

Evolution of South Korean Literature with special reference to Han Kang

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain the dynasties that existed in Korea and the formation of South and North Korean nation and the establishment of their literature during the late twentieth century. And how China's dominance, Japanese colonization, greed for liberation, split between North and South, the Korean War affected the literature of both the Koreas as well as brings an integral visibility of the South Korean writer Han Kang with respect to showcasing and emphasizing the "Horror of Humanity" in her work which she feels is intensely inhuman and thus tried to portray humanity by emphasizing the inhuman action and the illusion of being human. And it also explains the dominance of Chinese language in the Korean literature as earlier Korea didn't had the script of its own and was a vassal state of China for over one thousand years. In 109 BC, China invaded and colonized Korea and established four commanderies which were ruled directly by the Chinese. Subsequently over the centuries until the late 19th century, a politically unified Korea maintained a tributary relationship with the ruling dynasty of China. Korea was deeply influenced and followed the Chinese form of governance, and the Chinese religion of Confucianism and later Korea developed its own vernacular alphabet called 'hangul.'

KEYWORDS: Confucianism, idu, hyangchal, hanja, gugyeol, hangul, colonization, liberation, division, war.

INTRODUCTION

South Korea is a small peninsular region of East Asia and is a partitioned nation of a former unified Korea. "Korea" is a modern spelling of "Corea", a name attested in English as early as 1614. The name "Korea" is derived from the name of ancient kingdom Goryeo, also romanized as Koryo. The establishment of Korean dynasty begins with Gojoseon (Old Joseon or Choson, 2333 BCE, mythological) the first kingdom in the Korean peninsula established by the legendary founder named Dangun, Wiman Joseon (dynasty of Gojoseon, 194 BCE), the three kingdoms of Korea or Samhan (Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla in 57 BCE), Goryeo (918-1392), and ends with Joseon in October 1897.

According to the mythic account recounted in the *Samguk Yusa* (1280s), the Gojoseon (Old Joseon) kingdom was founded in northern Korea and southern Manchuria in 2333 BC. Gojoseon possessed the most advanced culture in the Korean peninsula and was an important marker in the progression towards the more centralized states of later periods. Wiman, Chinese Wei Man, (flourished c. 190 BC), Chinese general, or possibly a Korean in Chinese service, who took advantage of the confusion that existed around the time of the founding of the Han dynasty in China to usurp the throne of the Korean state of Chosŏn. He moved the capital to the present-day site of P'yŏngyang on the Taedong River, dominating the area on the Korean-Manchurian border, and extended his influence down the Korean peninsula.

From the 1st century BC, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla grew to control the peninsula and Manchuria as the Three Kingdoms of Korea (57 BC–668 AD), until unification by Silla in 676. Silla and Baekje

controlled the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, maintaining the former Samhan territories, while Goguryeo controlled the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, Manchuria and the Liaodong Peninsula, uniting Buyeo, Okjeo, Dongye, and other states in the former Gojoseon territories.

In the late 9th century, Silla was divided into the Later Three Kingdoms (892–936), which ended with the unification by Wang Geon's Goryeo dynasty. During the Goryeo period, laws were codified, a civil service system was introduced, and culture influenced by Buddhism flourished. However, Mongol invasions in the 13th century brought Goryeo under the influence of the Mongol Empire in Mongolia and the Yuan dynasty of China until the mid-14th century.

The last dynasty Joseon was formed on 17 July 1392 by powerful Goryeo military commander Yi Seong-gye which lasted over for 500 years. During the beginning of Joseon Dynasty on 1394, the capital was moved to Seoul, also known as Hanyang and later as Hanseong and it remained until its fall. Seoul has been the capital of numerous kingdoms on the Korean peninsula since it was established. But today's Seoul is the capital of South Korea. Joseon encouraged the entrenchment of Confucian ideals and doctrines in Korean society. Neo-Confucianism was installed as the new state's ideology. Buddhism was accordingly discouraged, and occasionally Buddhists faced persecutions. Joseon's peaceful era remained till two centuries but was broken by the Japanese invasion and later Joseon was invaded by Jurchens and Manchus in 1627 and 1636 respectively which led this dynasty to follow harsh isolationist policy due to which the country was known as the "hermit kingdom" in western literature.

Under Joseon dynasty- trade, literature, science and technology, and classical Korean literature flourished and saw the emergence of vernacular alphabet hangul due to its consolidate effective rule. The Joseon dynasty was replaced by the Korean Empire and in 12 October 1897, Korean Empire was formed. It was a Korean monarchical state proclaimed in October 1897 by King Gojong of the Joseon dynasty and the empire ruled till Japan's annexation of Korea in August 1910 and in 1905, the Korean Empire became a protectorate of the Empire of Japan.

Korea had been remained as a vassal state under the powerful countries by China, Japan, Soviet Union, and USA. Earlier Korea was the tributary state of China. For thousand of years East Asia was dominated by China because China possessed a large population and military, best products and technology, best education system and bureaucracy. Japan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Ryukyu and of course Korea were China's tributaries.

And in 1895, Korea got liberated from China and became a self-reliant nation. But this liberation didn't last for long. Prior Korea was not as powerful as the other nations who were planning to invade it. In 1904, the Russian and Japanese war began for invasion of Korea to which Japanese won. In 1910, Japan colonized Korea. Koreans were threatened a lot under Japanese rule. Japanese treated them as slaves.

In order to establish control, Japan waged an all-out war on Korean culture. It became a crime to teach history from the non-approved texts and authorities burned over 200,000 Korean historical documents, wiped out the historical memory of Korea. Japanese not only threatened the Korean people but also their cultural symbols too. One of the most powerful symbol of Korean sovereignty and independence was its royal palace called Gyeongbokgung, which was built in Seoul in 1395 by the mighty Joseon dynasty. The Japanese colonial government tore down over a third of the complex's historic buildings, and the remaining structures were turned into tourist attractions for Japanese visitors. Korean language and the names were banned during their ruling period. During World War II, many Korean men were compelled to serve in Japan's army or work in wartime factories while many women were compelled to provide sexual services to the Japanese soldiers and these women were known as the "comfort women."

And then Korean Declaration of Independence was announced on 1 March 1919 after the end of World War I against the Japanese rule so that Korea would no longer tolerate them. Then there was the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea on 11 April 1919.

The Korean Provisional Government (KPG), formally the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, was a partially recognized Korean government-in-exile based in Shanghai, China, and later in Chongqing, during the period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea.

On 11 April 1919, a provisional constitution providing for a democratic republic named the “Republic of Korea” was enacted. It introduced a presidential system and three branches (legislative, administrative and judicial) of government. The KPG inherited the territory of the former Korean Empire.

The Korean resistance movement actively supported the independence movement under the provisional government, and received economic and military support from the Kuomintang (“Chinese Nationalist Party”), the Soviet Union, and France. After the surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945, the provisional government came to an end.

When Japanese lost World War II, they left the Korean peninsula in 1945. Japan ruled over Korea for almost thirty-five years. And soon after the end of Japanese colonization over Korea, the Soviet Union and USA captured the Korean territory and divided Korea along with 38th parallel line through the National Geographic map into North and South without any proper acquaintance of geographical knowledge.

The Soviets and USA ruled Korea for over five years and left the Korean peninsula in 1948. And on 15th August 1948, South Korea got the liberation and officially declared itself as “The Republic of Korea” and on 9th September 1948, North Korea liberated and officially declared itself as “The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. And finally after thirty-eight years of being remained as a slave nation, Koreans were ruling Korea. But again this peaceful serene situation didn’t last for long, North Korea wanted to rule the entire peninsula so it began to invade South and consequently, the Korean War began on 25th June 1950 between North and South and this war lasted for almost three years till 1953. During the war North Korea was supported by China and the Soviet Union while South Korea was supported by the US and its other allied countries. And the fight ended with an armistice agreement, still divided with a demilitarized zone (DMZ) on 27th July 1953. This is how Korea got split and the new nation formed into North and South as well as Korea’s literature also got divided.

And later, the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula was adopted between the Supreme Leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, and the President of South Korea, Moon Jae-in, on 27 April 2018, during the 2018 inter-Korean Summit on the South Korean side of the Peace House in the Joint Security Area.

According to the declaration, the governments of North Korea and South Korea agreed to cooperate on officially ending the Korean War and the Korean conflict, beginning a new era of peace and sharing commitments in ending divisions and confrontation by approaching a new era of national reconciliation, peace, reunification and prosperity and improvements to inter-Korean communication and relations. This declaration agreed that both sides would “make active efforts to seek the support and cooperation of the international community for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula”. The declaration was submitted to the United Nations General Assembly on 6 September 2018.

DISCUSSION

Prior the division of literature into North and South, Korea didn’t had the script of its own and Japan too. Korea was totally dependant on Chinese writing system as it was the only writing system in Korea. Korea was deeply influenced by the Chinese civilization and also followed its ideology of Confucianism. And all the literary works in Korean literature were based on Confucian canon (literary Chinese) until the advent of vernacular Korean alphabet ‘Hangul’ in 1443-1444 by King Sejong of Choson dynasty. Although Hangul had been created but it did not come into widespread official use until the late 19th and early 20th century. Thus, until that time it was necessary to be fluent in reading and writing Hanja to be literate in Korean, as Korean documents, history, literature and records throughout its history until the contemporary period were written primarily in Literary Chinese using Hanja as its primary script.

Hanja are Chinese characters used in Korean writing. The knowledge of Chinese characters is still very important those who wishes to interpret and study older texts from Korea, or anyone who wishes to read scholarly texts in the humanities. A high proficiency in Hanja is also useful for understanding the etymology of Sino-Korean words as well as to enlarge one's Korean vocabulary. Korea has a rich vocabulary because of its historical contact with China and Japan and due to its rapid modernization. Therefore Sino-Korean words and loanwords are considered an integral part of Korean vocabulary. Hangeul is also known as Chosŏn'gŭl in North Korea. And during Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945), the Korean language as well as hangeul were suppressed and Japanese imposed their language on them for use. When Korea got liberated from Japan, the use of Korean language as well as the alphabet hangeul were restored both in North and South.

Prior the invention of hangeul, as Koreans grew familiar with the Chinese characters and classical Chinese, they tried to deconstruct the elements of the Chinese writing system so that they could express the native Korean sounds in a Korean way. Consequently, idu writing system was devised to represent the ancient Korean language by borrowing the Chinese characters. So, idu is defined as the transcription of ancient Korean vocabulary, phrases, and sentences that use Chinese characters. Hyangchal, the local writing system used to write vernacular poetry such as hyangga and it is often classified as the subgroup of Idu script, the gugyeol writing system which was created for interpretive reading of classical Chinese texts. But the 1894 reform abolished the traditional examination system and instituted Korean language as a subject for civil servants. So finally, the Chinese language was forbidden after one thousand year of being remained as dominant language among Koreans and considered detrimental among the Korean people and Korean believed that the Chinese language was responsible for their downfall.

Ever since its national division in 1945, the linguistic divergence also occurred in North and South Korea. Both countries had adopted different political ideologies from their ruling allies Soviet Union and USA. South Korea turned towards capitalism and North Korea turned towards communism. And they both had implemented different language policies. North Korea implemented P'yongyang based Cultured Language (munhwao) and South Korea implemented traditional Seoul based Standard Language (p'yojun mal). And both these languages adopted by North and South Korean territory include pronunciations, hangeul spelling conventions, lexicon, meanings and styles. And the most important conspicuous thing is the phonological difference between Cultured Language (CL) and Standard Language (SL).

And with their split and the Korean War led to the development of North and South Korean literature. South Korean literature depicts the scenarios of the time of colonization period under the Japanese and the liberation after 1945 which concerned the writers to purge the vestiges of Japanese colonization. The wounds and chaos of the people during the Korean War, political turmoil - the formation of the authoritarian and dictatorial power under Yushin constitution which allowed the president Park Chung-hee to legally and openly violate and suppress his opposition and the civil liberties during 1972, despotism, and the Gwangju Uprising during 1980 against the martial law implemented by the former president Chun Doo-hwan after Park Chung-hee, and the spur of industrialization which led to the development of labour and agrarian fiction and also the rise of roman-fleuve.

South Korean literature comprises the genres - mainstream fiction referred to as 'pure literature' in South Korea, popular fiction (defined as the mass market-targeted works, or as an opposite of pure literature), historical fiction (one of the largest selling genre in South Korea and it often covers the Choson Dynasty and the colonization era), fantasy, science fiction., poetry, and essayists.

And Han Kang holds a very important place not only in South Korea but globally. Han Kang, the South Korean writer born on 27th November, 1970. She was extremely affected by the Gwangju Uprising which took place in 1980 and this democratization movement against the martial law leads to many

brutal deaths of the innocent people with lots of blood spill around there. Han Kang too hails from Gwangju but the situation was remained serene till she stayed there but she had to shift to Seoul because of her father's occupation and then the uprising took place. Though Han Kang was small at that time but that horrifying incident had an immense impact upon her as well as displayed in her works too.

Inspired and horrified by this incident, Han Kang wrote 'The Vegetarian' and 'Human Acts' which portrays the humanity of human beings 'threatening.' With her fictional work 'The Vegetarian', Han Kang achieved the international fame and visibility for which she won the Man Booker International Prize in 2016. This international fame and visibility was also achieved by Deborah Smith, the British translator of Korean fiction who translated Han Kang's 'The Vegetarian' in English and won the Man Booker International Prize for it.

Whereas North Korean literature is based on socialist realism. After its division and its liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, North Korea set forth many objectives and one such objective was the establishment of socialist culture by including literature as an integral part of it. And during the mid-1960s, North Korean literature focused on Juche (self-reliance) thought of Kim Ilson (country's founder and the first leader) for its literary production. Juche is the state ideology of North Korea and the official ideology of the Workers' Party of Korea. With the establishment of Juche ideology, the emphasis of literature turned from socialist realism to Juche's revolutionary ideology. The main motive behind Juche was that Korea for many many years remained a vassal state and due to which Korea didn't developed itself and its people and that's why Korea had to depend on other countries for their survival and which was the reason for their downfall for always being remained as a slave nation but after the liberation however, learned from past experiences, North Korea didn't wanted that same thing to persist again and thus, North Korea isolated itself from the rest of the world.

Literary works in North Korean literature eulogize the character of Kim Ilson's anti-Japanese struggles during the colonial period especially under the period of Juche literature. Since 1970, the poems comprising tribute to Kim Ilson had become so extreme in quantity that it was grouped as a separate genre of songga (hymns). And in fiction, the North Korean writers emphasized on proletarian literature from the colonial period.

CONCLUSION

Korea has had suffered a lot prior and even after its split. Consequently, the partition between North and South Korea, emergence of the Korean War, and the political turmoil of imposing martial law or authoritarian rule over the citizens played a very crucial role in the development of South Korean literature. The scenarios of that time in South Korea had a deep impact over Han Kang which arose her visibility globally with her perspective of showcasing 'The Horror of Humanity' in her work.

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