small town in East Texas alone as a teen. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Notre Dame, lived in NYC, and moved back to Texas, the land that keeps pulling her back.

