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*The Force of Feeling: Piecing Together the Poetics of Yi Sanghwa and Guo Moruo**

Introduction

My paper looks at how the literary phenomenon dubbed “romanticism” (浪漫主義, 낭만주의) came to be shaped in East Asia vis-a-vis the placing under such rubric the works and lives of two poets of early twentieth century, Korea’s Yi Sanghwa (이상화, 1901–1943) and China’s Guo Moruo (郭沫若, 1892–1978). I have chosen to look at the thoughts of these two corresponding figures to help reconstruct a frame of reference for the “modern” in 1920s poetry in Korea and China: the force of feeling and sentiment associated with the “romantic” period of literature. This is in no way to suggest that “romanticism” was a unified phenomenon in East Asia but to suggest that the “fall into feeling” marking the lyrical impulse in the poetry of both poets became, through its offshooting into “marxism,” a leftist marker for modernity: it is here where the two poets converge and “embrace each other” in a relation of influence.

I am interested in the notion of influence as it relates to the ideological undercurrent shared by both writers: the romanticism–marxism trajectory based on the experiments with Western–style self–expression turning into social commitment. Rather than a comparative analysis insisting on a “Chinese” or “Korean” difference which could lapse into qualitative evaluations, this paper explores how literatures of the two adjacent nations can be juxtaposed at a major marker in their literary histories known for its force of feeling and its potential to turn feeling into praxis. Thus, “romanticism” and “marxism” are to be seen as two sides of the same coin which gains currency in the literary economy of early twentieth century Korea and China.

Though contemporaries, Yi and Kuo did not directly influence each other in the sense that they were not familiar with each other or with each other’s ideas about poetry; they were not in direct contact with each other. As Harold Bloom has shown, influence as creative power can be found at the level of the unconscious and a poet need not have read a given poem to

be interacting with its traces. The idea of trace resonates in the East Asian term for influence (影響, 영향), having to do with shadows and echoes, and, therefore, with the residue of something which is experienced indirectly. Thus, influence can lie beyond textual survival or historical phenomenon to signify a meaning that comes close to the notion of “citation, that is both a demonstration of an alliance with something and the enactment or activation of that very alliance or reappropriation, in this case of a distant movement from another language and culture.” What I suggest that each was responding to are the traces of Western literature in translation which by the twenties in both China and Korea cleared the space for new works to be created.

The ‘distant movement from another language and culture’ becomes the romanticism long associated with European movements taking place at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. During early twentieth century in Korea and China, Yi Sanghwa and Guo Moruo engaged in an ‘activation of that very alliance’ by their appropriation of the subject “I” which they employed to express subjective freedom. While one must be careful in equating the grammatical insertion of the subject “I” in the East Asian context with the subjectivity found in Western literature (because the latter grows out of a capitalistic economic structure), the phenomenon is still to be noticed for its difference from the literatures of the past. Thus, the grammatical performance of this force of feeling is part of what has made literary critics in both nations appropriate the particular ?ism with echoes of an European influence to apply to the poets’ works.

Applied to the two poets we are concerned with, romanticism becomes a foreign index to the reappropriation of what Earl Miner has called the East Asian “affective–expressive” literary tendency, i.e., the tendency best found in the genre of the lyric. That is, the lyrical force of feeling, often linked to a post–enlightenment Western phenomenon turning away from the rational to explore the subjective freedom found in feeling, need not be considered a product of Western impact on East Asian literatures; that Guo’s readings of Spinoza led him to rediscover Chuangtze relates to how Western “romantic” literature available in East Asia, especially the poetry of figures like Shelly and Byron by this time, led to reclaiming the familiar East Asian poetic practice steeped in the lyrical moment of affective–expressive energy. In a related manner, Yi Sanghwa’s “fall into feeling,” more than being an imitation of *fin de siecle* French poetry, can be a performative product of such “influence” but one which also extends grammatically a prior lyrical tendency in East Asian poetry.

What I hope to do is to first consider the early poetic thoughts and practices of the two poets to draw the contours of their ideological meeting. Secondly, I would like to demonstrate the alliance between Yi Sanghwa's virtual poetic silence from the late twenties to his death a decade and half later with Guo Moruo's continued writings in the form of propaganda to trace how the lyrical "I" emerging from the early works of both poets with surprising force (and lack of grammatical necessity) collapses into silence for one while rigidifying into the propaganda demands of a collective body for the other.

Yi Sanghwa's "I" and Silence

Yi Sanghwa's poetry from early to mid twenties, encompassing the period between two of his most well known poems "End of the World Cry" (말세의 회탄, 1922) and "Does Spring Also Come to Stolen Fields" (빼앗긴 들에도 봄이 오는가?, 1926), can be examined in the light of the grammatically inflected affective-expressive tendency which appears in these works. The former poem becomes an example of his experimental mode of interiority-oriented emotional excess while the latter clearly expresses the rhetorical power of socio-political engagement. This transition marks the shift from simply a rhapsody on feeling to feeling in service of reality.

Published in the "romantic" journal *White Tide* (Paekcho) in 1922, "End of the World Cry" aligns itself to the fin de siècle "decadent" French poetry in voice, tone, and diction:

In the blood-stained cavern at evening

Ah?into the bottomless cavern

Not knowing the end

Not knowing the end

I'm going to fall upside down.

I'm going to be buried.

In the bosom of the gentle breeze

Ah?in the bosom of the dreaming gentle breeze

Not knowing day

Not knowing night

I'm going to build a drunken house

I'm going to start a painful laugh.

The poem is remarkable for its repeated use of the first person subject “I” (*na*) occurring as the first word in the last two lines of both stanzas. The temporal directives of the poem (i.e., evening; fall) belie the disorientation produced by the lack of a referential world: the speaker desires to dwell in the excesses of his own imagination, occupying the “drunken house” and the oxymoronic “painful laugh” of his own making. The *na* which surfaces at the end of both stanzas is followed by the contrastive topic marker *nan?n* and substantiates the individualized agent of will and action. This emphatic “I” *nan?n* (as for me) speaks of a self deliberately separated from others and claiming to be different in choosing to fall in a deep inner chamber, the cavern of the poet’s psyche.

Valorization of interiority, excess and of the downward movement associated with the romantic descent into the unconscious can be observed in the above poem, reminiscent of Blake and revealing the poet’s readings of selected Western, i.e., British, romantic poetry the poet most likely read in Kim ?k’s Korean translations; interiority, at least in mood left unadulterated by social constraints, is created. The title also indicates an affinity with the melancholy associated with French symbolist poetry. “End of the World Cry” can be read as an ahistoricized product of the confluence of chronologically and geoculturally distant literary phenomena. While the interpretive tradition in Korea attributes the affinity between the mood of *fin de siecle* Europe to the despair felt by the Korean poets after the politically failed Independence Movement in March 1919, it is difficult to politicize an apolitical poem pointing to a self-sufficient world of its own with no suggested public, referential world.

As a twenty-one year-old young man who would leave for Japan the same year with the hope of continuing on to Paris to study French literature, Yi Sanghwa at this juncture comes close to fashioning a private world in which motifs having no particular counterpart in East Asian literature, e.g., motifs of cavern and abyss, appear in his poems as an index to the foreign and the private, lying beyond the parameters of the familiar and the communal.

After turning away from the interiority of his earlier *na* poems, the poet in 1926 wrote and published his most well-known work “Does Spring Come Even to Stolen Fields?” The language of the poem is immediately inclusive, no longer expressed through a self-enclosed internal thrust of the unconscious, sharply contrasting with a poem like “End of the Century Cry.” Now a familiar use of language and the lengthening of the rhythm pervades the local landscape of the poem:

The land is no longer our own.

Does spring come even to stolen fields?

Along the paddy path like a part in the hair,

I walk, sun-drenched, as if in a dream,

Toward where blue sky and green fields meet.

Sky and fields with closed lips!

I don't feel I came out on my own.

Have you enticed me or has someone else called?

Winds whisper,

Shaking my coat's hem to urge me forward.

A lark laughs in the clouds like a girl singing behind the hedge.

O bountifully ripening barley fields,

You washed your long thick hair in a fine rain

That fell past midnight? I too feel buoyant.

Alone I will walk

On the good ditch around the dry paddy,

My shoulders dancing, I sing a lullaby.

Butterflies and swallows, don't be boisterous
But greet cockscombs and wild hemp flowers.
I want to see the fields where girls with castor-oiled hair weeded.
I want a scythe in my hands.
I want to stamp on this soil, soft as a plump breast,
Until my ankle aches and I stream with sweat.
What are you looking for? My soul,
Endlessly darting like children at play by the river,
How amusing, answer me: Where are you going?
Filled with the color of grass, compounded
Of green laughter and green sorrow,
Limping along, I walk all day as if possessed by the spring devil:
But now these are stolen fields,
And even our spring will be taken.

The poem is virtually a warning against moral slumber and diametrically opposed to the earlier poem. The speaker stands upright; it is day; the location is clearly outdoors and the landscape is specifically local. Swift-footed, the speaker now strides "as if in a dream." Dream is no longer associated with a mysterious realm of darkness but linked to a heightened state of awareness and stimulation which empowers the ambulating persona. At the same time, because the speaker articulates the situation in a familiar, rather than through a self-generated and authorized language, dream becomes only a provisional topos stopping short of a full metaphor. It no longer functions as a vehicle for transportation into the unconscious but as a clear vision of hope under sun and blue sky.

Pointed out by critics as a work of uncontroversial significance, "Does Spring Come Even to Stolen Fields?" is read as a piece of literature which exemplifies the poet's love for his nation. Yi Sanghwa, after his return to

Korea, is to have shed the sentiment of despair, turning to “national emotion” with the posture of political resistance. So just how did this change occur in the poet? What was the impetus for the leap from poetry for its own sake to the poetry of engagement?

History as Catalyst

After spending several months in Japan, Yi’s plans were curtailed by the Kanto earthquake of 1923 and its aftermath; he returned to Korea the following year without being able to go on to Paris. The shift in his poetics is made clear in his prose. In an essay titled “Last Will and Testament of One Leaving Home” published in March of 1925, the poet insists on leaving the desire for rest in private dreams. He insists on leaving “home,” a motif repeated as an isolated shelter of rest, the private self of the individual:

Let’s leave! Let’s leave and go out! My body my heart let’s leave quickly.

Let’s give thanks for the protection of my existence and leave. I sinned much

the sense of self-sufficiency and my body made my conscience wilt by this

ability to mend. To make this body fit the shelter of isolation called home is

like leaving a child who is entranced by moon and stars reflecting on the water

in a well there at the well [my emphasis]. At times when a sudden light of

conscience, still half-alive, strikes inside my head, half my heart ink-stained

by self-sufficiency and the other half mending the eaten-away traces, o my

life?how many times have you seen this! Let’s hurry and leave?in order to

wash away the stain and cut off the tatter, before my heart becomes paralyzed

by incurable habits, let’s go?as far as strength allows.

Home is equated with “self-sufficiency” and “the body,” the physical site of the senses and thus the place of feeling, becomes the place of departure. The figure of the child left enchanted by the reflection of the moon and stars not only implicitly comments on the figure of Li Po in the popular legend falling into the river in an attempt to scoop up the reflection of the moon, but also on the figure of Narcissus. Focus on interiority, in other words, is construed as vanity, an act of self-indulgence harmful if

left unattended by the mature conscience. The poet wishes not to risk the destruction of the self in search of inner freedom; the value of the self as consciousness shifts to that of the self as conscience, intimating the shift from a solitary “I” to a consolidated “we.”

What is most interesting to note is that the heightened sense of emotion, inflected in the romantic pose, leads to a deeper sense of social malaise. As the poet experiences the turbulence of colonial history which changes his life, the risk to the social self that “romanticism” at the individual level exacts becomes too costly to sustain: the move from “End of the World Cry” and “Does Spring Come Also to Stolen Fields?,” then, is driven by the force of individual feeling which takes on a moral qualification.

Guo Moruo and the Death of Poetry

As in the case of Yi Sanghwa, Guo Moruo’s journey of inner sentiment becomes regulated and corrected by the turn of history. It has been perceived that the traditional romantic stance located in Taoist individualism was reawakened by the May Fourth movement in China, allowing for individual emotions to attain a moral legitimacy. As the literary marketplace of the 1920s and 30s were inundated with diaries, letters, and biographies, the frequent use of the subjective “I” as well as monologues begin to appear in fiction; as a flux of emotions, romantic love takes on the symbolic value of a new morality. Thus, the shift from ‘literary revolution’ to ‘revolutionary literature’ becomes epitomized by the dynamizing view of a figure like Lord Byron, heralded as both sentimental and active.

Against this backdrop, Guo Moruo begins to express his interest in the notion of limitless freedom and subjectivity; by 1920, he announces that the fundamental task of poetry is lyrical. This was, of course, not a new idea but a reassertion of the earlier impulse found in East Asian tradition. It became magnified, however, by a self-referential world bathed in tears: “I am a man with highly developed lachrymal glands, always overflowing with tears.” As cry of the soul, then, such energy released in the affective-expressive mode flowing from the well of life equated poetry with sentiment.

Yet by 1924, Guo had embraced Marxism, proclaiming the proletarian poet as the great Byronic hero: “Oh, Hero poet! Oh Proletarian poet!” Influenced by Kawakami Hajime’s essays on socialism, the poet began to grope toward a broader form of collective romanticism:

Once socialism has been realized great literary geniuses will be able
to freely develop their potentialities to the utmost. . . Only then will
literature be able to take pure human nature as its subject. Only then
will a pure literature become possible.

What we can deduce from the above quotation is the poet's belief in the necessary *delay* [my emphasis] of pure poetry, that is the pure poetry suggested by equating the lyric with the cry-of-the-heart expressive impulse devoid of politics. Guo's increasing commitment to Marxist-Leninism confirmed by his joining the communist party in 1927 has him placing China at the first stage of Lenin's social revolution: the propaganda stage (which is to be followed by the stages of struggle and management of production).

Our internal demands cannot be brought into harmony with
the external conditions. . . My thinking has not been
consistent in the past, but I feel

now that it has a single focus of concentration. . . .
Perhaps my poetry

will die as a consequence of this, but since there's nothing
for it, the

sooner it dies the better. . .

The predicted *death* of poetry, for the committed communist poet becomes a necessary step toward the renewal of a consciousness which would eventually lead to the production of poetry inspired by individualism. Thus, propaganda rises as the necessary step toward the fulfillment of the romantic dream, such fulfillment requiring the timely death of the lyric. The "internal demands" in conflict with the "external conditions" of the world channels the force of feeling into the force of political rhetoric and propaganda.

If, in fact, Guo's interest lay in the ends, rather than the means of Marxist-Leninism, the ensuing end goal, that of self-expression and the development of individual potential, experiences its own forgetting, however temporary or temporal. As literature itself became an act of labor in the new era where literature was established as a vocation, the *wen-jen*

(文人) found a political purpose to their vocation; thus, the “superfluous” man became the “superior” man, the heroism of the Byronic genius putting himself to the labor of class struggle. Particularly for the younger members of the Creationist group educated in Tokyo and based in Shanghai, e.g., Chiang Kuang-tzu and Hsiao Chien along with Guo Moruo, the romantic impulse necessarily dissolved into the calling of “proletarian” literature. Then it follows that Guo’s proletarian stance solidifies eventually to his contributing to Mao’s cult-like status by 1958. The strengthening of the communist party via the mythification of its leader is achieved through the poet’s faculty of feeling expressed through the romantic impulse.

Juxtaposing Yi Sanghwa’s poetic silence soon after a series of poems written in 1926 in the light of Guo’s new writings after 1927 at the expense of poetry raises two important questions: how does the pressure to represent imposed upon the lyric allow the latter to survive and in what ways? My limited readings into Guo Moruo’s poetics reveals the certain death of the lyric in order for its utopian return and completion; close readings of Yi Sanghwa’s poems and essays reveals the need for the sacrifice of self-expression for the larger goal of a moral personhood. Yi Sanghwa does not project into the future to draw up an utopian completion of self-image and also remains tacit about the future of poetry.

Japan and the Poetic Imagination

If Japan was the site of transformation for Yi Sanghwa’s consciousness during his stay in 1923, it became for Guo Moruo a place for archaeological digging, where China’s past and traditions were discovered. Guo’s long extended residence in Japan starting in 1914 (where he enrolled as a medical student in Kyushu; he did not fully return to China until 1937) and his subsequent marriage to a Japanese woman turned the imperialist nation into a second, though foreign, home; this was where he could settle and in homesickness seize the opportunity to immerse himself in the works of Wang Yang Ming and Chuangtzu. It was also the place where he studied Latin and German and translated from the works of Goethe and other Western romantic writers; during this stay in Japan Guo became exposed to the works of Tagore who had made a trip to Tokyo in 1916. It can be surmised, then, that for the young Chinese poet, Japan became a place where two streams of knowledge, one from the East and the other from the West, met. The poet’s many translation projects, from the poetry of Heine to Turgenev’s *Virgin Soil*, can be said to have been enabled by his physical presence in the nation where world literatures came to encounter each other in a milieu of simultaneity and selective

appropriation. Japan also became a nemesis as Guo became branded a traitor by his nationalist countrymen for having a Japanese wife.

In addition, his presence in Japan allowed Guo to come in contact with socialism and saw the apolitical beginnings of the “art clique” (Creation Society, 1921) turn toward leftist politics, deliberately blurring the distinction between art and life. For Yi Sanghwa, on the other hand, Japan became the symbol of hope (his passage to Paris) turned despair as he returned to Korea with his projected plans deterred by colonial history. The figure of Japan looms ominously for the Korean poet who still imagines himself to be in Tokyo after his return to Korea. In “In Tokyo” the poem Yi published in 1926, the same year as the publication of “Does Spring Also Return to Stolen Fields?,” a different, rather restless, voice is heard from the speaker; the poem begins:

The day almost done and still wandering around Japan’s capital,
My dream treads on the land of Chosŏn like leper’s flesh.

Dreaming of Tokyo in Korea, the poet writes a poem about dreaming of Korea in Tokyo. The inverse relationship between the real and the imagined becomes more inviting as an interpretation than the possibility that this is simply a poem about remembering what is no longer the case. So what has the lyric become for Yi Sanghwa after the confrontation with the colonial reality of repression and violence? What is interesting to note about the Korean poet, vis-a-vis Guo Moruo who articulated the death of poetry before turning toward propaganda, is the ambivalence expressed in Yi’s lyrical stance. Unlike the clear affirmation of the collective and shared existence and goal expressed in the poem discussed earlier, the first two lines of “In Tokyo” immediately turns the motif of love of nation into something decadent and reminiscent of Western symbolist poetry severing the classical connection between the good and the beautiful. That is, to follow the logic of “Does Spring Also Come to Stolen Fields?” one encounters the equation of morality and aesthetics, yet poetry in the above two lines refuses to bend to the image of nation purified by nationalist sentiment. The case is made more clear in another poem written the same year:

Disease of Chosŏn

Each person seen yesterday, today, is suffocating.

Without even the delight of meeting after a long absence,

The smile on a face like melon flower was building a house.

Without even the taste of winter of snowstorms

Sweat drops filled the fists like fernbrakes.

Over there?poke a small blind window into sky, it's suffocating.

Rarely chosen for discussion by postliberation critics, the above poem reveals the speaker's lack of whole-hearted devotion to his nation. The odd image of the smile building a house echoes the theme of individuality that the poet had decried earlier in his essay; the smile, the expected social currency among those who know each other, simply ends up building a house of solitude, affecting a flower-like cover. There is no imagined community, no fellow-feeling here.

As the lyric experiences the pressure exerted by the nationalist discourse favoring representation, the ready-made course looms as romantic propaganda and social realism, moving toward the validation of the narrative form. In effect, this is the choice made by leftist poets such as Im Hwa whose long narrative poems evince the force of fiction and function to turn poetry into the instrument of politics inspiring its readers and listeners into action. Yi Sanghwa's choice not to channel his lyrical energy into the narrative form speaks of the possibility offered by the lyric form to remain untouched by political pressure. Whether to protest the homogenizing force of the narrative form or to eliminate the dilemma which would rise from a continued practice of the lyrical form in such private manner, a founding member of the Korean Proletarian Federation of Artists Yi Sanghwa virtually stopped writing by 1930.

Conclusion

Curiosity about the possible reasons behind the difference between the choice made by Yi Sanghwa, i.e., silence, and that by his contemporary Guo Moruo, i.e., propaganda, has led me to begin the comparison between the two leftist romantics. Despite the vast differences between the literary developments of their two nations, the two poets around the same time were beset with the dilemma of choosing between poetry and a life of action as history intervened in their lives. What appears to surface at this juncture is not so much a qualitative difference between silence and

propaganda, but rather the shared need to give up the search for subjective freedom, or, perhaps, better put, return the search for subjective freedom to a prior source of collective affirmation of a necessary life.

Whether feeling was to be regulated by proper behavior according to the Confucian relation of ch'ing/ch'ng (情) and li/ye (禮), or to be celebrated without restraint according to Taoist effervescence leading to individual departures from regulations, the expressive energy of the lyric existed in East Asia before the advent of Western romanticisms. Western works celebrating feeling reawakened the familiar mode of poetic transport, and the lyrical impulse found new contexts for exploration. What appears new is that this force of feeling became recognized as such and thus transformed into the fuel for a political drive deemed inevitable to a modern existence freed from the legacies of traditional social hierarchies.

Whether in the colonial context of Korea which would divide into incompatible regimes or in the so-called "neo-colonial" context of China where socialist realism would dominate, the lyric became the testing ground for the building of national literatures still in need of completion. This is to surmise that "the end of history" propagated in the West as the present, global, postmodern condition cannot be applied to China and Korea even in this 21st century. More importantly, the delay of this end continues to exert pressure on the lyric form to convey, rather than lose, meaning.