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A New Angle on the Genealogy of North Korean Literary Genres

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Introduction

The prevailing conception on literary art of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, hereafter, North Korea) has been as if was under the Workers' Party of Korea's monolithic control. However, this paper argues that the construction of North Korean literary genres could be genealogically divided into two ways: official history under the cultural policy of the Party and the unofficial history through its autonomous evolution. Unlike many North Korean official cultural publications of the hagiographical '혁명력사Hyŏngmyŏng ryŏksa (revolutionary history)' under the control of the Party in circulation, one of the most important genres of literary art over their autonomous history is 오체르크 Och'erk¹ (Ocherk: Очерк) from Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union at the early stage of North Korean literature, which was changed to 실화문학Sirhwa munhak (Literature of true story) from around 1961 and other imported literary genres as well: 발라다Pallada (Ballade: Баллада) to 답시Tamsi, and 뿌블리찌쓰찌까Ppubŭllitchissŭtchikka (Current Political View: Публицистика) to 정론Chŏngnon.

The aim of this paper is to inquire into the autonomous genealogy of these genres from the emergence in postcolonial North Korea: when these genres were imported to North

¹ These terms mainly follow M-R Romanization in their orthography.

Korea; where published for the first time respectively; what was changed in the time of cultural transition; who had introduced and stressed these genres; why I want to shed light on them for the elucidation of the autonomous literary art history; and what is the difference from other field, like politics. I would like to argue that the unveiling of the North Korean literary undercurrent is not only a cultural deconstruction against North Korean literary history as the hagiography for the Kim family, but also an elucidation of early international influence to North Korean literature, prior to the emergence of Chuch'e(Juche) literature.

Appearance of Och'erk / Sirhwa munhak

As a literary specialist on Russian literature Ri Hyo Un introduced the theory of a new literary genre, Och'erk, for the first time in North Korea through an article in *Munhak Yesul*, the North Korean official organ journal of the general literary field. He urged the active writings of Och'erk as a not-used genre by writers, especially war correspondents, in that the literary genre was a highly mobile instant weapon in wartime of the Korean War (June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953). He wrote this article on 26 September and published in December 1952.

According to his explanation in the article of 1952, "On a Literary Genre Och'erk: Focus on the Writing Method,"² Och'erk is the narrative kinds of true story based on strictly required facts of reality. The types of the genre include Yöhaeng Och'erk (Travel Ocherk), Sakkön Och'erk (Incident Ocherk), Sip'yöng Och'erk (Current Affair Review Ocherk), Chönjaeng Och'erk (War Ocherk), and Ch'osang Och'erk (Portrait Ocherk). He said that Travel Ocherk has a long history and the works of this genre in postcolonial North Korea were Ri Tae Jun's *Travelogue to the Soviet* and Paek Nam Un's *Impression of the Soviet*. Incident Och'erk portrays characters focused on the incident in the narrative, such as Han Hyo's *Seoul People*, and Ri Puk Myöng's *Silgi* (Writing of Real Story: □ □), *Married Couple of Hunter*, that has a few similarities to Portrait Och'erk, but not. Whereas North Korea had no Current Affair Review Och'erk as a trigger to a big social opinion, he said,

² *Munhak Yesul* 5/12, Mun'yech'ong ch'ulp'ansa, December 1952. 126-41.

there were many War Och'erk works in the wartime of the Korean War. Originally, War Och'erk was boosted to work in the Soviet Union during its wartime. War Och'erk was also very popular at the time due to the Korean War, and a lot of North Korean writers as war correspondent competitively created numerous literary works of War Och'erk. The exemplar of this type was Kim Sa Ryang's *I See the Sea*, who was one of the most famous writers, and one of the founders of Korean-Japanese (Zainichi: □ □) literature.

Of them, I argue Portrait Och'erk to be the most important of these literary genres. Ri Hyo Un mentioned that in the Soviet Union the first Portrait Och'erk appeared as Maxim Gorky's *V. I. Lenin* and North Korean first Portrait Och'erk was Han Sörya's *The Human Kim Il Sung* and *The Hero Kim Il Sung*. Ri denied the assessment of An Ham Kwang, a well-known critic, in an essay *Advance of Literature* that Han Sörya's these two works were biographies not Portrait Och'erk. Many literary works well-known as short story, were actually closer to Portrait Och'erk, such as Choe Myöng Ik's *A Hero Han Nam Su*, Hyön Dök's *Rampart of Sky*, etc, he said.

According to Ri's argument, the Soviet theory of literature has not certainly defined the conception and categorization of Och'erk, due to the ambiguity and immensity of its form. It needed just the material of social political issues based on the real story as true. I thus found that many works have a few types of them within one work at the time. In those days, Kang Nŭng Su, who was an important critic, and maternal brother of Kim Il Sung, agreed with Ri's argument and additionally wrote about this literary genre, Och'erk, in his early criticism³ in 1958 where he argued that it had played a big role of the creation in North Korean literary field recently and its focus mainly was developed in Portrait Och'erk (Character Ocherk).

I would like to illuminate these two critics' points and show the progress of this genre over North Korean comparative literary history as an implantation of undercurrent from the Soviet Union towards underpinning of its mainstream, Chuch'e Literature. As I argued a hypothesis in my previous article, the name of this genre changed to Sirhwa munhak around 1961. Choe Il Ryong published a critique in September 1961 on Och'erk to Sirhwa munhak.

³ Kang Nŭng Su, "Several Problems Posed in Och'erk Literature," *Chosŏn Munhak*, June 1958. 135-44.

However, prior to the emergence of this critique, in North Korea there was already a spotlight on Sirhwa, real story,⁴ changing the name of Och'erk between 1960-1961.⁵

I found a few valuable appraisals on this genre in the succeeding evaluations. One is an academic article wrote by a scholar in 1990. In a collected articles in Social Science Press, Kim Myöng Hŭi wrote "A Study on Sirhwa munhak in the War of Fatherland Emancipation." Kim considered the first North Korean Sirhwa munhak as Kim Sa Ryang's war essays such as *I See the Sea*. As shown, Ri Hyo Un at the time considered Kim Sa Ryang's these works as a kind of Och'erk, that was War Och'erk. Thus, I argue the succeeded point between Och'erk and Sirhwa munhak.

In North Korea, Kim Il Sung University in P'yöngyang is generally considered to be the most prestigious institution of tertiary education. By its eminent scholar Kim Ryö Suk in 2008,⁶ professor in the university, Ri Hyo Un's critique on Och'erk in 1952 was also considered as one of the most leading criticisms during the Korean War. Therefore, we can see Och'erk was changed to Sirhwa munhak as a very important popular literary genre of the period and Ri Hyo Un was the initiator of Russian literary genres to North Korea. My argument was that afterwards Och'erk/Sirhwa munhak had two big steps of division to the Kim family's hagiographies and the writings of ordinary people to be hero of work, war, or revolution against Japanese rule and American Imperialism.⁷ Namely, under the stage of the supernatural heroic deeds by the Kim family, a few of North Korean people has had a narrow space to be hero in the field of literary representation. These two writing modes both could be thus origins of North Korean Chuch'e literature, not only hagiographies for the Kim family based on *semi-realism*.

⁴ See Cho Chöng Kuk, "Several Problems Posted in the Creation of 'Sirhwa'" (Munhak Sinmun, Sept. 2, 1960)

⁵ However, the final Och'erk in North Korea, Yun Sök Pöm's *For Future and Happiness*, remains in *Chosön Munhak* in January 1964.

⁶ Kim Ryö Suk, "A Study on the Leading Role of Criticism in the Great War of Fatherland Emancipation," *Academic Journal of Kim Il Sung University (Language and Literature)*, Kim Il Sung University Press, 2008.11-16.

⁷ See Lee Young Mi "A Study on the Och'erk, Literary Genre of North Korea" and "Genealogy of Och'erk and Sirhwa Literature Revisited through North Korean Sources."

Appearance of Pallada / Tamsi

Ri Hyo Un published another article on a poetic genre of Russian literary genre in 1954 that called as Pallada. Stretched from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, the terms of these two genres had been changed from Pallada and Och'erk to Tamsi and Sirhwa munhak. While the Och'erk changed its name to Sirhwa munhak between 1960-1961, Pallada changed its name to Tamsi in August 1959 in Ri's essay, "A Letter on Tamsi (Pallada)." After that, he created a few poems called Tamsi which he wrote from July 1960. Ri Hyo Un composed six poems as Pallada/Tamsi with other sorts of poetry, but no Och'erk/Sirhwa munhak throughout his lifetime.

The first work of Pallada written in North Korea, was a translated short poem *Story* (Iyagi) by a Rumanian poet in *Chosŏn Munhak* in April 1954 that sang lyrics about a mother of Chosŏn in burning P'yŏngyang. Directly after, in "A Study on the Poetic Literary Genre, Pallada"⁸ in May 1954, Ri examined the Pallada in the Soviet Union was from Western Ballade as a kind of dance literature. Born between sentimentalism and romanticism in Russia, many works of the genre had dramatic and lyrical melody. The most important characteristic in this genre is *lines* by the direct utterance of character in the poem, stressed Ri Hyo Un. Ri, a unique specialist of Russian literature in North Korea, seemed to have a theoretic eminence at the time. He historically divided Russian Pallada into two parts: Classical Pallada by critical realism and Soviet Pallada by socialist realism. Whereas the former's source is from Russian old tales and legendries, the latter real lives of the Soviet people. He called North Korean Pallada People's Pallada (Inminŭi Pallada), and stressed the lineage from the traditional Korean oral folk song (Kujŏn minyo). According to Ri's explanation, the first North Korean poet, who sang a Pallada in postcolonial liberated North Korea, was Cho Ki Ch'ŏn, one of the most famous poets, and writer of epic (Sŏsasi) *Paek'ttusan* (1947). Cho penned the first Pallada *They Were Three* in a long piece of lyric-epic (Sŏjŏng-sŏsasi) *Yŏsu Mutiny* in 1949, which was defined by Ri Hyo Un afterwards in the article on Pallada in 1954. I argue that the first solo literary Pallada by postcolonial North Korean was actually *Legend Alive* (San chŏnsŏl), penned by Ri Hyo Un in December 1952,

⁸ *Chosŏn Munhak*, May 1954. 119-34.

which published in May 1955. The poem under the headline of Pallada portrayed Kim Il Sung's visit to a fishing village.

Ri Hyo Un had certainly differentiated North Korean People's Pallada with *lines* from the lyric-epic, unlike the case of Soviet Pallada where Pallada has been considered as a kind of the lyric-epic. In his 1956 article, he argued that the lyric-epic was only now to be a literary genre in postcolonial North Korea.⁹ By separating Pallada from the definition of Soviet Pallada, he seemed to be willing to make the genre autochthonic. I thus argue that Ri wanted to recognize the dimension of these genres respectively by an ascending order of "Pallada–Lyric-epic–Epic."

Appearance of Ppubüllitchissütchikka / Chõngnon

Meanwhile, another genre from the Soviet was Ppubüllitchissütchikka. Yun Si Ch'öl's *Our Consistent Yearn* as Ppubüllitchissütchikka was unveiled for the first time in liberated postcolonial North Korea in 1954. Why did the genre emerge after the introduction of Ocherk and Pallada? Probably, the Party in those days seemed to have made its people ideologically bind by urging postwar socialist patriotism through the radical political reviews, disseminating into every sector of the society. However, could Ppubüllitchissütchikka recognized as political view insert into the literary art field as one of literary art genres at the time? Why did not Ri Hyo Un say anything about Ppubüllitchissütchikka? Ri Hyo Un could not directly mention the genre, because he had already studied about the authenticity of literature. Ri Hyo Un had no Ppubüllitchissütchikka work like Och'erk work. We could, of course, never figure out the extent to the most deep-seated layers of the literary field at the time, but a rough approximation: Aggressive connivance or low-leveled reluctance?

North Korea created rare works of Ppubüllitchissütchikka between 1954-1955, just four works: Yun Si Ch'öl's *Our Consistent Yearn* (*Chosõn Munhak*, Dec. 1954) and *Our People's Power* (*Chosõn Munhak*, Jun. 1955), Han Sõrya's *Ten Years* (*Chosõn Munhak*, Aug.

⁹ Ri Hyo Un, "A Few Ideas on Our Lyric-Epic," *Chosõn Munhak* 110, October 1956. 155-64.

1955), and Sŏ Man Il's *Pride of Citizen* (*Chosŏn Munhak*, Sept. 1955). Unlike Ri Hyo Un, other writers including Han Sŏrya penned several works based on the new genre, *Ppubŭllitchissŭtchikka*.

By the first appearance of Kim Yŏng Sŏk's Chŏngnon *Thinking of the Fatherland* in January 1956, *Ppubŭllitchissŭtchikka* had completely changed to Chŏngnon. Chŏngnon has soared the number of work and expanded its influence on the literary abyssal layer with its political view according to the control of the Party. Chŏngnon has sometimes changed the face to Kwŏnduŏn (□ □ □) as the preface of a press, the form to Chŏngnon-si (□ □ □) as a literary transformation of the genre. From January 1956 to date, many works called Chŏngnon have been created in North Korea: Kye Puk's *The Party! We are Only Yours* (*Chosŏn Munhak*, Feb. 1956), Han Sŏng's *My 'Written Decision'* (*Chosŏn Munhak*, Jun. 1956), Pak Se Yŏng's *Hot Hand* (*Chosŏn Munhak*, Aug. 1956), Han Hyo's *Vindication of Literature* (*Chosŏn Munhak*, Aug. 1956), and so on.

Yun Se P'yŏng tried to give a definition of Chŏngnon in his critique "On the Chŏngnon"¹⁰ in 1958. According to his argument in the work, Lenin did not set limits to Chŏngnon as a certain genre. It is thus more controversial and militant than both genres, Och'erk and essay. The characteristic of this genre is like criticism based on the current fact with leading, ideological, acute, turbulent, and political motivation. It always must catch the new, and pioneer a new way, said Yun Se P'yŏng. He linked it with many sophisticated influences from various exemplars, both Gorky, Russian revolutionaries, and the indigenous intellectuals Pak Chi Wŏn, Chŏng Yak Yong in the Chosŏn Dynasty.

As Ri Hyo Un had barely tried to confirm indigenous seeds in the genres with relation to North Korean cultural tradition, Yun Se Pyŏng followed the praxis. This suggests many literary theorists at the time not only accepted the Russian Socialist realism aggressively, and inherited from the North Korean literary tradition, but also inquired into the internal linkage toward the future's literary characteristics: Chŏngnon-si as an expanded form for an authenticity of literature, *semi-realism* for a justification of the regime in the methodology of composing, and so on. This could be also understood that North Korean literary intellectuals at the time managed to search their own postcolonial identity of

¹⁰ *Chosŏn Munhak*, Mar. 1958.

particularity (Chuch'e, Urisic...), denying the Japanese colonial literary legacies.

Conclusion

According to the prevailing conceptions of North Korea, there has been only one literary field grounded in the Chuch'e literature under the Party's cultural policy. However, as shown here, this paper demonstrates another side of the North Korean literary field at the early stage of North Korean history. There were various literary genres and they were influenced by the Soviet literature. It was an important undercurrent under the influence of foreign countries at the time. These genres changed in the definition and jargon from Och'erk / Pallada / Ppubüllitchissütchikka in the Imperial Russian literature to Sirhwa munhak / Tamsi / Chõngnon in the North Korean Chuch'e literature between 1956-1961.

I would like to talk about another point. Prior to the introduction of Och'erk, in North Korea literary genres were classified "novel, poem, and critique" as under the Japanese colonial rule. However, after the Korean War, Och'erk mushroomed and came to be one of the important literary genres in its classification. Unlike an argument put forth by Andrei Lankov in "Kim Takes Control: The Great Purge in North Korea, 1956-1960" that appeared in 2002, literary purges for Chuch'e lasted a little longer, until 1961. Moreover, I argue a little different operation system and its praxis between general politics and literary field. Even though North Korean politics drifted towards China, the literary field retained the literary legacy of Japanese colonial rule. North Korea easily shed this legacy of Japanese rule more efficiently than the South, but it had still remained in the North a dreg of Japanese colonial rule. In the literary field of early North Korea, there was the Soviet Union's influence from 1952 to 1961 as a postcolonial key, and as you see Chinese literature had no influence. I see this is a postcolonial difference between early North Korean politics and the literary field.

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