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### (Images of) “The Foreign” in Pre-Modern Korean Fiction

A number of diverse textual sources provide accounts of Korean interaction with “the foreign” throughout the pre-modern period. For over a millennium, Koreans documented such interchange through travelogues, poems, and compilations of historical and folkloric materials. Although many of these early texts possessed narrative and imaginative elements, they are not categorized as *sosŭ* 小説, or prose fiction. The specific genre of prose fiction came into being relatively late in Korea; the earliest example dates from the fifteenth century. The genre, however, was neither conceived nor born in a vacuum. Rather, it emanated from a historical experience and literary tradition of over one thousand years of significant and documented interaction with “the foreign.” Reflecting such a context, accounts of “the foreign” appear throughout the fiction written prior to the twentieth century. This paper will begin by investigating the matter of genre and the concept of prose fiction itself. It will then examine some of the best known and most widely anthologized works in order to provide a brief overview of the various images of “the foreign” contained in pre-modern Korean prose fiction.

## The Question of Genre

Though works of pre-modern Korean fiction exhibit salient differences in terms of length, organization, and orthography, in terms of genre, they are all referred to as *koj?n sos?l* 古典小說, or, literally, “classical novels.” Such a generic designation is problematic. Beginning with the term *koj?n*, “pre-modern” is preferable to the more loaded “classical.” Unlike the terms “classical” or “Classics” in the West, *koj?n* possesses no particular connotations of relative authority or antiquity. Nor, on the other hand, does it imply any sort of backwardness or lack of full development. Rather it is merely a blanket term used to refer to those works written prior to the twentieth century, and is employed without regard for issues such as length, structure, style, or content. Thus, using the term pre-modern, according to a simple chronological and value-neutral definition, provides a simple method to circumvent misunderstandings that might arise from terms that connote age, prestige, or both.

The use of the term *sos?l* proves much more problematic. The term, in its present incarnation, simply represents a translation of the English word “novel.” In Korea, prior to the twentieth century, however, no concept of such a genre existed. Pre-modern Korean writers did make the large distinction between *si* 詩, or poetry, and *mun* 文, or prose. But the category of *mun* itself was rather vague and undifferentiated. Writers defined it in the negative; *mun* essentially amounted to all that was not *si*. Such a negative definition proved facile as only *si* was considered Literature, while *mun* was merely writing. Matters related to genre such as length, structure, form, and language received little consideration.

During the pre-modern period, prose fiction represents one of the many forms of writing subsumed under the broad heading of *mun*. Presently, however, scholars lump the various forms of pre-modern prose fiction together under the heading of *sos?l*. Although the term *sos?l* did exist during the pre-modern period, it did not represent a generic category, nor was it even used exclusively to refer to prose fiction. Rather, writers employed the term somewhat randomly and idiosyncratically to denote a wide array of works that today fall into completely distinct generic categories. Thus, the term *sos?l*, despite, or perhaps due to, its blanket use by modern scholars, does not provide a meaningful unit of generic distinction or analysis. This is not to say that no distinctions can be made among the various works of pre-modern prose fiction. On the contrary, despite the present proclivity to place them all in a single category, in their original Korean designations these works do differ greatly. The titles of the works I will examine below each hint at some level of differentiation? *sinhwa* 新話, or “new tales,” refers, in this particular case, to a collection of short fiction, *ch?n* 傳 may be translated as “tale” or “legend,” while *mong* 夢 denotes a sub-genre often referred to as *mongyu sos?l* 夢遊小說, or “dream journey novels” (this sub-genre is also called *mongjaryu sos?l* 夢字類小說, or, loosely, “novels whose titles end with the character *mong* [dream]).

Thus, it is not a lack of difference among the various types of prose fiction that prevents a discussion of genre for the pre-modern period. Rather, it is the great divergence within what would appear to be single and unified qualitative generic categories that gives rise to problems. Appellations such as “*ch?n*,” to give just one example, could be and were added to any piece of prose fiction. Yet calling something a “*ch?n*” imposed absolutely no parameters in terms of length, content, form, style, or even the language in which the work was written. Attempting to write a coherent critical account of “the *ch?n*,” as so

many have done for “the novel,” would prove disastrous. It would be tantamount to attempting a critical theory of “stories” in English literature; the category itself is simply too broad and undifferentiated to be meaningful. The works *Hong Kiltong-ch?n* and *H? Saeng-ch?n* provide a perfect illustration of this. The former is a full-length tale of adventure written in Korean. It is referred to by Korean literary scholars today as a *y?ngung kundam sos?! 英雄軍談小說*, or “novel” depicting heroic military deeds. Western literary scholars would most likely categorize it a romance. The latter is a brief satire written in literary Chinese. Unlike the former, which the author produced in manuscript form as a work unto itself, the latter was contained in a travelogue. It depicts no heroic deeds and ends not with the protagonist’s victory and ascent, but rather with his uneventful disappearance. Scholars presently refer to it as a *p’ ungja sos?! 諷刺小說*, or satirical “novel.” Yet, clearly, despite their sharing of the pre-modern designation “*ch?n*” and the present (mis)designation “*sos?!*,” neither of these are novels, nor do they share any commonalities of form, style, length, tone, language, etc.

### Genealogy of *Sos?!*

The term *sos?!* itself also gives rise to some confusion. Though the Western novel has certainly evolved, or at least changed, referring to the novels of Dickens and to those of Nabokov in the same context entails no essential conflict. Despite the 100 years separating the two writers, to say nothing of differences in language and location, both might be comfortably brought together in a discussion of the novel. The enduring qualities of the genre possess the power to level other, smaller differences. This is not the case with *sos?!*; it means something quite different to different writers and in different time periods, and did not arrive at its present conflation with the novel until relatively recently.

From its origins until the encounter with the West, the term *sos?!* was defined somewhat idiosyncratically according to individual person and period, and, as such, can hardly be said to have constituted a coherent genre. The term, composed of two characters the literal meaning of which ranges between “small talk” and “insignificant story,” first appeared in Chinese works. The earliest documented use of the term appears in the writings of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu / Zhuangzi 莊子 (365–290 B. C.). He used *hsiao shuo* 小說 somewhat pejoratively, and to describe a decidedly non-literary discourse. Placing emphasis on the negative qualitative connotations of the initial character, Chuang Tzu / Zhuangzi used the term to denote small talk or, more literally, trifling stories. He went so far as to attach a practical proviso to his description, saying that those who peddle such diminutive words would likely also find difficulty gaining social and political stature. Caveats notwithstanding, he clearly did not view *hsiao-shuo* as a literary category or genre. Heng Tan / Huan Tan 桓譚 (c. 43 B.C.–A.D. 28), in his work *Hsin-lun / Xinlun* 新論, or *New Treatise* (c. A.D. 2), was the first to define *sos?!* in literary terms, and in terms of quantitative, not qualitative, smallness. He focused not on the insignificance but on the brevity of the stories that were collected to make up *hsiao-shuo*. He was not satisfied, however, with *hsiao-shuo* as mere stories. Perhaps in consideration of the ill social effects mentioned by Chuang Tzu / Zhuangzi, he opted to ascribe to *hsiao-shuo* a practical, normative role and value. His contention was that *hsiao-shuo* contained elements efficacious for the “governing of the self and ordering of the family (治身理家).” He adopted a Confucian view of *hsiao shuo*, defining it and locating its value, or lack thereof, in terms of its capacity to educate and order. Others possessed different ideas concerning both the content and utility of *hsiao shuo*, but all agreed that it was not Literature. Pan Ku/ Ban Gao 班固 (32–92), as recorded in the *Han-shu I-wen*

*chih / Hanshu yiwenzhi* 漢書藝文誌 (Bibliographic Treatise of the Han-shu), writes that *hsiao-shuo* are essentially poor imitations of existing genres and can be divided into two categories: those dealing with people and those dealing with events. When dealing with people, he argues, *hsiao-shuo* are akin to base and inferior biographies, *zi* 字, and when dealing with events they are merely poorly written and unsubstantiated histories, *shi* 史. Pan does list the writers/compiler of *hsiao-shuo* (小說家) as one among the ten classes of philosophers. But he also concludes that they are last among the ten, and not considered worth examining. For the term *hsiao-shuo* itself, he provides the following definition: “street talk and alley gossip, made up by those who engage in conversations along the roads and walkways.”

Although later writers would develop theories of *hsiao-shuo* that more closely approximated discussions of prose fiction in the West, the category itself remained quite diffuse, containing many genres that fall outside the boundaries of *hsiao-shuo* as presently constituted. More importantly, the importance and function ascribed to *hsiao-shuo* remained largely to supplement the existing classics of history and literature?read poetry?not to supplant them. Finally, these newer discussions occurred at a time that postdates many of the works of pre-modern Korean fiction examined in this chapter. As such, while important for a study of Chinese fiction in general, they have little relevance to this portion of the present study. In any case, such new theories and ideas concerning the *hsiao-shuo* can hardly be taken as inchoate versions of later, imported ideas concerning the *hsiao-shuo* as prose fiction. It was not until the close of the Ch'ing / Qing dynasty (1644–1912), with the introduction of Western literature and literary theory, often mediated by Japan, that scholars such as Liang Ch' i-ch' ao / Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), deliberately imitating the novel, were able to establish *hsiao-shuo* as a genre per se and to elevate it to the status of Literature.

The term *sos?*, ironically in light of its present meaning, first appears in Korea in the title of a work by the renowned poet, Yi Kyubo 李奎報 (1168–1241). Though most esteemed for his poetry, Yi also wrote fiction. The work in question, *Paegun sos?* 白雲小說, however is neither poetry nor fiction. Rather, it is a collection of criticism and miscellaneous writings on the poets and poems of Korea from the Three Kingdoms Period to Yi's own time. One source provides the following information regarding *Paegun sos?*: “It uses the title *sos?*, but, in fact, it is not a *sos?*. It seems to use the word *sos?* merely to mean trifling stories, or, in other words, small talk.” As was the case early on in China, here we see *sos?* used literally and somewhat disparagingly. Paegun was Yi's *ho* 號, or pen name, giving the title of this work a literal meaning of something akin to the consciously self-deprecating “Insignificant Ramblings of Yi Kyubo.”

Although over 300 years would pass before *sos?* reappeared in the title of another Korean work, its meaning had changed little. The volume *Ch' ?nggang sos?* 清江小說, written by Yi Chesin 李濟臣 (1536–1584), bears many resemblances to Yi Kyubo's *Paegun sos?*. The title again is comprised of the author's pen name, Ch' ?nggang, and the term *sos?*. And *sos?* again refers to a variegated collection of small talk. Various anecdotes regarding the royal court comprise the primary contents of this volume, with two smaller sub-sections?one of poets and poetry and another of humorous tales?constituting the remainder. Secondary sources again take care to remind modern readers of the dangers of conflating the *sos?* in the title of this work with the more recent connotations of the term. “There is a distance between *sos?* as it is used here and today's use of the term. Essentially, it means tales and rumors heard in the

streets about town (巷談街說) ….” It is ironic that despite the fact the authors themselves of both of the above works chose to call their works *sosʔl*, modern critics take much care to inform us that they are not.

The above represent examples of Korean works whose authors chose the appellation *sosʔl*. The work *Pʔ aegwan chapki* 稗官雜記, or *A Storytellerʔ s Miscellany*, by ʔ Sukkwʔn 魚叔權 (fl. 1525–1554) represents the first instance of a secondary source designating existing works, regardless of their authorsʔ intentions, as *sosʔl*. ʔ begins his commentary on *sosʔl* with the following statement: “There are few *sosʔl* in Korea (東國少小說).” ʔ, perhaps leading the way for later critics, omits *Paegun sosʔl* and *Chʔ ʔnggang sosʔl* from his discussion. But this is hardly due to the fact that his definition of *sosʔl* represents an indigenous version of the modern, Western–derived conception in sprout form. Rather, ʔ refers to his own work as *sosʔl*, and he includes under this same heading an idiosyncratic sampling of eighteen various works, of which only one *Kʔmo sinhwa* by Kim Sisʔp is still considered a *sosʔl* by modern scholars. The other seventeen are comprised of such disparate genres as *sihwa* 詩話, or remarks on poetry, biography, diary, travelogue, etc.

Modern literary critics and historians provide valuable discussions of the changing meaning of *sosʔl* in pre–modern Korea. Attempts are made to document an indigenous evolution toward a definition somewhat resembling the modern, imported one that exists today. Though isolated instances of definitions of *sosʔl* as prose fiction can be found, the majority of pre–modern writers, and readers, clung to a broader and more flexible conception of the term. As was the case in China, *sosʔl* never achieved true approval or autonomy as Literature—a space reserved for poetry alone—in the pre–modern period. Its conservative Confucian detractors were many, and, as one literary historian summarized: “Even its proponents never attempted to acknowledge it as a self–sufficient and independent narrative form. In a word, they were never able to move far beyond the (earlier) position and attitude of interpreting *sosʔl* in its supplementary relationship to historical writing.”

### Motif Over Genre

A careful investigation of the individual works themselves brings a realization of both the futility and speciousness of attempts to organize a study of pre–modern Korean fiction along standard lines of Western literary criticism such as genre or form. A new approach demands new units of analysis and organizing principles. This may initially prove more difficult than merely borrowing and superimposing upon Korean literature critical theories and categories from the West. It will also, however, yield categories that emanate directly from Koreaʔ s own literary tradition, and are thus specific and meaningful. Motif represents one such category.

As mentioned above, a general investigation of individual works provides a confusing array of differences in terms of form, style, and language. In a word, the category *kojʔn sosʔl* is a modern construct. Unlike modern authors who set out to write *sosʔl*, the writers of what are now termed *kojʔn sosʔl* did not use the term *sosʔl* to refer to their own work. They often made only the distinction between prose and poetry. Beyond this, no consciousness of genre existed. Thus the term and category *kojʔn sosʔl* represents an attempt by modern scholars to project modern, Western generic categories back onto a Korean literary history in which no such categories existed; this amounts to a historical

version of what is termed in literary criticism an inversion, or *ch?ndo* 顛倒. The term *koj?n sos?!*, however, lacks any real significance precisely due to the overly broad field it attempts to signify. As pre-modern writers made only the distinction between poetry and prose, modern scholars are forced to attempt to subsume much of what cannot be classified as poetry under the artificial rubric of *koj?n sos?!*.

The above phenomenon is testified to by the sheer volume and opacity of modifiers necessary to sustain a recent collection dedicated to the *koj?n sos?!*. This particular volume posits ten separate categories of *sos?!*. Upon even the most cursory investigation, however, the problems inherent in this conception become apparent. “Sub-genres” such as *y?ryu sos?!* 女流小說, or, literally, women’s novels, are devoid of all generic significance. They tell us nothing about form, content, length, style, or language. In this particular case, the only information provided is that a woman authored the work. To further complicate matters, only a single work is included in this category, and that particular work is a memoir. Thus, even the extremely broad translation of *koj?n sos?!* as “pre-modern prose fiction” begins to lose integrity. With the inclusion of such genres as memoirs, the definition must be expanded to include all of pre-modern prose. Still another example of the arbitrariness and lack of significance of such categories can be glimpsed in the designation *hanmun sos?!* 漢文小說, or, literally, novels written in classical Chinese. First, the great majority of the works of pre-modern Korean prose fiction were written in classical Chinese, including the majority of those included in the anthology in question. Yet only one work, a short story, is singled out for this designation. Second, just as with the category *y?ryu sos?!*, this “sub-genre” provides absolutely no information concerning form, content, length, or style.

As mentioned above, modern scholars have projected the term *sos?!*, in its present meaning, back upon these works of pre-modern prose. Though the term *sos?!* did exist at the time these works were written, it meant something quite different than it does today. In a word, despite present trends in Korean literary history and criticism that might make this unclear, the authors of these works did not write *sos?!*. This gives rise to a particularly ironic phenomenon: Modern critics must inform us that works consciously written by their authors as *sos?!*, works such as Yi Kyubo’s *Paegun sos?!* and Yi Chesin’s *Ch’ ?nggang sos?!*, are, in fact, not *sos?!*. Simultaneously, they must convince us that works written by their authors as memoirs or fables, works whose own authors called *rok* or *ch?n* but never *sos?!*, are, in fact, *sos?!*. This disconnect can be seen in the table below:

Period	Writer	Designation	Period	Writer	Designation
pre-modern	Author him/herself	<i>sos?!</i>	modern	Critic	not <i>sos?!</i>
pre-modern	Author him/herself	not <i>sos?!</i>	modern	Critic	<i>sos?!</i>

The next question then is what names did the authors themselves ascribe to their works of prose fiction, and will ascertaining this provide a meaningful generic category in lieu of the discredited *sos?!*? Although the term *sos?!* is nowhere to be found in the original works, a full twelve of the eighteen pieces in the anthology share the designation *ch?n*, or

tale. This might at first glance appear to provide some basis for a discussion of genre, but the fact that calling a work of fiction a *ch?n* tells us nothing about language, style, length, form, etc. has already been discussed above. The works in this anthology prove no exception; the twelve works designated *ch?n* fall into a full five of the ten separate sub-generic categories listed above. In other words, a *ch?n* may be a tale of filial piety or of military exploits, a love story or a fable. Furthermore, it may be long or short and written in either classical Chinese or Korean. In short, as is the case with *sos?l*, the appellation *ch?n* itself tells us nothing of genre. There are still other specious generic categories of pre-modern prose fiction. Although they are not as prevalent as *ch?n*, the arguments above hold true for them as well. Thus, the standard Western conceptions of genre superimposed upon pre-modern Korean prose produce only a hollow simulacrum of critical categories that can neither bare scrutiny nor serve as meaningful guides. When the investigation, however, abandons these familiar and comfortable guides and focuses instead on the specific content of individual works, a pattern begins to emerge: Pre-modern Korean fiction cleaves to and is anchored in certain images and motifs, rather than certain genres.

### Images of “The Foreign” and the Motif of Travel Abroad

As mentioned above, Korea possesses a long tradition of interaction with “the foreign.” Some of the earliest extant examples of Korean writings take the form of documentation such interactions in descriptive prose, as evidenced in travelogues such as the Silla monk Hye Cho’ s *Wango ch’ ?nchukguk-ch?n* and histories such as the *Samguk yusa* and *Samguk sagi*. Depictions of “the foreign” also appear from the very first examples of Korean prose fiction and continue to manifest themselves throughout the pre-modern and early modern periods. Such depictions represent a salient and common feature by which Korean prose fiction of both periods may be discussed and analyzed irrespective of the length, style, form, language, etc. of individual works. Such discussion and analysis, in turn, allow recurring motifs to be uncovered through a focus on specific content, rather than obscured by a focus on imported and ill-suited concepts of genre.

To this end, my future work will interrogate the actual content of certain representative works of pre-modern prose fiction. In particular, it will focus on examining the images and representations of foreign peoples and places in four specific and widely anthologized works of pre-modern Korean fiction: *Namy?mbuju-ji* (from Kim Sis?p’ s collection of short fiction *K?mo sinhwa*); H? Kyun’ s *Hong Kiltong-ch?n*; Kim Manjung’ s *Kuunmong*; and Pak Chiw?n’ s *H? Saeng-ch?n*. Following the explication of these images, I will contrast them with the fundamentally different images and representations of the foreign that appear in certain works of early modern Korean fiction?Yi Injik’ s *Hy?l ?i nu* and Yi Kwangsu’ s *Muj?ng*, to be exact.

Encounters with “the foreign” in pre-modern Korean fiction are coterminous with the birth of Korean fiction itself. All of the stories in Kim Sis?p’ s *K?mo sinhwa*, commonly considered the first work of Korean prose fiction, contain some mention of a foreign other, whether actual as in the case of Japanese pirates, or mythological as with the Dragon King. This is also true of later works of fiction. The eponymous protagonist of *Hong Kiltong-ch?n* departs Korea for a succession of three different island countries, in each of which he encounters foreign inhabitants, both human and bestial. *Kuunmong*, for its part, offers yet a different glimpse of “the foreign” ; it is set completely in Tang China with Chinese and even Indian protagonists. In *H? Saeng-ch?n* we encounter no foreign

peoples, per se. Rather, as with *Hong Kiltong-ch?n*, a good portion of the story revolves around leaving Korea in order to build a “new” society on foreign soil. The true common thread among these four works, however, is the distinct lack of “foreign-ness” encountered by Korean protagonists abroad and Korean readers at home. None of these works presents significant linguistic or cultural foreign-ness as an obstacle, either to the characters or readers. In a word, pre-modern Koreans were traveling, writing, and reading all within a fairly well-defined and well-known geographical, philosophical, and linguistic world.

All of this changed following the encounter with the West. This encounter engendered cataclysmic change, the shock waves from which resonate in early modern Korean fiction. This becomes immediately apparent when focusing on the motif of foreign travel. The motif of traveling abroad not only serves to unite many pre-modern works, but also continues into the twentieth century to provide a concrete link between pre-modern and early-modern Korean prose fiction. Contrasting works such as *Hong Kiltong-ch?n* with those such as *Hy?i ?i nu* or *Muj?ng*, demonstrates that, in the wake of Korea’s forced conversion by Japan and the West, travel abroad becomes a true experience of the foreign: nearly everything encountered is fundamentally different and unknown. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the actual purpose of such travel also changes radically. Whereas, in the pre-modern period, journeys abroad sought either to recreate Korea in a foreign locale or to strengthen Korea proper, in the early modern period, such travels took the express purpose of reconstructing Korea in the image of a foreign other. Korea’s encounter with the West engendered radical changes, forcing Korea into a truly foreign world system and worldview. Examining the images of “the foreign” and the motif of travel abroad in Korean fiction can provide us with an important and accurate barometer of these changes.