Male-Female Partnership and Competition for the Korean Classical Novel

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1. Introduction

“Gender and Narrative” is not a familiar theme in Korea.¹ I have had no opportunity to discuss it. The feminist criticism in Korea is drawing limited attention from a small group of Western-oriented female scholars. They are busy to import ready-made theories. But on a factual level many gender-related issues in Korean literature already have been widely studied. We can easily rearrange them with new insight. A new horizon of feminist criticism will be opened by such work.

In this paper, I will present my ideas on one basic problem of Korean literature, male-female partnership and competition for literary genres. Different genres of Korean literature show different relations between male-female writers and readers. Both sexes cooperate or compete with each other according to the specific conditions of each genre concerned. On such an assumption, I already analyzed many cases concretely. From the analyses, I will attempt to formulate a general theory, which is needed to clarify the issues in the most problematic genre, the novel.²

2. Male-female relations for Korean literary genres

Traditional Korean literature consists of three areas: (1) kubimunhak, oral

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² Recently I published Han’gukmunhakû Kairoe Iron (Theory of Korean Literary Genres)(Seoul Chimpundang, 1992) This paper has a close relation with that book
literature, (2) hanmunhak, Korean literature in classical or written Chinese, (3) kungmunmunhak, written literature in Korean. Male-female relations are different in each area. Broadly speaking, these three areas were divided as follows.

(1) a common area for both sexes.
(2) male literature, written in classical Chinese, hanmun, which was a writing system primarily used by males.
(3) female literature, written in the Korean alphabet, Han’gŭl, which was patrotnized by women.

In (1), there is male-female partnership as well as competition. Sŏlhwa, the folk narrative is transmitted and recreated by male and/or female storytellers. Storytellers of both sexes add respective styles and meanings. But there are no distinctions as male and female narratives. Minyo, the folksong, is a more competitive field. Male songs and female songs are distinguished from each other, in function and in esthetic orientation. Sŏsaminyo, the folk ballad is found only among female weaving songs.3 Muga, the shaman’s song is dominated by females. But a specific part of it, mudangguknori, the shaman’s play, an annexed part of the main rite, is the male shaman’s part. Munsokkŭk, the folk drama, is a male performance.

The male literature (2) is scarcely adopted by female writers. Hanmun, the prose in written Chinese is a more exclusive field; female prose works are hard to find. The only known female prose writer is Im Yunjidang,(1721-1793), a sister of the famous philosopher Im Sŏng-ju. Hanshi, the poetry in written Chinese was easier to imitate. There were two small groups of female hansi poetsesses. One from high class, such as Hŏ Nansŏlhŏn(1563-1589), the other from kinyŏ, female entertainers, of whom Hwang Chin-i(16th century) is the most widely known.

Male-female relations in (3) are more complicated. Though it is true that the Korean alphabet hangŭl was used mainly by females, male poets willingly composed vernacular works from the time of its invention.

The courtly epic, Yongbiŏch’ŏnga (Songs of Flying Dragons), opened the way in 1447. I Hwang(1501-1570), the leader of neo-confucianist philosophers, reaffirmed the value of the songs in Korean, with his shijo works, “Tosanshibigok” (Twelve Songs of Tosan). The kasa of Chong Ch’ŏl (1536-1593), showed the most refined style of Korean literary language.

Therefore, in the field of verse, female writers had to challenge the already

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3 I reported the collected materials of folk ballads from my fieldwork and analyzed them in Sŏksaminyo yŏn’gu(A Study of Korean Folk Ballad), (Taegu Kyemyŏngdaehakch’ulp’andu 1970)
established male hegemony. Such competition yielded different results according to the actual situations of the genres.

For the genre of akchang (*Yong-biokch'ôngga* is an example of its long form), female interference was not permitted, as it was composed and performed by government officials. Shiyo, as hanshu, were adopted by female writers. But, among two groups of female hanshi poetesses, only the kuryô group accepted shiyo. The reason was that to enjoy *sijo* was *p'ungryu*, a gay entertainment, which would compromise the virtue of high class women.

However, for the kasa genre, female writers succeeded in bettering their position. Unlike shiyo, the didactic genre kasa had an educational value. It was used as a textbook to improve reading and writing abilities, and to teach cultural norms for high class girls. From the 18th century male kasa were replaced by female kasa, kyubangkasa, as such textbooks. Female kasa was not restricted to moralism. A more liberal type, hwaçon'ga (the song of excursion) became popular from that time.

There are a very interesting pair of kasa works, written in 1746, exemplifying a direct example of male and female dispute about the song of excursion.¹ One is "Chohwaçon'ga" (Mockery on the Song of Excursion). It was composed by a male writer whose family name is Kwôn of Andong. As the material was recorded by a female, the given name is omitted. It mocked the female custom of composing songs of excursion. The other is the reply to it, entitled "Panchohwajôn'ga" (Counterargument to the Mockery on the Song of Excursion). The woman who composed it, a second cousin of the former male writer, maintained in it that women had the right to enjoy the seasonal blessing once a year in compensation for their labour for the household, and to exchange the exceptional experiences among them.

Such a mockery on the song of excursion could not have even a temporary validity. Female kasa flourished very much with various themes of female lives. In the 20th century, when male kasa declined and eventually disappeared, female kasa resisted against Japanese colonialism, playing the role of nationalist education. In the field of kasa, the female triumph over male was clearly manifested.

Prose in Korean, such as letters, diaries, travelogues, and other practical writings is the female domain. Any letter whose sender or receiver is female was written in Korean, even if it might be a political letter between a Queen Dowager and a minister of State. On that point, the Korean alphabet belonged to female culture.

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¹ See my *Han'gukmuhaki'ongsa* (A Comprehensive History of Korean Literature) vol 3 (Seoul Chushiksanôpsa, 3rd ed., 1994), p. 376
3. Some Ideas to Analyze the Case of the Novel

The case of the novel was not so simple. The most complicated relations between males and females made and developed the novel. To analyze it, two specific pairs of variations of the novel must be considered.

(1) There were (1a) hanmun sosŏl, the novel in written Chinese; (1b) kungmun sosŏl, the novel in Korean; (1c) the novel with both versions.

(2) The writer and reader were connected as (2a) male writer-male reader, (2b) male writer-female reader, (2c) female writer-male reader, (2d) female writer-female reader.

(1a) was directly linked with (2a). There was no gender problem in it. (1a) might be linked with (2b), in some exceptional cases. But there was no competition between the writer and the reader. (1a) could not be linked with (2c) or (2d)

(1b) might be directly linked with (2d). There was no gender problem. But (2d) is not yet identified clearly. (1b) was generally linked with (2b).

(1c) was directly linked with (2b). In many cases, its writers were male, its readers female. But the hannun version might be directly linked with (2a). There was a competition between (2a) and (2b) in different versions of the same work. The writer might give more importance either to his own message or to the readers' demand. More influential demands might come either from the male or female readers. That is the reason why the relation between both sexes became much more complicated.

All the writers of (1a) are known. All writers of (1b) are unknown. There is no evidence to identify them with. The writers of (1c) are not identified in the work just as (1b). But their names and careers can be investigated by secondary data. The list of such writers and their works is as follows:

Kim Man-jung(1637-1692), Kuunmong, (The Dream of Nine Clouds), Sassinamjonggi (Lady Sa's Journey to the South)
Cho Song-gi(1638-1689), Ch'angsŏn'gamûrok (Praise on the Virture and Emotion of the Righteousness)
Yi Chŏng-jae(1678-1758), Okrinmong (The Dream of a Jade Unicorn)
Shim Nŭng-suk(1742-1840), Oksugi (The Record on a Jade Tree)
Nam Yong-ro(1810-1858), Okryŏnmong (The Dream of a Jade Lotus), Okrumong (The Dream in a Jade Pavilion)

These writers were confucianist literati with high prestige of the yangban class. They might use their novels to give some messages about human conduct. But
writing novels, especially in the vernacular, did not belong to their normal activity. They wrote novels for female readers, in response to their demands. So the novels were cooperative products of male and female cultural spheres.

It is not easy to know whether the hannmun or the kungmun version was the original one. Written testimonies about it are insufficient. Scholarly reasonings based upon text analysis often meet counter arguments. This is a very significant fact, as it betrays the hidden history of male-female, author-reader relations.

To understand the actual situation, we must notice that according to the records, Kim Man-jung wrote Kuunmong to console his mother's grief, and Cho Sŏng-gi offered his works to his mother who enjoyed novels. Two cases provide an identical reason why a confucianist scholar participated in heretical vernacular literature. Filial piety to one's mother could justify any deviation. With such a typical justification, they accepted female readers' demands to counteract their own way of thinking.

It is possible to assume that hannmun versions put emphasis on the writer's ideas, while kungmun versions are inclined toward female readers' interests. But two kinds of versions played the same role in exchanging both sides' thoughts.

The case of Okrumong is more interesting. It is said that Nam Yŏng-ro wrote Okrumong to please his beloved concubine, and she translated the hannmun version into Korean. And then, Okryŏnmong was rewritten and changed into a more amusing new novel, Okrumong. As for Okrumong, it is not known whether the hannmun version or the kungmun version was produced first, and what was the role of the two persons involved. But it is clear that Nam Yŏng-ro's concubine was a co-author. Two authors cooperated well to make a masterpiece (which was) welcomed by a wide range of readers.

Kim Man-jung's Sassinamjŏnggi as well as Cho Sŏng-gi's Ch'angson'gamuirok are typical female stories. The common plot that a virtuous heroine overcomes hard trials can give consolation not only to the two authors' mothers but also to many other female readers.

But Kuunmong and Okrumong are men's life stories. An ideal hero leads a satisfactory life. The most brilliant success is the success in love affairs with female partners. According to the custom of polygamy he is provided with two wives and several concubines. How could such a story be welcomed by female readers?

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5 For the sources of quotation see my book Han'guk Sosŏl-ŭi Iron (Theory of Korean Novel), (Seoul. Ch'ŏlsŏnsa'p'sa, 1977) pp. 415-416

is the question. Is Kim Man-jung’s intention to console his mother’s grief with such a novel a mistake or an excuse?

But such a doubt arises from the surface level of the work, where the male author reigns over female readers. On the deeper level, the feminism triumphs over male dominance. In the actual courses of the love affairs, female characters take the initiative. They willingly make intrigues to capture the male partner, and do not hesitate to make a fool of him. Their ways of love hunting showed interesting variations according to their social status. Indirect and elegant tricks of the daughters of noble families as well as direct attacks of the lower class females, especially female entertainers, make the novel very colourful.

The male readers can enjoy the novel, identifying themselves with the protagonist. But another way is opened for female readers to experience multiple metamorphoses into several heroines. Which is more fascinating between the two cases: to plan to have love affairs with many partners or to imagine to live various lives? No one but a hermaphrodite can make an impartial judgement on that issue. So the novel offers endless disputes.

Whether there were female novelists or not is not clear, as all the writers of (1b), the novels only with kungmun version, are not known. These novels were produced abundantly to please ever increasing female readers by occasional or professional writers, who thought it shameful to sell manuscripts to book lenders or to publishers. Most of them seem to be yangban intellectuals who lost hereditary prestige because of social change. If there were female writers, it is natural to believe that they were not professional writers.

We have only tiny traces of female writers. It is said that the famous scholar Yi Kwang-sa (1705-1777)’s daughter and son wrote a novel in collaboration. 7 The interesting story about it recounts that they had to finish the novel, which was abandoned in the middle for some inevitable reason, because its heroine appeared in the dream and scolded them for not revealing the remaining story. This case, I think, is rather an exceptional case of occasional writers.

Recently another remarkable record is found, which suggests that Wanwol-hoeamaengyŏn (the Banquet Enjoying the Moon for Alliance), the longest novel in 180 volumes, 8 was written by a female writer, lady Yi of Chŏnju (1694-1743), An Gyŏm-je’s mother. 9 To accept it as a fact, we must change a part of our assumption.

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7 See my book Han’guk Sosŏl-ǔ Iron, p 422
8 This novel, deciphered by Kim Chin-se, is being published by Seouldaehkkyoch’ulpanbu in 12 volumes
If such a roman fleuve requiring a long laborious work with excellent techniques was written by a woman, the competition between male and female novelists may well be said to have developed as nowadays. Among Korean contemporary novelists, Pak Kyŏng-ri, a female novelist wrote the longest ambitious masterpiece, T’oji (The Land).

4. Perspectives for Comparative Studies

My argument, I think, can open not only a new perspective on the Korean novel but also that on the general theory of the novel. To do so, it is indispensable to try comparative studies. First, I would select Chinese and Japanese novels to compare with the Korean case, as the classical novels of the three north eastern Asian countries flourished side by side.\(^9\)

The basic idea that the novel is the best genre to confront male abilities with female’s must be sustained in making a new theory on world novels. But the concrete situations can be quite different from nation to nation. Therefore I have to clarify both the general and peculiar aspects of male-and female relations. That is the main point of my further argument.

Different situations are found in the nature of writing systems used in the novels. Korean novels had hanmun and kungmun versions in almost equal proportion. But Chinese novels were inclined toward the hanmun side, to use Korean terminology. Some colloquial style, biahwa, used in them, could not change the basic orientation of written language. Japanese novels, on the other hand, were inclined toward the kungmun side. Only Japanese language written by kana was used in it.

Chinese novels were not so widely opened to female readers. Not only male writers, but also male readers, even male protagonists ruled their territories. Japanese kana was a female writing system from many centuries ago. But male usurpers of the chonin class took over the female kingdom and built their edifice of the novel on it. As a result in Japan the competition between male and female was developed unfavorably to the latter.

The love story between one man and several women, as in Kummmong, was a

\(^9\) See Im Hyŏng-t’ae’k, “17segi Kyupangsŏl’i Sŏngnpkwa Ch’anggŏn’gamnŭrok” (The Formation of 17th Century Female Novels and Ch’anggŏn’gamnŭrok), Tongbanghakchi 57, (Seoul: Yonseidaehakkyo Kukhakch’ŏn’guwŏn, 1988)

\(^{10}\) The conception of the novel (Chinese xiaoshuo, Korean sosŏl, Japanese shosetsu) was compared in my article, “Chungguk, Han’guk, Ilbon Sosŏl-ŭn Kaenyŏn” (The Conception of Chinese, Korean, Japanese Novels), in Han’gukmunhak-kwa Segyemunhak (Korean Literature and World Literature), (Seoul Chushiksanŏpsa, 1991)
common and favorite theme. The Chinese example is Jinpingmei (Mrs Jin, Ping, and Mei), and the Japanese one is Koshokuichidaotoko (A Man Who Devoted His Life to Eroticism). But these two novels satisfied male readers' want of sexual love stories, and neglected the female taste of romantic love affairs.\textsuperscript{11}

Some other characteristics of Korean novels, clearly identified in comparison with Chinese and Japanese counterparts, also derived from the Korean way of male-female partnership and competition. The anonymity, the complicated process of meeting and parting of lovers, and the temporary reverse of gender roles are some important items.

The comparison of Korean novels with Chinese, Japanese, and Western counterparts requires many further studies. By such studies my theory will be developed and refined.

GLOSSARY

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Andong & Ch'ŏng Ch'ŏl \\ akchang & han’gŭl \\ An Gyŏm-je & hanmun \\ baihua & hanmunhak \\ Ch'angson’gamūro & hanshi \\ Chohwajon’ga & Hwang Chin-i \\ Cho Dong-il & hanmunsonil \\ Cho Sŏng-gi & Hŏ Nansŏlŏn \\ chŏng’in & hwajŏn’ga \\ Chŏnju & Im Hyŏng-t’ae
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\begin{tabular}{ll}
安東 & 鄭澈 \\ 樂章 & 한글 \\ 安兼濟 & 漢文 \\ 白話 & 漢文學 \\ 彰善感義錄 & 莊詩 \\ 嘲花煎歌 & 黃慎伊 \\ 趙東一 & 漢文小說 \\ 趙聖期 & 許蘭雪軒 \\ 町人 & 花煎歌 \\ 全州 & 林熾澤
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\textsuperscript{11} When this paper was discussed at the workshop mentioned in footnote 1, professor Ja-hyun Haboush, a Korean American female scholar, asked me “Isn’t it your male prejudice to distinguish so the male and female tastes of love stories?” I could not give a convincing answer. It is beyond my experience to confirm directly the female way of thinking. After that time, I found a useful book which gives a good proof of my argument In Discovering Sexuality That Will Satisfy You Both (Tiburon, Canada: The Printed Voice, 1993), of which the author Anne Stung is a female expert of sexual problems with a Ph.D. in psychology there is a noticeable passage as follows

"For women, the use of romance, tenderness and seduction are analogue to the use of pornography for men. Romance novels sell millions each year, attracting women by creating sexual arousal or diffuse sexual feelings by describing relating between men and women" (p 117)

\textsuperscript{12} In my book Tong’ashannhaksa pigyoron (Comparative Studies on East Asian Literary Histories) (Seoul: Seouldaehakkyoch’ulp’anbu, 1993), I investigated another aspect of differences between Eastern Asian novels that was derived from the historical changes which decided the social status of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese novelists in peculiar ways
Im Sŏng-ju 任聖周
Im Yunjiptang 任允摯堂
Jinpingeret 金振梅
kana 假名
kasa 歌辞
Kim Chin-se 金鎭世
Kim Man-jung 金萬重
kinyŏ 妓女
Koshokuichidaiotoko 好色一代男
kungmun 國文
kungmunmunhak 國文文學
kungmunmunhosŏl 國文小說
Kwŏn 權
kyubangkasa 間房歌辭
Kuunmong 九雲夢
kubimunhak 口碑文學
munsokkakk 民俗劇
minyŏ 民謠
mudanggunori 藁堂鼓놀이
muga 巫歌
Nam Yŏng-ro 南永魯
Okrinmong 玉麟夢

Okrumong 玉樓夢
Okr'yŏnmong 玉連夢
Oksugi 玉樹記
Pak Kyŏng-ri 朴景利
Panchohwajŏn'ga 反嘲花煎歌
p'ungryu 風流
Sassinamjŏnggi 射氏南征記
shujo 時調
Shim Nŭng-suk 沈能淑
somwha 說話
Sŏng Hyŏn-gyŏng 成賢慶
sŏsaminyo 敘事民謠
T'oji 土地
Tosanshibigok 陶山十二曲
Wanwolhoemaeng'yŏn 玩月會盟宴
Yi 李
Yi Chŏng-jak 李廷繡
Yi Hwang 李滉
Yi Kwang-sa 李匡師
yangban 兩班
Yôngbiŏch'ŏn'ga 龍飛御天歌