

Reflections on Chinese-Western Comparative Literature Studies in an Age of Globalisation

Comparative Literature as an independent discipline of the humanities has been in existence for over a century since it rose in the latter part of the 19th century although it has undergone some profound challenges within and without this discipline. Some of the comparatists are not infrequently worried about the effects that these challenges have brought about, and therefore, they are even worried about the future of Comparative Literature itself. Obviously, at the turn of the century and the beginning of a new millennium, Comparative Literature is once again confronted with several challenges, as it is always challenged from different sides in different periods. But what is the strongest challenge to our discipline since we are now in an age of globalisation? In my view, both in the Western and Chinese context, the severest challenge we are now faced with is the impact of so-called “Cultural Studies”. Along with the advent of economic globalisation, especially in Chinese culture and society, popular culture and mass media have played a more and more important role in our cultural and intellectual life. The rise of popular literature has even more challenged canonical literary studies (cf. Hillis Miller 2000). Chinese comparatists are even suspicious of the future of Chinese-Western comparative literary studies which emerged only after the Cultural Revolution when China opened its door to the outside world and started its economic reform. To respond to the various challenges, the present essay will first of all deal with the new “crisis” that faces Comparative Literature in general, before exploring the prospective orientation of Chinese-Western comparative literary studies in particular.

Will Cultural Studies Replace Comparative Literature Studies?

It is true that in the present age of globalisation, the humanities and social sciences are all affected by the impact of economic globalisation. It is not surprising that canonical literary studies are challenged by the rise of popular culture and even consumer culture, and the literary and cultural market is shrinking more and more. Obviously, as a prevailing branch of learning and interdisciplinary discourse, Cultural Studies exclusively deals with contemporary popular culture from a theoretical or critical perspective. Scholars of Cultural Studies, although many come from literary studies, try to highlight the long-repressed and marginalised discourses rather than pay attention to elite culture and its product: literature. The domain of "literature" is expanding further and wider, including non-elite and non-Western literary works. The great tradition of English literature is somewhat "hybridised" with the impact of postcolonial writing. Literary studies are filled with various cultural concepts and theoretical jargon borrowed from other disciplines. Literary theory is no longer "pure"; it is being replaced by the more inclusive "critical theory" according to Hillis Miller. Or it should rather be regarded as "theory" proper. As for the future of literary theory, just as Ralph Cohen summed up over ten years ago, the present and incipient directions of theory are not always recognisable in terms of the usual models. There are "four types" of theory change to explain the directions theory is taking:

Political Movements and the Revision of Literary Theory;
Incorporating Deconstructive Practices, Abandoning Deconstructive Ends;
Non-Literary Disciplines and the Extension of Literary Theory;
Seeking the New, Redefining the Old, and the Pleasure of Theory Writing.
(Cohen 1989:vii-viii)

If we think that critical theory has essentially revised and enlarged literary theory, then Cultural Studies has certainly narrowed the domain of literary studies. Actually, Cultural Studies scholars explore anything they like, except literary works. Or they just use literary texts as the object to analyse a broader social and cultural context. Thus it is not surprising that some comparatists in the traditional sense are most concerned about the

“new crisis” with which Comparative Literature is confronted. They even predict that with the expansion of Cultural Studies, some day Comparative Literature will either come to an end or it will be totally swallowed by Cultural Studies. As a Chinese scholar who does both Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, I fully understand their situation. So I am just thinking of some practical strategies to meet such a challenge.

Apparently, Cultural Studies could be done in different ways: either exploring the problem of culture proper from a theoretical perspective, or dealing with literary phenomena from a cultural and ideological perspective, or analysing all the cultural phenomena from a sociological and anthropological perspective, or focusing on mass media, etc.. Comparative Cultural Studies should also be included in the inclusive domain of Cultural Studies. If we recognise that early Cultural Studies still paid considerable attention to literary studies, or comparative studies of literatures in a broader cross-cultural context, then the current prevailing Cultural Studies is almost dominated by studies of ethnicity, gender, identity, mass media, popular culture and even consumer culture. It is going farther and farther away from literary studies. In such a broad context, the domain of Comparative Literature has become narrower and narrower, with more and more scholars involved in studies of popular culture and mass media. In North America, institutionally speaking, Comparative Literature is almost on the verge of being swallowed by the more and more prevailing Cultural Studies. Therefore, it is understandable that some comparatists are most concerned about whether it is necessary for Comparative Literature as a discipline to exist in the next millennium. If the answer is yes, what practical strategies shall we adopt to deal with this then?

I always hold that since there are several ways of doing Cultural Studies, the one practical way to narrow the gap between studies in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies is to put literary studies in a broader context of cultural studies since literature itself is part of culture and closely related to culture and society. Many of the theoretical topics discussed by today's Cultural Studies scholars come from literary studies; similarly, many of the influential Cultural Studies scholars used to be literary scholars dealing exclusively with Anglo-American literature or Comparative Literature. So it is not necessary for the two types of

scholarship to be opposed to each other. Possible dialogue could undoubtedly be carried out. In this respect, the critical path and scholarship of the late Canadian comparatist and cultural critic Northrop Frye have set us a good example (cf. Wang Ning 2001). Frye should therefore be regarded as one of the pioneering figures of Cultural Studies. The same is true of the work done by Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak who are not only recognised as comparatists but also have made relevant contributions to contemporary Cultural Studies. Actually, in today's context of globalisation, the boundaries of all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences are obscured. Cultural penetration has become an irresistible trend. We can hardly say, for instance, whether Jameson is a comparatist or a cultural studies scholar since his work exerted great interdisciplinary influence and significance. Even my own research is done in an interdisciplinary way: doing Comparative Literature studies from cultural and theoretical perspectives and analysing cultural phenomena by referring to literary texts. So my argument is: Cultural Studies cannot take the place of comparative literary studies; it can only co-exist with the latter and improve and enrich the latter with new perspectives and methodologies.

What Shall We Do in Chinese-Western Comparative Studies?

Now let us come to our own area: Chinese-Western comparative literary studies. Obviously, we should not deny the fact that, for a long period of time within our discipline, Eurocentrism and then West-centrism dominated over comparative studies of literatures till the time when the force and value of Oriental culture and literature were recognised by Western comparatists. So-called "cultural relativism" was initially intended to highlight the dominance of European or Western culture over Eastern culture. Douwe Fokkema is perhaps one of the first European comparatists who revised the connotation of cultural relativism by referring to Chinese culture and literature so that it could be accepted by both Western and Chinese comparatists. He correctly points out,

The acceptance of cultural relativity was certainly a step forward in comparison with the older claim of the superiority of European civilisation. Ruth Benedict emphasised that "the recognition of cultural relativity carries

with it its own values", such as tolerance of other, equally valid patterns of life. (Fokkema 1987:1-6)

His frequent visits to China and various lectures delivered at Chinese universities on Chinese-Western Comparative Literature studies have certainly proved his tolerant and sympathetic attitude toward Chinese culture and literature which were once very flourishing in history but were later marginalised for a long time. In the 20th century, Chinese culture and literature were strongly influenced by various Western cultural trends and literary thought, which easily enables us to do Chinese-Western comparative studies from the perspective of influence and reception. During the past dozen years, along with the rise of Oriental culture and literature, the connotation of cultural relativism has been substantially changed. As one of the oldest Oriental cultures with a long and splendid tradition, Chinese culture and literature have been moving closer and closer to the world since China opened itself to the outside world and practised economic reform in the latter part of the 1970s.¹ Chinese literary studies have also attracted the attention of international literary scholarship.² So Chinese-Western Comparative Literature studies will undoubtedly have a bright future although it is now subjected to some crisis. The crisis arises from the fact that some Chinese scholars still do not want to communicate with international scholarship, or more exactly, with Western Sinological circles. They still confine themselves to a narrow domain of national literature studies, which is indeed outdated. It is sometimes understandable to adopt a nationalist attitude toward the impact of foreign culture, but if such cultural nationalism is pushed to an inadequate extreme, a new opposition between the East and West will occur.

It is true that domestic Chinese scholars usually believe traditional Chinese literature to be rather autonomous and not influenced by any other

¹ Although Gao Xingjian's winning the Nobel Prize for Literature is opposed by the Chinese authority, I still think it a hopeful token that the achievements of contemporary Chinese literature have been recognised by international literary scholarship.

² In this respect, the great success of the International Conference on the "Future of Literary Theory: China and the World" (July 2000, Beijing) has actually taken the first step to internationalise Chinese literary theory and literary studies.

cultures. So it is not necessary to do comparative studies of traditional Chinese literature and Western literature. No doubt Chinese literature was almost isolated from any other influence before the late 19th and early 20th century. Even so, we could still compare Chinese literature with Western literature in theme, motif, style, narrative technique, aesthetic spirit and artistic representation so that a common poetics or theory of interpretation could be found through such comparative studies. It was the Opium War and then the May 4th Movement that forced China to open its door wider to the outside world. So Chinese literature since then has been strongly influenced by various Western cultural trends and literary currents. Some scholars even believe that Chinese literary theory and criticism has been characterised by losing its critical “discourse” or even its “voice” since 1919.³ If it were true, why then should we do Chinese-Western Comparative Literature studies? These scholars have actually neglected another fact: Chinese culture and literature have also had considerable influence on Western culture and literature. In almost any place in today’s world, we can easily find a Chinatown or Chinese restaurant or Chinese goods. In this way, Chinese-Western comparative study should be done in two ways.

Obviously, in the current context of globalisation, to explore the dissemination and reception of Chinese culture abroad has become a new research topic attracting the attention from domestic scholars in Comparative Literature and culture. They are accumulating research materials, writing scholarly works and putting forward new ideas, in an attempt to demonstrate the state of the art of the dissemination, introduction and translation, teaching and research of Chinese culture and literature in the West. Undoubtedly, their effort will “fill up the cultural gap” caused by the long-standing “Eurocentrism” and then “West-centrism” in international Comparative Literature and culture studies. We could affirm that Chinese people’s knowledge of the West is much more than Western people’s knowledge of China, largely due to the imbalance in East-West cultural

³ Among those who hold this idea is Cao Shunqing, whose essay in Chinese should be mentioned: “Ershiyishiji zhongguo wenhua fazhan zhanlue yu chongjian zhongguo wenlun huayu” [“Strategies for the Development of Chinese Culture in the 21st Century and the Reconstruction of Chinese Critical Discourse”], *Dongfang Congkan* [A Multidimensional Study of Orientalism], Vol. 3 (1995): 213-227.

relations. Just as Ji Xianlin (1999:2) has correctly pointed out in the "Preface" to the series on Chinese Learning in the West,

Chinese people can not only "grab" things from the West, but also "send" things out. In history, this "sending out" might well be unconscious, but today, to us, since Western people do not want to take things from China, we could only send these to them. From a strategic point of view, we could say, it is our international responsibility that we should undertake. In this way, we must introduce to people of all countries the essence of Chinese national culture so that they could share it with us. (Ji Xianlin 1992:2)

That is to say, on the one hand, we will sum up the occasional encounter between Chinese and Western culture in history and their interaction with and possible inspiration to each other, and on the other hand, we should also intentionally and systematically introduce the excellent research results of Chinese culture and literature made to the West by domestic Chinese scholars so as to fill up the gap between Chinese and Western cultural exchange.

In disseminating Chinese culture and literature abroad, Western Sinologists have made considerable contributions. As far as the state of the art of Sinology in the West is concerned, we cannot deny the conspicuous fact in recent years: there are already hundreds of Chinese or Chinese European or Chinese American scholars who either teach in departments of Comparative Literature or East Asian studies in Euro-American countries. Their wide knowledge of Chinese culture and profound learning in many related disciplines of social sciences and the humanities have undoubtedly changed the essential quality of Western Sinology, inserting in it some new methodologies and ideas. It is true that to some conservative domestic scholars, the introduction of Western learning might appear to have "colonised" traditional Chinese learning and obscured Chinese national and cultural identity, but facing the above fact in Western Sinology, how can we say that Western culture has also been "colonised"? Anyone might know that in international cultural and academic exchange, any culture, if it is intended to influence other cultures or to innovate itself, could not but lose something. That is to say, in introducing its own culture, we should find an effective means by which other nations could accept it. The means to this is

certainly language. It should not be regarded as a sort of cultural "colonisation" to talk about Chinese things in a Western language and even in Western critical and theoretical discourse since English is always regarded as a world language in which we could easily communicate with people of all countries. In my view, it is a historical trend beyond anyone's expectation or resistance for Sinology to exchange with traditional Chinese learning, and only in this way can Sinology make greater achievements and be recognised by domestic Chinese scholars. On the other hand, domestic scholars dealing with traditional Chinese learning should respect what Western Sinologists have achieved, especially their perseverance in searching for first-hand materials and conscientiously applying new methodologies from new theoretical perspectives to their research objects. Although Chinese culture could no longer be so "pure" in absorbing things from Western learning, it will be a "necessary loss" if Chinese learning should be known to more people in the world or "globalised".

Along with the realisation of an increasing importance of China's position in the world, Chinese culture has been more and more attractive to the international community. This is evidenced by the fact that the interest in teaching and research of Chinese culture and literature has developed in leaps and bounds. We could see such a rapid development in two aspects: first, more and more canonical and contemporary Chinese literary works have been translated into other languages and read by a comparatively large audience, and some of them have even become compulsory readings for those studying Chinese language and culture; secondly, Sinology in the West has been playing an important role in introducing and disseminating Chinese culture and literature. These two forces are both necessary, without anyone of which it will be difficult for Chinese culture and literature to be known to the world, especially to the West.

But for a long period of time, some domestic scholars were often confused as to the work done by Sinology (done by foreign scholars) and traditional Chinese learning (done by domestic scholars); and what is even worse, they even neglect the legitimacy of the existence of Sinology and the important role it has been playing for centuries. So, before I put forward my idea of reconstructing Sinology in the age of globalisation, I would like to make a distinction between the two: Sinology is a unique learning established by those who are not Chinese but who are engaged in the study

of the Chinese language and its literature and culture. Its starting point is by no means China proper, nor are the major researchers Chinese people themselves. They only observe China, conceive China and even construct the image of China as an "other" from their own cultural and theoretical perspectives. Therefore, their research results, largely due to the difference in starting point and methodology from domestic Chinese scholars, are naturally different from those made by the latter. But some of their insightful ideas might well inspire domestic scholars, for if we want to overcome the possible "blindness" in recognising our own cultural shortcomings, we had better have such an "other" through the eye of which we can more clearly recognise our own value. But in contrast, traditional Chinese learning starts from the Chinese nation proper, with the research body made up of Chinese scholars themselves who observe and study China from within rather than from without. Only once these two orientations interpenetrate and complement each other can Chinese studies in the world be really prosperous in the new century as well as in the new millennium. If we say the former is a necessary process in which Chinese culture could be internationalised or globalised, then the latter will stick to the Chinese nation proper. That is to say, a sort of localisation opposed to globalisation will take place. We are now delighted to see that the two orientations, after conflicting with each other for years, have a tendency of more or less converging. Although they are still different in methodology and ideology, they can still possibly communicate and complement each other, for one of the important functions of the humanities and social sciences lies in its continuous theoretical construction and reconstruction. So it is high time for us, Chinese scholars as well as Western Sinologists, to reconstruct Sinology in the age of globalisation. Only by effectively co-operating with Western Sinologists, can we make greater contributions to Chinese-Western comparative literary studies in the near future.

Is There a Future for Chinese-Western Comparative Literature?

I now will focus on the current situation and the future of Comparative Literature, especially Chinese-Western comparative literary studies, faced with the impact of Cultural Studies in an age of globalisation.

Although some scholars are still suspicious of the future of Chinese-Western comparative literary studies, I am fully confident. I always think that in recent years, along with China's approach to the process of economic globalisation, cultural globalisation has also attracted the attention of literary scholarship, especially in the field of Chinese-Western comparative literary studies. Quite a few orthodox scholars of humanistic orientation do think that globalisation is nothing other than a way of imposing American values on Oriental and Third-World countries in an attempt to homogenise their national cultures into a new totality. To these scholars, in order to resist the cultural intervention from the West, especially from the United States, we should also resist the intervention of Cultural Studies in an age of globalisation, otherwise, Chinese culture will lose its national and cultural identity. They have forgotten that cultural penetration always occurs in two ways: no culture could avoid being influenced by other cultures if it is intended to influence others.

In current Chinese critical circles, the prevailing debate around the "construction of Chinese critical discourse" is such an attempt to resist the Western influence. This inadequate prevalence of nationalism may well form a new opposition between Chinese and Western culture, and will do harm to Chinese-Western comparative literary studies. Others think that in an age of globalisation, Cultural Studies will help to deconstruct the traditional hierarchy of literature and culture in the Chinese context, thus paving the way for a more equal and fruitful dialogue between different genres of literature and between Chinese and Western literary scholarship. I think that the second attitude is obviously more practical and realistic. It is true that the phenomenon of globalisation does come from the West, but it also has the other line if we just confine it to the domain of culture. That is, apart from the fact the process of globalisation started with Columbus's discovery of the New World in the Western hemisphere, it also started elsewhere: China's silk road westward in the communication between Chinese and Western culture. But unfortunately, the value of the latter has not yet been fully recognised. And further more, due to the long-standing poverty of China and its people, Chinese cultural values and literary achievements have been deliberately overlooked by those Eurocentrists. In this sense, the advent of globalisation has actually brought to us both challenges and opportunities: it challenges our economy and culture to a

competitive state, but it also stimulates our economy to develop more rapidly and encourages our culture to communicate more effectively with the international community. The irresistible tendency in the new century as well as in the new millennium is cultural communication and dialogue rather than cultural conflict. In this way, in the age of globalisation, Chinese-Western comparative literary studies will offer us the opportunity to carry on dialogue with international scholarship. It also enables us to have a broad cross-cultural perspective if we want to keep our discipline still alive as well as academically energetic. And my tentative conclusion is obviously optimistic and confident although the current difficulty should not be neglected.

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Comparative Imaginations: Chinese and Western Poetry

In classical Chinese and Western poetry, we can often find descriptions about the poets' or protagonists' travels in an imaginary universe rather than in the real world. This travel in an imaginary universe has been of great interest to us in our study.

First, let us look at some of the poets and their works. The Italian poet Dante Alighieri narrates his unique experience of travelling in the "Three Realms"—from Inferno to Purgatory and then to Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*. His poem presents before us an amazing world. At the beginning of the story told by *The Divine Comedy*, Dante gets lost in a dark wood. When he tries to climb a hill, he is scared by the presence of three fierce beasts on his way; a leopard, a lion and a wolf. He turns back in fear and finds himself back in the dark wood again. Later, led by Virgil and Beatrice the poet arrives in paradise, a place outside the human world where he eventually obtains happiness.

Faust, written by the German poet Goethe, contains episodes of the romantic travel of Faust and Mephistopheles. Using his overcoat as a cloud, Mephistopheles travels around with Faust by way of riding this cloud. In the second part of the drama, Faust flies to the Alps and joins the Greek gods and spirits in their evening party. Towards the end of the play, Faust's soul is saved and gains entry into paradise, thus Faust leaves the human world forever.

In the long poem *Paradise Lost*, the English poet Milton creates the image of Satan and a peculiar background of the story: hell, chaos and

human world. Although the story was taken from *The Old Testament*, Milton greatly expanded the plot.

Shelley's first long poem *Queen Mab* is written in the form of a fairy-tale dream in which the fairy Queen Mab carries off in her celestial chariot a beautiful and pure maiden Itathe, and shows her the past, present and future of mankind. Through the mouth of the fairy Queen Mab, the poet attacks the tyranny of gold, militarism and religious superstitions.

We might call these examples "romantic journeys". Such journeys are also well known in China. Representatives of the "Romantic Travel" poems were "Li Sao" (Song of Feelings of Sadness) and Qu Yuan who wrote *Yuan You* (Far Travel) in the period of the Warring States. The protagonist of "Li Sao" suffers so many setbacks and difficulties in the real world, i.e. the state of Chu, that he has to leave his own country because he is unable to realise his ideals there. Thus he starts his travel into the imaginary universe:

Yoking four jade dragons to a phoenix carriage
I rose on the wind and journeyed abroad.
In the morning I set out from Ts'ang-wu;
By evening I reached the Hanging Gardens.
I wanted to rest a while by its Spirit Gates,
But the sun hurried on to its setting.
I ordered His-ho to slacken his pace,
To linger by Yen-tzu and not press on.
Long, long is the road, and far the journey,
But I must go searching high and low.

We can also find descriptions of "Romantic Travel" in poems written after the period of the Warring States, such as *Xian Zheng Ren* (in the Qing Dynasty), or *Wang Zi Qiao* (in the Han Dynasty). And "Romantic Travel" also occurred in some other poems written by poets like Chao Cao, Chao Zhe, He Shao, Guo Pu, Li Bai, and Li He. These poems are known as "poems about immortals", among which there are Li Bai's *Visiting T'ienmu Mountain in a Dream on Parting*, *Song of Lu Mountain: To Censor Lu Hsü-Chou* and *Westward I climbed to Lotus Blossom Peak*. In such poems imaginary figures embark on romantic travel, though the flight through the heavens is usually depicted as a dream.

After a careful study of this kind of poetry, we will come to see that it is a particular kind of poetry which involves a special subject matter together with a particular artistic method. What this poetry displays is the poet's artistic conception of supra-space and supra-time made possible by an exceptional way of thinking on impulse. The protagonists make their "Romantic Travel" into the universe far away from the real world, high up in the sky or down into the earth. The poetry unfolds, before our eyes, the magnificent scene of the universe and the gods and spirits in nature and on earth. We call this kind of poetry "Romantic Travel". Here, "Romantic Travel" means "Spiritual Roaming" which is symbolic of the poet's pursuit of his ideals. Of course, we need to point out that such poetry is not intended merely for description of "Romantic Travel". Rather, it gives expression to the sentiments and ideals of the poet. For instance, in Qu Yuan's "Li Sao", strong feelings of love for his birthplace drive Qu Yuan back home again after searching high and low in the universe. Therefore, it can be concluded that the poet aimed to embody his ideals and aspirations in his "Romantic Travel" in the universe.

We may classify such poetry in two categories according to its content and form. In the first category, the poet seems to be concerned mainly with a display of contradictions between reality and his ideals; and "Romantic Travel" is a sheer artistic expression of the poet's pursuit of his ideals. So, in poems of the first category, "Romantic Travel" is the process of searching for ideals and the universe of "Travel" is the ideal world. For instance, the "Three Realms" in *The Divine Comedy* are actually Dante's deliberate arrangement and representation of the real human world by means of imagination, and the "Three Realms" stand for three stages of the search for ideals. In short, the first category can be represented by the poems of China's Qu Yuan and Italy's Dante.

However, in the second category, there is a difference between Chinese poems and Western poems. The second category is different from the first one in that there is no direct relationship between the experience of the poet and the reality of society. Such poems were known as "poetry about immortals" in traditional Chinese poetry. The poems in this category are recognised in Chinese history of poetry for their special subject matter and way of expression. The earliest ones were Qu Yuan's *Yuan You* (Far Travel) and Zhuang Zi's *Xiao Yao You* (Romantic Travel). By the time of the

Southern Dynasties, “poetry about immortals” had established itself as a special category. What characterises this poetry is that the subject matter deals with immortals, a land of immortals is presented, and the poet, although he does not desire to become an immortal, expresses his own displeasure and dissatisfaction in his life through immortals.

If we compare the above two categories of poems, we can find that poets of the first category hold a positive view of life, i.e. to leave the world in order to enter the world, but poets of the second category mean to negate life, i.e. to detest life and try to escape from the human world. That is the case in Chinese poetry.

The second category in the Western world is represented by Goethe’s *Faust* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Different from the Chinese “poetry about immortals”, “Romantic Travel” in Western poems is associated with religion. How did such differences between Chinese and Western poetry arise? The cause lies in the different influence of religion in China and the West. The decisive influence of Christianity in the Middle Ages in Europe deeply affected the poets, including non-believers. But, the Chinese “poetry about immortals” was influenced by Taoism, one of the chief religions in old China. It is the rich imagination of Taoism that was carried over into “poetry about immortals”, resulting in many visions. This gave great inspiration to the poets who made immortals part of their subject matter, and tinged the artistic form with Taoism. Thus, the Chinese poetry became obviously different from the Christian poetry in the West. We can say that the different influence of different religions gave rise to different subjects and styles in poetry.

It is evident that the emergence of “Romantic Travel” poetry was due to the influence of religion. Religion stimulated the poets’ imagination and led to their religious way of thinking, thus making possible “Romantic Travel” in the universe.

However, what is more important is imagination. It is imagination that turns the vast universe into a great stage on which poets could undertake romantic travels; it is imagination that enables poets to describe the sun, the moon, stars, winds, clouds and so on. Without imagination, there couldn’t have been poetry about “Romantic Travel”. So I think that religion is also the result of imagination, or more exactly, religion was born out of human imagination in the early days of mankind. Out of the rich imagination of

Chinese and Western poets came the imagination of the same “Romantic Travel” in the universe. This is an artistic coincidence.

Of course, imagination in art is by no means a wild flight of fancy; it is a conscious artistic effort to transcend time and space for the creation of an ideal universe and travel in the vast universe in search of an ideal objective.

It can be stated unequivocally that it is imagination that gave rise to this special type of poetry about “Romantic Travel”, and it is the different social, religious and cultural conditions that have brought about the discrepancy between Chinese and Western poetry about “Romantic Travel”.

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The Goal of Korean Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiculturalism: Transgressing and Traversing National Boundaries

I. Introduction

The historical background of Korean comparative literature can be considered in three ways: ancient, medieval, and modern. From the ancient period have been recorded three short poems entitled “Song of Orioles”,¹ “Song of Love Crossing the River”,² and “Song of the Turtle”.³ The first two are lyrics, while the last one is an epic related to the foundation myth of Gaya.

Among others leading the main stream of medieval literature, “Song of Cheoyong” and “You May Go” suggest useful sources for our study.

¹ “Two orioles are flying and singing together. With whom can I rest in this loneliness?” The second king of the Goguryeo Kingdom (668), king Yuri (B.C. 19-A.D. 18), wrote this poem while thinking of his second queen named Chihui from China. She went away to her country after the quarrel with the first queen called Hwahui born in Korea. Though there are various ways of interpreting this poem, it is generally evaluated as the first Korean lyric. Hereafter, all English translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

² “Love should not have tried to cross the river. Why did you try only to drown? What could you do in the end?” While the sailor, Gwakrizago, was repairing his boat early in the morning, he saw a madman trying to cross the river with a wine bottle in his arms. Though the madman’s wife tried to save her husband, he drowned. Weeping bitterly she accompanied a song on the lyre, then she drowned herself in the river. When Gwakrizago told his wife, Yeook, what he had witnessed, she also played this song on the lyre.

³ “Oh turtle! Dear turtle!/Show your head/If you do not/We’ll roast you and eat you.” When two or three hundred people gathered on top of Mt. Guji (Turtle’s Head) on Lustration Festival Day, a strange voice asked them to sing this song. When they did, a purple rope descended from the heaven with a golden chest wrapped in red cloth containing six eggs. The boy who had hatched first became the founder of Gaya and was named king Suro.

Since it appeared in 879, the first poem has been transformed into various forms of literary art from myth, poem, and shaman dance to modern poetry. Today several poets have employed its theme as poetic subject to emphasise the fact that it signifies in the so-called high-tech society. Feelings of ordinary people inscribed in the second poem can be compared with King Yuri's emotions reflected in the first poem of those three ancient texts. Connecting ancient and modern, these feelings and emotions still breathe in modern lyric poems. The highlight of this medieval period is King Sejong's (1397-1450) invention of the Korean alphabet⁴ in 1443. It enabled those illiterate people with Chinese characters to write and read with their own language system. It also recorded and arranged many poems that until that time had been transmitted orally.

Modern literary activities in Korea have been influenced by Western literary trends. These are symbolism, realism, surrealism, modernism, post-modernism, deconstruction, culturalism, and multi-culturalism. Some of them have influenced literary circles indirectly through the period of Japanese colonisation (1910-1945); others have led to experimentation in a more direct manner by those literary people who have tried to keep up with worldwide literary theories. As a result, Korean literary society nowadays is led by lyricism, modernism, and culturalism. Here lyricism, usually called new-lyricism, does not mean gentle and romantic emotions often expressed in the ancient and medieval period; it means rather impartial observations of poetic objects with intellectual aesthetics. Modernism entails such literary fields as avant-garde, post-modernism, and deconstruction. And culturalism is concerned mainly with questions of how to accept foreign cultures without undermining the characteristics of the national culture in an age of

⁴ The Korean alphabet is composed of ten basic vowels and fourteen basic consonants. [unfortunately, technical resources in South Africa are not sufficient to reproduce the pictograms provided by the author. Only the descriptions are mentioned herewith. The Editor.] Three vowels symbolise "heaven", "earth", and "I" = the human being, respectively. By using these, ten vowels are available, namely (a), (ya), (eo), (yeo), (o), (yo), (eu), and (i). Fourteen basic consonants, imitating human speech organs, are (g), (n), (d), (l/r), (m), (b/v), (s), (o), (j/z), (ch), (t), (p), and (h/f). Integrated within the Korean alphabet are philosophical thoughts and intellectual understandings of sound systems. The combination of these vowels and consonants make up the pictogram, meaning *Hangul*, which is one of the most scientific letters in the world.

multi-culturalism. Its literary subjects sometimes treat the importance of keeping the national environment free of industrial pollution.⁵

With this brief survey of the background of Korean comparative literature, our study will focus on (a) transformation of myth, (b) consistence of lyricism, and (c) other arts transformed into lyric. (As concerns originality and influence of literary theory from a Korean perspective, see my submission to Workshop 3, organised by the Committee of Literary Theory, 15 August 2000.)

II. Transgressing and Traversing National Boundaries

(a) Myth⁵ Transformed into Suro's Queen and Cheoyong

The Foundation myth of Gaya (?-562), an ancient country located in the southern part of Korea, provides several sources for the study of cultural relationships between Korea and India at that time. Gaya⁷ means "fish" in old and new Dravidian (cf. Byeong-Mo Kim 1999:128).⁸ Two fishes painted on the entrance door of King Suro's tomb gives us a certain clue that Gaya's culture might be related to the ancient Indian culture. This kind of emblem has been popular not in Korea but in an ancient Indian region called Ayuta which is today's Ayudhia. It is said that King Suro's Queen, Hwangok (yellow jade) Heo, came from Ayuta. And King Suro's name reminds us of Sanskrit *Sura* which denotes ruler, superman, or hero (cf. E-

⁵ Of course social-realism was once very strong from the mid-1920s to the end of the 1990s. Its voice has been weakened since there was the summit meeting between North and South Korea on June 13, 2000.

⁶ Though there are differences among myth, legend, and folklore, our study uses myth as a representative form in classical Korean literature. According to the late professor Deok-Soon Jang, myth emphasises the divine, the archetypal, the systematic, the comprehensive, and the national; legend refers to the true, concrete, non-systematic, individual and regional, and by folklore we mean interest, abstract, non-evidence, ordinary, and personal.

⁷ William Bridgewater and Elizabeth J. Sherwood (1956: 755) suggest that Gaya is the west central Bihar state in India. Hindu pilgrims visit the temple of Vishnupad which means Vishnu's footstep in Sanskrit. The temple is a plain building surrounding a depression in a rock. Buddha Gaya, the site of Buddha's enlightenment, is six miles to the South.

⁸ Kim quotes Gil-Un Kang's "Comparative Study between Gaya Language and Dravidian"(1999:1).

Wha Lee 1998:74-75). Many of these are written in Ilyeon's *Records of Three Kingdoms*,⁹ for instance:

In A.D. 48, an Indian princess on a ship with red sails and a red flag approached from the south west. She told her story to the king Suro, "I am a princess of the Indian kingdom of Ayuta. My surname is Heo, my given name is Hwangok (yellow jade). I am sixteen years old. In the fifth month of this year, my father and mother told me of a dream they had, wherein the supreme deity appeared and said, 'The king of Gaya, Suro, has been sent by heaven. He is a holy man. He is still unmarried, so send your daughter to be his queen.' He then returned back up to heaven. His words still ring in my ears: 'Take leave of your parents and go there.' So I started on my voyage, with steamed dates and heavenly peaches to sustain me. Thus it is that I stand before you now." (E-Wha Lee 1984:15)

When the princess arrived at Gaya and was greeted by King Suro, "she removed her silk trousers and offered them as a gift to the mountain spirit. Her retinue consisted of some twenty people, including Sinbo and Jogwang, and their wives and slaves, they had brought numerous precious goods as well" (Lee 1984:14-15). Among these was also the *Bhasa Stone Pagoda*, "Bhasa" meaning "every wisdom originates". The story of the pagoda continues:

While the princess was heading toward the east according to her father's order, she was not able to move any more because of god's anger. When she returned, her father gave her this pagoda, saying "it will protect you". And she arrived safely in Gaya. Although [the material of the pagoda] is beautiful with several red marks, such stones cannot be produced in Korea. (E-Wha Lee 1984:319)

⁹ Its author is Ilyeon (1206-1289) who was a leading Buddhist monk in Goryeo Kingdom (918-1392) as well as a well-known scholar teaching royal families. In this book are recorded invaluable sources of ancient Korean myth, legend, folklore, religion, society, thought, origin of surnames and regional names, everyday lifestyle, etc..

These discussions lead our study to a tentative conclusion that Indian culture might have influenced ancient Korean society, language, religion, customs, music, and family lineage.¹⁰ That the stone is not a Korean production is true and persuasive. “Mute stone does not speak.” It only witnesses what had happened between two Asian countries about two thousands years ago.

In connection with international cultural influence on the ancient Korean society, the “Song of Cheoyong”¹¹ gives us several suggestions, though not authentic, to be related to the Arabian world. The song derived from the following myth: As one of the seven sons of the dragon king in the eastern sea, Cheoyong married a beautiful woman. An evil spirit transformed himself into man and seduced her while her husband was in Seorabeol, the capital city of the Silla Kingdom (57BC—935AD). On returning home and witnessing the scene, he sang the song, which so much moved the evil spirit that it disappeared, promising: “I would not even try to enter the entrance gate to which your portrait is attached” (E-Wha Lee 1984:256-257). Since then song, dance, and masks related to Cheoyong were popular during the period of the Goryeo Kingdom (918-1392) and the beginning of the Yi Dynasty (1393-1910).

On the question of Cheoyong’s identity and his song, authoritative interpretations have been debated among classical literary scholars in fields from folklore, Buddhism, historicism to eclecticism. In verifying the fact that Cheoyong came from the Arabian world, Yong-Beom Lee’s historical understanding among others offers our study persuasive possibilities. According to him, Ulsan was a seashore place and centre of international trade during the Silla Kingdom and Cheoyong was one of the Arabian merchants. To support his ideas, Lee quotes from Bu-Sik Kim’s (1075-1151) *The History of Three Kingdoms* (Vol. 11) which was written in 1145: “When the King Heongang made a tour around eastern sea area in 879, four strange men appeared and knelt down in front of him. Then they sang and

¹⁰ King Suro and queen Heo had ten sons and two daughters. The first son became the second king, seven of them Buddhist monks, and the other two sons got their surname Heo, as the queen demanded. Since king Suro’s surname was Kim from Gimhae, the capital city of Gaya, even today a Kim and a Heo from Gimhae do not marry each other.

¹¹ “Having played late at night/In the moonlight of Seorabeol,/Returning home,/I saw four legs,/Two were mine. Whose are the other two?/Though they were mine,/What can I do since they were taken?”.

danced. Their features and clothes were so unfamiliar to the King's group that they called them mountain-sea spirit."

According to our history, there was some evidence of active international trade during the King's reign in the period (875-886). And we can infer a conditional conclusion that Cheoyong might be an Arabian who arrived at the Silla Kingdom by way of China or Japan. Whether he came from Arabia or not, his heritage still breathes in Korean culture and literature. Its mask and dance have been used to get rid of devils and illness in our traditional society.

In the modern period, Chun-Soo Kim (b.1922) has transformed the myth into his poetic theme, as it appeared in his *Short Poems of Cheoyong* (1979), although the myth has been modernised with diverse images (cf. my *Comparative Literature* 1994:154).¹² The first poem from the poet's anthology reads: "In the cage, bird's urine is rather fragrant/There comes evening/A mountain bird caught in the cage/Was dreaming a dream/A berry eating snow in the snow was ripping in the winter/A red berry/Spring was falling with the petals of cherry blossoms." As Jeon Bong-Geon (b.1923) says, Kim uses image as such as his dominant poetic device and pursues poetry without meaning.

(b) Consistence of Lyricism

As our study surveyed in the introductory part, Korean lyricism has its root in missing love and memories of bygone days. It is different to that of Western lyric because it was not originally a song set to the lyre or to other musical instruments. When we talk of Korean lyric in comparison with Western poetry,

it is worth remembering the post-Renaissance lyric or lyrical passage, though not often intended to be sung but tends to be relatively mellifluous in sound and rhythm and to have a flowingly repetitious syntax that lends

¹² In addition to Chun-Soo Kim's anthology, Gwang-Gu Han's *Seoul Cheyong* (1993) and *City of Cheoyong* (1955) are available.

itself to expansive, often exclamatory, expressions of intense personal joy,
sorrow or contemplative insight. (Cluysenaar 1973:138)

A first-century Korean example is King Yuri's "Song of Orioles", whose emotions are inherited by "You May Go" during the thirteenth century from which these two verses are taken:

I might cling to you, not to go,
Fearing you may never return
Because of my overdo grumbling,

Go, then, I'll let you go
But come back soon
As easily as you leave me now,
(Yuri, "You May Go")

This kind of lyric, usually short, is often constructed on a single mood of parting love. Such a poetic theme of sorrow because of parting still continues in the 20th century, especially in the poems of So-Wol Kim (1902-1934) and Yong-Rae Park (1925-1980). Kim's last stanza of "Azaleas" is closely connected to the mood of "You May Go".

Because you hate me so much
If you go away,
I shall allow you to go
In a deep silence.

Mt. Yak in Yeongbyeon
Azaleas
Are being picked in armfuls
To put in your way

With every step that you take
Where flowers are laid
Tread them gently and lightly.
Please go on your way.

Because you hate me so much
If you go away,

Though I die, suppressing grief,
Never will I weep.

(Kim, "Azaleas")

While the last stanza reflects traditional poetic feelings, its second part is usually compared with W.B. Yeats's "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" whose last two lines are: "I have spread my dreams under your feet/Tread softly because you tread on my dreams". Yeats spreads his dreams under the feet of his beloved; Kim does the same with azaleas. "With every step that you take/Where flowers are laid/Tread them gently and lightly/Please go on your way." Kim might have read Yeats's poem in translation by his mentor, Eok Kim (1893-?), entitled "Dream".

In many of Park's poems, we can find clean images synthesised in short forms. One of them is "Parting", consisting of only two lines:

I was raising my hand, color of balloon flower.
A goldfinch was crying at my fingertips.

(Parks, "Parting")

Without explaining the sorrow of parting love, only two images are suggested. One refers to a visual image ("balloon flower"), while the other is of an acoustic nature (the "goldfinch" crying). From the former, we can trace the purple colour of the evening sky under which the persona was standing just raising his hand without saying "goodbye". His word is said by a goldfinch crying alone. Birds sing in western poems; in Korean poems birds cry. This informs us about cultural differences. When a Korean says a bird sings, it reflects happiness; when it cries, it shows sorrow or grief.

As Lorna Sage says, imagery has not got much to do with verbal analysis. And the most persuasive analysts like William Empson hardly use it. It has become associated with the demand that we respect what is "there" in the work, but the connection is tenuous, and the empiricism fake. Image is, however, still persistent in contemporary Korean poems as a means of poetic design. Let me introduce to you a famous lyric poet, Chang-Whan Cho's (1945-) "Winter Solstice":

In the deep sky frightened
A crescent is hung like a grass leave

Long-jointed bamboo forest rustles
A little bird soars quickly
Sharp wind passes fast
A scream like a blood mark falls

I have to live. With the spirit of sword slain
(Chang-Whan Cho, "Winter Solstice")

As I.A. Richards says, image blurs the verbal facts about metaphor by obscuring the relations that are being made between tenor and vehicle. It also suggests a free-floating emblem which is offered in a poem. When we read a poem, we have to try to find out the real connection of image implied in a group of assumptions which places a poem in relation to deep structure, for example, personal psychology, objective description, etc.. In the first three stanzas of the above poem, a winter-night landscape is transformed vividly by several images. Then in the last line, the persona suddenly recognises himself as a victim in the chilly waste world in which every poetic object tries to survive by itself without regard to others. Studies of imagery tend almost irresistibly towards the assumption that images are not the expression of the poet's purpose but of a greater force working through his inner mind.

Korean lyricism has been changed in various ways since King Yuri's "Song of Orioles" first appeared about two thousands years ago. At first it pursues to show personal sorrow aroused from parting love. Such examples can be seen in So-Wol Kim's poem which is connected to "You May Go" and Yeats's poem "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven". Then in Yong-Rae Park's poem, personal grief is abbreviated into visual and acoustic images. Park's poem reminds us of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough" (Pound 1926:35). Such heritage is summed up and reaches to the summit in Chang-Whan Cho's poem. He is highly appreciated as a canonical lyric poet in the so-called post-modern literary society, and his poems are evaluated as one of the most authentic examples of aestheticism by many literary critics. These are the lines of Korean lyricism from ancient times to the present.

(c) **Other Arts Transformed into Lyric**

Henry H.H. Remak emphasises:

The strengthening of the concept and the increased use of comparison in comparative literature remains also one of the strongest arguments in favour of including the comparative arts and the comparison of literature (by analogy or contrast) with other areas of human cognition in the field we call “comparative literature”.
(Remak 1961)

Since then comparison between the arts has been encouraged in comparative literary circles.

In our study, we shall now consider Hye-Gyeong Ahn’s “Gogh: Crows over the Wheat Field” (cf. here my detailed analysis of the poem in *Journal of Korean Comparative Literature*) and Chang-Whan Cho’s “Boléro” (cf. also my analysis in *Journal of Korean Comparative Literature*). Ahn’s poem has transferred Vincent van Gogh’s painting code into poetic code, while Cho’s “Boléro” has changed Ravel’s music code into poetic code. First, Ahn’s poem reads:

Neither the sky nor the field
Nothing is said.
When the mind filled with sorrow
Runs away,
Road is changed into a stream suddenly rushed.
Intoxicated with day-dream originated from the sorrow.
The endless field is embraced into the road.
Wind has awoken every wheat and grass,
Let them shake,
Let die ripen wheat field run away
Among the tough swirl.

The sky rolls over with dark blue,
Shining and murmuring
Murderous intention spreads all over the field.
To make the ground sing,
Low whispering of the wind is enough.
Breathe, the breast filled with fragrance.

The birth of storm.
Whispering of the broken drums
Is heard from the deep ground of the wheat field.
Uncomfortable days
Falling with pieces under the hands, bright and skilful.

In the gun brought by the crow
There is a breath of smile.
In the field where even the crow cannot sit down
He steps the first step for the eternal start,

(Ahn, "Crows over the Wheat Field")

In the above poem, we can say that van Gogh's painting entitled "Crows over the Wheat Field" is well transferred into Ahn's poem named "Gogh: Crows over the Wheat Field". This is not because Ahn as a poet has tried to reflect van Gogh's painting as exactly as she could, but because her poem has effectively transferred the subject matter of his painting. In her particular objective way, Ahn has related van Gogh's personal life with his painting. Such relationship can be found in the first two lines of her poem: "Neither the sky nor the field/Nothing is said." In this simple poetic statement is abbreviated the theme of Ahn's poem. This kind of "nothing is said" originates from the whole impression of van Gogh's painting, in which we can read such impressions as candid expressions, strong contrast of colours, thorough disharmony among different elements, trouble and obstinacy. All these elements converge into the death image in the last independent line.

There are three roads in the front of the painting and these roads are related to the nonnegotiable reality of van Gogh's life. The road in the centre is the will of the painter and the two roads on both sides are supporting such a will. And all these are transferred into "road is changed into a stream suddenly rushed" and "the endless field is embraced into the road". Second, the most important word is "the wind", because of this wind, the crows in the painting are flying into the sky and the poetic words in the poem start to reveal the poet's inner intention. From "dark blue", "murderous intention", "storm", and "enough" to "breathe", the poetic word reaches its height to show the hidden meaning of the painting. And the peak lines of the second stanza are "uncomfortable days/falling with pieces under

the hand, bright and skilful". These lines are implying the death of the painter himself. In the last stanza, we can find another start of life after death is implied in the line "he steps the first step for the eternal start". There the comma means that van Gogh's life continues, although he committed suicide by shooting himself, and Ahn's poem does not end.

In the field of comparative literature, the interest in comparing painting with poetry has just begun. In this regard I hope that this kind of study will be understood among the many comparative literary scholars.

On the important relationship between music and poetry, E.T.A. Hoffmann says: "Poets and musicians are members of one church, related in the most intimate way: for the secret of word and tone is one and the same" (Hoffmann quoted in Scher 1982:225). That poetry and music share their origin is a notion as old as the first stirrings of aesthetic consciousness. "Histories of both have remained in many ways mutually contingent" (Hollander 1965:553). With the developments of these two fields, various theories were advanced about their possibility of comparison as basic media of artistic expressions. From early times to the present, juxtapositions like "poetry and music", "word and tone", and "poetry and sound" recur with formulaic frequency in the field of comparative studies (Scher 1982:225). Chang-Wan Cho's "Boléro" appeared in his 4th anthology entitled *Blue Eyebrow: Anthology of Musico-Poetry* (1994):

Vague air mass comes forward
Dispersing fog, flute sounds come forward
Wearing green scarf, locust trees come forward
From doors opened, cloud shoes come forward
Hats of hen's feathers come forward
Wet voltaic electricities come forward
Steel made, slopes come forward
Sulphur, and acids come forward
Golden colour, locomotives come forward
Fire, waves, vapour, and
Flags come forward

(Chang-Wan Cho, "Boléro")

Music and poetry are twins in the study of comparative literature. One cannot be separated from the other, not only because these two fields

belong to the area of the arts but because they have been accompanied with human history from ancient times to the present. In the form of music and poetry, we usually reflect our feelings toward every possible object and non-object that we can understand.

As the sound-image in Ravel's *Boléro* becomes louder and louder from the weakest flute through to the strongest trumpet to the all playing musical instruments, in Cho's "Boléro", word-images follow up such sound-images. We can group them into visual and acoustic images. In the poem, these images develop from visual-uncatchable "air", "fog", "cloud", "feather", "fire", and "vapour" of acoustic-catchable "locomotives" and "waves". All these images contribute to the final image of "flags". The image of flags implies self-conceit, march, conquest, victory, and cheers.

Recognising the important relationship between music and poetry in the study of comparative literature, Ravel's *Boléro* and Cho's "Boléro" suggest possible comparison by focusing on differences and similarities between musical theme and poetic theme, success and failure in transferring sound-image into word-image, effectiveness in the process of reflecting musical instruments into figurative language, comparing the musical structure with poetic structure, and finally the possibilities of studying poetry in regard to such other fields as opera, video-art, play, movie, etc..

Comparing poetry and music today is a steadily growing field in comparative studies. It is also a pioneering field that requires terminologically and methodologically concrete understanding of various systematic relations between the two areas. In the study of musico-poetry, we should consider the feasibility and potential usefulness of semiotic approaches, though it has already been explored in depth by Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Nocols Ruwet, Roland Harweg, and Jean-Jacques Nattiez.

As our study has discussed, future works in music, linguistics, and poetry may help us to make clear certain aspects regarding mutual influences between poetry and music. This idea leads our comparative literary scholars to overcome the narrow circumference in studying literature nowadays and to advance towards the centre of a truly international comparative literary society.

III. Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiculturalism: A Conclusion

The approaches to comparative literary studies are many and various. Some scholars are interested in studying literature as an entity itself, as an individual, coherent, self-contained, and self-existent whole, while others choose literature and other fields such as literary psychology, sociology, history, politics, and philosophy. Today, another field of comparative literature is the study of interrelations between literature and the other arts. At present, our study has surveyed possibilities of Korean comparative literature from ancient times to the present focusing on myth, lyricism, and the relationship between poetry and the other arts.

Literary history everywhere gives us the closeness and complexity of the relation between literature and myth. But the real nature of this relation cannot be solved since myth is just surviving in the form of literature. Our study, therefore, just suggests the possibilities of influence of ancient Indian and Arabian culture on Korean society. There is not enough concrete evidence to make it clear, even though we can trace it according to several historical facts and some particular relics. Those facts and relics provide us with some clues that there were already cultural influences overcoming the national boundaries between Korea and India or the Arabian world.

Though lyric is as old as music history, Korean lyric has been developed in a particular way and its first main theme was sorrow of parting love. Then it has become poetic characteristics in lyricism. Since the influence of imagism or new lyricism, lyric poetry achieves its role as showing image-centred figurative languages. Sometimes such images are compared with Yeats's or Pound's poetry. And this kind of comparative study reveals that Korean lyricism always tries to traverse its national boundaries. By doing so it can be comparable with foreign literary works. Among those poets concentrated on the property of poetic images, I strongly recommend you to read Chang-Whan Cho's lyric poetry, because he is one of the truly distinguished lyric poets who pursue their own poetic world in this post-modern society.

To extend the field of comparative literary study, we have shown two poems transformed from painting and music. As comparative literary scholars, it is necessary for us to broaden our concerns on interrelations of literary studies. Such a study has been discussed for centuries; for example, we can go back to G.E. Lessing or the Italian Renaissance theorist, Horace. More recently scholars like Cornelis de Deugd endorsed the extension of literary study across national boundaries as well as across literary boundaries. René Wellek also advocated this necessity. As regards this aspect, we have discussed two poems related to van Gogh's painting and Ravel's music, respectively. Because of the time limit and space, they could not be fully discussed. However, you all may at least understand what the main tendency in Korean literary circles is and how much we try to reflect and develop the current state of interdisciplinary studies of literature as well as interrelations of comparative literary studies.

The goal of Korean comparative literature in an age of multiculturalism is to overcome the strict boundaries of a national borderline as well as to cross literary boundaries. And such efforts, I think, are already begun in many ways. In myth there were suggested tentative cultural relationships between ancient Korea and India or the Arabian world. In lyric poetry, there were influences by Yeats's and Pound's poetic world. Through their shadows, image-centred poems are consistent in this techno-economic society. And there are also diverse poetic efforts to overcome the narrow sense of literature by connecting poetry to the other arts. In short, in this so-called multicultural literary circle, Korean literary society is open to world literature; world literary society is open to Korean literature.

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Contemporary Korean Poetry in the Age of Mass Culture

Since the Enlightenment Period through the Japanese colonisation and the Korean War, writers and especially poets were respected as intellectuals in Korea for their works. However, since the 1960s, Korea underwent rapid economic development, and the post-war generations were brought up under the strong influence of mass culture, TV, movies, and advertising. Computers became a part of everyday life, and modern Korean society was assimilated to the mass culture of America and Europe. This so-called *Hangul generation* in particular, was very different from the previous *Hanmun generation* in that it tried to avoid ideological, contemplative thinking in order to concentrate on a sensual, extemporaneous attitude.

Unlike their predecessors who sacrificed themselves for democratisation and economic development, today's young generation is able to enjoy freedom and material abundance. Nowadays, major immediate problems in Korea are related to the quality of life, the protection of the environment, the improvement of social systems, and enjoyment of leisure time. A capitalist mind-set pursuing maximum profits brought the prevalence of commercialism. Naturally, this kind of cultural change is also manifested in literature, especially in poetry and fiction. The borderline between difficult "high-brow" poetry for a handful of advanced readers and popular poetry for the "run-of-the-mill" reader came to dissolve.

Commercial publications without any consideration for literary quality are prevailing in Korea nowadays. Light novels enjoy huge commercial success. Best-selling poems are written by amateur poets who have not won any major literary award. Popular works for immature readers,

wasteful use of vulgar language, and works of low-level poetic expression all bear the name of poetry. Obscure works are being distributed that cannot be judged "literature" by experts.

In the case of pure poetry, it seems as if the inevitable unintelligibility of modern poetry scares readers away; and in order to compensate for this difficulty, many attempts have been made to recover communicability by way of recitation of poetry, poetic drama and exhibitions of illustrated poems. It is customary for anthologies to provide explanatory notes for poems, written by experts, so as to assist the "ordinary" reader. Moreover, poets prefer in their works sensual and concrete Korean words to ideological and conceptual Chinese words.

It seems that the dichotomy between specific poetic diction and everyday language is disappearing. The difference between poetic and prosaic words becomes blurred and (stylistic) techniques are increasingly diverse. Impracticality and purity emphasised in Kant's or Schiller's aesthetic that so greatly contributed to literary manifestations becomes less important today. Until the early 20th century there seemed to exist a marked line that separated pure from popular literature. However, in the post-industrial or information society, the literature addressed to a few high-level readers loses ground. The classification of high- and low-brow became less clear as commercial concepts that appeal to people's taste became more evident. Unlike lyricism in traditional poetry, popular modern poetry pursues anti-lyricism. Typical for this is the acceptance of everyday life as subject for poetry. Traditional lyric poems based on empathy are considered to be too commonplace although they are still being enjoyed by many readers. Many poets depict everyday life objectively without modification or beautification in prose style. Graceful or mystical life no longer furnishes subjects for poetry, instead poems deal with ordinary life.

Kim Kwang-kyu reveals himself as a helpless common citizen, criticising a self who indulges in self-deception in a meaningless life. In his poem "Seoul Bound", the poet compares a strange face, symbolising an introspective self, with familiar faces which do not think about the meaning of real life. It can be said that the writer regards himself as stranger from time to time because he does not identify with those ordinary people who just enjoy everyday life. They play cards, read magazines, drink cola or

beer, and talk about the drought, soccer games, growing GDP, and stock prices without concern for the inner world of human beings.

Seoul Bound

When you are passing Pyungtaik in the Seoul bound train
across the twilight field in autumn fog,
on the rattling window pane
suddenly you might find a strange face.
Please don't think it is you.
There are familiar faces around you
chewing dried squids and playing card games.
Colourful roofs shouting in the twilight
antennas of TV sets shaking like dragon flies.
Please just nod.
Reading tabloid magazines.
Cries of insects suffocated with poison....
Please do not pay attention to those hard-to-hear sounds.
How jubilant are the sounds of energetic songs from the loud speakers
and the sounds of automobiles zipping along the highway!
Since, for a long time, life has been compared to a journey,
please, have a great trip
drinking cola or beer.
Think as little as possible.
Just say "oh!"
when you are surprised.
Please be silent if you want to utter a longer sentence.
When the silence makes you feel uncomfortable,
please, talk about the drought,
the soccer game of Argentina,
and the growing GDP and stock prices.
For you
and for me. (Kim Kwang-kyo, "Seoul Bound")

In "It's my Life", by O Kyu-won, an advertising billboard or a picture from newspapers or magazines is described:

It's my Life

A couple (their faces are Korean)
is walking in the desert.

A couple (a man with a cowboy hat
is staring straight at the front—he is
definitely a man, a voluptuous woman is
staring at the camera—she is definitely a woman)
is walking in the desert.

Only the following is written.
An ad for Dong—Il Lenagoon:
“It's My LIFE—Simple Life”.

(It is simple!)

“Simple Life”, oh, the wide desert of
symbols (?)
there isn't even a stone in the desert
to throw at the forehead of life— (O Kyo-won, “It's my Life”)

“A man with a cowboy hat” and a “voluptuous woman” are walking in the desert: this is a typical American image that we can see in Marlboro cigarette advertising. “Simple Life” also refers to copies of American life that were quite popular during the 80s, and which aim at presenting functional simplicity, strength and quality of commodities and low prices. With the image together with the notion of a “simple life” the writer criticises contemporary materialism and capitalism, besides pointing out how deeply Korean life is influenced by the American mode of living. There are no deserts, cowboys and voluptuous women in Korea, yet most Koreans are familiar with such images. We can see that Korean culture is being assimilated to American culture, something that seems to be the fate in this multicultural society.

In his poem “Which Way should I Go to Get to Kaima Plateau?” by Hwang Ji-woo, a newspaper article is inserted which reports on ADM (Atomic Demolition Munitions) stationed in the DMZ (De-militarised Zone).

“Which Way should I Go to Get to Kaima Plateau?”

Washington Correspondent Chang Doo-won.

According to the secret Pentagon Report, the US has 21 ADM's in the Pacific region, most of which are stationed in the DMZ in Korea, the columnist Jack Anderson reported on the 3rd in the “Washington Post”

“Look guys. Now we can talk about these things.”

People listen without saying a word. Loud noise of silence.

Can you tell me 50 rumours on love?

A crazy woman is asking me the directions to Kaima Plateau in the Kwangwha-moon subway.

Which way should I go to get to Kaima Plateau?

Mother, I am the son of a poor family.

I can't escape even Seoul with the mushroom cloud.

A part of my family is in the North. Within such a short distance,
50 ways to turn into skulls.

(Hwang Ji-woo, “Which Way should I Go to Get to Kaima Plateau?”)

The newspaper article used in this poem enhances the feeling of crisis that is embedded in the present-day situation of Korea. Korea today is the last remaining country divided by Cold-War ideologies. Kaima Plateau is a famous place situated in North Korea, and the “crazy woman” asking directions to the Kaima Plateau symbolises the eagerness of people longing for reunification. The images of the poem such as “loud noise of silence”, “a crazy woman”, “mushroom cloud”, and “a part of my family are in the North” all refer to the tragic reality of a divided country.

“Meditation on Hamburgers” by Chang Jung-il enumerates all the ingredients needed to make hamburgers, and the recipe (in prose style) certainly resembles an entry into a cook-book or one of those TV cooking programmes:

Meditation on Hamburgers

—A Poem Intended for a Cookbook—

A long time ago, I meditated on gold or dreams

On something very solid or on something transparent.

However, now I am going to also meditate on something soft.

- 2 Hamburger buns
- 1 ½ tablespoons butter
- 1/3 lb. beef
- ¼ lb. pork
- 1 ½ onions
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups bread crumbs
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 4 lettuce leaves
- 1 cucumber
- a little mayonnaise
- ¼ cup brown sauce

First, finely chop beef and pork.

While you are doing this, do not think of anything else, the first step for this meditation is made to make it a better meditation for the meditator in a carefully arranged order, and, if you think something else when it [the hamburger] is made, you cut your finger with the sharp knife. So you will stop meditating.

After chopping the beef and pork, now stir-fry the finely chopped onion rings in a frying pan with oil until they turn yellow, cool them.

The sizzling sound of oil and the tasty smell of onion will make your heart beat faster with excitement.

This shows that you are interested in this meditation.

Without interest, meditation is impossible and without interest, the world doesn't exist

.....

After that,
put brown sauce, onion, and the cucumber on the patty.
Now the meditation ends.

What a useful meditation!
After a tedious and meticulously designed meditation

a delicious American snack is born!

(Chang Jung-il, "Meditation on Hamburgers")

Readers may be perturbed by both the content and style of this poem. However, this text illustrates the culture that is accustomed to the taste of hamburgers. It means that our traditional culture has been overtaken by the modern style of life which, in Korea, means the same as the Americanised way of life. The poet criticises this contemporary Korean society with its culture that is domesticated by the West. At the end of the poem, the writer questions this Americanisation of Korean culture by cynically exclaiming: an "American snack is born!", "What a useful meditation!".

These works with their comments on current topics and descriptions of actuality parody materialism and critique modern culture. The style of these poems is very interesting inasmuch as it suits the expression of the subject matter. The use of everyday language or prose dominates these works; and introducing brand names that refer to merchandise, prices, and advertising is not awkward in some of these poems. Besides, quoting from newspaper articles and documents could be effective in increasing a sense of reality. Furthermore, some poets indulge in extreme experimentalism by adopting in their verse techniques borrowed from photography, or they parody other famous works, they even utter some meaningless words. These techniques are distinctive features of postmodern poetry.

Style in literature is influenced distinctly by social conditions and the environment. The Korean society today is westernised, something characteristic of capitalism and industrialisation. Mass production and mass consumption are the main characteristics of the modern industrial society. The development of mass media plays an important role in connecting this mass production with mass consumption. Since unsold products are meaningless, mass media have to influence both manufacturers and consumers. Mass consumption is not just a means of mass distribution. Rather, it defines and controls the way of our life. It would not be exaggerating too much to say that contemporary life for a human being is one that cannot escape the mass media.

Moreover, contemporary Korean poetry is influenced also by Western literature, especially postmodernism. The poems that I cited above are representative works that indicate such a trend in Korea. The examples

are influenced more by Western literary works and theory than by traditional Korean lyrics and poetics. In this regard, it is worthwhile to trace the source for this poetic trend and style in terms of comparative literary studies.

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