The Process of the Formation and Diversification of the Readers of Korean Prose Fiction in the 1920’s and 1930’s

Cheon Jeong-hwan*

1. Problematics

With the readers of Korean prose fiction in the 1920’s and 1930’s as its object of analysis, this paper aims at examining the reception of fiction and its process through which the cultural significance changed. The main concern of the paper therefore lies in the issue of who read which works and in what manner in the 1920’s and 1930’s. It will be discussed in relation to the social significance of the reception of prose fiction within the overall cultural topography.

Reading prose fiction is one form of praxis vis-à-vis popular culture with complex significance. It is an act of entertainment and

---

* Lecturer at Seoul National University and Seowon University

This paper is a revised version of the author’s “The Process of the Formation and Diversification of the Readers of Prose Fiction in the 1920’s and 1930’s [1920-30nyŏndaesosol tokcha-ŭ Hyŏngsŏng-gwa Punhwakwa Kwajŏng],” Yŏksa Munje Yŏn’gu [Korean Historical Studies] 7 (edited by the Yŏksa Munje Yŏn’gu [Institute of Korean Historical Studies], December 2001)
leisure in modern capitalist society and, at the same time, an act of reproduction and popular appropriation of ideology through the publication media. In addition, fiction is enjoyed by the recipients as a genre of modern art. For these individuals, reading prose fiction is a serious act of enjoying arts and of cultivating themselves. In Korea, the social significance of the reception of fiction came to be formed in earnest in the 1920's and 1930's. In other words, the act of reading prose fiction came to be recognized in this period as the most popular and powerful act of cultural praxis.  

It did not enjoy this status for long, however, because audiovisual media such as the radio and the cinema emerged to the center of popular influence and cultural communication during the same period.

Despite the considerable accumulation of research on prose fiction of the 1920's and 1930's in Korean literary studies, the readers of fiction and their reception of works have yet to be examined. The process of the formation of modern literature is a process through which literary culture came to be reestablished and the arena of literary institutions came to be constructed anew. It is a process that perforce included major changes in the composition and consciousness of the reader and in turn absorbed the influence of those shifts. Nonetheless, the composition and cultural status of modern Korean readers of prose fiction and the interrelation between these individuals' reception of fiction and the production of such works

---

1 Regarding this issue, see Yi Gwang-su, "Literary Lectures [Munhak Ganghwa]," Joseon Mundan [Korean Letters] (October 1924), "Social Change as Viewed through Reading [Dokseo-ro Bon Sahoe-ui Byeoncheon]," Dong-A Ilbo (January 8, 1927) 2, and "Korean Culture and the Populace and the Newspaper [Joseon Munhwa-wa Munjung-gwa Sinmun]," Sanscholli [3,000 Chinese Miles] (July 1935)
have yet to be discussed in depth. The lack of primary materials seems to have caused this situation above all, for it is difficult to unearth even the most basic statistics on which and how many books were purchased and read and what the size and composition of their readership were. Also contributive to such a lacuna in research has been the absence of methodology and perspective that can unite and synthesize the various materials strewn here and there. In addition, the stance shaped by formalism or literary austerity has tended to bring about the relative neglect of the problem of readership and of the social realization of literary works.

The significance of literary works, however, is transmitted through those in charge of publishing to the recipients of the works and realized through these readers' reading process. It is only through such a process that literary works can acquire their social significance wholly. In the realization of the significance of literary works, the role played by recipients or readers and by mediators therefore is neither secondary nor passive. This is because the literary field is established and maintained as a social "institution" by not only writers themselves but also literary critics, publishers, educators, and the recipients of literary works. From this perspective, the reader can be granted a more active status in literary studies. In other words, readers do not merely receive and consume the significance produced by the "writer as the subject" but can be established as yet another subject. They act to create new meaning in the literary field through the process of receiving, consuming, and realizing literary works in their everyday lives.

Nor, for that matter, are the factors that influence the formation of the readers of prose fiction and determine their manner of reception
of literary works few. Political, social, and economic factors, including the economic and educational condition of the populace, the degree of capitalization and modernization of culture in general, and ideological topography act in concert to influence the formation of readers and their reception of literary works. Unfortunately, this paper has not been able to systemize the operation and effect of such factors. Nonetheless, relatively greater attention has been paid to those factors deemed to have directly influenced the formation and diversification of the readers of prose fiction; that is, the reading culture and the formation and development of popular culture.

There is no doubt that the abovementioned factors universally act on and influence the formation of modern readership. As with the course of their respective social development among various nation-states, however, there exist concrete differences in the course of the formation of the readers of prose fiction, which plays a significant role in the "formation of the collective sense of a nation-state." In addition, the factors that wield influence on the process of a nation's "modernization" and the expansion of the readers of fiction differ according to each temporal stage. For instance, from the latter half of the 19th century to the 1900's, the most important factors were the series of changes including the growth of printing capital, the dominance of classical novels privately published for commercial purposes, and the introduction of modern typography. They could no longer act as the agents of such important changes in the 1920's, however, when typography had become universal. Likewise, the concept of "Patriotic Enlightenment" and nationalistic ideology, which had been significant ideological factors to the readers of prose fiction up to the 1900's, did not hold
the same meaning in the 1920's. Finally, Korea seems to have differed clearly from the West and Japan in the role and degree of importance of foreign prose fiction and school education in the formation and expansion of the readers of fiction. For colonial Korea, foreign works may be considered to be all-important while school education, relatively insignificant. As will be discussed in depth later, this is because "literary education through the Korean language" and "reading of Korean-language literary works" were nearly excluded from public education.

The task of systematizing the role of these factors and of determining their direction is, therefore, crucial. However, that project is still in progress and, considering the nature and amount of the present paper, it was difficult to systemize the changes that took place over the comparatively lengthy period of the 1920's and 1930's. Consequently, this paper will present the image of contemporary readers of prose fiction and overview cultural changes therein, on the basis mainly of newspapers and magazines.

This paper presupposes that, in the 1920's, changes in the reading culture itself were important and that, in the 1930's, a period which saw the conventionalization of modern reading and the reception of prose fiction, the increasingly powerful urban popular culture played a more significant role. Another focal point of discussion is the significance of the readers of prose fiction and of the "act of reading prose fiction" recognized as a social act.

Section 2 deals with the cultural conditions under which readers of prose fiction came to be formed in the 1920's and 1930's. It examines the relationship between the act of reading, which by then had been imbued with significance unlike that of preceding eras, and writing,
and the formation and expansion of the readers of prose fiction. Section 3 inquires into the diversification of the readers of prose fiction. With the introduction of modern Western literature and the gradual ascendancy of New Literature, the Korean readers of prose fiction widened and became more multilayered. This section explores the actual process of such diversification and the various factors that influenced this process. Section 4 mainly deals with the dissemination of popular culture and the popularization of prose fiction in the 1930’s and later on.

2. The Cultural Conditions of the Formation of Prose Fiction Readers in the 1920’s and 1930’s

1) Changes in the Social Significance of the Act of Reading Prose Fiction: From a Tool of Enlightenment to “True Art”

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the social efficacy of prose fiction emerged in an unprecedented manner. The social efficacy of fiction was newly discovered because of the ideological needs of “Patriotic Enlightenment.” Of course, the latter half of the Joseon Dynasty had already seen the growth of a large body of fiction readers including Confucian literati, women, and non-aristocratic technical professionals. Nonetheless, the formation of

---

new publishing capital and the expansion of distributive channels acted to increase further the number of readers. Faced with such a situation, intellectuals who sought to enlighten the populace strongly felt a need to “intervene” in the latter’s act of reading prose fiction. More specifically, this involved the “reform of prose fiction” including the creation of a new narrative form and the critique of the “prose fiction of preceding ages” and some of the “new novels” that were being devoured by contemporary populace.

Such efforts to make prose fiction a medium of national awakening and enlightenment ideology, however, could not be very successful because contemporary populace likewise thought of fiction as a medium not of serious ideology but, more often, of low-class entertainment and titillation. Moreover, prose fiction began to be produced and distributed en masse with monetary profit in view, precisely as the Newspaper Act and the Publication Act made it increasingly difficult to publish works embodying the ideology of

---

3 Regarding the Korean readers of prose fiction in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Otani Morishige, A Study of the Readers of Prose Fiction During the Latter Half of the Joseon Dynasty [Joseon Hugi Soseol Dokja Yeon-gu] (Seoul Institute of Korean Culture [Minjok Munhwawa Yeon-gu-won], Korea University, 1985)

4. See Section 2, Chapter 3 of Baek Un-gwan and Bu Gil-man, A History of the Changes in the Publishing Culture of Korea [Han-guk Chulpan Munhwawa Byeoncheonsa] (Seoul, Tarae, 1992)

5. Regarding this issue, see the famous passage in the Liberty Bell [Jayapong] that reads “the Tale of Chon-hyang is a manual of lewdness, the Tale of Sin Cheong is a manual of mournfulness, and the Tale of Hwang Gil-dong may be seen as a manual of incredibility” and Sin Chae-ho’s remark that “most traditional novels of Korea are a melange of obscenity and pro-Buddhist sentiments” in his essay “Notes to the Authors of Modern Korean-Language Prose Fiction [Geundae Gungmun Soseol Jeoja-ui Jutui],” Daehan Muam Simbo (July 8, 1908).
Patriotic Enlightenment. Consequently, works of fiction that were in the market were more likely to lower public esteem. In fact, even the Confucian literati of Korea were aware that the purpose of reading novels lay in pleasure and relaxation. Often, intellectuals have the tendency of seeing the efficacy of prose fiction and the social effect of reading fiction in terms of national exigency and enlightenment. But the realization of their efforts is the exception because the inherent “lightness” of prose fiction cannot withstand such ideological demands.

However, the significance of prose fiction as envisioned by the leaders of New Literature, which began to emerge in the late 1910’s, was altogether different. According to these intellectuals, what was “truly literary” had to be at the center and fiction had to be elevated to the status of one of the “arts.” Consequently, these individuals had to fight against negative views of fiction. Indeed, novels were seen by “teachers and Christian workers” as the “cause of ruination” and by some “aristocrats, scholars, and gentlemen” as things to be read only by “vagabonds and ruined prodigals.” At the same time, a large number of the populace “only like[d] domestic novels, popular novels, and novels for sheer diversion” and viewed prose fiction merely as a means of entertainment and amusement. The leaders of

---


New Literature, on the other hand, held the novel and foreign view that "art [was] divine providence" and that "the true artist or novelist [was] the human soul itself." That is, for the sake of the "autonomy of art," they were willing to be isolated.

In the early 1920's, there existed but few readers of "true" New Literature who shared such views. But because they were being fostered by new media and education, these readers of New Literature could serve to reorganize the entire readership of prose fiction. First, they differed completely from the majority of existing readers of prose fiction in terms of their symbolic capital and social status. According to the education they had received, prose fiction definitely was a means of modern cultivation and artistic diversion. At the same time, however, fiction had been a genre outside mainstream literature in the preceding age. In particular, it had been impossible for a male member of the Confucian literati openly to read and enjoy prose fiction written in the Korean script then. As we can see from Kim Tong-in's words, the same situation was being repeated in some quarters even in the 1910's.

With the influx of the recipients of "new education" into the readers of prose fiction, the quality and form of fiction became even more clearly diversified. Such diversification in turn expanded and reproduced the diversification of the recipients of fiction, which was reflected by the production and distribution process of fictive works. In other words, the manufacturers came to produce prose fiction in accordance with the purchasing power, interest, and tastes of the

---

recipients. Such diversification was translated into differences in the language (Japanese/Korean), price, publication format, and method and place of advertisement. Schematically speaking, the total readers of prose fiction were expanded through the following process: the expansion of previous readers of prose fiction (18th century-1910’s), the formation of the new readers of prose fiction (1890’s-1910’s), and the new formation of the readers of New Literature (1910’s-1920’s). From the 1910’s onward, the number of annual primary school graduates amounted to approximately 100,000 (latter half of the 1910’s)-250,000 (latter half of the 1930’s). On the basis of such statistics, it is possible to estimate the total number of the readers of prose fiction, which continued to increase.

2) Illiteracy and the Cultural Significance of the New Writing

The number of people who actually could read prose fiction with ease, however, was not large. The Japanese colonial authorities refused to implement compulsory education in Korea and avoided humanistic reading education. Consequently, in the early 1920’s,

---

9 According to Ōtani, upper-class women, who had been the principal readers of Korean-language novels from the 17th century onward, once again became active when rental libraries emerged in the 18th century. As for classical novels privately published for commercial purposes, which gained ascendancy in the 19th century, they were by nature abridged or translated in part, thus failing completely to absorb the readers of rented books. It was only in the late 19th century, with the emergence of "new education" and literature, that the readership of rental libraries gradually disintegrated. See Ōtani, op cit., 119.

10 O Seong-choel, "A Study of Primary Education in Korea in the 1930's [1930nyeondae Han-guk Chodeunger Gyoyuk Yeon-gu]," Ph. D dissertation, Seoul National University, 1996.
approximately 90% of the entire population of Korea was utterly illiterate. Even in 1930, those who could read both Japanese and Korean only amounted to 6.78% (women: 1.9%) of the total population. Because public education and literate life were conducted in Japanese, the problem of illiteracy was a dual contradiction. For a refined cultural life, knowledge, and upward social mobility, proficiency in Japanese was indispensable and hence related to the issue of one’s admission to the colonial system and of the discrimination between intellectuals and ignoramuses. Indeed, the high rate of illiteracy and the “bilingual” situation are some of the factors that shaped reading and cultural life in Korea under the Japanese colonial rule.

What coexisted with such a high rate of illiteracy were orally transmitted culture and communal reading. In other words, a premodern, orally transmitted culture of communal reading (reading by turns) and vocal reading was still widespread in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Of course, it would be incorrect to view communal reading and vocal reading automatically as the forms of reading employed in premodern societies. Nonetheless, the transition from “orally transmitted culture” to “literate culture” and from “vocal and collective reading” to “silent and individual reading” admittedly is a

11 O Seong-chool, *op cit.*, Chapter 3

tendency observed in the transition from premodern to modern society.\textsuperscript{13} In premodern Korea, there existed a class of individuals who, despite their illiteracy, “read” and enjoyed prose fiction through the existing culture of oral transmission and narration. The main objects of such enjoyment were classical novels, some “new novels,” and “dime novels” or cheap classical novels printed with old movable types for the populace.

There are several factors that deserve attention here. First, orally transmitted culture and its media were not significant solely as the vestiges of the preceding age, nor were oral narration and communal reading cultural forms exclusively for the illiterate. This is because they continued to exert a pervasive influence over almost all recipients of contemporary culture. Consequently, such oral, communal, and “premodern” acts were but some of the general methods of communication and, as such, continued to change and to be reproduced in the 1920’s and 1930’s. Newspaper reading rooms, reading clubs, and large-scale historical romance recitals\textsuperscript{14} therefore held significance as unprecedented acts and forms of orally

\textsuperscript{13} According to the following work, the shift from “vocal reading” to “silent reading” took place in the early Meiji period in Japan and in the 17th and 18th centuries in the United Kingdom. Maeda At, “From Vocal Reading to Silent Reading: The Formation of Modern Reading [Onkoku-kara Mokudoku-e Kindai Dokusha-no Seimitsu],” \textit{The Formation of the Modern Reader [Kindai Dokusha-no Seimitsu]} (Tokyo Chikuma Shobo, 1989), Walter J. Ong, \textit{Gensil Munhwa-ara Manya Munhwa—Longo-real Darunmun Geul [Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word]}, translated by Yi Gi-u and Im Myeong-ju (Seoul Munye Chulpan-sa, 1995), and Alberto Manguel, \textit{Dokse-ui Yeoksa [A History of Reading]}, translated by Jeong Myeong-ju (Seoul Sejong Seojeok, 2000).

\textsuperscript{14} “Spring Historical Romance Recital [Sinchun Yadam Daehoe],” \textit{Dong-A Ilbo} (January 31, 1928).
transmitted culture, and completely new media such as the silent film, radio, and phonograph likewise were used in and for the orally transmitted culture. As a result, not only pansori but also narratives such as comic tales and movie plots came to be recorded on phonograph albums. In addition, actors replaced professional storytellers in the street to recite novels on the radio. Accordingly, the works thus read over the air were not classical novels such as the Tale of Chun-hyang and the Color of the Autumn Moon but works by the likes of Yi Tae-jun and Kim Mal-bong, who were classified as writers of New Literature. Moreover, authors of prose fiction including Bang Jeong-hwan and Yun Baeng-nam were extremely talented oral narrators as well.  

Second, the most important media of the orally transmitted culture were the numerous classical novels and “new novels.” To writers and readers who had received “new education,” these works were objects of contempt and had to be discarded for the purpose of constructing New Literature. On the other hand, the sense of fictivity and narrative convention instilled in the majority of the populace by classical novels and some of the “new novels” were important. In addition, the writers who had been adolescents in the 1910’s themselves had developed and enlarged their literary talents and experiences through not only foreign novels but also such “lowly” and popular works.^{16} Reminiscence of the novelist Han Seor-ya, who was born in the 1900’s and attended Gyeongseong High School in

15 “Interview Outstanding Actors Mun Ye-bong and Sun Yeong [Daedam, Myeong-u Mun Ye-bong-gwa Sun Yeong],” *Samcholli* (August 1938)

Seoul from 1915 to 1917, in the passage below conveys a very typical scene of oral narration observed near Chonggye-cheon, as well as his impressions.

Sitting there [the streets along Ch’ŏnggye-ch’ŏn in Seoul] in front of a gas lamp was a shabbily dressed man, who was reading from an open book at the top of his voice. Other such books were scattered about before the man and below the gas lamp. Printed on the cover, which also bore a clumsy drawing in garish and ill colors, were the words “New Novel” and, under them, the title of the work in larger letters. This man had come out to sell the novel and therefore recited “new novels” each night at the top of his voice. Always surrounding him was a group of shabbily dressed people.

Those in the crowd that I could discern at a glance were backalley people such as rickshaw pullers and maidservants. Also visible were the occasional faces of young women. As the man in the center raised his voice in excitement for the crowd, the people held their breath in order to listen more carefully.

It was no wonder, for, after paying attention, I realized that these “new novels” read by the man recounted numerous sorrows similar to those of the listeners. It was as though they knew that a tragedy greater than depicted in the novel would assaul them in the future. Finally, a wife began to sob. . . From that day on, I sought out this scene under the bridge every day. Starting out from the bridge near East Gate and moving toward the bridge near Jongno, the hawkers of “new novels” nightly recited novels.

Emptying their pockets to the last coin, destitute people bought those novels. Although mostly domestic tragedies, those novels had already moved beyond the hearth and were now great social problems.17 (emphasis added)
The elements of orally transmitted culture within the overall culture, however, were being ousted by the increasingly universal printing culture. What had a decisive impact on this situation and brought about cultural changes was the hitherto expanded and internalized "writing." Unlike speaking, writing is a "completely artificial technique" instead of a mere supplement or an addition to the former and opens up an entirely new sensory world. In other words, it transfers speaking from the world of oral transmission and auditory sense to one of visual sense and changes the acts of speaking and of thinking, thereby "restructuring" both.18

The expansion of school education and modern institutions turned writing into a major skill in the new culture that had to be taught and learned. In other words, the advent of a situation where everyone could read signified at the same time the arrival of a situation where everyone could write. Indeed, from the beginning of the colonial era, composition was an important item in teaching Korean and Japanese. In addition, lists of and advertisements for new books dating from the 1910's and 1920's reveal that books on writing (or restructured speaking) were produced and purchased *ad infinitum.*

These books can be divided into two large categories: ① Those on practical writing (speaking) and ② non- or semi-practical books addressing readers' desire for an elegant prose style. ① included


collections of epistles, various forms, discussions, and speeches. Because of the need to adjust to codified modern institutions, such books were becoming indispensable. Of course, Korea had had indigenous administrative and economic forms. However, all of them had to be learned and used anew. Published in the December 1936 issue of Samcholli, the advertisement for the Encyclopedia of Composition reads, "The evaluation of a man’s character and talents starts from just one sentence [written by him]. Once you read this book, you will be able to write any kind of sentence with ease." That for the Encyclopedia of Epistle Writing, also included in the same issue, says, "Skillfulness at writing letters will advance your worldly success more quickly. . . . Whether in social relations or business, skillfulness at writing letters will win you the respect of everyone and allow you to conduct yourself successfully." In other words, writing was a measure of one’s character and talents and, at the same time, a means of worldly survival.

Were published mainly in the form of educational anthologies bearing titles such as "Composition Reader" and "Literature Reader." Included here were epistle collections such as the Flame of Love (1923), which was a phenomenal best seller in 1923-25. The advertisement for the Anthology of New Literature, which was published in 1932 for "300,000 middle school students," reads thus: "The Anthology of New Literature—A must for any modern youth." "In selecting works for this volume, we established as our standard the intensity of tone, majesty of thought, and elegance of composition." In other words,

20 Samcholli (March and April 1932)
writing was not only a measure of one’s character and talents but also a requisite to “modern youth.” Indeed, in these books, modern writing is related to new codes such as self-consciousness and the desire to express it, romantic love, literature, and the arts. What then did it mean, in a situation where everyone could and had to write something, to become a professional man of letters? This is related especially to (2) because, to contemporary youths and students, not solely writing per se but also an “elegant” and “fine” prose style was of primary importance. It was in the first half of the 1920’s that literature came to be equated, at times, with sentimental and elegant phrasing.

However, such romanticism and sentimentalism of Korean literature of the 1920’s concerned not merely world view but also the way in which writing was viewed and done. Contemporary youths and students, who for the first time had to express themselves through serious writing, were seized with an urge for “elegant” writing and literature. Regarding these circumstances and traits of the new culture, which may be called the confounding of literature for life,


22. Examples of the emphasis placed on an “elegant” style include the following: Nakamura Soyama, Elegant Japanese Epistles [Bibun Nihon Shokambun] (Tokyo Ganshō-do) (advertisement in the February 19, 1923 issue of the Dong-A Ilbo), Hwang Ui-don and Sun Hyeong-cheol, Epistles for Students In a New and Elegant Style [Sinche Minmun Haksueng Seohan] (Seoul Hongmun-gak) (advertisement in the April 1927 issue of Dongguwang [Eastern Light]), and Yu Chun-jeong, Collection of the Latest Literary Epistles and Exemplary and Poetic Writings [Mokseom Sirjeok Minmun Choeseon Munhak Seogang], (Seoul Gyeongseong-gak Seogyom) (advertisement in the November 1935 issue of Samchollī)
Bang In-geun, the publisher of *Joseon Mundan*, made an apt comment “Indeed, this is an age full of only maiden works.”

3. Progress in the Diversification of the Readers of Prose Fiction

1) Classical Novels, New Readers of Prose Fiction, and “Potential” Readers

The image of the readers of prose fiction as portrayed by intellectuals of the 1900’s and 1910’s was mainly that of the masses including “fools, dolts, and thoughtless children” and “ignorant laborers.” Although it persisted among some intellectuals, the idea that the readers of prose fiction consisted of uneducated laborers and peasants differed slightly from reality. Admittedly, the kinds of prose fiction sold in rural communities were mostly classical novels printed using old movable types. Nonetheless, illiteracy and poverty made it difficult for laborers and peasants to be the main readers of fiction. On the other hand, illiterates including laborers and peasants did enjoy prose fiction, if only as “potential readers.”

---

23 Bang In-geun, “Reminiscence of My Thoughts upon the Publication of My Maiden Work [Cheonyeok Balpyo Dansi-ui Gamsang],” *Joseon Mundan* 6 (March 1925)

24. Editorial, *Daehan Mael Sinbo* (July 8, 1908) and “Trends among Novelists [Soseolga-ui Chuse],” *Daehan Mael Sinbo* (December 2, 1909)

It is difficult to determine just how many "attentive" readers existed in agrarian markets and households and what their composition was. Scholarly discussion therefore has focused on the fact that classical novels printed using old movable types and some of the "new novels" were the materials primarily consumed by such agrarian readers and that these novels contained elements of oral transmission in their style and narrative forms.27 The readers of classical novels, some of the "new novels," and "newly written classical novels," however, went beyond such illiterates. The readers of classical novels, who had been formed in the 18th and 19th centuries, and their composition were still being maintained and reproduced.28 Consequently, depending on the publication format,
literary genre, and language used, works grouped under the common term "classical novels" could be classified into classical novels privately published for commercial purposes, manuscript novels, heroic novels, family novels, pansori novels, and Sino-Korean novels. Their readership likewise can be broken down further. One of the groups consisted of relatively well educated and wealthy readers in non-urban areas. In this case, the degree of their contact with urban popular culture and "new education" served as a decisive criterion in determining the various readers of prose fiction.

While works such as the Tale of Chun-hyang and the Tale of Zhao Xiong were the indisputable best sellers, "newly written classical novels" influenced by New Literature and transitional works that defined classification were produced and read also. In terms of the language used and publication and distribution formats, the novels enjoyed by these readers included classical novels privately published for commercial purposes, "dime novels" (classical novels printed using old movable types), some of the "new novels," and "newly written classical novels." The distribution channels of such works differed from those of novels circulated in cities, which depended on large bookstores and mail orders. The readers of the latter works included diverse groups who had received a decent level of "new education." Sold several ten million copies annually, classical novels printed using old movable types were not consumed solely by agrarian readers.\(^9\)

\(^9\) "purchases." In addition, these readers preferred "record [-rok or -nok]" novels to "tale [-jeon]" novels because they assessed a work by its elegance of style and ethical theme.

\(^{29}\) According to the Government-General of Korea, "The Status of the Distribution of Publications within the Jurisdiction of the Pyeongyang Police Bureau (As of the End of
For writers in the 1920's, the fact that most readers sought after classical novels and, at best, popular newspaper novels instead of full-fledged works of New Literature was the greatest and anachronistic limitation to creation. The act of listening to or reading printed classical novels and newspapers, however, did not belong to the old culture but was one of enjoying new cultural objects through new media. As with the act of seeing plays and cinema and of listening to the radio, that of reading books and newspaper novels, the emergence of their readers, and the acceptance of reading as an everyday act were new phenomena that had not existed in Korea prior to the 20th century. Consequently, classical novels such as the Tale of Ch'ón-hyang, which, after the 1910's, were consumed in far greater volumes than during the era of classical novels privately published for commercial purposes and which were remade into other cultural genres did not merely signal the cultural lag of the populace. Rather, this period saw the full-fledged emergence of the

combination of international and state-of-the-art technology and traditional and unique cultural contents. In other words, the new characteristics of contemporary culture are evident from symbols such as Korean folk songs and semi-art songs recorded on American-label albums, Confucian texts such as the Lesser Learning and genealogical tables printed using new typographical technology, p'ansori broadcast on the radio, and the Tale of Ch'Un-hyang made into talkie film versions.

2) The Readers of Prose Fiction as the Consumers of Urban Popular Culture

The group of people who constituted the bulk of the readers of prose fiction in the 1920's and 1930's were students and middle-class women living in cities. While they occupied the top level of cultivation and cultural consumption vis-à-vis the entire population of Korea, these particular readers formed a separate "popular" category in terms of taste and behavior patterns. In other words, what determined the consumers of popular culture was not their social class but their system of behavior and cultural enjoyment. As for students, they had received enough education to read Japanese with more or less ease and evenly realized the complex significance of the reception of contemporary prose fiction. Women readers, on the other hand, were not as numerous. Nevertheless, they demand attention because of the uniqueness and enthusiasm of their reception and the

30 More specifically, they included (male) students in middle schools and higher educational institutions and women attending girls' high schools or having similar educational backgrounds.
degree to which they were affected by particular authors.

Students and middle-class women mainly read novels by Yi Gwang-su, popular novels by writers such as No Ja-yeong and Yun Baeng-nam, Korean adaptations of foreign prose fiction, popular newspaper novels, popular Japanese novels, historical romances, some of the historical novels, and "classics" from Japan and the West. The following works were cited in a survey taken in 1931 by the Dong-A Ilbo regarding the reading habits of 44 female high school students (January 26, 1931), 111 male high school students (February 2 of the same year), and 95 pressmen (March 9 of the same year) in Seoul. Russian novels including Resurrection, Fathers and Sons, and Crime and Punishment, famous Japanese novels such as The Pearl Beauty, I Am a Cat, and Tsurumi Yusuke's The Mother, and an overwhelming number of Western "classics" such as A Doll's House, Hamlet, Les Misérables, and All Quiet on the Western Front. The Korean works mentioned in this survey consisted mostly of those by Yi Gwang-su: The Heartless, Regeneration, and Sambong's House.

As with the existence of "new women" and "modern girls," the act of reading itself is depicted as a problematic one in Korean novels of the 1920's that deal with women. This was because the peculiarity of feminine reading was seen by male writers as a case of strong "reading hallucination." Indeed, save for their self-adornment and physical appearance, reading very well may have been the most

noticeable characteristic of "new women" because contemporary women were in a far more contradictory situation than were men in terms of (the lack of) education. In general, illiteracy rate was much higher among women than among men so that differences in educational levels were tied to serious contradictions among women themselves. Second, the Korean script continued to be seen as "women's script" instead of a tool of civilization, as were Chinese characters and the Japanese script. In fact, the "Editorial Announcement" in the first issue of Geunu, the official bulletin of the Society of the Friends of the Land of the Rose of Sharon, stresses that the editorial board "intended to edit [the bulletin] entirely in the Korean script so as to allow all members to read it through but, due to daily business, were not able to match the level of the articles to the original plan during the editorial process."\[^{32}\] In addition, Girls' High School Korean and Classical Chinese Reader (1924), a textbook edited by the Japanese colonial authorities separately for female students, used the Korean script far more than did its counterpart for male students, which consisted mostly of classical Chinese. The existence and influence of women and students seem to have considerably affected not only the romantic and sentimental tendency of Korean novelists in the first half of the 1920's\[^{33}\] but also the tendency of newspaper novels in the 1930's.

In terms of this category of readers, what promoted the diversification of the readers of prose fiction from the mid-1920's onward was the expansion of education and urban popular culture.

\[^{32}\] Geunu [Friends of the Land of the Rose of Sharon] (May 1929) 13

\[^{33}\] Kim Gi-rim, "Comical Newspaper Novel The 'Olympic' Age [Mandam Sunmun Soseol—'Ollimpik Sidael]," Sanchooli (February 1933)
This in turn diversified the quality and quantity of cultural capital possessed by social members and their tastes. The greatest characteristic of modern reading probably lies in its "functionality." In the past, books in themselves had been treasure houses of knowledge and ideas possessing supreme value. Now, they were a medium and, at the same time, a type of tools (manuals). The act of reading for various functional purposes reflects the capitalist division of labor and the dichotomies created by modernity (work/rest, mental work/manual work, and expertise/dilettantism). In other words, while objects of autotelic artistic enjoyment and taste for them are created, commercial products limited in their function to entertainment and titillation also emerge. Indeed, from the mid-1920's onward, a large number of "leisurely reading materials" began to emerge. It was in 1925 that dailies such as the Dong-A Ilbo and the Chosun Ilbo increased their pages and allotted separate pages to cinema, sports, and women. In addition, this period saw the consumption en masse of pornographic products such as collections of erotic paintings ordered from Japan through mail.34 Byeolgeongon [Another World], which espoused "pastime" as its motto, unlike Gaebyeok [The Creation], a representative intellectual monthly, was founded in 1926. The following year saw the publication of A History of the Historical Romances of Korea, which claimed the historical romance as "newly

34 The kinds of books that were advertised the most in newspapers from 1923 to 1928 were Illustrated Study Compendium of Male and Female Reproductive Organs [Zukan Kenkyu—Danjo Seishokuuka Zensho], Collection of Nude Female Photographs: The Drenched Crow of Love [Rana Byun Shashin Gasha—Ko-no Nure-karasu], Beauty of Women's Naked Bodies [Onna-no Rataiku], A New Study of Male and Female Sexual Desire and Intercourse [Danjo Seyoku Oyobi Seko-no Sinkenkyo], and Illustrated Guide to the Sex Lives of Maidens and Wives [Zukan Shijo Oyobi Tsuma-no Seto-se Seikatsu]
founded, popular, and modern entertainment." Such tendencies inevitably influenced to a considerable degree the taste of the populace in approaching print media and prose fiction.

By the 1930's, the consumption of popular culture (cinema, music, sports, etc.) other than reading materials also seems to have determined and affected the significance of the act of reading prose fiction. Pointing out that the readers of newspaper novels were "mostly housewives and students," Kim Dong-in commented that what housewives and students wanted from these novels were "maternal love, domestic conflict, tears, laughter, and an eventually happy ending" and "romantic affairs, adventure, horror, action, conflict due to triangular or quadrangular love relationships, fear, and insoluble mystery," respectively. Indeed, the reception codes of newspaper novels pointed out by Kim were shared by contemporary popular culture. Urban readers of newspaper novels also formed the primary audience of various "hobby" magazines imported from Japan, plays, and cinema. That is, the elements of domestic tragedy, romantic affairs, adventure, and mystery were the most popular and universal codes of formalized or generic popular novels and, at the same time, the production and reception codes of "New Style" drama and cinema, which both competed against and complemented prose fiction. The cultural praxis of reading, which, as the source of modern cultivation and entertainment had enjoyed uncontested status,


36 Kim Dong-in, "How Are Newspaper Novels to Be Written? [Sinmun Soseor-eun eotteoke Sseoya Hana]" Chosun Ilbo (May 14, 1933).
came to be merely one possible form of enjoying popular culture from the mid-1930's onwards. In other words, the status of "literature" had to be readjusted.  

3) The Cause of the Emergence and Diversification of "Highbrow" Readers

There are two causes of the formation of the taste for and readers of the most exclusive and "highbrow" type of prose fiction. The first lay in the strength of the literary field itself, which acquired "autonomy" and gradually constructed an institutional order of its own. Indeed, up to the 1920's, "so-called highbrow works with a comparatively belles-lettres tone" had been "incapable of moving beyond the scope of being enjoyed and appreciated by those with similar tastes." From the mid-1920's onwards, however, New Literature considerably expanded its influence over intellectuals and youths. The simultaneous success of the Korean Proletariat Artists' Federation (KAPF) and Joseon Mundan is symbolic of this process.

---

37 Regarding this issue, see Yi Gwang-su, "Reminiscence of Joseon Mundan of Yore [JeonJoseon Mundan Chueokdam]," Joseon Mundan (August 1935)

38 Yeom Sang-seop, "Prose Fiction and the Masses [Soseol-gwa Minyung] (2)," Dong-A Ilbo (May 29, 1928)

39 According to Yi Gwang-su, "Literary Chat Chat [Munye Swaedam]," Dong-A Ilbo (November 2-December 5, 1925), what revealed the most surprising differences between contemporary Korean society and what it had been 20 years before "[could] very well include a variety of items such as suits, beer, and romantic affairs but, above all, [were] school education, literature, and socialism" and, "moreover, literature [had] become a fearful force that dominate[d] the minds of tens of thousands of youths in Korea today." In this respect, the editorial principle of Joseon Mundan is worth noting because the journal clearly meant to serve as an arena for the education and training
It was a process through which "literary circles" as an arena of literary creation, criticism, and appreciation was completed and the ideology, institutions, and "reserve manpower" needed to form and maintain that arena were prepared and supplied. This in turn was accompanied by changes in the internal form of prose fiction that could meet the now autonomous order. Consequently, prose fiction gradually acquired strict generic conditions as a form of artwork. Accordingly, readers were demanded to read novels as objects of "enjoyment" and "appreciation" and in terms of their sublime ideas, composition, and style instead of "entertaining story lines." 40 "Highbrow" readers were thus born.

The second cause was the strength of literary education out of and without schools. In schools of primary level and above, not only was the education of the Korean language deficient in itself but public education performed a negligible role in relation to literature in general. Following the takeover of public education by the Government-General of Korea, it was only in the Newly Edited High School Korean and Classical Chinese Reader that literary works were used in the public or official education of the Korean language for the first time. "Literature" had yet to become an independent subject in middle school education and High School Korean and Classical

---

40 This is clear from the discourse used in contemporary advertisements. While advertisements for popular novels generally emphasized the "entertaining" aspect through an introduction of the plots and the heroes' tragic fates in an exclamatory tone, those for collections of works by writers of the New Literature camp stressed formal perfection and themes.
Chinese Reader (1911; revised in 1924), the official Korean language textbook, included far more passages from classical Chinese texts such as the Lesser Learning, Analects, and Mencius. It is likely that middle schools utterly failed to satisfy the students' demand for new types of writing and literature.

Such deficiency was being amended elsewhere. First, as has been stated above, the 1910's and 1920's saw a veritable explosion of manuals for "new" or "modern" composition and "readers" in anthology formats. Second, foreign literary works including those from Japan, and Japanese-style education was closely related to the new literary education. Utterly unlike textbooks for the instruction of Korean and classical Chinese, the Newly Edited High School Japanese Reader (1924), a Japanese textbook, included numerous passages from modern Japanese works such as Natsume Sòseki's I Am a Cat. Consequently, more professional or "high-level" literary cultivation had to be formed by Western and Japanese literatures. Through these works, literature was being taught in the highest educational process, above the community college level.

This signifies the possibility of the formation of a considerable gap between general and "highbrow" readers of prose fiction in terms of consciousness and taste. In addition, it demands attention to the nature of the cultural and social role played by Korean-language

---

41 Pak Bung-bae, Complete History of Korean-Language Education in Korea [Han-guk Gigeo Gyoyuk Jeonsa], vol. 1 (Seoul: Daehan Printing & Publishing Co., Ltd [Daehan Gyogwaseo Jusik Hoesa], 1987) 363

42 Between Choe Nam-seon's Poetry Reader [Sunmun Dokbon] (1911) and Yi Tae-jun's Lectures on Composition [Munjang Ganghwa] (1939), countless "readers" and "lectures" produced the ideology of modern "writing" and technical norms in Korean letters.
works of New Literature. That is, classical novels, works of the New Literature camp, and modern prose fiction imported from the West each played different roles and, at the same time, all contributed to the formation of the taste of both writers and "highbrow" readers. In terms of Korean writers who made their literary debut from the mid-1920's onward, they were influenced by classical novels until their boyhood (early teens) and by modern Korean novels such as Yi Kwang-su's works in their adolescence (middle and high schools). What "highbrow" readers read for cultivation and literary training once they had learned to appreciate belles-lettres literature, however, were foreign novels only. In particular, Russian novels were read widely and from an early age. Although the situation was to change slightly in the next decade, in the 1920's, many intellectuals thought that they had to read all "classics" and literary theories in Japanese translations precisely because there was no Korean-language work worth reading, in both quality and quantity.

43 "O Youth Writers Look Back on Their Twenties [Oo, Ipa! Cheongchun—Munun-ui Isip Sudae Hoesang]," Samcholti (March 1933) and "Writers' Brief Autobiographies," Samcholti (January 1937).

44 In the early 1920's, Yi Gwang-su recommended the following works to youths who "aimed at literature as their vocation." Caleb Thomas Winchester's Some Principles of Literary Criticism [Bungaku Hihyōron], Natsume Sōseki's Theory of Literature [Bungakuron], Honma Hisao's An Introduction to Literature [Bungaku Garon], Tsubouchi Shōyō's A History of English Literature [Eibungakushin]," and Igarashi Chikara's A History of Japanese Literature [Nihon Bungakushin]. According to his remembrance, Yu Chun-o, as a freshman in the Preparatory Course of Kyōngsŏng Imperial University [predecessor of the present Seoul National University], read nearly all modern Western literary works. It was "Ikeda Hachi's Sixteen Lectures on Modern Thought [Kindai Shiso Jiroku-ko] and Kuniyagawa Eiji's Ten Lectures on Modern Literature [Kindai Bungaku Jako] that had served [him] as a guidepost." See Yi Kwang-su, "To Those Who Aim at Literature as
While individual "professional" readers already possessed unique and differentiated sensibilities by the early 1920's, the succeeding era saw more sophisticated socialization of such diversification of sensibility instead of a situation where the literary experience of both writers and readers had involved only "maiden works." As a result, from the 1930's and onwards, several writers including Yi Gwang-su came to be respected as "literary giants" or "leading writers," collections of modern Korean "classics" were published on the basis of works that had accumulated over the past 20 years, and literary lectures organized by the Nine Writers' Society captured public attention.

4. Progress in the Popularization of Prose Fiction and Changes in the Social Significance of the Act of Reading Fiction in the 1930's

1) The Discussion on the Popularization of Prose Fiction and the Awareness of Readers as the "Populace"

It was in the latter half of the 1920's that changes in the composition and tastes of readers began to be considered as important conditions of literary creation. In turn, the expansion of and changes in the readers of prose fiction are closely related to two debates among writers on the issue of the popularization of fiction. The first discussion, which involved the theory of the popularization

Their Vocation [Munhag-e Teus-eul Duneun Ieje]," Gaebyeok [The Creation] 21 (March 1922) and Yi Chung-u, Gyeongseong Imperial University [Gyeongseong Jeguk Daehak] (Seoul Dagokwon, 1987) 89
of prose fiction, took place from the late 1920's to the early 1930's. The second, which took place from the early to the mid-1930's, was related to the problem of newspaper novels and popular novels. Raised by the writers and literary critics of the KAPF in an effort to organize the populace, the theory of the popularization of prose fiction is significant in terms of the interaction between the production and reception of fiction. Through this discussion, readers came to be understood not as "ignorant fools and dolts" in an elitist and intuitive manner but as entities in a concrete state and as the members of an undeniable social group.

This is especially clear from Kim Gi-jin's analysis, which, despite its continued dependence on intuition, problematizes not only the motive and tendency of readers' consumption and reception of prose fiction but also the style, content, price, physical appearance, and ornamentation of novels. According to Kim, "they [laborers and peasants] buy this book because ① its colorfully illustrated cover stimulates their curiosity and interest as consumers, ② it is printed in letters large enough to be read without discomfort even under a kerosene lamp and in a prone position, thus leaving a favorable impression, ③ its price is reasonable enough even for them to buy a volume or two at once, which again arouses their interest as consumers, ④ its style is plain enough to facilitate recitation yet "elegant" enough to invite repeated reading; ⑤ its accounts of the tragic fates of young wits and beauties, successful attainment of wealth and fame, adventures of amorous men and women move these potential readers to tears, allow them to forget reality, and provide them with erotic titillation." Consequently, the recipients of prose fiction "cannot possibly discard books even if they wish to"
and "do not merely buy and read books by themselves but even invite neighbors and recite their favorite passages at the top of their voice and in an emotional manner." As intellectuals saw it, the "most troublesome problem" involving the populace, whom they saw as the object of organization, was precisely the ideological effect of prose fiction, linked to (3) above. In other words, "as a result of the psychological effect of such storybooks, which ha[d] accumulated over the past century or two, the social institutions and atmosphere of a bygone era continue[d] to haunt the imaginative world of the populace."^45

Newspaper novels and popular novels, the topic of the second debate, were related to the expansion of urban popular culture. In general, writers presuppose that their readers likewise will approach their texts earnestly and seriously. Such expectation, however, is never fulfilled. The expansion of opportunities for education and the subsequent rise in the number of educated people increased the total number of the readers of prose fiction. In addition, as the full-fledged commercialization, increasing influence of journalism, and the expansion of the effect of urban popular culture became established trends, readers' tendency of seeing reading materials as a means of entertainment clearly intensified. With the years 1927-31 as the dividing line, however, classical novels printed using old movable types began to drop in popularity and to be supplanted by newspaper novels and magazines, whose influence speedily increased. Although traditional works such as the Tale of Chun-hyang and the

---

^45 Kim Gi-jin, "A Theory on the Popular Novel [Daejung Soseollon]," Dong-A Ilbo (April 18, 1929)
Tale of Liu Zhong-lie continued to be read much, light "reading materials" printed in magazines such as Shufu-no Tomo and King came to be viewed as the enemy of serious literature.46

As such, the active discussion among writers and critics over a long period of time on popular novels and newspaper novels actually focused on the issue of how the reality of readers, who had witnessed considerable changes in their number and tendency, was to be accepted and accommodated as a condition of literary creation. The diversification of writers' tendency in literary creation took place rapidly irrespective of their stance toward popular novels. While an "Olympian age of newspaper novels" was beginning, subgeneric narratives such as essays, comic tales, radio novels, and cinema novels emerged in masse. On the contrary, this age also saw the development of a sphere where writers, now placed in a context different from that of the 1920's, could entirely disregard readers or be mindful only of an extremely limited range of readers. Works whose motif was the writer's alienation from popular readers itself, modernist works that openly espoused elitism, and Kunstlerroman emerged, too. Nevertheless, writers of the mid-1930's basically retained the view that they must "enlighten and move" the readers.47


47 "A Writer's Letter to 100,000 Fans [Surman Aedolga-egh Bonaeneum Jakga-ui Pyeonyi]," Samcholh (November 1935)
2) The Popularization of Prose Fiction and the Changes in Popular Culture in the Latter Half of the 1930's

Two indices of the changes in Korean culture in the 1930's are the popularization of prose fiction and the expansion of the influence of the cinema. The popularization of prose fiction in 1937-38 signalled a wholesale increase in the influence wielded by the readers of popular novels, Korean adaptations of foreign prose fiction, popular newspaper novels, popular Japanese novels, comic tales, and some of the historical novels and the popularization of the entire corpus of literary works regardless of their genres. Unlike the problem of popularization in the preceding period, this phenomenon had been brought about by writers' passive response to the rapid growth of the populace and the expansion of cultural capital Contemporary literary critics such as Im Hwa and Yi Won-jo understood it in terms of the relationship between newspaper capital and prose fiction. That is, the pursuit of profit by commercial newspapers, which by then had entirely discarded any pretension to the enlightenment of the populace, now combined with the yet underdeveloped genres of Korean prose fiction. This period also saw considerable changes in the stance of the writers of New Literature toward classical novels. When Kim Gi-jin earlier had advanced the slogan "Novels on a par with the Tale of Chun-hyang" in espousing the theory of the popularization of prose fiction, he had been bombarded with criticism and derision charging him with right-wing opportunism. However, in 1938, Jang Hyeok-ju, the new writer who had made his literary debut

48 Im Hwa, "A Theory on the Popular Novel [Tongsok Soseollon]," The Logic of Literature [Munhag-i Nolh] (Seoul: Hagye-sa, 1940) 394-95
through the Japanese magazine Kaizō and even published short story collections through the same publisher, to public acclaim, reworked the Tale of Chun-hyang. Moreover, members of the Nine Writers’ Society such as Yi Tae-jun and Pak Tae-won too were trying their hand at the creation of popular historical novels and the translation of classical novels. Of course, this phenomenon was related to selective circumstance of the entire literary circles and the sudden emergence of the theory of the revival of classics.

“Why is that girl so hooked on movies?” / She says spitefully / “It’s none of your business! Girl, who on earth reads musty old novels day and night the way you do?” / “Ha! It’s cultivated to read novels as a hobby, you know!” / “But they’re a bit lowbrow!” / Gyebong struck back, stroking her freckles / “Why, girl, is reading novels lowbrow?” / “Reading novels is lowbrow? Look, it’s a misunderstanding!” / “Then what is lowbrow?” / “The novels you read …” / “Just how are the novels I read lowbrow?” / “Kikuchi Hiroshi’s novels are lowbrow, aren’t they? Aren’t ***’s lowbrow? Do they count as ‘art’, too?” / “‘Art? What doggone ‘art’? Novels are just novels” / “Hahahaha, you’re right. You’re right. But it’s still surprising that you won’t read the Color of the Autumn Moon or the Tale of Liu Zhong-lie” / Poking Okom with her hands and mimicking the voice of an older man, Gyebong [then said.] / “Hmmm. Even if it’s to cultivate your modern sense, a girl will grow the letter ‘D’ on the back of her head if she goes to the movies too often. Do you understand? I mean ‘Delinquent girl’.”

The above passage is an excerpt from the novel Turbulent Stream.

49 Chae Man-suk, Turbulent Streams (Seoul Munhak Sasang-sa, 1986) 460
which Chae Man-sik serialized in the Chosun Ilbo from October 1937 to May 1938. This conversation between Gyebong and her fellow department store clerks is revealing in many ways. At the time, female department store clerks generally were women who had received high school education or its equivalent and therefore cultivated above the average level. Gyebong, the heroine’s younger sister, had wished to go on to a medical or pharmacological college after graduation from high school but had become a “shop-girl” in order to be economically and socially independent. According to the passage above, modernized working women in the latter half of the 1930’s possessed a sensibility that made possible the following series of equations in terms of taste: “the hobby of reading prose fiction = an outdated hobby, worthwhile cultivation, or a not-too-lowbrow hobby / (the act of reading) Kikuchi Hiroshi’s novels = lowbrow or unartistic novels or a barely passable hobby / The Color of the Autumn Moon, the Tale of Liu Zhong-he = the lowest act of reading prose fiction / cinema viewing = a modern hobby, the enjoyment and appreciation of modern sensibility, or an act that can turn one into a ‘delinquent girl’ if overindulged”.

The excerpt above shows in a condensed form the process of popular substitution in the enjoyment of popular culture, which took place in the 1920’s and 1930’s. That the cinema would eventually dominate popular culture had already been foreseen in the 1920’s.50

50 “The Story of the Motion Picture [Hwaidong Sajin iyagi],” printed in the December 1926 issue of Byeoleageongun, thus comments “The world has become so full of motion pictures that even the Government-General of Korea makes films flaunting its good rule over Korea. This is because they too have realized that a form of entertainment derided in the past as mere ‘play’ actually wields more control over the
In the following decade, however, "in merely 10 years, the cinema [was] completely popularized so that nearly all youths [were] turn[ing] into 'cinema boys' and 'cinema girls'."^51 In particular, the consumption of cinema, thus popularized in the 1930's, provides the most powerful index of the interrelation between modernity and the patterns of consuming popular culture. In other words, the "consumption of film is far more related to socioeconomic and cultural modernity than are literate media such as newspapers" and has the greatest explicability "in discerning the regional differences in cultural consumption vis-à-vis socioeconomic and cultural (especially Christianity and Japanese proficiency) indices as compared to other media."^52

The act of seeing movies, however, failed to supplant the act of reading prose fiction entirely. This was because reading had been firmly established as the most powerful act of cultivation and means of education and, from among all reading materials except comics, prose fiction was the most easily approachable. On the other hand, the act of seeing movies, despite popular enthusiasm, could not but remain within the sphere of mere "entertainment" for a long time and was acknowledged and admitted to the establishment as a significant form of "cultivation" only much later.

What can be read from such a process of cultural shift are changes in the omnipresent structure of cognition or "knowledge." Lying behind the expansion of individualized reading and the act of


^52 Yu Soon-yeong, op cit, 264
reading prose fiction was the construction of orality, individualization of knowledge; and behind the process of the emergence and ascendancy of cinema lay the shock of pictorial representation and the power of visualized knowledge that could supplant the role and function of writing.

5. Conclusion

Foregoing discussion has examined the process through which the readers of prose fiction were formed and changed in the 1920’s and 1930’s. To the intellectuals of the 1900’s and 1910’s, fiction was a new and popular cultural medium and a means of spreading the ideology of enlightenment. From the latter half of the 1910’s and onward, the act of reading prose fiction began to be seen as a way of enjoying and appreciating certain genres of modern art. Through this process, intellectuals who had received “new education” newly came to join the ranks of fiction readers. By the 1920’s, however, the act of reading prose fiction was firmly established as one form of enjoying popular culture. This was also a process accompanied by the internal diversification of the readers of fiction. Peasants and laborers, who possessed a low level of cultural capital, read and appreciated classical novels and some of the “new novels” in the traditional way. At the same time, there existed a widespread group of urban readers of prose fiction who mostly read popular novels such as newspaper novels, Korean adaptations of foreign prose fiction, and popular Japanese novels. In addition, readers with systematic literary education and reading experiences came into being. The differentiated formation of general readership seems to have been completed.
through such a process

The expansion and reorganization of both the entire reading population and the readers of prose fiction are deeply related. As the most popular form of reading, the act of reading fiction is significant as a barometer of the consciousness and the ideological and educational states of the populace. This paper has focused primarily on changes in the reading culture and the process through which popular culture expanded.

GLOSSARY

_A History of the Historical Romances of Korea [Joseon Yadamja]_
_Anthology of New Literature [Sunmunhak Seongup]_
_aristocracy, aristocrats [Yanghui]_
_Bang Jeong-hwan_
_Bang In-geun_
_belles-lettres, polite literature [sunmunhak; sunsu munhak]_

belletristic novels [sunsu soseol]
_Byeolgeongon [Another World]_
_Chae Man-sik_
_Cheonggye-cheon_
_Chosun Ilbo_

“cinema boy” [Korean. yeonghwa cheongnyeon, Japanese. ega semen]
“cinema girl” [Korean. yeonghwa sonyeo, Japanese. ega shoyo]
cinema novels [yeonghwa soseol]
class literature [gyegeup munhak]
classical (Korean) novels [gososeol; gojeon soseol]
classical (Korean) novels based on pansori plots [pansong-gye soseol]

『朝鮮 散文史』
『論語』
『新文學 進集』
方定煥
方仁根
純文學
[純粹文學]
純粹 小説
別乾坤
蔡勳植
清溪川
『朝鮮 日報』
映畫 青年
映畫 少女
映畫 小説
階級 文學
古小說，古典
小說
판소리系 小説
classical (Korean) novels printed using old movable types, "dumee novels"
[gaehakjabun gososeol, itakibon, yuljeon saseol]

classical (Korean) novels privately published for commercial purposes
[banggakbon saseol, banggabon saseol]

Color of the Autumn Moon [Chuwolsuk]
(traditional) comic tales [Korean mandam, Japanese mandan]
communal reading, reading by turns [gongdongsjeok dokseo, yundok]

Confucian literati [Korean sadaebu, Chinese shilu, Japanese shinafu]
domestic novels [gjeong saseol]
Dong-A Ilbo
East Gate [Dongdaemun, Heung-ni-man]

Encyclopedia of Composition [Bunsho Hyakka Dainiten]

Encyclopedia of Epistle Writing [Tegami Hyakka Jiten]
"ero[nc]"

erotic paintings [Chinese chunhu(-tu), Korean chunhwa(-do),
Japanese shunga(-zu)]
(personal) essays [mannun]
family novels [gumun saseol]
Flame of Love [Japanese Ai-no Kaen, Korean Saram-ui Bulgot]
folk songs [mogyo]
Gaebuyeok [The Creation]
genealogical table [yokbo]
Gemu [Friends of the Land of the Rose of Sharon]

Girls' High School Korean and Classical Chinese Reader [Joshu Kōto]
Chosendo Oyobi Kanbun Tokuhon

Government-General (of Korea) [Japanese (Chosen) Sotokufu, Korean (Joseon) Chongdokbu]
"gro[s]esque"

Gye bong(-a)
Gyeongseong High School [Gyeongseong Godeung Botong Hakyo, Gyeongseong Gobo]

Han Seor-ya
heroic novels [yeong-ung seseol]

High School Korean and Classical Chinese Reader [Kotö Chosendo Oyobi Kanbun Tokuhon]
historical novels [yeoksa seseol]
historical romances [yadami]
I Am a Cat [Wagahai wa Neko-de Aru]

Im Hwa
Jang Hyeok-ju
Jongno
Joseon (Dynasty)
Joseon Munidan [Korean Letters]
Kazō [Reconstruction]
Kakuchi Hiroshi
Kim Gi-jun
Kim Mal-bong
Kim Dong-in
King "King"
Korean adaptations of foreign prose fiction [beoman seseol]
Korean Proletariat Artists’ Federation, KAPF [Korea Artista Proleta

「女子 高等
朝鮮語 及 漢文
讀本」

(朝鮮) 總督府
「ユロ’ [Japanese ‘クロ’]
桂鳴(がい)

京城 高等 普通
學校: 京城 高普
韓雪野
英雄 小説

「高等 朝鮮語 及
漢文 読本」
歴史 小説
野談
『吾が輩は猫で
ある』
林和
張鍾宙
鍾路
朝鮮 (王朝)
『朝鮮 史理』
『改造』
菊池寬
金基鎬
金末峰
金東仁

副業 小説
Federatio, Coreene Artiste Proleťaneumae Fédération; Joseon
Peuroleátara Yesulga Dongmaeng, Kaper]

Korean script, "women's script" [ankeul; (sun)eonmun, Hangeul]

Korean translations of foreign prose fiction [beoyeok soseol]
Kunstlerroman [yesulga soseol]
"leisurely reading materials" [ch'wunmu dongmul]
Lesser Learning [Chinese Xiaoxue, Korean Schak; Japanese Shōgaku]
"literary circles" [mundan]
manuscript novels [pilsabon soseol]
Mencius [Chinese Mengzi; Korean Maengja, Japanese Moshi]
"modern boy" [Korean modeon boy; Japanese modan bunka or mobu]

"modern guil" [Korean, modeon geci; Japanese, modan geci or moga]

national reformism [munyok gaeryanggun]
Natsume Sōseki
"new education" [modern education, sin-gyoyuk]

New Literature [modern literature, Sunnumye, Sunmunhak]

"new novels" [modern novels, sunsuseol]

"New Style" drama [Korean Simpa-geuk or Simpa yeon-geuk; Japanese
Shimpageki or Shimpagengeki]
“new women” [modernized women, Korean: sunyeosong, Japanese: shimosei]

Newly Edited High School Japanese Reader [Shuppen Kōtō Kokugo Tokuhon]

Newly Edited High School Korean and Classical Chinese Reader
[Shuppen Kōtō Chōsengo Oyobi Kanbun Tokuhon]

“newly written classical novels” [sinjak gusseseol]


Nine Writers’ Society [Gum-hoe]

No Ja-yeong

non-aristocratic technical professionals [jung-in]
novels, prose fiction [(jungpyeon) sseol]

Okom(-i)

Pak Tae-won

pansŏn

Patriotic Enlightenment (Movement) [Aeguk Gyemong (Undong)]

popular novels [dajeung sseol, tongseok sseol]

professional storytellers [jeon-gisu]


“Editorial Announcement [Pyeongyeup Sago]”

radio novels [radio sseol]

“reading hallucination” [dokseol hwan-gak]

Regeneration [Jaesaeng]

rental libraries [sechakt]

Sambong’s House [Sambong-i-ne Jip]

Samcholt [3,000 Chinese Mules]

semi-art songs [Japgo]
Seoul [Hanyang; Hanseong(bu), Gyeongseong(bu), Japanese Kayosu]

“shop-girl”
short stories [danp’yeon (sosóeol)]
Shufu-no Tomo [Housewives’ Friend]
silent reading [mukdok]
Sino-Korean novels [hanmun sosóeol]

Society of the Friends of the Land of the Rose of Sharon [Gewnu-hoe]

Tale of Zhao Xiang [Jo Ung-yeon]
Tale of Ch’un-hyang [Chun-hyang-yeon]
Tale of Liu Zhong-ke [Yu Chung-yeol-yeon]
The Heartless [Mujeong]
The Mother [Haka]
The Pearl Beauty [Shuyu Fujun]

theory of the popularization of prose fiction [sosóeol daeungmunmun]
theory of the revival of classics [gojeon buheungmun]

“True Art” [Chun-yesul]

Tsurumi Yasuke
Turbad Stream [Tangnyu]

vocal reading [sumdok]
Yi Gwang-su
Yi Tae-jun
Yi Won-jo
Yun Baeng-nam

(Translated by Yoo-suk Kim, Seoul National University)
<Abstract>

The Process of the Formation and Diversification of the Readers of Korean Prose Fiction in the 1920's and 1930's

Cheon Jeong-hwan

Despite the wide acceptance of the proposition that the "reader completes the meaning of a literary work," research on the readers and reception of modern Korean fiction has yet to be conducted. This study explores the social composition and scale of the readers of modern Korean fiction and their historical changes and cultural implications.

With the 1920's and 1930's as the temporal backdrop and with a focus on prose fiction readers, the present dissertation aims at examining the way in which works of fiction were received and how the social significance of readerly reception changed. The primary task of this study therefore lies in elucidating who read what kind of prose fiction and the social and cultural contexts in which such activities took place.

No previous study on the history of modern Korean fiction raised the problem of readership in earnest and attempted to elucidate the basic ways in which works of fiction were read and received, and the significance of such a phenomenon in terms of literary history. The significance of the present dissertation therefore lies in establishing the basis for future research and in discussing some of the fundamental, related issues in literary history.