



The Peculiarities of the Development of Korean Literature in the 1970S–2000S

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Abstract

This article provides an analysis of the various internal and external elements that have played a significant role in shaping the evolution of Korean literature during the final 25 years of the 20th century. Additionally, it explores the complexities surrounding the development of literature during this period. The popular discontent sprang from two primary factors: the post–civil war military government and the subsequent era of anarchy, characterized by a power vacuum, as well as the demise of agriculture due to the quick pace of economic growth. These events failed to make a significant impact on the field of literature. A novel form and genre, as well as distinct language and style, emerged within the realm of poetry and prose. The painters employed their pencils to explore a range of subjects. The literary landscape witnessed the emergence of novel heroic figures, alongside the introduction of hitherto unexplored female archetypes. One individual was conceived with the purpose of becoming a warrior in pursuit of justice, whilst another individual was brought into existence just to champion the cause of intellectual expression. Authors such as Yan Kwi Ja documented the aforementioned societal transformations experienced by individuals of common status.

Keywords: *Industrialization; Korean Literature; Military Rule; Democracy; Poetry; Novel; Story; Literary Works; New Images; Heroic Figures*

Introduction

Commencing in the 1960s, the industrialization process in Korean society experienced a significant reversal during the 1970s. The 1970s are regarded as the “period of progress and development” in Korean history [1]. There were both material and spiritual transformations in the way of life of the people and the nation. Following a phase of civil unrest and disorder, the nation embarked on a fresh phase of progress. However, advancement was not smooth and even. As a result of the industrialization process, labor demand increased. The nation’s economic development policy engendered a multitude of contradictions. The rural economy was experiencing a decline concurrent with the “rapid growth” era that urban areas were experiencing.

Advancements made in the realm of industrialization served as a catalyst for Korea’s ascent to the status of a developed nation. As more individuals relocated to urban areas, their living conditions improved to some degree; they grew accustomed to living and working in major metropolitan centers. However, the country’s economic expansion has only served to exacerbate the disparities among those in

need of social protection. Additionally, the power of economic growth to eradicate societal injustices was negligible.

Park Chung-hee, the President of the Fourth Republic, passed away in October 1979. Following his passing, Choi Gyu-ha initiated efforts to establish the nation on a democratic and just foundation. However, Hanah, the New Military Government headed by Chun Doo Hwan, initiated hostilities against Choi Gyu Ha's government in December of this year. The newly formed government, having initially seized control of the army, initiated efforts to acquire substantial authority. As the nation descended into anarchy, the inhabitants of Gwangju initiated a multitude of protests in favor of Choi Gyu Ha's governance. The number of individuals who attended the demonstration increased daily and dispersed throughout the nation. Nonetheless, these demonstrations were quelled by the newly formed military administration with an unprecedented display of violence. Chun Doo Hwan ascended to authority.

Participants in the Gwangju protest were sanctioned by the newly formed military council. Amidst the arrest of Park Jong Un, a prominent figure within the "Democracy Support Committee" and the "University Culture Association" of Seoul National University, in January 1987, protests reemerged in response to the wrongful prosecution and torture of a student affiliated with this institution. Parents and students from a variety of tertiary institutions participated in the demonstration. Arrests of the demonstration participants commenced, which infuriated the already impatient crowd even more. The populace commenced to advocate for revisions to the Constitution.

The Main Part

The government advocated for amendments to the constitution, and incumbent President Chun Doo-hwan delivered his "Special Presidential Address" to the nation in April 1987:

"Because my tenure as the country's leader is coming to a close, I arrived at a significant conclusion after conducting extensive research on the region's situation. Amendments to the constitution are beyond the scope of my mandate, which is set to expire in February of the following year. It is with great pleasure that I declare the transfer of power to my successor. Prior to the successful Seoul Olympics and the peaceful transfer of power, it is critical to prevent superfluous debates that seek to sow discord and amend the constitution through excessive exertion" [2].

The populace, representatives from every stratum of society, and even Catholic cardinals voiced their dissent and objections to the President's address. The nation and its populace started to decline in condition. The intensity of demonstrations opposing the tyranny of Chun Doo Hwan's military regime increased daily. Public buildings were stormed by protesters. The government even fears organizing events within its own offices. The end of the fifth republican regime is evidently near. At that juncture, radical transformations in social existence were deemed imperative. Thus, Ro Tae Woo, a Democratic Party member, submitted an application for the presidency.

Amidst the political landscape and economic expansion of the nation, writers directed their focus towards concerns including the erosion of traditional values, infringements upon national customs, superficial moral standards, and the detrimental influence of mass media on individuals' cognition and thought processes. Fresh concepts and visuals emerged within the realm of fiction. In poetry, not only has the form of prose, but also its ideological content, has evolved, particularly in the novel genre.

The aforementioned societal transformations did not fail to influence literary processes. Quarterly periodicals including "Literature and Consciousness" and "Creation and Criticism" ceased publication in the 1980s. However, in spite of this, proponents of the national literary movement initiated efforts to enhance literary processes. Initially, literary works that depicted the reality of life in fiction, the atrocities

of the military dictatorship, or the ideology of stagnation were scarce. However, writers who possess an awareness of the ordinary concerns of the populace, demonstrate concern for the significant issues confronting society, and have the audacity to artistically examine internal strife began to emerge in the realm of literature gradually. As a consequence, a number of literary works of the era were concerned with the environment and the lives of people. Language and style, as well as form and genre, advancements were noted in both prose and poetry.

During the literary era of the 1980s and 1990s of the 20th century, poets including Ko Choonhee, Kim Namju, Kim Myonin, and Do Jeonghwan emerged.

The literary movements of the 1980s and 1990s were particularly notable for the prominence of poets' works. Poet Ko Chonghi, who devoted particular attention to this matter, examined the subject of women's rights in the poetry of modern poets Lee Okbon, Honan Solkhan, and Shin Saimdan, as well as the work of classic era poetess Hwang Jini (who composed a poem under the pseudonym Menwol–Wild Plum). She observed that poets formed separate groups to discuss issues pertaining to the rights of women and that Hwang Zhiji composed poems in which kisen were transformed into common women. She held the conviction that poets possess the ability to effect positive change in the lives of women. This statement evokes the words of Khurshid Davron: "A genuine poet actively engages in the endeavor to effect global change" [3]. The reason Ko Chong-hee recalls the works of Hwang-ji is not without reason, as the poet approached the subject of women's rights in a distinctive manner. Amidst a systematic examination of the aforementioned poets' works, the poet expressed in his poetry his endorsement of the women's movement and the notion that respect should be accorded to women of all backgrounds.

Another poet who rose to prominence in 1980s Korean literature with his poems, Kim Namju (1945-1994), remarked to himself, "Call me a fighter, not a poet or writer" [4]. The poet is regarded as the progenitor of Korean literary military lyric. Through the use of numerous emotionally charged words such as "blood", "death in battle", and "bloody struggle", the author conjures up vivid images of a horrifying war scene and imbues the characters' inner selves with a loathing of war. The poet exhibits profound concern regarding the trajectory of human society, the worth and standing of individuals, the solace and tranquility of those who have endured the calamitous days of war, and the desolation and despondency of those who have lost loved ones.

The poems of Kim Myonin evoke recollections of the past. The voice of the poet's father, who is pursuing him from his homeland, is audible in each line of the poem. The poet, who was deprived of a joyful, carefree existence since early infancy, lived his entire life as an outcast. A young boy whose father expelled him from a peaceful world spent an entire existence perplexed as to the reason for his expulsion. His anguish was poured into poetry. The poet's poetry employs the path as a metaphor for destiny. The protagonists of the poet's poems perpetually "doze off", "drift aimlessly", "flow", and "stand precariously at the precipice of a vanishessible road". Each poem concludes with the question, "Why did his father behave in this manner?" In this passage, V.G. Belinsky illuminates the sorrow of the Korean poet:

"When the great poet speaks of himself, of his "I," he speaks of the entirety, of all humanity, because the happiness and sorrow that all humanity experiences are concentrated in his image". "As a consequence, each individual perceives his or her own anguish through the sufferings of others, internalizes his or her own emotions, and thus recognizes not only the poet but also a great man embodied in the poet's image" [5].

The poet's tragic tone in his poetry resulted from the calamities he endured in life and the afflictions inflicted by his father. This results in the occurrence of an incident in the poems of Kim Myonin, which demonstrates the poet's distinctive approach.

Do Jeonghwan, a poet of significant stature in modern Korean poetry, rendered the transformations in individuals' lives with poetic accuracy while taking a fresh look at the reality that was occurring in the country. "Kodumi village", "You are like pale pink Gulkhairi", and "Who are you" are examples of the poet's poems that possess a melancholy lyrical quality and resemble farewell songs. The poet exaggerates the exceptional qualities that define an individual in the lyrical hero persona in his or her poems, catering to the era's preeminent concern regarding the waning of human qualities. Furthermore, his poems exhibit an intensity of reflection that approaches tragic colloquies. Depressing-toned poems are imperceptible at first glimpse against the backdrop of the lyrical hero's life-affirming aspirations. The poem "Who are you?" contains the following concepts from the poem "Kodumi village", "You are like pale pink Gulkhairi": "memory", "compatriot", "love", and "people near to (the poet's) heart".

Poetry in Korea as a whole was revitalized during this time period. On the subject matter of ecology, lost childhood, morality, grief, concern for the future, everyday experiences, and the position of women in society, numerous poems have been composed. Poets of this era established a profound connection with their readers through the incorporation of their personal struggles, interior turmoil, and emotional states into their works.

Subsequent to the 1980s, the novel genre in Korean literature underwent a significant transformation, emerging as a prominent and progressive domain within the literary sphere, with an extensive array of subject matters. Much has also altered regarding the artistic ability of numerous authors and the development of characters in exchange for a profound and realistic examination of life. The historical novels "Jang Gil San" and "Mountains of East Korea" by Hwang Sogyon received the highest commendation from readers. However, the novel "Mountains of East Korea" encountered a lack of acclaim and even negative evaluation from some critics within the literary community. When a film adaptation of the novel was produced, journalists initially praised the effort; consequently, the critics' previously negative views of the novel underwent a transformation into positive ones [6].

The literary work "Mountains of East Korea" delves into the narrative of the initial days of liberation for the Korean people following Japanese tyranny, shedding light on the ideological foundations that emerged among the populace and highlighting the origins of the Korean civil war and the causes of one nation, two ideologies. The author underscores the notion that injustice and oppression laid the foundation for the fragmentation of the populace through the illumination of instructive facets amidst the people's arduous and convoluted existence. The novel's narrative revolves around the Cholla-namdo province hamlet of Bolge, situated in close proximity to Mount Chirisan. Mount Chirisan was not selected by the author without reason. As per the scholarly investigations of poet and writer Li Inno, who amassed specimens of P'hesol literature:

"Chirisan (also referred to as Turyusan) extends in a magnificent mountain range from Pektusan mountain in the north to the Tebangun district, encompassing numerous picturesque gorges. These mountains span thousands of li in length from south to north [7]. The process of reviewing them would require over a month. There are scores of divisions in total. An oasis inhabited by cranes is purported to exist atop Chirisan Mountain, as per ancient legends [8].

Over time, this south-to-north extending mountain became the demarcation line between the two nations. Two distinct ideologies that emerge within the novel are emphasized through life events—statesmen's lives and activities, historical facts, and interlaced images—as the foundation. The author adopts a philosophical stance towards past events, reflects on history from the perspective of a historian, and uses the image of statesmen to highlight the tragedy of ancestors and the bitter destiny of the people. Furthermore, it serves as a historical primer for the current generation. Ignorance and ignorance deprive individuals of humane and virtuous emotions.

During this time period, the narrative genre, in addition to poetry and novels, was distinguished by its novel and distinctive characteristics. The advancement of contemporary Korean narratives, which commenced in 1910, was supplemented in the post-1970s by the contributions of new-generation representatives. In terms of both form and subject matter, the story genre has been revised by time, environment, and social era. Particularly, the narratives crafted by writers emerged as an outcome of innovative artistic concepts. The narratives of this era focused on the critical challenges that individuals encountered in life. The authors incorporated the prevailing social perception of the time into their narratives, depicting contemporary women in evocative detail. Their body of work prominently features a profound artistic interpretation of the representation of women, an all-encompassing exploration of a woman's interior experiences, personality, and spiritual realm, as well as the exposure of her weaknesses and strengths. Furthermore, the artistic representation of the era and the author's ability to imbue the stories he or she authored with a fresh sense of realism garnered the interest of critics.

The period of profound transformations in the evolution of modern Korean literature coincides with the brisk ascent of numerous authors into the realm of great literature. In contrast to their male counterparts, female writers whose literary careers intersected with the postwar era exhibited a marginally distinct perspective regarding historical events. The war, the division of the country, the period of anarchy that followed, and the devastation that followed all contributed to the escalation of class animosities, which were further exacerbated by the first generation to receive an education in the mother tongue. The abrupt transformation in societal norms, turmoil, and devastation that transpired during the mid-20th century functions as a defining characteristic for them [9].

Chhwe In Ho, Jo Son Chak, Pak Pom Sin, and other "permanent writers" who supported themselves solely through pen fees entered the sphere of literature during this time [10]. The issues that the aforementioned authors addressed in their works were not contemporaneous. Consequently, an increasing number of individuals have criticized the paper with a rudimentary comprehension of the fundamental nature of creation, as stated by Ibrahim Haqqul [11].

While describing a new type of woman, some writers recognize that women whose husbands emigrated believe it is freedom and enter the streets of immorality, or that the emigrant husband forgets the norm of earning money and does not want to return to his family, giving up his personal well-being and "prosperous life". The women who chased them portrayed a girl who witnessed her father's infidelity, a different approach to family relationships, and a woman who surrendered her own happiness for her social standing.

"So Many", "Black Widow", "The Couple and Singles", "Airport Meeting", by Park Wan-soo "My Woman's Box", "Duet" by in Hye-gyeon, "Where the Harmonium Stands", and "When Will It Go?", "Who is currently present with us?" by Shin Kyong Suk, such works are mature examples of the narrative genre of the period. Under the influence of the era's environment, vivid images succinctly and convincingly convey the innermost workings of women's psyches and spiritual realms in these stories. Every narrative concept is deftly integrated into the overarching theme and essence of the piece.

In contrast to his contemporaries, Yan Kwi Ja used the interactions of the inhabitants of the new region and the occurrences of daily life to illustrate the plight and destiny of the poor. Adiba believed that small people are honest, virtuous, and sincere at heart; they never withhold the assistance of those in their vicinity. As a result, the characters she selected for her stories were portrayed in a manner that was both moving and authentic. The issues of "small society" are reflected in the poet's conception of small persons.

Conclusion

Between the turn of the 20th century in the 1970s and the beginning of the 21st century, the development of Korean literature was extraordinarily complex. The military dictatorship, social unrest in the nation, the June 1987 demonstrations, and the Gwangju uprising all exerted an adverse influence on the evolution of literature. However, this does not imply the cessation of artistic innovation. In pursuit of their objective, proponents of the national literature movement have accomplished the following: writers have gradually entered the major field; the effort to promote the mother tongue, which commenced in the early 20th century, has been significantly revived; the content and form of the prose and poetry produced have undergone transformations; the artistic prowess of each individual artist has been emphasized; and authenticity in prose and verse has been restored. This demonstrates the role that fiction plays in the progression of society.

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