

The Story of the Novel in Korea: A Modern Episode

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논문 Abstract

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International Invention of the Novel

In some respects, the novel is a product of a culture too radically foreign to be assimilated into Korean culture. Just like the sonata or perspective painting, it is one of the most distinct and complex expressions of modern European culture. According to Ian Watt's standard account, the novel has its historical origin in the great transformation of Western civilization which brought the worldview of the Middle Ages to an end with the Renaissance. The modern worldview that gave birth to, and found its expression in, the novel is “one which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times at particular places.”¹ The underlying belief of the modern worldview, that of “the priority of individual experience,” explains why earlier literary models lost their narrative power in the form of the novel, and why such styles as the autobiographical memoir are dominant in the novel genre. As often indicated since Ian Watt, the rise of the novel is also closely related to the industrialization of book production in Europe. Novels began to be published for bourgeois readers in England and France, replacing the religious and canonical books to be found in homes, and then became commodities that spread all over Europe. With the growing popularity of English and French novels, a common literary market arose in Europe, which, according to Franco Moretti, caused

¹ Ian Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957. p.31.

“a ruthless and unprecedented centralization of European literature.”²

In a word, the novel is a characteristically European form of European origin that carries with it a certain “Europeanness.” European novels were, however, not circulated within the confines of the continental literary market. As the European imperial powers expanded, novels spread outside of Europe together with other European products and became models to be imitated in non-European countries, just as English and French novels had earlier in other European countries. In Latin America, Africa and Asia the novel found its advocates largely amongst the newly emerging bourgeois classes, and writing novels took on a cultural significance comparable to nation-state building in the realm of politics. The novel as a modern, foreign, and Western genre was introduced to Greece through the auspices of the diaspora bourgeoisie who had returned home from Europe after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The modern Greek novel emerged from their efforts to build a new Greek state along European lines. The encounter with the Western novel in the Arab world started in Egypt, first during the French occupation and later under English rule; this was followed by the rise of the modern vernacular novel that was part of the political and cultural movement often called the “Arab awakening.”³ Writing in the manner of the Western novel was often regarded as serious, creative, or truly modern at least in the early formative phases of modern fiction in non-European countries. In Latin American countries like Brazil, where European novels had been in circulation prior to the establishment of vernacular fiction, novelists had no choice but to follow the European models to satisfy the expectations of their readers,⁴ and many writers in the formative period of modern Chinese literature tried to achieve a realist mode of narrative they had learned from reading European and Russian novels.⁵ The Western novel was, of course, not easy to imitate in regions whose cultures were different from those of the modern West. One of the difficulties that plagued Indian writers derived from the contradictions between the values they had learned from reading English novels and the values

² Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the Modern European Novel, 1800-1900*, Verso: London, 1998, p.186.

³ Mary N. Layoun, *Travels of a Genre: The Modern Novel and Ideology*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990, pp.21-32; 56-62.

⁴ Roberto Schwarz, "The Importing of the Novel to Brazil", *Misplaced Ideas*, Verso: London, 1992. 참조.

⁵ Bonnie S. McDougall, "The Impact of Western Literary Trends," Merle Goldman ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

indigenous to their society,⁶ and one of the most profound critiques of modern Japanese fiction focused on its alleged failure to achieve a Western style of realism despite its development in contact with European and Russian novels.⁷ It can be argued that in the non-European world of the nineteenth and twentieth century an imitation of the European form was most important in the establishment of modern literature, at least, in its first phase. The emergence of “the novel without borders” in non-European literature represents the beginning of its attempt to transform itself in response to the cultural hegemony of modern imperial Europe.

Modern Korean fiction originated from different sources: there are, among them, historical narratives and popular anecdotes in classical Chinese, many genres of Korean prose fiction such as family stories, Pansori tales and other oral narratives. These traditional genres and styles **were put into use** in writing for the purpose of national awakening, taking part in a multifarious move toward the modern in the formative period of modern Korean fiction. The traces of their existence can be found in a broad range of didactic stories, biographies of historical heroes, and *sinsoseol* (new fiction), which are generally regarded as narrative forms of the transitional phase between pre-modern and modern fiction. A notable breakthrough in the historical study of modern Korean fiction has been made in an attempt to discover its sources in the formal and thematic conventions of the precedent Korean prose narratives and to demonstrate an overall historical continuity of Korean fiction. However, modernity in fiction, as is the case with other forms of culture, does not come into being within the boundaries of a nation. It does so, rather, in a process of cultural and literary exchange extending beyond the national boundaries. **According to those critics who argue for the hypothetical idea of an international invention of the novel, the English or French novel had come into being** in the literary and cultural zone of intersection between the two

University Press, 1977, pp.37-61

⁶ Meenakshi Mukerjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Oxford University Press: Dehli, 1985, p.7.

⁷ This can be illustrated by some of the most important pieces of Japanese literary criticism such as Kobayashi Hideo's work on *shishōsetsu* (“shishosetsu-ron[1935],” Kobayashi Hideo zenshu 3, Shinchosha, 1968) and Nakamura Mitsuo's critique of Japanese novels of manners (“fū zoku shōsetsu-ron[1950],” *Nihon no kindai, bungei shunshu sha*, 1968).

nations.⁸ Therefore, a historically correct understanding of the modern Korean novel should pay attention to the transnational genres, ideas, practices, and institutions that participated in its formation. A generation of Korean men of letters who were old enough to find the novel so extraordinary a form was acutely aware of the genre introduced into Korean fiction and also recognized that such was an indication of a significant change in its historical development. In his *A History of Korean Fiction*, the first book of its kind, beginning with his definition of *soseol* which was based on rudimentary knowledge of the novel, Kim Tae-jun states in his description of the current state of Korean fiction that “a school of Chunwon (Yi Gwang-su) started to write fiction in Western styles.”⁹ This is a discriminating sense we need to regain in order to reach a new understanding of modern Korean fiction.

2. Realism and the Nation

Korean Writers in the colonial period generally came to know the western novel by way of Japanese translations and critical writings, as they did other aspects of Western culture. Among the Japanese books that seem to have exerted the earliest influence on the way the novel was understood is Tsubouchi Shoyo’s *The Essence of the Novel* (*Shosetsu shinzui*, September 1885-April 1886), along with Uchida Roan’s translations of Tolstoy. This first serious critical work on the novel ever written by a Japanese person was never acknowledged or even mentioned by Korean writers, but I surmise that it was either read by or known to pioneering writers such as Yi Gwang-su and Kim Dong-in. Shoyo’s theory of the novel (*shosetsu*) is unmistakably modern in that it defines the literary genre, above all, as art (*bijutsu*) with its own purpose. He defines art as something that “delights the human heart and eyes and elevates the human spirit and character,” and includes the *shosetsu* with music, poetry and drama in the art of the “formless” kind that appeals to the human heart. His definition of the *shosetsu* as art freed it from the Confucian didacticism of “encouraging good and punishing evil” and

⁸ Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, ed. *The Literary Channel: The International Invention of the Novel*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2002, pp.1-34.

⁹ Kim Taejun, *Joseon soselsa*, Gyeongseong: Chongjin seogwan, 1931, p.206.

provided a basis for a new conceptualization along the lines of the Western novel. Shoyo locates the distinctiveness of the novel in its concentration on “human emotion and social custom.”¹⁰ The *soseol* as Yi Gwang-su understands it is akin to the *shosetsu* or the novel in Shoyo’s sense. Defining literature as a kind of art and separating it from morality, Yi contends that “we should represent real thoughts, feelings, and life as they exist before everyone’s eyes without writing literature in order to advocate a particular morality and bring out an effect of encouraging good and punishing evil and without employing any moral standards and examples.” He expands the art of the novel until it is practically identical to literature in general, as seen in his argument that literature should “depict human life, so readers of literature can have a look at what is called the signs of social custom and human emotion.”¹¹

It is customary to say that realism is central to Shoyo’s idea of the modern, genuine, novelistic *shosetsu*. The novel offers, he states, realistic depictions of a variety of human emotions and social customs that exist in the “real world” and thereby reveals the “hidden causality of human life.” In specifying the narrative attitudes necessary for writers to achieve realism, he advocates their impartial observation and faithful description of both human emotion and social custom while denouncing their manipulation of fictional stories and characters. His warning against the writers’ omnipotence or sovereign subjectivity is bolstered by his reasonable objection to didacticism. According to the criteria of the western novel, however, his argument for the reduction of subjectivity on the part of authors is a shortcoming in his theory. Realism is undoubtedly one of the important modes of the novel, but it does not result from the author’s self-abandonment in favor of the objects he wants to represent. Rather, the novel form is based on an author’s subjectivity that tries to go beyond faithfulness to the immediacy of the given world and construct a world that is different from and superior to the given one. The belief in the primacy of individual experience underlying the novel form involves the understanding that humans exist not in an order unchangeably determined prior to individual experience but in a order that is created by humans, and therefore subject to alteration. Doubts as to the given order of things, intuitions into the artificial nature of the human world, and respect for creative subjectivity provided an important intellectual condition under which the novel form could flourish in Europe. The form aims at presenting a fictional world in its resemblance to a real world, with its own rules, forces, and patterns, and in that sense,

¹⁰ Tsubouchi Shōyō, “shōsetsu shinzui,” *Nihon kindai bungaku taikei 3: Tsubouchi Shōyō shū*, Kadogawa shoten, p.45, 48.

as Edward Said indicates, it represents the human intention to alter the reality of the given world from the beginning, a desire to create a new world in an imaginative way. The author of a novel seems to embody a creative subjectivity which exemplifies what is implied by the word author and authority—a power to begin, to create for the first time.¹²

Yi Gwang-su surpasses Shoyo in his recognition of imaginative, fiction-making power. He maintains that “the novel indicates something that makes readers feel as if they have found themselves and taken a real look at a world that exists in the writer’s imagination, and that it does this by depicting a sphere of human life in its correctness and preciseness and by developing the imaginative world in such a way as to seem real and clear to their eyes.” For him a writer’s “real world” is of less importance than his “imaginative world” as a response to it, and more room is thus allowed for the recognition of a writer’s creative power, the authority that he or she exerts in inventing and controlling fictional events and characters. Yi’s idea of the writer as a creative authority can be found in a phrase from his novel *Mujeong* (*The Heartless*), where the narrator says of “literature or art” that “it is made by men who imitate or steal the Creator’s ideas.”¹³ It goes without saying that the Creator or God is one of the classical metaphors for creative subjectivity. In his statement on the writer’s power and mission, Kim Dong-in put such a metaphor to use, declaring that “a writer (*soseolga*) is an artist, . . . a man who should accomplish the unification of God and humanity,” and that “a literary work is, indeed, God’s whisper.” He does not hesitate to endow the writer with divine authority and also draws an analogy between the creation of the world and writing novels. The writer, as Kim perceives it, embodies “the greatness of human creativity” in which humanity makes its own world without being content with the world created by God.¹⁴

Kim’s notion of the writer as an agent of the unification of God and humanity illustrates individualism, one of the modern ideologies sustaining the genre of the novel. Not only does the novel attempt to free itself from previous models of the world, it also works in service of an individual will to aggrandize his or her authority by establishing a new, alternative model. It follows that it is critical of, and even hostile to past literary

¹¹ Yi Gwangsu, “munhak iran hao,” Yi Gwangsu jeonjip 1, p.511-2.

¹² Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Basic Books: New York, 1975, pp.81-83.

¹³ Yi Gwangsu, *Mujeong*, ed., by Kim Cheol, Munhak dongne, 2003, p.668.

¹⁴ Kim Dongin, “soseol e daehan joseon saram ui sasang ul,” *Kim Dongin jeonjip* 16, 1988, p.139

models. In general, the novel simultaneously conquers and incorporates traditional literary models in its emergence. In Egypt, verse and folkloric forms that had long dominated the country's literary tradition were incorporated into materials for novelistic writing,¹⁵ and with the establishment of the novel in its modern sense in Japan the earlier literary genres began to vanish.¹⁶ The modern Korean novel had a similarly colonizing effect when it emerged in the 1910s. This is best illustrated by the story of Yeongchae in *The Heartless*, probably the first modern novel in Korea. Once isolated from the other characters' stories, the Yeongchae story reveals its close relation with a traditional type of fiction that features a beautiful and chaste *gisaeng* as the protagonist, a type of fiction usually called *yeomjeong soseo* (novel of erotic sentiment). The Yeongchae story is similar to *Chaebong gambyeolgok* (Chaebong's Song of Separation), one of the **most recent** works in the *yeomjeong soseol* tradition, in that the two female characters, who are *gisaeng* in the city of Pyeongyang, decide to enter this lowly profession out of filial duty and remain faithful to their true loves in spite of being sexually enslaved to men. It is naïve, however, to consider *The Heartless* a successor to the *yeomjeong soseol* tradition just because the former refers to the latter in a rhetorical gesture, for usually the purpose of the reference is not to secure the effect of cultural verisimilitude but to question a model of the human world offered by the earlier text. While the Chaebong story confirms a permanent human order in which "filial piety and cardinal virtue (*hyoyeol ji sim*)"¹⁷ prove superior to their opposites, the Yeongchae story signifies the impossibility of a moral order in the human world. *Heartless* incorporates the elements of the dutiful and chaste *gisaeng* stories into its narrative plot and then reveals that the Confucian model of the world in which the principle of natural morality (*cheonsim*) reigns is nothing but an illusion. In *The Heartless* "filial piety and cardinal virtue" are no more than material for parody. With Yi Gwang-su's novel the lineage of virtuous *gisaeng* practically came to an end in Korean fiction.

The characteristic of realism in the Western novel derives from a secular and rationalist effort to correct illusory representations of human reality. In Shoyo's words, "human emotion and social custom" come to have an air of reality in a work of fiction by altering the way they are perceived, rather than by being depicted in their alleged

¹⁵ Mary N. Layoun, *op. cit.*, pp.60-62.

¹⁶ Karatani Kojin, "soseki to janru," *Soseiki-ron shusei*, Daisan bunmei sha, 1992, p. 215, 230.

¹⁷ *Chaebong gambyeolgok*, in Dongguk daehakkyo hangukmunhak yeonguso, ed.,

objectivity. Realism is generally achieved by creating a new, secular sense of human reality incompatible with the narrative plots, symbolic configurations, and religious or philosophical rhetoric prevalent in earlier literary conventions. In *The Heartless*, the Confucian world of morality, in which “filial piety and cardinal virtue” are prized, is overlapped by a new world indicating that it is irrevocably out of time. The new world is far broader in scope than the world presented in *Chaebong’s Song of Separation*, which is largely bound within Yangban aristocratic society. It has a new upper class, as represented by Kim Jangno, a church elder, and Kim Hyeon-su, a principal, and a lower class represented by an old woman who works in Yi Hyeong-sik’s boarding house and the anonymous residents of Samnang-jin village. The new world in *The Heartless* also includes such different geographical areas as Gyeongseong, a city of industry and culture, Pyeongyang, a city of tradition and entertainment, the countryside around Hwangju, and Samnangjin, a crossing point on the Nakdonggang river. The members of society mix with each other beyond their class and regional boundaries: Hyeong-sik, an orphan born in the northwest countryside, becomes a son-in-law to one of the richest men in Gyeongseong city, and Yeongchae, a *gisaeng* in Pyeongyang, finds employment in a red-light district in Gyeongseong until she starts a second life as an artist during her stay in Hwangju. Their lives are dominated by a swift social and regional mobility, which even takes them beyond the geographical and cultural boundary of Korea, as indicated by the presence of Japan and the United States in their careers and projects. It is, indeed, highly suggestive that a train never fails to appear in every important path of life which the main characters of the novel travel along. The symbol of the all-encompassing dynamic of modern civilization indicates that Koreans had begun to form a new community released from the shackles of Confucian society and riding the waves of global modernization. It holds true of Korean fiction that the modern, secular reality of the nation was invented by the novel.¹⁸

Hwaljabon gososeol jeonjip 10, Aseamunhwahsa, 1978, p.523

¹⁸ For the discussion of the relationship between nation and the novel see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso: London, 1983, pp.28-40, and Franco Moretti, “Modern European Literature: a Geographical Sketch”, *New Left Review*, 1994, August/September, p.97; *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*, op., cit., pp.12-29.

The Youth, or a Symbolic Form of Modern Subjectivity

Korean intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century began to study the Western novel as part of their attempt to catch up with what they saw as the advanced West. As the idea that Western civilization represented the universal development of humanity had pervaded Korean society, and as campaigns had been launched to build “a new civilization” of Korea, modeled on that of the West and following their Japanese precedents, an imitation or utilization of Western forms began to gain momentum in areas of politics, economy, and law, as well as of culture. It was young Koreans studying abroad in China and Japan, eager to accumulate their knowledge of the West, who first gained access to Western novels. As a student in Tokyo from 1907 to 1909, Hong Myeonghui devoured Japanese translations of Western novels, including works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, in addition to works by Natsume Soseki and Naturalist writers. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest evidence of Korean encounter with western novels is found in the diaries Yun Chiho kept while being a student at Zongxi xueyin, a Methodist missionary school in Shanghai in the mid-1880.¹⁹ But Yun seems to have read Daniel Defoe and other British novelists for the purpose of learning English, and it was among the younger generation of Korean students in Tokyo that western novels began to be appreciated for their literary merits. As a student in Tokyo from 1907 to 1909, Hong Myeonghui devoured Japanese translations of Western novels, including works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, in addition to works by Natsume Soseki and Naturalist writers.²⁰ Hong Myeonghui, Yi Gwang-su and Choe Nam-seon understood the greatness of the novel, though the range of their reading was largely limited by what had been translated into Japanese, and laid the foundation for the Koreanization of the novel form through their translations, adaptations and creations.

From the 1900s on in Korea Western knowledge was generally believed decisive to both the self-establishment of individuals and self-protection of the nation, whereas traditional political and moral authority fell into decline and Confucian education was dismissed as out-of-date. An extraordinary sense of obligation thus

¹⁹ *Yun Chiho ilgi* 1, ed. by Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, Tamgudang, 1973, p. 223, 277.

²⁰ Hong Myeonghui, “Dae tolstoi ui inmul gwa jakpum,” *Byeokcho hong myeonghui wa imkokjeong ui yeongu jaryo*, ed. by Im Hyeongtaek and Gang Yeongju, Sagyeojeol, 1996, p.83-85.

rapidly spread among the Koreans who were being educated in Japan around the time of Korea's colonization. They believed their education was taking the lead in the intellectual improvement of the Korean people and were willing to assign themselves the task of strengthening and regenerating their nation. For them the word youth meant more than a man or woman in an earlier stage of life. The younger generation in the late 1900s and 1910s argued that they were qualified and responsible for "introducing a new civilizing light into the darkness of the nation" and their project would represent a progressive movement that would make it possible for the nation to survive in the modern world, catching up with the development of human civilization.²¹ The young Koreans' self-definition seems to resonate with the discourse on youth popularized in Japan from the 1880s on. In fact, the word *cheongnyeon* itself was a neologism in Meiji Japan. It first appeared as a translation of "young men" when the YMCA (Tokyo Kirisutokyo Seinenkai) was founded with a group of young ministers at its center in 1880²² and spread all over the nation with the publication in 1885 of Tokutomi Soho's celebrated essay, *Youth of New Japan* (Shin nihon no seinen, whose 1885 first edition is entitled *Jyukyu seiki no seinen to sono kyoiku, Young Men in Nineteenth-Century Japan and Their Education*).

Soho's essay on youth offers an influential account of the historical experience and social responsibility of the first generation of young Japanese whose Western-style education after the Meiji restoration had led them to believe themselves to be superior to their elders. His views on the Meiji youth is framed by a theory of societal evolution from the viewpoint of which he explains the changes taking place in Japan since the restoration. Relying on Spenser's social Darwinism, he argues that Japanese society has undergone a shift from a military and aristocratic stage to an industrial and democratic stage, and urges the Japanese to make theoretical and practical efforts to complete this transformation. What Soho means by youth is, needless to say, the agent of such efforts. On the basis of the presupposition of the universal evolution of society and also the dichotomies of the East and the West, an old Japan and a new Japan, elders and the youth, he stresses that youth have a great responsibility for building a new Japan modeled on an advanced West.²³ Although there is little evidence to show how Soho's

²¹ The rhetoric of the enlightenment combined with the assumption of universal historical development pervades the self-articulation of the Korean youth that is a focus of interest in the such gazettes as *Hakjigwang*, published in the 1910s by one of the largest associations of Japan-based Korean students.

²² Kimura Naoe, *Seinen no tanjo*, shinyosha, 1998, p.330.

²³ Tokutomi Soho, "Shin nihon no seinen," *Tokutomi Soho shu*, Meiji bungaku zenshu 34, Chikuma shobo, 1974. p.122.

essay was accepted by young Koreans in the early twentieth century, it is not difficult to surmise from Yi Gwang-su's essay on youth that it was a source of inspiration for them. Yi, a great admirer in his twenties of Soho, wrote on the subject of youth in a manner similar to Soho. For example, Yi's argument develops along the line of the opposition between the elders and the youth, predicated on the general tendency in the contemporary world of the old being replaced by the new. Though his opposition between the elders and youth lacks the meaning of a historically specific generational conflict as found in Soho's opposition between "the Tenpo elders" and "the Meiji youth," it provides the grounds for exclusively assigning the young men of Yi's generation the task of building a "new Great Korea." In Yi's argument the opposition between the elders and the youth is also interchangeable with that between the practical (*yuwi*) and the non-practical (*muwi*).²⁴

Soho's youth refers to young people committed not only to practical achievement, but also to an ideal of freedom. In his remarks on education, which form the larger part of his *Youth of New Japan*, appears an opposition between two kinds of learning, one in service of "despotic command" and the other of "free inquiry." The former represented by "eastern Confucianism" aims to produce submissive subjects, whereas the latter exemplified by "western liberalism" intends to nurture independent free men. For the purpose of educational reformation he proposes free development of the inherent cognitive and moral capacities of individuals.²⁵ Youth who think and act autonomously—this was an ideal that encouraged Korean students in the early twentieth century. The idea of freedom often comes out in crude but varied forms in the gazettes published by the organizations of Korean students in Japan, and Yi Gwang-su even argues that young Koreans must teach themselves (*jasu jayang*). Yi's advocacy of "teaching oneself" indicates a profound incredulity in the mind of his generation toward traditional authority and also manifests their newly acquired awareness of the significance of self-determination. In his argument, the source of New Great Korea, whose creation relies on young Koreans, lies in their inborn capabilities, and the creation of the new nation begins with the effort of each individual to develop their own genius.²⁶ Central to his conception of youth is an idea of the free, self-determining individual. The self-awareness of the youth, as he understands it, is akin to the realization of a free, creative subjectivity latent in each of them. It is not surprising,

²⁴ Yi Gwangsu, "Joseon saram in cheongnyeon deul ege," *Sonyeon*, vol.3 no.8, 1910. 8.

²⁵ Tokutomi Soho, op. cit., pp. 138-139, 146-151.

²⁶ Yi Gwangsu, op. cit.

then, that the students exposed in Japan to the ideal of youth comprised the first generation of Koreans who understood the literary form of modern subjectivity, that is, the novel, and also that Yi Gwang-su was the first Korean writer to produce a *soseol* in the form of the novel.

Yi Gwang-su's **concept of youth means more than just young men or women.** It is an indication of a mode of modern individualism. In his useful study of the discourse on the youth of modern Japan, Kimura Naoe writes that the notion of youth came into existence and developed its own "system of practices" in opposition to the "energetic man" (*soshi*), a mode of the freedom and people's right movement, and became dominant in the constitution of young male subjectivity in the Meiji twenties (1887-1896). These practices particular to the mode of youth of whom Kimura writes are, to a large extent, also found in the private and public activities of young Koreans in the early twentieth century. The "youth practices" that constitute the care of individuals for their own selves and thereby cause a separation between everyday life and politics are supposed to have provided a model of life for some Korean writers. In understanding the idea of Korean youth, however, no less important than the Japanese influence is its relation to the upward social mobility that occurred in a certain sector of Korean society in the early twentieth century. A number of political and students' associations founded in both Korea and Japan after 1905, when Korea became a protectorate of Japan, were not simply "patriotic and enlightenment societies," as the standard Korean histories lead us to believe. They were, in many cases, associations of intellectual elites who aspired for social advancement under the appearance of collective struggle for the restoration of Korea's political sovereignty. Among the members of the societies were young men, coming from an underprivileged class (e.g. *jungin*, the middle-class men) or an alienated region (e.g. Pyeongan-do province), who tried to move up the ladder of success by taking advantage of their knowledge of the West and Japan.²⁷ **It is highly revealing that one of their gazettes published in installments Samuel Smiles' *Self-help*, a bible for many generations of Japanese dreaming of social advancement since its translation first appeared in 1870, entitled *Success Stories of the West*.**

Choe Nam-seon offers evidence of the underlying morals of the Korean youth discourse and practices. As editor and publisher of *Sonyeon* (Youth), in which he serialized his translation of *Self-help*, and also a director of Cheongnyeong Hakhoe

²⁷ Pak Chanseung, *Hanguk geundae jeongchi sasangsa yeongu*, Yeoksabipyongsa, 1992, 42-43, 47-56.

(Young Fellow Students' Association), Choe was eager to encourage his generation to create a new self, liberating themselves from class and moral restrictions. On the assumption that class discrimination had disappeared and one's social standing derived now from his or her capabilities, he suggests that his young readers "satisfy their natural desire for wealth and rank by increasing their capabilities."²⁸ It would be mistaken to consider the patriotic tone of the Korean youth discourse as nothing but a verbal disguise, but, as Choe's writing shows, the advocacy of the young often involves moral support for the self-improvement of individuals in pursuit of success. The ideal of the youth seems to manifest a desire for a new self, for power and glory, which could have been felt by the majority of young Koreans when they found themselves in a society in which Confucian morality had given way to individuals' self-advancement in the whirlwind of political upheaval. The eulogy of young Koreans signifies new men or women whose individual self-creation is in harmony with Korea's national regeneration. In this sense, the birth of the youth is what Yi Gwang-su's novel *The Heartless* is all about.

Authorial Authority and Imperial Power.

The rise of novelistic fiction in Korea is consequent upon the changes in its culture that occurred via the impact of Western and Japanese imperialism. *The Heartless* began to be serialized in *Maeil sinbo* seven years after Japan's colonization of Korea, and the newspaper affiliated with the government general had secured cultural hegemony of Japan while continuing propaganda work to consolidate its colonial rule. It was in the pages of the newspaper that the traditional Korean narrative genres gave way to new narrative forms imported from Japan. The adaptations of Japanese popular novels published in installment in *Maeil sibo*, such as *Dugyeonseong* (A Cry of A Cuckoo, an adaptation of Tokutomi Roka's *Hototogisu*), *Ssangongnu* (Two Streams of Noble Tears, an adaptation of Gikuchi Yuho's *Onore ga tsumi*), and *Janghanmong* (A Long-Lived Regretful Dream, an adaptation of Ozaki Koyo's *Konjaki yasha*), established a taste among the Korean public for tear-jerking, sentimental stories, producing a significant change in the Korean readers' expectations of fiction. In this connection, it cannot just be said that *The Heartless* derived from a skillful imitation of the Western novel by a man of talent from Korea's first generation of students of the form: it should be

²⁸ Choe Namseon, "Gwicheon ron," *Cheongchun* 12, 1918. 3.

understood with regard to the effect of the hegemonic power which the colonial authorities was strengthening, taking advantage of such public mass media as *Maeil sinbo* being under its control. According to Yi Gwang-su's retrospection, his first novel relied on Nakamura Kentaro and a few Koreans on the editorial board of *Maeil shinbo* for its completion and publication. Following their plan to have a new novel by a Korean writer published in the newspaper, they offered the job to Yi, whose essays had already appeared in the same pages a few years before, and, after going over his manuscript of *The Heartless*, long enough for about ninety rounds of installment, which he had happened to work on while studying in Tokyo, they gave permission to its publication.

In fact, in reading *The Heartless*, it is impossible to fail to hear a voice in concert with Japanese colonialism. In one notorious passage towards the conclusion, after bringing all the events of the novel to an end with Hyeong-sik's and other young Koreans' departure to study abroad, the narrator claims that great progress had been made in every sector of Korean society, and, as often criticized, this involves not only a neglect of the exploitation and oppression suffered by Koreans under Japanese government, but also a collaboration with the propaganda campaigns conducted by Japanese colonialists for the perpetuation of their rule. The idea of civilization, which provides a framework for the interpretation and judgment of all the characters and events in *The Heartless*, serves to make modern imperial order seem natural. It is well known that imperial powers rationalized their expansionist policy on the pretext of universalizing the benefits of civilization, and the idea of civilizing missions often provided an ideological foundation for Japan's control over Korea. *The Heartless* effectively helps to justify Korea's condition of being colonized as inevitable and even beneficial to the country. The narrative of the youth on a march out of an old enclave of morality toward a new world of civilization declares and celebrates the triumph of the logic of civilization in support of colonialism. Taking as its subject the conflict between old and new morality, *The Heartless* depicts Korean society as undergoing a drastic change, involved in the world-wide homogenizing process of modernization, and, in this respect, it approaches a type of world literature which can be called the modern global novel. Unlike such exemplary works of the type like Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, however, it draws little

attention to the tragedy inherent in modernization.²⁹ There is no room in the work for anything tragic, in a Hegelian sense, which derives from the clash between two incompatible values or cultures, and Yeongchae, whose embodiment of Confucian feminine virtues could have made her a tragic figure, starts a second life anticipating the blessings of modern life rather than dying a heroic death in confrontation with relentless historical change. The narrative of modernization without tragedy seems to give striking evidence to the complicity with colonialism of the novel in question.

I mentioned earlier in my discussion of the issue of realism in *The Heartless* that it is credited with inventing the modern, secular reality of the nation, but now it needs some alteration. The imaginary geography of the nation is created from the perspective which acknowledges that Korean life is ultimately determined by Japanese imperialism. Although all the fictional characters of the novel are Korean and their action is set against Korean society, there are not a few indications that they are subject to imperial order. One of the most striking of them is found in an episode at Samnangjin in which Hyeong-sik and his company hold a charity concert **for flood victims they came across on a** Pusan-bound, second-class train. In this scene there is a Japanese chief police who offers kind and swift administrative help, as well as a number of unnamed Japanese passengers who most likely make up the largest group of contributors, and it is not difficult to see that they imply the powerful, civilized, and benevolent presence of Japan.³⁰ In addition, the so-called new civilization that is invoked in the novel as evidence of Korea's **beginning development shows ambiguous** signs in the moral environment of Koreans, with no connection to their own life needs. As is the case with the shops run by Japanese settlers on Daedongmun gate street or steamships at the Daedonggang river, which Hyeong-sik finds strange when he sees it on his first visit to Pyongyang as a child, it is something obviously extraneous to Korean life, an effect of Japan's subjugation of Korean people. *The Heartless* conveys the will of young men and women to enlighten and strengthen their ethno-nation, but new knowledge and technologies necessary for such an enterprise are not organically related to their collective memories and experience and, on the contrary, originate outside their country,

²⁹ I owe Michael Valdez Moses for the concept of the modern global novel. See his *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995.

³⁰ For more detailed account of the presence of Japanese in *The Heartless*, see Hatano Setsuko, "yonche, soniyon, samnangjin: mujo no genkyu (III)," *Chosen gaku ho* 57, 1995. 10.

in places where they want to pursue their academic career such as Japan, the United States, and Germany. The image of the Korean nation as it is represented by *The Heartless* implies an adjustment to the globalization of culture driven by the competition between imperial powers.

In his clarification of the subtlety and complexity of the way in which the great works of the English novel perform an act of complicity in imperial projects, Edward Said refers to the solidification of authority which is a function of the genre of the novel as part of “the attitudes and structures” which he describes as enabling a vision of empire to persist. The authority finds its mode of existence on the various levels of author, narrator, community, specific locality, and specific historical moment, and presents itself as normative, absolute, and self-legitimizing.³¹ We saw earlier how Korean writers had acquired faith in their authority while finding the greatest form of creative writing in the genre of the novel, and, more correctly, they are implicitly linked with greater, trans-individual ones. In the case of *The Heartless*, there is no doubt that Yi Gwang-su’s authorial authority joined that of the Japanese empire. It does make sense that nationalistic readers of the work are reluctant to acknowledge its success in the formation of the modern Korean novel. Given the time of the writing, when Koreans lost their right to self-determination and suffered cultural dislocation, the attempt to represent Korean society in its place in an imperial order, however, can be evaluated as a new kind of realism sensitive to the present of Korean life, in spite of the perspective restricted to the experience of a particular class and region. To tell the truth, realism in Korean fiction developed by refining the novelistic form of narrative, rather than by abandoning it, in such a way as to make the authorial and imperial authority subject to interrogation and indictment. Indeed, the emergence of Western-style Korean novels reflects the loss of cultural autonomy suffered by Koreans under Japanese rule. On the other hand, however, it indicates that they began to have in their literature the art of fiction, which would enable them to define themselves and determine their fate in their adjustment to the culture of imperial and global modernity.

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³¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Norton, 1993, p.77.

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