

# Study on Practical Methodology of Introducing Korean Literature to Foreigners

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## 1. Foreword

When teaching or simply introducing Korean literature to foreigners, we have been faced with the questions of 'what' and 'how' to tell them about it. Given the ever increasing interchange between Korean and overseas universities, other academic and cultural institutions and the opening of the department of Korean studies at more and more universities worldwide, those questions demand and deserve more than casual attention now. As scholars of Korean literature, we need to consider how to effectively map out our literary tradition and achievements for foreigners. It will be almost needless to add that making the literature of

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a nation better known abroad is one of the surest ways to promote its cultural recognition in the international world.

Personally, I had opportunities to teach Korean literature at the University of Toronto, Canada, when a couple of practical problems arose: first, how one can make the long history of Korean literature intelligible enough to foreign students without oversimplifying it; and secondly, on what criteria one can assess and explain its achievements in universal terms of aesthetics. With these questions in mind, I will, in the following pages, suggest some practical models of introducing Korean literature, hoping that more systematic methodology will soon establish itself in this relatively neglected area. My suggested models are meant to take various approaches, from historical to formalist: the first one introducing the historical and cultural background to the shaping of modern Korean literature; the second discussing the quintessential characteristics of Korean literature in general; the third outlining the genealogy of Korean fiction, followed by particular remarks on some Korean novels written in English (one of them in German) and therefore within easy access of foreign readers; and the last emphasizing the necessity of proper structural analysis of the novel *per se* and then illustrating the case with an analysis of 'character structure' in specific works of modern Korean fiction.

## 2. The Historical and Cultural Background of the Shaping Period of Modern Korean Literature

It is necessary to start with examining the period around the Kabo

Reformation (the Civilized Party's reformation of old institutions in 1894), in order to understand the historical background of the formative period of modern Korean literature. The Kabo Reformation spelt the dawn of the modern age of Korean literature.

Both the national and international situations of the times were delicate and complicated, urgently demanding reformation. The national conditions of the thirty years' reign of Monarch Taewon (King Father), which had begun in 1864, were dominated by political sectarianism and civil strifes. Between the impotent and unruly government and the resistant and demonstrative people, the safety of the country was threatened. On the international level, the pressure from the great powers was increasing, with the expansion of the influence of America and the European countries towards the Orient.

In 1866, the French fleet attacked Kangwha Island in retaliation for Taewon's oppression of the Catholics. American merchant ships invaded Taedong River in Pyongyang, followed by another attack of the American fleet on Kangwha in 1871. In 1873, one year after the political seizure of the Mins (the Family of Queen Min) following Taewon's resignation, the island suffered a third attack from Japan. The foreign powers claimed that these attacks were justified as protests against Korea's political misuses. Behind these masked excuses lay selfish attempts of those countries to plant their powerful influence in Korea for their own national interests. For they all demanded in unison the freedom of commercial trade with Korea. Russia also joined in this demand for commercial freedom for its ambitious interests. To sum up the contemporary international situation, the Korean Peninsula was completely besieged by the world powers that turned their rapacious eyes to it.

The Korean government, with virtually no power to withstand the compulsory demands, could not help but sign commercial treaties with

the foreign powers one after another. This could temporarily avert the imminent danger from outside to the country, but successive uprisings of the people, dissatisfied with the corrupt and arbitrary government, were beyond any measure. When the people rose in the Tonghak Rebellion, the government finally appealed to China, which was then under the Chŭng dynasty, for military aid to suppress it.

Tonghak ('Eastern Learning') was originally a religious body formed for the cause of saving the country by protecting and promoting the indigenous Korean culture and way of life against Seohak ('Western Learning' or Catholicism), taking as its creed the merits of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. But it gradually developed from a mere theoretical principle into a popular movement to overthrow the impotent and corrupt political system. This was illustrated by the fact that the leader group of the Tonghak Rebellion was made up of the common people of the times. The Tonghak Rebellion was a centralized explosion of the accumulated popular dissatisfaction against the ancien regime of Korean society. With Chun Bong-jun as its leader, the Tonghak power grew beyond the government control. The ruling classes had to ask the Chŭng dynasty for military aid. With the stationing of Chinese troops in Korea, Japan immediately dispatched its army, anxious about losing influence over the peninsula. Japan won the Sino-Japanese War 1894-95 and as the victor began its political intervention in Korea's domestic affairs. The Kabo Reformation was an outcome of this internal intervention from Japan. Japan closely involved itself with the reformation, for which the main motive was no doubt its ambition to secure sole influence over Korea by disconnecting it from its Chinese relationship. Still the reformation marked the great turning point in modern Korean history, for the reforms were in accordance with the Korean consciousness of keeping abreast with the modern world.

The following are some of the 23 items announced in the 1898 Reformation:

Henceforth, the year after the opening of the country be described in all private and official documents within the country or abroad.

The pacts with the Chŭng be adjusted, and the minister plenipotentiary be dispatched to each country.

The class discrimination of birth, aristocrat and plebeian, be abolished, and the offices be opened to all talents high and low alike.

The institution of military and literary distinction be abolished, and courtesy be paid according to the rank alone.

Punishment be restricted to the criminal alone, and the guilt-by-kinship system be abolished.

Child-adoption be permitted only when both the legitimate wife and the concubine are fruitless.

Premature marriage be prohibited, the man at the age of 20 and the woman at 16 be qualified to be married.

Remarriage of the widow be wholly disposed to her free will irrespective of rank.

The law on private and public servants be abolished, and the human trade be prohibited.

Station servants, actors and artisans be exempted from the low rank status.

Other reformed institutions, such as the monetary system on silver basis, weights and measures system, the establishment of banks and companies, were also announced and executed.

The Kabo Reformation, which was originally meant to mark the birth of modernized Korea, proceeded, however, in accordance with the dark ambitions of Japan to annihilate Korea's sovereignty and independence. The result of the Korea-Japan Protocol that granted Japan's right to dispatch troops to Korea on the pretext of the Russo-Japanese War in

1904 was the first manifest political infringement upon the nation's sovereignty. Japan's construction of the Seoul-Pusan Railroad, for strategic convenience in the war, might be regarded as a contribution to the modernization of Korea, but that same year witnessed the First Korea-Japan Agreement that officially granted Japan's right of political intervention in Korean affairs. The next year, the Second Korea-Japan Agreement was signed, the source of indignation to all Korean people, which provided that Japan station a superintendent as its representative under the Emperor of Korea. This meant the de facto subordination of Korea to Japan. the grief of the Korean people was exemplified by the patriotic suicide of Min Yeong-whan, whose last words were: 'I, though dead, will exert myself to help and encourage my dearest brethren, even here in the nether world, to restore freedom and independence by arousing national spirit and concentrating on study. On the day of freedom and independence, I will shake Hades with pleased laughter.' In 1906, Japan established the superintendent's headquarters, and the next year saw the execution of the new Korea-Japan Pact, which dispersed Korean armies. Finally in 1910, the Koreans were compelled to accept the humiliating and ignominious annexation with Japan. The fifteen years from the Kabo Reformation through to the annexation was not only a historically critical period in the birth of modern Korea but a lamentable one that witnessed the process of Korea's subordination to Japan.

Contributions of the Kabo Reformation to modernizing Korean culture are found in the establishment of some educational institutions and the publication of a few journals. In 1895, one year after the Reformation, Seoyou-gyeonmun ('Information about the Western World') was published by Yoo Gil-jun, whose style in this book spelt the first unification of the written and spoken language, using the combination of Hangul (the Korean alphabetical writing system) and Chinese characters. Also in

1895, there came out the first Korean translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* by an English missionary named Gale. These two books increased the Koreans' awareness of foreign cultures and stimulated them further towards modernization. 1895 was also the year of the founding of many modern educational institutions, including primary, middle and foreign language schools and other academies. The publication of newspapers was activated in the following decade: The *Dongnip Shinmun* ('Independence Newspaper'), the first modernized journal published by Seo Jae-pil and Yun Chi-ho in 1896, The *Whangseong Shinmun* ('Imperial Newspaper') by Nam Gung-ok and Na Soo-yeon, The *Daeguk Shinmun* ('Newspaper of the Great Country') by Lee Jong-il and Shim Sang-ik in 1897, The *Maeil Shinbo* ('Daily News') in 1898, The *Daehan Maeil Shinbo* ('Korean Daily News') in 1905, and The *Manse-bo* ('News of Hurrah') in 1906. Magazines were also actively published: The *Joyang-bo* ('The Light of Korea') by Shim Eui-seong, The *Mathematics Magazine* by Yoo Il-seon in 1896, The *Hanseong Monthly* in 1898, The *Seo-woo* ('Friend in the West'), The *Taeguk Gazette* in 1907, and The *Sonyeon* ('The Boy'), the great harbinger of modern Korean literature, by Choi Nam-seon in 1908. The birth of many educational institutions and journals was a natural outcome of the Koreans' awakening and enthusiasm for modernization. At the same time, it represented the Korean patriotic spirit in the face of the country's crisis and the people's determination to assert their independence against the political oppressions under Japanese rule.

Of the many contributions of such cultural activation to Korean society and people, the most significant is that most of the journals were published in the style combining Hangul and Chinese characters and unifying the written and spoken language and that the Korean language was for the first time accepted for official usage in schools. Considering

the fact that Chinese characters had persisted as the official writing system even after King Se-jong's invention of Hangul in 1446, except for a limited number of literary works and documents, the appearance of the Korean writing system in journals and school books and the unification of the written and spoken language were major, almost revolutionary cultural advancements. It was Yoo Gil-jun who pioneered such progress by publishing the above-mentioned Seoyou-gyeonmun, one year after the Kabo Reformation, in which he wrote of his experiences during his study in America. In response to the censure of still old-fashioned scholars against his use of the combined style of Hangul and Chinese characters, he justified it as follows:

First, I tried the easy style for the uneducated common people to be able to share new information for their enlightenment.

Secondly, the convenience for description was pursued, for the pure Chinese writing system was inadequate to freely express my findings.

Thirdly, the clarity of meaning was attempted. I witnessed the variety of alphabets along with the variety of languages in the world. Now that communication with foreigners is granted, it is better to describe their situations clearly in a familiar style than to make an ambiguous statement in the pedantic style. This encourages easy understanding of our people high and low alike.

I regret the inability to use Hangul alone and abandon Chinese characters altogether. Thus, I entrust the judgment of my combined use of Hangul and Chinese characters to future generations rather than to the present age.

This was a bold and meaningful challenge in an age still ruled by the old-fashioned and stubborn classes. It was bold because the Kabo spirit was not yet in full blow when Yoo's book was published and most meaningful because he had provided the very basis of the modernization of Korean culture.



Indeed Yoo's foresight was marvelous. The use of the Hangul-Chinese style in the unification of the written and spoken language was soon demanded by the public. Newspapers and magazines began to publish in that style, and official documents and school textbooks adopted it, too. The combination of Hangul and Chinese characters, along with the unification of the written and spoken language, was the most important cultural outcome of the Kabo Reformation. It can be interpreted as the discovery of our true 'self' in the same sense that King Se-jong's creation of Hangul had been so. As a matter of fact, our subjective consciousness to restore a pure Korean tradition, in the course of accepting the foreign civilization, worked politically as a defense against the attacks from abroad. Also, the leading classes well understood that modernization in the Western countries was also rooted in their consciousness to ascertain their own national identity.

Such social, historical and cultural situations consequently gave shape and birth to the modern genres of Korean literature coinciding with the times. They gave rise to the genres of chang-ga ('verse to be sung'), shin-soseol ('new-style fiction'), and shinpa ('new') drama, along with other types of modern art such as Westernized paintings and music.

### 3. The Characteristics of Korean Literature

The Korean people have produced great works of literature in each era through the history of thousands of years. In spite of the delayed invention of the writing system in the fifteenth century and the loss of many great heritages due to frequent wars, the surviving works still illustrate the excellency of our literature.

Literary historians have commented on the characteristics of Korean literature defined and refined through its long history. Cho Yun-je, one of those literary historians, identifies three main themes of traditional Korean literature. First, Cho points out 'suggestiveness' and 'steadfastness'. According to him, the Koreans prefer implicative and metaphoric expressions to direct ones. For example, the beauty of Chunhyang, the beautiful heroine of *Spring Fragrance* the most popular of all Korean classical novels, is described only in a metaphorical manner, with no direct statement, her face compared to

The smiling moon among the clouds,  
Or a lotus blossom in the pond.

Nam Goo-man, in his *shijo* (traditional metric verse composed of six poetic units) *The Dawn Breaks*, also evokes the comfortable life of rural areas in an indirect style, rather than by realistic presentation. And the 'steadfast' temperament, represented by the rose of Sharon, the national flower of Korea, is the very theme of Cheong Mong-joo's *Song of My Constant Heart* and an ancient popular ballad *Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?*

Secondly, Cho attends to the 'feeble' and 'pathetic' heartstrings of Koreans. The pathetic tune is what commonly characterizes such traditional songs as *Arirang Song*, *Yookchabaegi* (the lively folk tune popular in southern districts), *Chooshimga* ('heart song in autumn'). Korean literature is the art of 'strings', thin, delicate and feeble.

Thirdly, Cho points to the *que sera sera* and *carpe diem* way of life. He finds such 'what will be will be' and 'seize the day' views of life especially in *Kyeongggichega* (verse of scholars in the Koryo dynasty) and the folk-songs of the Choseon era, most of which often described

the idling away of transitory life in intoxication. Cho also recognizes a fatalistic trend in the frequent repetition of 'what will be will be' (or dooera in Korean) in the refrains of many shijos.

Koo Ja-gyun is another literary historian with his own ideas of the characteristics of Korean literature. First, Koo divides Korean literature into the 'aristocratic' and the 'vulgar' type; he equates the former with such qualities as respectability, honor and didacticism, and the latter with such characteristics as humor, Bohemianism and obscenity. Secondly, he points out the continuous maintenance of life-force, and thirdly, he illustrates the differences in subject and expression with relation to social ranks, by distinguishing the static and the generative sentences.

Kim Dong-wook, commenting on Cho's suggestiveness and steadfastness, suggests that they are representing our own standards of aesthetic appreciation of Korean art, unlike the sublime, tragic and refined beauty asserted by general aestheticians. And he acknowledges that, in spite of the lack of unified systematization of the whole range of Korean literature, the aesthetic sense innate in our life-principle is neither the magnificence of the Continent nor the sharpness of the Island, but the beauty inherent in 'suggestiveness' and 'feebleness'.

Other commentators upon the characteristics of Korean literature include Chang Dok-soon, Chung Byong-wook and Park Seong-ui. Perhaps their common concern has something to do with the desire to know about their own literature. And they face difficulty in trying to do so, because drawing any kind of conclusions on the characteristics of a literary tradition is no easy job at all, especially when the tradition in question is one that formed itself over thousands of years, acquiring a chameleon-like variety. For example, the quality of indirect 'suggestiveness' is inadequate to explain the attitudes of *The Song of Cheoyong*, some Koryo folk ballads, folk dramas and some saseol shijos (a variation

on the standard shijo, in which the second two units are extendible to unlimited length).

On the contrary, some may assert that the formation of a synthetic conclusion on the true qualities of Korean literature is easier in comparison with that of any other country for ours is the outcome of the long history 'of a single race'. But there is another problem of variety (?) according to the choice of the country. Therefore, I think that the ontological analysis of the characteristics of literature itself must be proceeded with in order to overcome these limitations. Therefore I am going to make another attempt to define the real characteristics of Korean literature, hoping that their true nature will emerge gradually in the course of inspecting the literature itself.

I shall indicate, first, the strong inclination to 'tendency'. I once met a foreigner who commented on the uniformity of the Koreans' dressing, saying that we wear clothes not according to the temperature but to the season. He must have seen some Koreans wear linen shirts on a cool day in summer or thick cotton coats on a warm day in winter. This habit of uniformity still remains, though it is rarer than before. The same phenomenon lies in literature, too, so that it is led by a certain 'tendency' formed in the period. The common color of Buddhism in Shilla and Koryo literature and the one-sided literature of Confucianism in the Choseon era are good examples of this literary tendency. In fact, literary fashion is found in any country, but in the case of Korean literature, such dependence on a certain literary tendency is extraordinary. I believe that the strong uniformity of the times was enhanced by such factors as confined territory, sensitivity to fashion, centralization of government and extreme yearning for new thought.

Secondly, I point out 'simplicity' or 'artlessness.' This quality may be accepted in the negative sense in that it means the lack of refined

beauty. But we usually give it a positive meaning, for it is nearer to purity. Above all, the scale of setting is small and simple. Compared with the Chinese novels, *The Story of the Three States* and *Soocho-ji*, which deal with vast continental settings and numerous individualistic characters, our epic literature, based on China though it is, cannot overcome the geographical idealism and the uniform characterization.

The following shijo is a good illustration of the unsophisticated taste:

"Firewood, firewood, the best quality for you!"

"Stop, Mr. Woodcutter, let me see the price of your firewood."

"Ten for the birchwood and five for the oakwood, fifteen in all."

"There you are, Mr. Woodcutter, count them well."

"Once you use my firewood, my gentle lady,

I'll bet you will always want it"

Anonymous (from Cheonggu-yongon)

Here, the artless exchange of words with a firewood seller is poetically turned into a shijo. We can taste the clumsiness and naiveté of the common people.

"I don't need a straw-cushion,

For the leaves are comfortable enough;

I don't need a pine torch,

For the moon set yesternight returns to me."

"Oh, sir, let me drink a coarse wine

And taste the wild herbs."

By Han-ho (from Cheonggu-yongon)

The above shijo is also simple and artless, both in its subject and in the poet's taste. The poet refuses the straw cushion, which is very humble itself compared with the expensive sofa, and chooses to sit upon

the fallen leaves. He even refuses the pine torch light(how simple it is with regard to the splendid chandelier(and prefers the moonlight. Here, we see a man living a simple life in the breast of Nature, rejecting the artificial and sophisticated world. The taste of simplicity develops into the perfect assimilation of man and nature.

It is 'an ideal world beyond artificiality. The traditional beauty of Korean art is that of artless simplicity and of naturalness. On a superficial level, it may seem to be crude and presumptuous, but actually, it has something more like refinement. The charm of Korean beauty starts not in showy and gaudy situations but in simple and intact things. It develops into subjective assimilation with nature itself and achieves a perfect harmony of man with supernatural value. The masterpieces of Whang Jin-hee and Yun Seon-do all succeed in this elevation of the simple to the divine realm.

Thirdly, I would like to illustrate the 'optimistic' attitude of life. In spite of political tyrannies, attacks from abroad and insufficient natural resources, the Koreans have tried to enjoy harmonious life by making the best of any given situation. The feelings of our ancestors suffering from the confusion of the rebellions of the military officers and foreign attacks during the Koryo dynasty are well expressed in Cheongsan Byolgok (verse in the blue mountains). The narrator, who was struck without any provocation by the environment, wishes to find unfrustrated hope in the blue mountains and in the green sea. Instead of protesting or giving up in distress because of the harshness of reality, he creates his own world through escape and wandering.

Such optimistic acceptance of realities, being not so much revolutionary as conservative, enabled the long survivals of dynasties and resulted in the slow transition of thoughts. It also contributed to characterizing Korean literature as suggestive, reserved and humorous. The

fact that most novels conclude with happy endings is another result of the same temperament.

There are other characteristics of Korean literature, such as didactic emphasis and the estrangement of low and high class literature, but my opinion is that the discussion about the matter will be more effectively done, when more profound studies have been attempted on each genre of our literature.

## 4. Introducing Korean Fiction

### 4. 1. Genealogy of Korean Fiction

The most popular Korean works of fiction from among five hundred known stories are the *Nine Cloud Dream* and *Spring Fragrance*. Written in the seventeenth century, the *Nine Cloud Dream* (or *A Dream of Nine Clouds*) is a Buddhist romance on the familiar theme that the fame and glory of human existence are but a dream. The "nine" of the title refers to the nine main characters, who transmigrate from the life of Buddhist devotees to the dream of worldly life; 'cloud' is a common symbol of the transience of life. Archetypal patterns of withdrawal/transformation-return, the elements of quest, inward associations with dream, blurred barriers between reality and fantasy, episodic plot, high stylization (including interspersed poems in the narrative) all seem to point to the story's nature. The first translation by Gale (London, 1922) is faulty, but a more reliable version is provided by Richard Rutt in *Virtuous Women: Three Masterpieces of Traditional Korean Fiction*.

Written by an anonymous hand, *Spring Fragrance* is the story of a

romance between the son of an upper-class family and the daughter of a socially despised *kisaeng*, or female entertainer. They marry secretly, but the hero is soon ordered to accompany his father to the capital. The new governor of the town, enraptured by the beauty of Spring Fragrance, wishes to make her his concubine. But she refuses and is imprisoned. In the meantime, the boy passes the civil service examination and returns to the town as the Secret Royal Inspector in the guise of a beggar. He punishes the evil governor and delivers his faithful wife. The story contains brilliant characters: beautiful and virtuous Spring Fragrance, her devoted and shrewd mother, the passionate and upright hero, and his cunning but loyal servant are masterly inventions. The people delight to see in Spring Fragrance a paragon of chastity and a model of the virtuous wife; others read the book for its protest against the privileged class and defense of human rights. The story has been told countless times in prose and verse, as opera, drama, and film, and in the town associated with the heroine there is a shrine dedicated to her memory. Earlier translations of adaptations suffer from one defect or another, but a quite readable version is included in *Virtuous Women*.

Twentieth-century Korean fiction has matured in a most turbulent setting: Japanese occupation (1910-45), collapse of the independence movement (1919), World War II, the liberation (1945), the Korean War (1950-53), and the revolutions (1960, 1961). Few peoples have experienced so many political and spiritual crises in a span of fifty years. But what is important is that these crises were occasions for the emergence of a new generation with a new voice. Each time, new writers subjected the ruling literary fashions to a fresh valuation. Each time, they succeeded in reshaping the literary medium adequate to contain the quality of new values and new visions. Indeed, these cultural and moral crises not only fostered the experimental movements but effected the modern-



ization of language and the liberalization of techniques.

Examples from this bountiful harvest of new fiction have appeared in journals, notably *Korea Journal* (the first issue appeared in September 1961), a monthly publication of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO. Some found their way into international collections like *Asian Literature: Short Stories and Plays*, compiled by the Asian Writers' Translation Bureau, where Korea is represented by six stories; five stories are included in the miscellany *Listening to Korea*. To date, the most comprehensive collection of twentieth-century Korean stories is *Flowers of Fire*, which comprises twenty one stories by seventeen writers (from 'Fire' (1925) to 'The River' (1968)). Earlier decades are somewhat meagerly covered, but the post-liberation years, especially those after the Korean War, are generously represented. The collection gives an adequate notion of the diversity of modern Korean short stories. Mention should be made of another collection in German, *Die Bunten Schuhe*, which contains nineteen stories by fifteen writers. Selections are not always based upon literary importance, and the translator's German at times fails to do justice to the originals.

Modern Korean writers continue to write some of their best works in the short story form, but the novel, as a protean form of literature, has also flourished and is read widely, often serialized in the daily newspapers for a diversified audience. Such advocates of V Narod (To the People) movement as Yi Kwang-su's *Soil* (1932-33) and Shim Hun's *The Evergreen* (1935) and such sociological novels as Yom Sang-sop's *Three Generations* (1931) and Chae Man-sik's *Muddy Stream* (1938) were at first serialized. In recent decades, the historical, sociological, and psychological novels have come into vogue, some panoramic, some dramatic, some sentimental best sellers. Hwang Sun-won's *Descendants of Cain* (1954) deals with a struggle between landowner and tenant in

the North after 1945; An Su-gil's North Kando (1959-67) concerns the struggles of Korean settlers in Chientao in southern Manchuria. Whang has produced other prize-winning novels: *Trees Standing on the Slope* (1960) delves into the spiritual crises of a soldier and *The Sun and the Moon* (1964) explores the alienation and solitude of a young architect, a descendant of the despised butcher class, as a symbol of alienated modern man. One of the foremost writers of the roman-fleuve, a long epic fiction around one or more families' progress or decline, is Park Kyong-ni (born 1927), whose *T'oji* (Land, 1969-) has been acclaimed for its commanding style and narrative techniques. These works skillfully explore complex contemporary realities and universal human concerns and deserve to be better known to the West.

#### 4.2. Some Korean Novelists Writing in Western Languages

The twentieth century has produced a number of Koreans who write in Western languages. Li Mirok (1899-1950), a medical doctor in Barvaria, wrote *The Yalu Flows* originally in German (Munich, 1946); later it was translated into English. Younghill Kang (1903-1972), Yong-ik Kim (born 1920), and Richard E. Kim (born 1932) have written their representative works in English. Kang's *Grass Roof* and Richard Kim's *Lost Names*, together with *The Yalu Flows*, represent three definitions or metaphors of self, more or less in the form of autobiography. Kang and Li deal with the traumatic years before and after the Japanese seizure of Korea in 1910; Richard Kim concerns himself with the last fifteen years of the occupation. All deal with the disintegration of traditional systems and values, conflicts between the old and the new, 'us' and others, and within one's own self, and the awakening of nationalism and the discovery of individual identity.

"Life in such country districts as mine" says the narrator in *The Grass Roof*, "was a long unbroken dream lasting thousands of years, in which the same experiences, the same thoughts, the same life came unceasing, like the consistently reappearing flowers of spring, whose forms and attributes were the same, although the individuals were changing." Into this Arcadia intrudes cataclysmic change, which is depicted as a raging flood, unbound and mutinous, portending death and disaster. But Kang is not writing a historical novel; he is happy in portraying such characters as his prodigal-son uncle, crazy-poet uncle, aunts, and grandmother. Grandmother is matriarch of the family comprising her three sons and their wives and their in-laws, one of whom is a newly rich widow with no respect for the scholar-poet family. Grandmother's job is to maintain order and degree in the teeth of poverty and frustration. Consider her tragic, lonely figure in the following passage (p. 85):

Now in her land of religious Utopia beside the lotus pool in the garden, my grandmother could forget her domestic trouble, and all the agonizing pains and tears that simple human life brings from day to day.

Yet she believed thoroughly in the domestic life, even as she mounted into the world of Buddha. She believed in raising children, and in getting her children and grandchildren married. It seemed to her that the only progress possible was through the domesticity of life. But somehow she could not bear this time to see the night go and the dawn break.

"Don't come(I don't want you!" she thought as a wan streak came. "I don't want to be seen. The sun shames me."

And it seemed like a man's hand upon her soul, calling it back. Night, the time of her woman's supremacy, was ebbing. She could no longer rest with perfect understanding upon the dark. But she raised her eyes to the pine tree outlined against the rosied sky.

"O let my heart be inspired by that tall pine tree!"

Lost Names by Richard Kim refers to one of the measures initiated by the Japanese in February 1940, when Koreans were ordered to adopt Japanese names. Kim's father, a Protestant pastor in Pyongyang, was, like most Korean Christians at the time, involved in some form of independence movement and was under Japanese surveillance. Kim, who was then no more than ten, does not fully realize the enormity of the humiliation suffered by his elders when they gathered around ancestors' graves to repent their sins and announce to the spirits the inevitability of their deed. But the boy (the "I" in the narrative) cries out: "Stop! Please stop! ... What is the matter with you all, you grown-ups! All this whining, wailing, chanting, bowing to the graves, sorrowful silence, meaningless looks, burning tears..." The story ends with Korea's liberation. When his father tells him that "The liberation is a gift...and not something that we have fought for and won...And perhaps that's why most of us, grown-ups, are confused and bewildered and feel at a loss," the boy assures him, "We will be all right, Father. We are going to be different from your generation, stronger and more confident. I mean, sir, my generation is beginning with our liberation and freedom, which your generation didn't have. That ought to make all the difference."

Kim's first novel, *The Martyred*, is again set in Pyongyang, now occupied by the advancing UN forces during the Korean War. The narrator is Captain Lee, a South Korean political intelligence officer whose job is to investigate the circumstances of the execution of twelve Christian ministers by the retreating North Korean army. Adopting the role of inquisitor, the captain sets out to discover why fourteen were arrested and only twelve killed. One of the survivors has become insane. The other, Mr. Shin, the real hero and martyr, knows how the ministers died ("like dogs, whimpering, whining, wailing, begging for mercy,

denouncing their God for abandoning them.” Shin survived, as a captured North Korean major reveals, not because of his collaboration but on account of his bravery. Although Shin confesses to his congregation that he was the betrayer, what he conceals from them is that he can no longer believe in an unjust God. Despite these terrifying doubts that torment him, when the Chinese communists intervene and the UN forces are compelled to withdraw, Shin chooses to remain with his flock: “I must make them believe God cares for them and I care for them.” Will Captain Lee be able to reconcile the conflicting voices, “one from within history, the other from far beyond history, each promising salvation beyond history, each promising justice, each asking them [the people] to pledge themselves to its promise?” It is a moving story well told. Kim has hardly written better since.

In *The Diving Gourd*, as in all Yong-ik Kim’s novels, such as *Love in Winter*, there are admirable scenes that evince his firsthand knowledge of the regions and their people. As the subtitle suggests, it is a novel of farmers, fisherfolk, and the Korean earth. Bosun, a diving woman, lives with her son Bau on the southeastern coast and supports her family by her catches from the sea. She realizes that “a woman and diving do not go together”, but her zeal for independence and freedom drives her to the sea, which she calls her nunnery. Bau falls in love with Songha, the daughter of a cattle farmer who sneers at his mother’s trade. As the boy and the girl get intimate, Bosun’s loneliness becomes unbearable. When her son returns after a night with Songha on the beach, Bosun’s bitter anger erupts. “She snatched Bau’s kite from the wall and smashed it with her hands and threw it at him. With mouth open and eyes wide open, Bau stared at this crumpled kite. He kicked open the swinging door and dashed from the room. Bosun heard her *dyun bak* crash in the yard. Has he thrown my diving gourd on the steps? No, he wouldn’t(he

couldn't) that supported catches and my tired body on the surface of the water." Such scenes and symbols point to the novel's larger metaphorical patterns. In Yong-ik Kim we see that traditional subjects and modern techniques are inseparable.

## 5. Toward a Structural Analysis of Modern Korean Fiction

### 5.1. Why Structural Analysis?

The term 'structure' of the novel is generally used to indicate the organic structure which forms it. In the analysis of the novel, the structure clarifies its systematic form. This discussion of structure, with our attention focused on the organic system of the novel, aims at revealing the governing rule inside the novel. Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, and Edwin Muir respectively attempted to examine the operation of the aesthetics and the rule in the novel through its structure. Lubbock sought the formal rule of the novel based on its 'point of view', Forster tried to find the operation of its characters, and Muir attempted to find its according to the way of plot establishment, classifying the novel form into activist novel, character novel, and dramatic novel on this principle. They systematized the organic rule by analyzing the novel from different standpoints, for they felt some problem in its critical methodology. It must have been caused by the fact that the genre of the novel, formed far later than poetry or (verse) drama, has not experienced the theoretical systematization over a long period and lacks a variety of critical approaches. And it is also related to the fact that with the rapid changes of modern society, the social phenomena have not been

successfully treated in the methodological study of the nature of the novel. Therefore, they attempted to define the nature of the novel by systemizing various critical approaches and theories focusing on its structure. Since the novel has a certain 'mold' or pattern in dealing with and representing life, the reader enjoys another life contained in the mold of the work. The aesthetic contents or the structural system can be established by systemizing this mold or pattern of the novel.

The novel suggests a new view of life, the creation of meaningful life, the change of order and morality and so forth, and thus it has a basic structure since it creates a new pattern. The novel must have 'unity' in order to create a new life out of the ordinary one by the method of language. That is, the method and consciousness of life must be treated from a unified point of view in relation with real life. Therefore, the structure has such unity, and the understanding of the structure is the way to understand the nature of the novel.

In the Korean novel, the matter of structure has been discussed only fragmentarily since Kim Dong-in's analytical criticism of Chunwon's novel. I say 'fragmentarily' for his method failed in revealing the structural elements in terms of the organic wholeness of the novel. That is, the word indicates that he merely confined the structural concept to a particular part of the novel instead of explaining the interrelation of the structural elements. It was a limited analytical approach which disintegrated the sense of organic wholeness, like the partial discussion of character creation only in terms of the point of view, or the lame explanation of story development only based on the plot. Here, therefore, we realize that it is necessary to have a new critical method by which we can examine the entire substance and nature of the novel by clarifying the organic relationship of all the elements in the novel.

The partiality in analyzing the literary work as stated above is also found in the history of the novel. For instance, the main emphasis has been merely put on a certain tendency of thought or technique of expression depending upon the responsibility and trend of the times, regardless of the due evaluation of the literary work as a whole entity. This biased emphasis on the non-literary situation has been an obstacle in understanding the nature of the novel. Historical criticism has evolved before concrete examination of the true nature of the Korean novel and the subordination of the history of the novel to the history of thought or social changes. As a matter of fact, it cannot be denied that the novel has a contemporary social structure dealing with social realities. But we should remember, moreover, that the true function of the novel treating social realities is to rearrange the historical time and social space so as to create new social realities. And the rule and aesthetic value of the novel which re-creates life must be considered at the same time.

Thus why the author uses a certain method to describe life is a question on the nature of the novel. In this regard, Henry James says in his *Art of Fiction*:

A novel in its broadest definition is a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we can enjoy the test of execution.



Henry James argues that the author's choice of material and form should not be interfered with by non-literary elements such as religion, society, history, and institutions. That is, the author must not be restricted by any other intention than his own creative spontaneity. But it seems natural for the author to use his impression experienced in life primarily as the contents of his work. Accordingly, when we confine James's assertion to the notion that "the intensity of the impression" should be the material treated in the work, the author's choice of subject and theme remains as a question of 'how' he puts the impression of life into the pattern of language art. Since the form embodies the standpoint of describing life and the contents are meant by the sort of life chosen, the author's discretion is decided between the two.

Therefore, the anatomy of the structure of the novel, the basic frame representing life, will give certain sources and evidences of its transition; then the combination of the novel with such non-novelistic situations as social, spiritual, and philosophical histories can also be clarified through the transitional process of the structure.

In the history of Korean novels, the literary trends of Romanticism, realism, and naturalism were introduced without chronological distance. Thus the lack of sufficient opportunity for the authors to have the critical eye of perspective. They took such writings for granted, infected by the flu of trends. The same disorder spread to the theoretical area, where the logical systematic discussion of the novel was impossible. And so, it is true that social changes directly influenced the transition of the novel and the inflow of foreign thought was accepted as the civilized mind. This aspect hindered the comprehensive establishment of theories of the structural transition of the Korean novel from the illumination period to the present day has been ignored so much. We have treated novels in the limited scopes of theme, story development, and social

consciousness, and the history of the novel has been subordinated to those of society, politics, culture, and so on.

In this regard, for the right establishment of the history of the novel, it is necessary to overcome the conventional theories and to study the structural transition of novels based on a precise analysis of works themselves.

Modern novelists employ entirely different techniques from conventional novels in their structural aspect. Modern novels are free from the order of time, varying the narrator's points of view. They are experimenting with various methods of sudden interchanges of the past and the present and the adaptation of a 'movie technique'. The most conspicuous results of such experiments are the problems of 'consciousness' raised by psychological novels and of 'structure' containing the consciousness.

The nineteenth-century novelists were only superficial reporters of the subjective world of consciousness. They thought that it would spoil the logical plot of the novel to represent their subjective experiences. The twentieth-century novelists, however, think that the novelization of their subjective world of consciousness has no less logical value than objective realities.

It was not until the discovery of the fact that our unconscious world must be accepted as a part of the human mind that psychological novelists attended to the thought which just 'grazed' human memory, unexpressed in language, like a feeling. William James discussed the subject of consciousness in his *Psychology*, in which he defined it as the combined entity of what was experienced and what is being experienced. He extended the traditional way of understanding humanity merely as reason and sensibility to a new aesthetic level of perceiving what was

experienced and what is being experienced in our inner world. His discovery of consciousness had a strong impact on modern authors. The nineteenth-century authors excepted the subjective world of consciousness from the aspects of humanity; psychological authors, however, can represent it in their novels one the theoretical basis.

Psychological novelists frequently used poetic terms and autobiographical statements. For they emphasize internal experience, while the conventional novelists were wholly absorbed in the precise description of things as they are. They separate psychological time from actual time. The time in their novels is different from the sequential time treated in earlier novels. They write down a certain thought on the spot as it comes into their consciousness, regardless of chronological order. And they arrange their experiences as they appear in their mind with no sense of logical sequence, for they express momentary and floating ideas, not logical and systematic thoughts. The word 'floating' means the situation where one can think of something else even while speaking with one's friend. And these floating ideas appear as real, describing the static situation as an actuality. Thus, they have developed anew form of 'subjective novel' by this characteristic description.

Modern novelists also created special relationships with the reader. Whereas earlier novels made the reader follow the novelist from the authorial point of view, psychological novels make him have the author's identity and feel as if he were actually experiencing the realities in the world. And the reader, like an actor on the stage, recognizes the world in his own eyes instead of being indirectly informed of it through another's eyes.

Here, we feel the necessity of having a new critical method fitting this transition in order to correctly grasp and estimate the novel as a whole. The conventional method of story-telling traces the monotonous

thematic analysis and cannot achieve the wholeness of the novel. Traditional novels had the linear method of development, for they were story-tellings based on straight and systematic logic. But psychological novels have the 'point method of development' in that they express unsystematic and undifferentiated experience without order restriction.

As already stated, I suggest that the structural analysis of the novel and the study of its transitional process must proceed in order to establish a new methodology of clarifying the characteristics of modern novels.

The structural analysis of the novel can contribute to describing the history of the novel not only as a provider of basic materials for the historical description but as a factor which indicates the stage of transition with regard to the relationship of these elements and the aesthetic aspects of the novel. 'Character' occupies a great ratio in the structure of the novel, for the nature of the novel is to create character types out of ordinary human life.

The author selects a character. Once he decides upon a certain character, he makes him go around the world. And the hero's action is completely predetermined. Therefore, even if his action seems to go beyond the reader's expectation, he is not actually breaking the ready-made route. Sometimes there may be cases where the waves of life seem to roll over him and drown him, but actually, he belongs to the ready-made type of character. The 'ready-made man on the ready-made route' indicates the limitation of the created character in the work. When the author presents a person in his novel, he cannot make him act beyond the limits of reality and must prove the naturalness of his action to the reader. And so, the 'ready-made man on the ready-made route' indicates the inevitable limitation of the created character in its likeness

to real life.

Let alone the realistic probability of character in actual life, the roles of character within the novel are as follows. First, man is the main constituent in the development of the novel, and the novelist endows some abstract idea upon the character type. In other words, the type of man in the work can be represented as a symbol of the abstract idea. The author creates his character as the concrete symbol of the theme in his novel, for he wishes to show his character among the conflict of ideas. In interpreting the type of man in the novel, we are apt to overlook the real identity of the man in the structure of the novel, owing to our unbalanced emphasis on the abstract idea symbolized by his character type. But the excessive attention to the abstracted meaning of the character is liable to cause the loss of understanding of all properties of humanity which includes actual living and psychology. Secondly, we can concentrate on the fragmental characteristics of the character. It is to show some phase of his humanity in the novel.

These two methods must be applied to the analysis of character at the same time mutually cooperating; otherwise it will cause a failure to understand the whole significance of the character as his human relationship, psychological world, and symbolic implication.

As surveyed earlier, modern novels are the result of radical changes. We are in urgent need of a new methodology of analysis and theory of study fitting this transition as the subjective novels crush the superiority of objective expression. Thus, a way of approaching the Korean novel must be sought in its internal aspects, and more concrete analysis must be made on the nature of 'character'.

The main purpose of this study is to clarify the correlationship of 'character' with other elements of the structure of the novel by illustrating the transitional process of character under the influence of

the literary thoughts of the time with regard to the theories on the structure of the novel suggested by Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, and Edwin Muir, and many other theses. It will reveal the transitional factors in the structure of the novel, overcoming the traditional way of describing the history of the novel as depending upon the division of literary thoughts.

## 5. 2. The Development of 'Character Structure' in Modern Korean Fiction

Now I have confirmed that character represents human quality and aesthetic significance as an organic principle of structure in the Korean novel from the illumination period during the 1950's by analyzing the general features of their 'character structure' and its transitional process through the course of time. It means that 'character' functions as a fluent which brings forth the structural transition of the novel. These aspects of character as the embodiment of human quality and the fluent of the structural transition have often been discussed in the study of Korean novels, I present the following conclusions obtained by analyzing the character and its transitional process in our novels.

Above all, the character reflected in Korean novels shows a transitional tendency from objectification toward subjectification. It was the twenties novelists who established the structural recognition of character in the novel. In the novels of the illumination period, character was limited to the function of mere story developing without the notion that it embodies human nature and characteristics.

We can find some structural confusion of narration in Chunwon's novels too. It is caused by the author's intentional intervention and the disunity of character formation due to his omniscient point of view.

Nevertheless, his employment of the third person narrative technique of 'he' must be estimated as the first attempt to keep the aesthetic distance between the author and the characters in the work. But his obsession with thematic and situational consciousness prevented him from the aesthetic creation of character structure.

In the twenties, Dong-in's novels achieved the objectification of characters. This was due to the realistic recognition of the rural poverty under Japanese colonial policy and the mutual relationship of the individual and society and to the introduction into the novel of foreign literary thoughts such as realism and naturalism. He pursued reality through 'tense' by the intentional use of 'epic past tense' in the theoretical basis of his novels and realized the objectification of character by abandoning the author's omniscient point of view.

The thirties novelists searched for character type combined with 'setting', 'accident', and 'tone' as a systematic element, rather than trying to plan character structure as a mere objectification. Hyo-seok showed the harmonious combination of character with other elements of structure in his works by pursuing the identification of man and the pastoral setting beyond urban artificiality. But his novels have a simple formation of originality and archetype in characterization, and the reflection of human characteristics into the theme of the novel is not successful owing to the simple coloring of character and setting in nature. Anyway, he created the subjective and simplified character type, not the objectified one, by his aesthetic attempt to unify humanity with nature.

In the forties, Kim Dong-ri suggested the equation of character as the symbol of theme unlike Hyo-seok. He aimed at clarifying the relationship of man and the gods of local superstitions and thus attempted to form his characters by understanding the human world through blood-relations and the original nature of life.

The fifties novels tended to the 'subjectification of character' as a result of its variant transitional processes. First, through the Second World War and the Korean War, people grew skeptic about the value of objective life and more interested in self-consciousness. The skeptic concept was based upon the sense of unjust suffering among the international strife. Besides, the change of value-view and the nihilistic sense of human existence accelerated the concentration on the nature of 'self'. And the matter of 'nature' was the main object existentialism and the philosophy of life, and the analysis of 'self' and the study of its nature also increased on psychological and sociological levels. Thus the attention the individual human quality was reflected in the novel as the 'subjectification of character'.

Secondly, there was the expansion of the concept of space in the novel in accordance with the transition of character. In the novels of the twenties and thirties, the value of a man in his relationship in society was conceived on the objective standard of social realities. The fifties novels, however, focused more on a man's self-recognition than on his relationship with society by the individual and subjective method of interpreting its realities. They show the direct, sentimental, and skeptic conflicts of the characters having a sense of doom and defeat, and seldom represented rational types of man.

The spatial expansion of the novel through the collapse of the rationalistic character type and the various approaches to the nature of life had influence on the transition of narrative technique. Unlike the conventional accident-centered way of development through time-ordered description, they employ the new character-centered way of development through the spatial narrative of consciousness.

The expansion of the spatial concept enabled the psychological approach to human characteristics in the internal world of consciousness



and realities beyond the limit of accident.

Thirdly, there was the representation of the psychological world of character. The 'stream of consciousness' technique directly suggests the internal world of the characters in the work, for it tries to express human nature through unrestricted association of experiences with the notion that the nature of the human mind is intuition, inconsistent, and irrational. The stream of consciousness technique is not only a new method of perceiving the nature of human experience, but shares the same direction with modern trends of understanding humanity.

After all, the fifties novels showed the psychological way of approach to the internal world of character with the intention to appreciate and novelize the individual value of experience and its subjective meaning, liberated from the traditional way of logical approach.

In the above argument, I have suggested the three most important changes of modern Korean novels through their structural study: the subjectification of character through its transition, the expression of the internal world of the character by the spatial expansion of structure, and the presentation of character structure by the psychological method.

From this point of view, it may well be asserted that the character study of the novel should be done by both vertical and horizontal inspection in relation with contemporary situations. But this thesis focused on revealing that character is the epitome of social realities and the aesthetic aspects inside the novel and that its transitional phenomena can be the central clue to the development of the novel.

I tried to deal with as many authors and novels as possible in order to justify my conclusion. But I think that this study is merely the first in a series of trials. In order to overcome and compensate for the defects of the past, we must set out on a path of broad and profound investigations.

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