Issues and Prospects in the Studies of Modern Literature

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I. Introduction

The history of modern Korea, having recorded repeated and successful confrontations with afflictions, is dynamically opened to the future. Its historical process includes the following dramatic events: liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, which restored human dignity as well as sovereignty; Korean War, an outcome of East-West cold war; 4. 19 Uprising that raised the torch of democracy against autocracy; 5. 16 Coup, the starting point of corrupting and corrupted military rule; and finally, Kwangju Uprising of 1980 and June uprising of 1987; in addition, the reorientation of the world history due to the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe; restoration of diplomatic relations with Russia, China, and Eastern Europe countries and the ensuing changes in the relationship between South and North Korea. Caught in this historical vortex, Korean literature gradually expanded its sphere into social interests and ideological evolutions in accordance with and in adaptation to historical changes.

Studies of modern literature, based on a number of serious investigations, have proceeded from studies of individual works to historical evaluations. Studies of our literature have been firmly established not only by the histories of specific genres

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but also by the rewritings of Korean literary history, academic endeavors that comprehend various issues.

I believe that it will be meaningful at this point to reconsider the important turnpikes of our protracted history of modern literature, and to review the implications thereof. It will be especially significant if the organically interrelated issues can be presented in the historical consciousness of past leading into present, and vice versa. This paper proposes to specify the direction of future discussions by emphasizing important issues and evaluating important achievements in the field.

This paper will review the following issues of modern literary history: post-Liberation discussions of National Literature, the lively adoption of foreign theories in the 50s and 60s, and the contravening forces of traditionalism. In addition, this paper will survey the debate on the etiological theories of Early Modern literature advanced in the writings of literary history in the 70s, and the more recent reflections on the methodologies of literary history—an issue raised by the younger generation of scholars. The issues that I have chosen to discuss is necessarily selective, but I have tried to maintain a comprehensive outlook. That is why I have avoided, as best as I could, confining myself to specific genres.

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3 Hong Mun-p'yo, Han'guk Hyŏndaes Pip'yŏng Non'jaengsa yŏn'gu (A Study of Crucial Debates in Modern Korea), Chupmundang, 1980, Hwang P'ae-gang and others, Han'guk Munhak yŏn'gu Ipmun(An Introduction to Korean Literary Studies), Chushik san'opsa, 1982; Chang Tŏk-sun and others, Han'guk Munhaksa-ui Chaeongŏm (Issues in Korean Literary History), Chupmundang, 1986, Han'gul Munhak Editorial Committee, Han'guk Kŏn-hyŏndaes Munhak yŏn'gu Ipmun(An Introduction to Studies in Early Modern and Modern Literature in Korea), Han'gulsa, 1990
II. Issues and Prospects

1. Post-Liberation Discussions of National Literature

Post-Liberation discussions of National Literature were closely related to the literary theories of colonial period. The representative literary debate in the colonial period was the confrontation between “Proletariat Literature” and Nationalist Literature. But this long sustained confrontational structure failed to develop a creative consciousness of the other, which may have resulted in strengthening the logical position of each other. Due to external pressures, both sides were distorted and stunted in their growth. After being silenced for a number of years, discussions of National Literature came to forefront only after the Liberation, under conditions very different from those of the colonial period. But this flowering of National Literature was possible because of the various efforts for new perspectives in the late 30s. Lim Hwa in the late 30s, for example, had National Literature in mind when he suggested ideological reformation of Chosŏn literature.

What should Proletariat Literature—the creative mainstream—and its supporting groups do today to establish Chosŏn literature = National Literature in the real sense? This is our immediate duty, and I believe that we should envision the direction.

As we can see from the above quotation, Lim Hwa proposed that Chosŏn literature in the real sense should be National literature, which, in turn, should be the outcome of ideological reformation of Chosŏn literature. As to the specific content of this argument, he echoed the cultural policies of Russia after the Revolution, i.e., “international in content” and “national in form.” But he took the “construction of National Literature” as the immediate duty, and he asked Proletariat Literature and its supporting group to take the lead. His argument, so to speak, was a precursor of post-Liberation discussions of National Literature.

In his argument for National Literature, Lim Hwa defined the leading protagonist as “the community of people’s front excluding the privileged,” and more specifically, as laborers, farmers, and petit bourgeois. He also made it clear that he

4. This stunted distortion resulted from the colonial restrictions that obstructed native development as well as from the internal limitations that arose from the lack of experience in literary studies.
objected to imperialism, feudalism, and reactionary revivalism.

Ch'ŏnglyyangsanin went a step farther than Lim Hwa by asserting "democratic reformation in opposition to feudalism and imperialism." That is, he made Lim Hwa's argument for National Literature more specific by arguing that it should "reflect political and economic structures of democracy," and thereby, fight for and move towards democracy.

National Literature Thesis of "Union of Literary Men" was opposed by National Literature Thesis of Kim Tong-li whose ideas were based on pure literature. Kim Tong-li defined "national spirit as national unit of humanism," and equated it with pure literature. This made Kim Tong-sŏk deplore as follows: "Where is Kim Tong-li going alone leaving the people and National Literature behind?" Working along with his discussions with Kim Tong-sŏk and Kim Pyŏng-kyu, Kim Tong-li came to establish his arguments for the "Literature of Essential Orthodoxy," which is supposed to deal with "the universal, fundamental, general human fate." He came to assert "the third humanism" which emphasized the universality of human nature and ultimatum of life as the main sphere of literature. In short, Lim Hwa, Kim Tong-sŏk, Kim Pyŏng-kyu and others of "Union of Literary Men" focused on the people in its historical form, whereas Kim Tong-li, Cho Yŏn-hyŏn, Cho Chi-hun of "Society of Literary Men" located the people in its universal form. In other words, both sides failed to overcome the simple-minded dichotomy of literature and politics, and therefore, they failed to realize the real autonomy of literature.

As we have seen from above, the discussions on National Literature that arose right after the Liberation were not as a whole developed within the literary sphere. Since it was discussed in relations to political forces and interests in literary policies, it was limited in its development. Accordingly, it could not help being restructured by external forces along with changes in political geography. This operated negatively in the literary history thereafter and obstructed its development.

As the interests in the recovery of unified national consciousness and in the possibility of unification literature heightened, the studies of post-Liberation

discussions of National literature are widening its sphere to include those of North Korea in the same period. 13

2. Adoption of Foreign Theories and Traditionalism

While the arguments for or against tradition were going on, foreign theories were adopted according to circumstances and opened new paths toward literary development. Literary studies that focused on theory from the Liberation up to the 50s; the adoption of New Criticism and the changes in the literary studies thereof in the 60s; social realism, structuralism, receptive aesthetics, discourse theory in the late 70s--these are the examples of new foreign theories that were accepted and practised. Political pressures led to the collapse of autonomous National Literature, which, in turn, led to total abandonment of ideology in literature and literary studies. Escape from ideology in the 50s and 60s is different from the passive resistance of the late colonial period. When the pseudo-politics of imperial literature was strongly demanded, the only possible political action was to escape into art. In contrast, rejection of ideology of this period, characterized by "the coordinates of 13. The following list includes important studies of post-Liberation discussions of National literature Kwon Yong-mun, Haebang Chikhu-ŭi Minjok munhak yŏn'gu (A Study of Post-Liberation National Literature), Seoul National Univ Press, 1986 and "Haebang konggan-ŭi Minjok munhakron-ka k'i inyŏmgok Stulch'er" ("National Literature in the Liberational Sphere and Its Ideological Essence"), Han'guk Minjok munhakron yŏn'gu (A Study of National Literature of Korea), Min'umsa, 1988, Kim Yun-sik, "Haebang konggan-esŏ Minjok munhakron" ("National Literature in the Liberational Sphere"), Munhak-kwa Pipt'ŏng (Literature and Criticism) 5 1988 3 and "Inmun Minjumwi Minjok munhakron Pip'an" ("A Critique of National Literature of People's Democracy"), Han'gil Munhak 9, 1991 Summer; Kim Yun-t'ae, "Haebang jīkhru Minjok munhakron-ŭi Munhwya yusan gyesŏng munje" ("Post-Liberation Theories of National Literature and the Problem of Succeeding National Heritage"), Munhak-kwa Noll(Literature and Logic) 2, T'aehaksa, 1992; Kim Chae-yong, "KAPF Haesop'a Pihaesop'a-ŭi T'earp-kwa Haebang hu-ŭi Munhak undong" ("Split Within KAPF and Literary Movement After Libération"), Yŏksa Pipt'ŏng (Historical Criticism), 1988 Autumn and "8 15 chikhu-ŭi Minjok munhakron" ("National Literature Thesis Right After 8 15"), Munhak-kwa Noll(Literature and Logic) 2, T'aehaksa, 1992, Pak Yong-kyu, "Chosŏn Munhakka Tongmaeng-ŭi Minjok munhakron yŏn'gu" ("A Study of National Literature of Chosŏn Union of Literary Men"), Master's Thesis, Seoul National Univ, 1989; Sŏ Kyŏng-sik, "Migungyŏnggi Minjumwi Minjok munhagnon-ka Imnŏngmun munje" ("Democratic National Literature Thesis and the Idea of the People Under the US Military Rule"), Han'guk Hakt'ong 52, 1988 Autumn, Shin Hyŏng-gu, "Haebang chikhu Munhak Undong yŏn'gu" ("A Study of Post-Liberation Literary Movements"), Ph D Diss., Yonsei Univ, 1987, Yi Yang-suk, "Haebang chikhu Lum Hwa-ŭi Minjok munhagnon-e tachai" ("Lum Hwa's National Literature Thesis Right after Liberation"), Munhak-kwa Noll (Literature and Logic) 2, T'aehaksa, 1992; Lim Kyo-ch'ŏn, "8 15 chikhu Minjok munhakron-ŭi Minyŏngsŏng-kwa Tangg'aŏng" ("Ideas of People and Party in National Literature Thesis Right After 8 15"), Stulch'ŏn Munhak, 1988 Winter, Lim Hŏn-yŏng, "8.15 chikhu-ŭi Minjok munhakkwan" ("National Literature Thesis Right After 8.15"), Yŏksa Pipt'ŏng (Historical Criticism) 1, 1987 9
zero degree,”\textsuperscript{14} was positive repudiation of and severance from politics. This tendency manifested itself in the analytical method that investigates the internal structure of a work as well as the comparative literary method that examines the foreign influences of Early Modern literature. These methods exerted great influence on the literary studies and education after the 60s. In the late 70s, Anglo-American literary theories were expanded to include receptive aesthetics, cultural sociology, structuralism, discourse theory for more serious investigations of methodology in literary studies. In the meanwhile, one should also note that literary theories appropriate for Korean literature were being explored.\textsuperscript{15} Adoption of foreign theories was set in opposition to traditionalism, which became the starting point for overcoming mere imitation of foreign theories.

First of all, analytical criticism, originating from Paek Ch’ol’s translation of René Wellek’s \textit{Theory of Literature}, can be evaluated as enormously influential, flowering in the practical criticism of post-war critics such as Yi Sang-sop and Yu Chong-ho. This phenomenal success resulted from the similarity between American conservatism before and after the Second World War and the loss of sense of direction after the Korean War. But in spite of sophisticated objectivity, its significance cannot but be limited because it rendered secondary the co-relationship between work and writer/reader, between work and world. This limitation is exemplified by the fact that analytical criticism was unsuccessful with novel in contrast to its success in explicating poetry. Especially when the unique epistemological reference of world view (on which all methodologies rest) is being challenged, analytical criticism can be useful only when it adapts to specific changes in creative ways.

Comparative literary methodology went on the same route. To investigate what elements were influential in Korea was in itself a loaded job at first. But after a while one was required to go beyond this simple analysis to inquire into why a certain element was influential when others were not. This direction of inquiry was necessary because a positivistic investigation of simple interrelationship failed to point to the dynamic crux,\textsuperscript{16} which engendered the structural similarities between

\textsuperscript{14} Kim Yun-shik, \textit{Han’guk Hyŏndaeha Munhak Pip’yŏngsa (A History of Modern Korean Literary Criticism)}, Seoul National Univ Press, 1982, p 271


\textsuperscript{16} Kim Hŭng-gyu, \textit{Munhak-kwa Yŏksagŏk In’gan (Literature and Historical Man)}, Ch’angjak-kwa Pip’yŏngsa, 1982
two comparable objects. One must also make note of the similarities and dissimilarities between positivistic comparative literature of Europe and “general literature” of America. Like analytical criticism and comparative criticism, discussions of traditionalism from the late 50s to 60s started from the opposing viewpoints of rejection of and renewed interests in socio-historical aspects of a work. It should be noted that Yu Chong-ho and Kim Chong-gil and others, who adopted analytical criticism, rejected tradition, whereas Cho Yön-hyon and, who had connections with the Right National Literature immediately after the Liberation, was for the continuity of tradition. From this, one can ascertain that both the Left and the Right who participated in the discussions of National Literature, despite their differences, were homogeneous in the sense that they assumed the socio-historical dimension of literature; critics from the post-war generation stood in the opposite direction. These changes in structure—that is, from the Right / Left ideological confrontation to the acceptance / rejection of socio-historical dimension in literature—strengthened by in-depth study of tradition, developed into attempts to interrelate classical literature and Early Modern / Modern literature in the 70s. Kim Yun-shik, Kim Hyön, and Cho Dong-il’s thesis of traditional continuity provided such an example, in contrast to Lim Hwa and Pack Ch’ol’s thesis of Severance from Tradition via Implantation of Foreign Culture.

After the 70s, a new phase of Modern literary studies began with the application of myth criticism, cultural criticism, receptive aesthetics, and discourse theory.


19 The following is a few examples of application of foreign theories to Korean literature Yi Sang-u, Hyöndae Sosul-zi Wonyeongak T’angul(A Study of Archetypes in Modern Novel), Chipmundang, 1985, Yu Ki-ryong, “Shinhwa Munhakron-üi Suyong-kwa Kwaje” (“Myth Criticism Application and
3. Etiological Theories of Early Modern Literature

It was widely agreed that duality of literary history should be reconciled through traditionalism, but this was easier said than done. The reconciling process should not stop at grasping the internal links in individual works and separate genres, but historical vision should be restructured as a whole via the actual writing of history. On extending this problematic, the periodization of literary history, more specifically, the etiological theories of Early modern literature became the focus of attention after mid-70s As one critic points out, Early Modern is “a period concept as well as substance concept,” and the definition thereof not only reveals the problematic of the present but also touches on the unique problematic of literary history which reconstruct and evaluate the past from the import of the present.

A more in-depth study of the starting point of Early Modern started with Kim Yun-sik and Kim Hyŏn’s *History of Korean Literature*. Their literary history rejected the periodization of previous literary histories that situated the starting point on the external shock of *Kabo Reformation* (1894); accepting the Embryo of Capitalism Thesis from historical studies, pushed up the starting point to 1780s To overcome colonial historiography, Kim Yun-sik and Kim Hyŏn argued for the establishment of National historiography and defined the Early modern as a period of self-realization and development. From this point of view *Hanjungnok* became the originating work of early modern literature, read as a rejection of patriarchal feudalism in behalf of individual self The question then raised is that of *Hanjungnok*’s literary excellence and its continuing significance. Kim Yun-shik and Kim Hyŏn ignited the debate on the starting point of the Early modern in which many scholars participated and various opinions were aired. Some even argued that Early modern literature has not even started, since the state of North / South

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21. Kim Yong-ŏp’s work on Agricultural history of late Chosŏn is a representative achievement in this area
22. Cho Dong-il’s narrative of actual literary history is significant in that it is a concrete epitome of such debate
division has obstructed the establishment of real National Literature. In the same context, the starting point of Early modern literature has been discussed along with the modern characteristics of Yi Sang and others in the mid-30s. In the debate on the starting point of Early modern / Modern literature, the focus is not so much on the Liberation as on the post-war literature,\(^\text{23}\) and therefore, the significance and continuity of literature is important\(^\text{24}\).

But the real problem is that history, especially the history of literature is not made by a sudden change nor does it change proportionally with the times. One outstanding work or one turning point does not make the Early modern period. The Early modern as a trend comes to existence in its relationship with historical development, and literature changes accordingly. It should be noted that the crux of the debate on the starting point of the Early modern and Modern literature lies on the definition of modernity and the autonomy and continuity of literature. Accordingly, only by grasping the nature of its tendency one comes to illuminate in historical terms the internal structures of literary history and the significance of changes. This leads to the study of literary history as the study of its methodology, and the work of young scholars are directed this way.

4. Evaluation of Lim Hwa’s Theory of Literary History

Literary historians, who, refusing to stop at positivistic reconstruction of the past, write with consciousness of methodology, are: Cho Yun-je, Lim Hwa, Paek Ch’ol, Kim Yun-shik, Cho Dong-il and others. Among these, Cho Yun-je’s methodology, based on Nationalist historiography and philosophy of life, and Lim Hwa’s methodology, based on materialism, are of special interest. Especially the latter,

\(^{23}\) Refer to my Han’guk Kındae Sosŏl yŏn’gu (A Study of Recent Korean Novel), Samyŏngsa, 1983, pp 36-38

who defined Early modern Korea literature as “the history of Implanted Culture,” attempted to establish succinct scientific methodology.

The previous evaluation of Lim Hwa’s methodology of literary history was in general negative: following the logic of his “Historiography of Stagnation,” it was said that he erred in the base analysis of Chosŏn as colony; as a result his thesis of subject-denial came to justify Japanese imperial invasion. Recently, literary characteristics of Chosŏn’s colonial capitalism is newly recognized from the “dialectics between general and specific” and scientifically defined. Of course the point of analysis is a little different with each scholar. For example, some assume that base, environment, and tradition as the analytical center; others conceive of form and spirit as the main category. But in spite of such differences, they concur in that Lim Hwa’s theory of literary history was not a mere variation of “Thesis of Implanted Culture,” and thereby, they confer unique significance to his work.

But the question is not that who presented a clearcut methodology but that how a methodology confers consistency to the actual writing of literary history, and also that how such writing achieves its unique objective. Despite rational composition, if methodology disrupts the dynamic nature of actual history writing and disorganize each item, one must reevaluate methodology itself. If literary history is “not so much content as form,” flexibility of methodology that faithfully records the changing subject is required.

28 Ibid.
31 Such disruption is identified in Lim Hwa’s own writing of literary history, though he tried to overcome the dualism of form and content in Shina Nam-Ch’ol and Pak Yong-hŭi.
III. Conclusion

As we have reviewed so far, studies of Modern literature started with strong connections to ideology; in reaction they went through complete rejection of ideology; more recently, they have come to the conclusion that unique autonomy of literature is neither an escape from reality nor a mechanical reflection of reality but that there is inner logic in literature which transforms the reflection of reality. For example, an inquiry into Lim Hwa’s methodology of literary history is an extension of such problematics, differing at some point from his materialistic world view to embody the particularity of literature.

By a short review of the studies of Modern literature, this paper has tried to show that a writing of literary history is not a mere accumulation and projection of individual items, but a reconsideration of the contemporary problematics which form a part of historical currents. These currents do not show the ultimate direction of history, but a close study of historical past enables one to point out the issues and thereby opens up the field for farther academic endeavors.

GLOSSARY

Cho Chi-hun 趙芝薰
Cho Dong-il 趙東一
Cho Yŏn-hyŏn 趙演鉉
Cho Yun-je 趙潤濟
Ch’ŏnglyangsamin 清凉山人
Han'γungnoγ 閔中錫
History of Korean Literature 韓國文學史
Kim Chong-gil 金宗吉
Kim Hyŏn 金惠
Kim Pyŏng-kyu 金秉圭
Kim Tong-li 金東理
Kim Tong-sŏk 金東錫
Kim Yun-sik 金允植
Lim Hwa 林和
Paek Ch’ŏl 白鐵
Seo Jung-ju 徐廷柱
Yi Sang 李箱
Yu Jong-ho 柳宗鎬