Literary Research and *Geistesgeschichte*

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Recently, such words as Geistesgeschichte, Literary History as Geistesgeschichte, and approach to Literature in the context of Geistesgeschichte have been repeatedly used among those who study modern Korean literature. However, it seems to me that there are few who have used those words in the original and comprehensive sense of the word ‘Geistesgeschichte.’ Some people have been enticed by its freshness or delicate nuances, while most of the others have developed the habit of using the term only in its superficial sense.

Literary history can be embodied in various forms, history of themes, history of ideology, and history of genre development. And there are few poets, writers, and students of literature who can object to the proposition that “Literature is a vessel for human minds.” That is the very reason why literary history stands on the basis of Geistesgeschichte.

However, the terminology Geistesgeschichte has been questioned by many from the beginning. The questions are largely summed up in two aspects. One is whether Geistesgeschichte is a definite terminology with clear connotations and denotations. The other may be summarized as follows: Is it possible to define the ‘Geist’ as clear as anyone else can be convinced? We are still at the incipient stage, from time to time we hear such phrases as literary history as Geistesgeschichte and hermeneutic methodology. We don’t have any remarkable achievements made intrinsically under the use of this methodology. There are many slogans, but no definite

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Now, we feel the need to rearrange the fundamental meanings of Geistesgeschichte. Heinrich Schmidt's *Philosophische Wörterbuch* has it that Geistesgeschichte indicates the history of ideology and world view on the one side, and Zeitgeist and its evolution process on the other. This definition implies that the areas of ideas are so large and its meaning is so complicated that the clear definition of ideas or Geistesgeschichte is practically impossible. In his *Methoden der Literaturwissenschaft*, M.M. Giesebach sets up Geistesgeschichte as an independent sphere, and applies the method in the context of Geistesgeschichte as a combination between ideas and history. According to his elaborate explanation, Geistesgeschichte is nothing but a joining procedure between the ideology as the purpose of ideas themselves and the practicality as the basis and ingredient of history. What we usually call historical change or transition procedure can be given an appropriate meaning only after filtering through ideas or synthesis. In this viewpoint, we may say that Geistesgeschichte is originally located at the point where ideas and history, which can be easily combined, are so naturally harmonized.

As we may judge a man by the company he keeps, in order to understand the spirit of Geistesgeschichte deeply, we need to grasp firmly its kin concepts or its analogous modes of thinking. We may easily find the related concepts of Geistesgeschichte: history of philosophy, history of ideology, Ideengeschichte, Problemgeschichte, etc. Literary research in the context of Geistesgeschichte took firm root as a methodology of literary study through Wilhelm Dilthey's *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*. This methodology could be deepened and enlarged by stimulus and encouragement from such methods as Problemgeschichte by Rudolf Unger, Ideengeschichte of H.A. Korff, Gattungsgeschichte of Karl Vietor and Gunter Muller, and Volksgeschichte of Josef Nadler.

As mentioned above, ideas what we call Geistesgeschichte not only stand posit between ideology and practicality, but also reflect the conflicting relationships between existence and speculation, ultra-historicity and historicity, and sense of eternity and sense of time. In a sense, the procedure which gathers the hidden meanings of Geistesgeschichte may result in histories of ideas, ideologies, and intellect.

While histories of ideas, ideology, and philosophy are concerned with superstructure, Geistesgeschichte, we may say, spans widely from superstructure to substructure. Geistesgeschichte may seem to be shallow as a history of ideas, but the latter tends to be less wider.
However, just as those who are going to write about the history of the intellect take pains as to the priority among the cognitive faculty and its practice with the general public and ruling class respectively, also the ideas and behaviors of intelleguetitia, so too do the scholars who try to unravel the Geistesgeschichte methodology over which contents they should choose concretely from and what subjects.

We may consider the history of liberal arts as having a kinship with Geistesgeschichte, though the former has more ambiguous elements compared to the latter. Among the family conceptions of Geistesgeschichte, Problemgeschichte is one of the strange of ones for us to accepts. Problemgeschichte mainly deals with religious views of an age, fatalism, view of nature, problem of love, and view of life and death. These concepts and contents of perception have not yet proceeded into hard and systematic ideologies. Rudolf Unger who had presented the models of Problemgeschichte has implied that poets or writers can more effectively unfold their own thematic perceptions as a form of critical mind than their ideologies or ideas.

Then, let's see how Geistesgeschichthliche methodologies are applied to a certain writer or literary work.

1) Geistesgeschichthliche methodology claims that sincere literary research should seek the advice and help form various fields of liberal arts or mental sciences vigorously but humbly. After all, every literary research method applies the viewpoints and knowledge of such neighboring sciences as sociology, psychology, philology, and history to the interpretations of writers and their works. Especially, this methodology could gain its own characteristics in the sense that it sought synthetic vision positively combining all these viewpoints and perceptions.

2) Just as Wilhelm Dilthey's central concepts, such as generality and Lebenszusammenhang, developed into the essential idea of Geistesgeschichte, this methodology tries to find a comprehensive view of the text advocating correlation between life and the work of art. Life in the sense of correlation between life and the work of art should not be seen as indicating only the life of the artist himself. If life indicates the life of a writer only, Geistesgeschichte methodology comes to mean nothing but a historical approach in a large scale and biographism in a small scale. Therefore, life have should be considered as including a researcher's life as well.

3) Geistesgeschichtliche methodology came out of rejecting the so-called mimesis or reflexive theory which is strongly advocated by our recent...
literary scholars. As mentioned above, since Geistesgeschichtliche literary researchers would like to get a comprehensive view rather than analyze only a part of a literary work, it is natural that they assume a critical attitude toward realism or reflexive view that starts from the hypothesis that literature is a mirror of nature. Geistesgeschichtliche methodology does not say that mirror theory is absolutely wrong. It tries to deny that the mirror theory is the only way to literary research and interpretation. In a word, this methodology is understood as an attempt to secure maximum spontaneity, self-sufficiency, and originality for writers and their works.

4) Geistesgeschichtliche methodology which attempts to restore spontaneity, self-sufficiency, and originality to literary works acknowledges the possibility of a writer to create universal ideas or ideology transcending a certain age or times. This methodology has tried to relate a literary work with other works of the same age and with similar literary works, thereby history of literary trends, typology of world view, and theory of age division becoming even more important. Framing history of literary trends in the view of Geistesgeschichte, drawing typology of world view through the connection of numerous works, seeking the division of a literary period appropriate for literary history as Geistesgeschichte, we may certainly pursue the procedure of synthesis. In order to finish this synthetic process or theory of comprehensive view successfully, literary scholars of Geistesgeschichte should open their eyes to the problem of structure as they have been well revealed. Since the ‘structure’ stands right in the middle where a certain work or an individual phenomenon proceeds toward synthesis or comprehensive view. Geistesgeschichte methodology tried to find the structure in the background, the form and content, the creation psychology of a literary work.

5) However, we should not criticize Geistesgeschichte as a monadism since it places great emphasis on the individual value of a piece of work. Besides the above mentioned the idea of synthesis, when we take into consideration interpretative circulation theory which puts emphasis on the circulation between parts and whole, we must interpret Geistesgeschichte as always focusing on the ‘comprehensive structure.’ Practical methodology rejects that students of literature rush into an object simply with only head and heart. They think it is most desirable to read, analyze, and evaluate an object coupling the intellectual with the empirical potential. They consider it as most idealistic when their analytic power is harmomously combined with their intellect and life.
Literature produces thought, ideology, and spirit in a different way as compared with philosophy or sociology. Since they take their departure from this thesis, Geistesgeschichtliche methodology cannot but turn their back on positivists and biographical critics who try to tie a piece of work into a certain causal sequence or reductionism. While positivists cling to conceptions of existence, fact, inevitability, and causal sequence in the study of literature, Geistesgeschichtliche methodologists incline to the conceptions of creativity, essence, and autonomy.

Approach to literature in the context of Geistesgeschichte promises and emphasizes that literature can 'create' ideology, thought, and spirit by itself, thereby remarkably enhancing the value of literature.

When we translate Geistesgeschichte into Korean, the Korean equivalent invites misunderstanding that the concept attempts to locate literature as supplementary to ideology. However, as I have mentioned earlier, this methodology tried to restore the originality and autonomy of literature against the positivists or biographical scholars who bury writers and their works in a swamp of causal sequence and reductionism.

Approach to literature in the context of Geistesgeschichte not only emphasizes the need for views and insights in areas such as sociology, psychology, philology, and anthropology, but also advances one step further presenting the subject of mutual interchange or synthetic possibility of adjacent sciences. On the other hand, it expostulates that the only intellectual study and life bears fruit to all students of literature.

We must pay special attention to the fact that this methodology vivifies the self-respect of writers and their work by accentuating the logic of generality and analytical general reasoning in the course that Geistesgeschichtliche methodology criticizes absolute realism or reflectionism. We witness such a phenomenon that some Korean literary scholars of today tend to take the position that literature is rather a vessel for the consciousness or ideology of a certain group than an original and self-existent text.

(translated by Byon Chang-koo)