

Intercommunication between "Realism" and "Modernism": A Return to the Literary Work

Choi Won-shik

Abstract

Korean literature in the twentieth century was marked by the confrontation between realism and modernism. This confrontation intensified particularly with the division after liberation and the Korean War. Moreover, several opportunities to overcome the confrontation were lost due to the immature state of both subjective and objective conditions. Consequently, the opposition between realism and modernism became, just like the Balkans, a sensitive tinderbox of Korean literature.

In this junction, what is important now is a return to the work itself, while making clear that at the place where the best works are produced, realism and modernism have already reached a state of "intercommunication."

The confrontation between realism and modernism can be subsumed into the issue of how to survive the modern capitalism we face today. In Korean society, modernity is still something that needs to be achieved and simultaneously something that will end in catastrophe if it is not overcome. The intercommunication between realism and modernism is the first starting point of my efforts to visualize a solution to this conundrum.

Keywords: realism, modernism, *hyeondae*, *geundae*, modernity, Kim Su-yeong, Kim Gi-rim, national literature theory

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Choi Won-shik (Choe, Won-sik) is Professor of Korean Literature at Inha University. His publications include *Munhak-ui gwihwan* (The Return of Literature) (2001). E-mail: ps919@hanmail.net.

With this as a condition, that exists.

With this as a condition, that arises.

此有故彼有 此起故彼起

Two "Modernities," Two "Modern" Literatures

Two different terms, *geundae* and *hyeondae*, have been used to refer to the modern era in Korea. But this is not due to simple confusion. *Geundae* is defined as the time dating from the formation of nation-states, propelled by the emergence and development of capitalism, whereas *hyeondae* refers to the twentieth century, when the oppressive nature of the nation-state became apparent and capitalism fell into crisis, especially following the outbreak of the First World War (1914) and the success of the Russian Revolution (1917). This periodization of the modern era into *geundae* and *hyeondae* is based on the political unconsciousness of social democracy or socialism, both of which transcend bourgeois democracy based on capitalism as the ultimate model for Korean society. Though not all may agree with this view, given that the fear of the left as expressed in the anticommunist complex can be seen as a manifestation of the crisis felt by the (extreme) right, the term *hyeondae*, as opposed to *geundae*, has been generally accepted in both negative and positive ways.

However, when the *geundae/hyeondae* divide is applied to Korean history, these two periods do not line up in a simple chronological manner. This is mainly due to the fact that Korea was not able to enter modernity on its own strength but rather was forced into the capitalist world system (with the opening of a port in the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876) by external coercion. Unlike Japan, which succeeded in constructing a modern nation-state despite its own forced opening, Korea was colonized in 1910 by Japan, a latecomer to capitalism, which made for an even more complicated situation. At first glance, overcoming Japanese imperialism and establishing a modern nation-state may appear to be a clear and simple task of entering modernity. However, the reality is different. It is difficult for the liberation move-

ment to achieve a final victory against colonization without the growth of the bourgeoisie. However, the growth of the bourgeoisie under colonialism faced the dilemma of being at once conducive to expanding the material basis for independence even as it helped strengthen the pull of colonial authority over the bourgeoisie. In this regard, the Russian Revolution emerged as an excellent solution to this dilemma. After the March 1st Independence Movement, there was a nearly explosive reception of Marxism and Leninism in Korean society. The anticolonial *minjung* movement developed dramatically from the mid-1920s and was a typical example of a national liberation movement that found expression as a socialist movement. It showed the “synchronism of asynchronism” of the tasks of *geundae* and *hyeondae*. Thus, Korean society in the early twentieth century seemed to have caught up quickly with *geundae* and *hyeondae* after the condensed growth of the anticolonial *minjung* movement. However, the development of the anticolonial *minjung* movement was also similar to the growth of the bourgeoisie. Just as the labor movement within a capitalist society is at once a blow to capital, yet reinforces the incorporation of labor into capital, the anticolonial liberation movement also deals a blow to the capitalist world system yet contributes to strengthening the system. For the same reason, disillusionment regarding socialist *hyeondae* was widespread in the 1930s when the “waning capitalism” after the Depression (1929) resurged as Japanese fascism. In the midst of this, the capitalist *hyeondae*, an upgraded form of capitalist *geundae*, surpassed the socialist *hyeondae* theory to become the new mainstream discourse. This was also a new form of condensed growth.

Before a more fundamental reflection on the modern period or modernity even took place, which was facilitated by the downfall of actually existing socialism, the concept of *hyeondae* in Korea held unique ideological implications. Although somewhat of an oversimplification, it can be said that Korea experienced two types of *hyeondae*: The *hyeondae* of the left began after the Russian Revolution (1917), while for the right it generally began after the Depression (1929), when the revision or modification of capitalism accelerated.

In the former case, the Russian Revolution was a shining preemption of the worldwide socialism that would inevitably appear along with the decline of capitalism, while for the latter, the Depression emerged rather as a symbol of great vitality, in which capitalism dramatically overcame its impending collapse. For this reason, they distinguished this era from *geundae* and named it *hyeondae*, with the strong implication of being “after *geundae*” or “post-*geundae*.”

Two theories of *hyeondae* literature were thus established based on these two theories. While for the left, *hyeondae* literature referenced the socialist realism (or its variations) of proletariat literature, which itself critically succeeded the realism of modern bourgeois literature, for the right, the introduction of modernism (or its variations) that deconstructed the realism of modern bourgeois literature became an important sign of *hyeondae* literature. With the emergence of the “new tendency” group (*sin-gyeonghyang pa*), Baek Cheol of the KAPF, who divided the “history of new literature” into *geundae* and *hyeondae*, can be identified with the former, while Jo Yeonhyeon of the Young Writers’ Association (Cheongnyeon Munhakga Hyeophoe), who emphasized the introduction of modernism in the 1930s and corrected the history of *geundae* literature as being that of *hyeondae* literature, belongs to the latter. The strict homogeneity that appears between the two forms of *hyeondae* and the two types of *hyeondae* literature manifests how closely literary discourse in Korean society is related to political struggle. As was the case of Russia under the Czar, social issues were expressed through literature in Korea not only during the colonial era, but also under the authoritarian governments that followed. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that literary debates were debates over both the ideology and practice that included political and social strata.

After the emergence of the two theories of *hyeondae*, Korean literature in the twentieth century entered a state of intermittent war between “realism” and “modernism,” as well as among the modified discourses that originated from these two. The war between the two discourses, which were directly and indirectly related to the struggle between the left and the right, intensified particularly with division

after liberation and the Korean War. Consequently, the opposition between “realism” and “modernism”¹ became, just like the Balkans, a sensitive tinderbox of Korean literature.

Before and After Kim Su-yeong

After the Korean War, the theory of pure literature that originated from the modernism of the 1930s united with the anti-left struggle after liberation, equipping itself with unique ideological characteristics before rising as a type of dominant ideology in South Korea. The theory of pure literature was not anticommunist, pro-authoritarian, and pro-government from the onset. On the contrary, it had its own awareness of “*hyeondae*-ness” that tried to simultaneously overcome capitalism and “actually existing socialism.” However, it rose as a dominant ideology by taking advantage of worsening political circumstances, and the pure sprout of modernism of the 1930s, which, antagonized under colonialism, disappeared as a consequence.² Subsequently, the theory of national literature,³ which originated with the KAPF of the 1920s and was ideologically founded in relation to

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1. I put realism and modernism in quotes in order to clarify that these terms convey meanings that are commonly used. In other words, whereas the former is a literary trend that explores the prospect of overcoming the modern with the reflection theory, the latter experiments with the critique of the modern using the non-reflective method. However, this simplistic differentiation disappears with the ideal realism and modernism.
 2. One of the reasons why the sincere attempt of pure literature theory to locate a new worldview beyond both capitalism and socialism decreased immediately after liberation was that the representative modernists of the 1930s such as Kim Gi-rim, Jeong Ji-yong, Yi Tae-jun, and Bak Tae-won joined the Korean Writers' League after liberation. Pure literature theorists who wanted to follow the modernists at a new level within the transformation of the latter also abandoned the establishment of their own issues and turned rightist.
 3. The theory of national literature of the Korean Writers' League was not invented as an ideology from the beginning. As the struggle intensified while the situation was exacerbated, national literature theory structured itself as a type of political platform. It was at this point that its original intent began to weaken.

the anti-right struggle immediately after liberation, was hidden as an undercurrent. The theory of class literature during colonization, or the theory of national literature of the left after liberation, undertook socialist realism as its central methodology. Though the latter went through a process of earnest reflection on modernism while criticizing the dogmatic characteristics of the former, it was linked to the urgent political circumstances following liberation. In other words, the national literature movement of that era could not overcome the fundamental limit of having defined the outer organization of the political party, and thus ended up running toward realism without properly dealing with the issue of modernism.⁴ Under these circumstances, realism was also forced to leave the stage with the extinction of the left's national literature movement.

Realism resurged as an important literary discourse after the 1970s, when the generation of the April Revolution began to enter the center of literary circles. As the national literature movement of the 1970s, which was established based on engagement literature theory of the late 1960s, developed, the realism that had been hidden could be restored. Naturally, it was not a duplicated restoration of the previous form of national literature. Just as the national literature theory of the 1970s kept its critical distance from actually existing socialism (Leninism and its Asiatic variations) while being critical of capitalism, the realism of this era also responded to national reality and aimed to overcome both modernism and socialist realism simultaneously.

The national literature theory of the 1970s existed in a complicat-

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4. It is very interesting that the Korean Writers' League started off as a joint organization between writers such as Im Hwa and Kim Nam-cheon, who criticized the class literature theory of the KAPF, and Yi Tae-jun, Jeong Ji-yong and Kim Gi-rim, who denied colonial modernism. Despite their differences, both sides established modernism as an object to negate and overcome. Given that the modernists who joined the league were overwhelmed by reality and consequently fell into literary decline in both creativity and critique due to their difficult inner struggle to conform to the platform, omitting self-reconciliation with modernism, the fact that national literature theory after liberation did not properly face the issue of modernism is a source of continuous disappointment.

ed relationship with the modernism of the previous era. Take the example of Kim Su-yeong, who was the key link between the engagement literature theory of the 1960s and national literature theory of the 1970s. He is what one may call a modernist. His modernism succeeds the modernism of the 1930s. The modernism of the 1930s was a project that aimed to overcome the dispute between class literature theory, national literature (*gungmin munhak*) theory, and the eclecticism of the late 1920s, as well as to reach a new dimension of modernity in Korean literature. Though the class literature movement was also a *hyeondae*-style project that sought to overcome the naturalism and romanticism of the early 1920s, it was fundamentally in line with the *geundae*-style project of that era despite its subjective intentions. In this regard, it is interesting that Kim Gi-rim's declaration of modernism is summarized as an emblem of anti-romanticism. In a word, Kim Gi-rim saw the entire body of literature of the 1920s as the era of romanticism and realism (*sasiljuui*), comparable to the nineteenth century of the West. The modernism movement of the 1930s was a process of transplantation with condensed growth that aimed to bestow the characteristics of the twentieth century on Korean literature, which had stubbornly remained in the nineteenth century.⁵ As a result, Kim Gi-rim ignored the "*hyeondae*-ness" of the class literature movement, and this ignorance became the Achilles' heel of the modernism of the 1930s. As Yi Sang, who "fainted" continuously between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was acutely aware, the modernism of the 1930s also formed a discontinuous continuity with the 1920s. It is certainly not a coincidence that the modernism of the 1930s began a new search around the time of the death of Yi Sang. Korean society and literature at the time demanded the dual pursuit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore,

5. To be sure, the new literature movement of the early twentieth century and the literature that was produced during this process did not simply stay within the nineteenth century in the Western sense. The best works that were produced during this time, for example "Jindalaekkot" (Azalea Flowers) by Kim Sowol, "Nim-ui chimmuk" (The Silence of Love) by Han Yong-un, and "Mansejeon" by Yeom Sang-seop share the characteristics of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

it was typical that Kim Gi-rim, who had been the most enthusiastic about this pursuit, himself criticized modernism and searched for a "total poem."⁶ However, it is not fair to write off the modernism movement of the 1930s as a simple failure. After modernism, the construction of sound literature could not be achieved simply by skirting around the issues raised by modernism. Modernism is the child of the capital or the city. Despite this, however, modernism is not a simple admirer of either. On the contrary, it is often the most severe critic of the evils of the city. When considering that Baudelaire, who gloomily described the moaning of a cursed soul that had been enchanted by the wickedness of the newly-born purgatory, or the city, was one of the first modernists, the dual aspects found in the relationship between the city and modernism becomes clear.

Amid this tension, modernism sometimes took the position of anti-modernity, the leading figure of which was poet Jeong Ji-yong. Jeong, who captured the fundamental fluidity of things through the liveliness and sensibility of his prose, also wrote an excellent series of poems titled "Gohyang" (Homecoming). The following is one of them:

I return to my home at long last
To find it's no longer my old home.

In the mountain the pheasants still brood,
And the cuckoos sing in the right season;

6. Though it would be distorting his intention to relate Kim Gi-rim's concept of the "total poem" to the fascism of the 1930s, especially Japanese totalitarianism, using the term "total" in the attempt to overcome the disintegration of modernism would not be completely irrelevant to the totalitarian tendency at the time. For the poet who had awakened to the emptiness of transplanted colonial modernism, "totality" could have been fascinating. The reason Kim Gi-rim joined the Korean Writers League after liberation, albeit hesitantly, may have been due to the acceptance of Marxist totality that seemed radically different from the fascism of the 1930s but in actuality had been contaminated by the disease of totalitarianism. However, it does not seem to have been complete acceptance. He was already somewhat disillusioned, which was directly reflected in the fact that poetic achievements after liberation were much weaker than during the era of modernism before liberation.

But my heart, drifting away from its home,
Wanders like a cloud to a distant harbor.

Climbing the hill alone today again,
I see a white-spotted flower smiling tenderly;

But the grass reed doesn't sound as in olden days,
And tastes bitter upon my dry lips.

I return to my home at long last
Only to see the longed-for sky lofty and blue.

("Homecoming,"⁷ 1932)

This poem is not a common song of nostalgia for the speaker's hometown, but rather sings of his experience of returning home. However, the home the speaker returns to is unfamiliar. Has it changed? No. As the second and fourth stanzas show, home remains the same as before. What then has changed? As the speaker bitterly confirms in the third and fifth stanzas, his heart has already left home. And you can never go home again! The distance between the speaker and the lofty, blue sky of his hometown? It is there that sorrow haunts, as expressed by Pascal, who wrote, "The infinite silence of that sky makes me shiver." As the poem reaches its climax with "But my heart, drifting away from its home,/Wanders like a cloud to a distant harbor." Jeong sings of his nostalgia in a classical style, lamenting the fundamental loss of home felt by a modern man whose heart has left home forever, despite the fact that he has returned. This echoes Heidegger's claim that a true poem expresses the nostalgia for home. Jeong's nostalgic poems based on the sharp rupture between the present and the past, which emerged amid the progress of colonial modernity, opened up a new field moving beyond the romanticism of the 1920s with Sowol and Manhae, who sang of their burning passion for the absent *nim* (the beloved). With this, Korean poetry shift-

7. This translation is quoted from *Korea Journal* 30.11 (November-December 1990): 89.

ed from the "era of *nim*" to the "era of *gohyang* (hometown)." By attempting transcendence again in the perfect solitude of a mountain-top after overcoming nostalgia and deteriorating circumstances, Jeong perfected the anti-modernist character of the modernism of the 1930s.

Because it started by differentiating itself from socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism, Kim Su-yeong's modernism shares the modernism of the 1930s that began by departing from the naturalism and romanticism of the 1920s. Despite this, however, Kim's modernism is almost completely free from any romantic remnants or classical poses of 1930s modernism. During the era of *Gisangdo* (A Weather Chart) (1935), which glorified "Pensée de midi," or after the era of "Bada-wa nabi" (The Sea and the Butterfly) (1939), which predicted its failure, I felt a violent romantic drive toward utopia in Kim Gi-rim's poems, despite their exuberant and modernistic wording. The continuity of the modernism of the 1920s and the 1930s is again confirmed in the fact that the poetic world of Kim Gwang-gyun, who sang of the tamed nostalgia of the urban petty bourgeois who were wrapped in thin fatigues, can be seen as the popularization of Kim Gi-rim. As pointed out already, the world of the transcendent nostalgia of Jeong Ji-yong that inclined toward anti-modernist classicism was lacking in the struggle against the evil of the city that modernism attempted to face. In a word, the modernism of the 1930s, despite its appearance, is surprisingly lacking in its "hyeondae-ness." In this regard, one should pay attention to the strictness shown in the best poetic works by Kim Su-yeong, that is, the rejection of romantic or classical transcendence. He injects his body and soul into the reality of the "here and now" completely. Because of this, his language is faithful to the prose of everyday language, beyond the "poetic diction" of the modernism of the 1930s. Stoic intelligence is demanded even more with everyday language—in other words, when everyday life that has been excluded in the existing poetic territory is turned into the body of one's own poem. This is why this intellectual trend is more evident in Kim Su-yeong's poem. Unlike the modernism of the 1930s, which inclined mostly toward imagism, Kim Su-yeong's

poems may be related to this. Kim Su-yeong's style, which set a rare example of "an enduring intellectual statement"⁸ as a poem, is profoundly related to the trend to make falling things the main subject of poetic thought, unlike 1930s modernism, which fed on transcendence and horizontal crossings. J. Vier pointed out that "the birth of Baudelaire's literature is achieved when the recovery of everyday life is imposed on the poet, when swans and albatrosses are allowed to take a step forward."⁹ This may correspond, to a certain degree, to Kim Su-yeong. By the time it arrived at Kim Su-yeong, perhaps Korean poetry could be compared to an immortal who was exiled to earth, awakened, and began taking an earthly, adventurous path, like an albatross that abandons the unbearable temptation of flight and sways as it walks, surrounded by the taunts of onlookers. Therefore, one can witness in Kim's best works the soul of the fateful place where the best poem is born, i.e. the moment of a death-defying leap that transcends even as it remains faithful to modernism. Kim was indeed a rare poet who displayed in his best works a comprehensive understanding by crossing the boundaries of general modernism and realism.

The national literature movement in the 1970s began with critical thinking about the Kim Su-yeong's literary legacy. Recognizing it as both positive and negative, Kim Ji-ha declared an overthrow of modernism based on the perspective of the masses in his representative work "Pungjanya jasal inya" (Satire or Suicide?) (1970). Kim Su-yeong was neither a simple Westernist nor an ordinary anti-traditionalist. Despite this, however, there is something lacking in Kim Su-yeong, in that the understanding of nostalgia is woefully inadequate. Baudelaire regarded "the calmness that originates from a firm decision not to be impressed" as the esthetic characteristic of a

8. Paik Nack-chung praised Kim Su-yeong's "Pokpo" (Waterfall) (1956) as it "transcends the bounds of simple lyricism to form an enduring intellectual statement" (Paik 1978, 244). This was one of the overall characteristics of Kim Su-yeong's poems. This intellectualist trend can perhaps be related more to Yi Sang than any other modernists of the 1930s.

9. Yun (1998, 107).

dandy.¹⁰ While paying respect to Kim's intellectualism, which resulted from his struggle to resist succumbing easily to a nostalgia based on longing for the past and fear of the future, we see a weakening sense of the other world that is contained in true nostalgia. It was as if the weakness of the 1930s modernism that underestimated the KAPF "hyeondae-ness" of the 1920s was repeated on a new level with Kim. The national literature movement of the 1970s faced a golden opportunity to overcome the rupture between "realism" and "modernism" by critically succeeding Kim's works. In reality, national literature after the 1970s achieved important success in both creation and critique. When seen overall, however, the national literature movement after the 1970s can only be said to have turned from "modernism" to "realism." This trend, as it came immediately after liberation, accelerated as the anti-dictatorship struggle grew imminent. More fundamentally, it was due to the presence of actually existing socialism. This was because, as has been pointed out before, despite the fact that the national literature movement of the 1970s started from a fundamental awareness that aimed to overcome capitalism and actually existing socialism at the same time, it could not free itself entirely from dichotomous thinking in its relation to struggle. Also, one needs to consider the fact that the separation of the generation of the April Revolution had been realized within the literary world. The launching of *Munhak-gwa jiseong* (Literature and Intelligence) in 1972 was typical of this trend. By succeeding Kim's modernism, this centrist group that made their nest between opposing pure literature and national literature theories displayed a slight difference from the national literature movement which criticized Kim Su-yeong's modernism and which succeeded his realism. As the national literature movement spread and intensified, especially after the 1980s, this difference widened with writing that resembled Sin Dong-yeop's¹¹ coming to overwhelm that which resembled Kim

10. Baudelaire (1960, 99-100).

11. Sin Dong-yeop is another powerful figure from the national literature movement in the 1970s. He was an essential link that critically succeeded the non-modernist

Su-yeong's in the national literature movement. In other words, as the vulgarization of Sin Dong-yeop's writing became the general trend, another great wall was built between "realism" and "modernism." A new opportunity to rise above the dichotomy, a second chance given after liberation, was thus lost due to the immature state of both subjective and objective conditions.

The Significance of 1989

The opposition between "realism" and "modernism," which aimed to fundamentally overcome their conflicting structures but kept falling back to making a simple choice between the two whenever the social situation worsened, faced a new situation as the actually existing socialism collapsed instead of the waning capitalism. More than anything, as after 1929, it was manifested as the fall of a rigorous dichotomy. The collapse was more serious as it was related to the abandonment of the *geundae/hyeondae* dichotomy, which boasted of eternal tradition.

Initiated by Jin Jeongseok's speech at the symposium "For the Renewal of National Literature Theory," which was co-hosted by the Association of Writers for National Literature (Minjok Munhak Jakga Hoe-ui) and the Institute for the Korean Literary History (Minjok Munhaksa Yeonguso) in 1996, the modernism debate that continued with discussions and counterarguments by participants including Kim Myeong-hwan, Yun Ji-gwan, and Bang Min-ho was significant. In particular, Jin's argument¹² that national literature theory and realism theory had failed to capture the rapidly changing reality of the 1990s, and his presentation of "modernism in a broad sense," which comprised both realism and modernism as a new methodology were the

tradition of Korean literature, particularly left-wing poetry, which permeated into the underground after the Korean War, and connected it to the national literature of the 1970s. Undoubtedly, his best works were not a simple repetition of left-wing poetry.

12. Jin (1997, 152-153).

most provocative issues that came from within national literature theory. Let us compare this to the series of debates on realism that framed the opening of the 1990s. Yun Ji-gwan summarized: "the principle of representation and the existence of prospects constitute the two axes that support realism. Still, while postmodernism denied the validity of the former, the changes in Eastern Europe also aroused doubt concerning the realization of prospects. Each is thus testing the premise of the current state of realism."¹³ The realism debate at the time was designed to criticize postmodernism, which entered Korea after the revolution in Eastern Europe, while defending national literature theory and realism, which acted as the main methodology of national literature theory. To be sure, realism theory at that time was not the repetition of the simple realism of the past, especially the socialist realism that was raised by the progressive literature movement of the 1980s and its variations. Though existing discourse was reformed, by overcoming the habitual practice of dividing critical realism and socialist realism based on *geundae/hyeondae* theory, and by looking at the issue of reflection and representation again from its roots, the general trend was to fundamentally maintain the larger principle of realism. In this context, Jin Jeongseok's proposal to dissolve realism into modernism made one feel the remarkable changes that took place within a short span of time. Whether or not his assertion was valid or whether one agreed with or criticized him, he pushed the Korean literary world into the tinderbox of confrontation between realism and modernism. It was no longer possible to use the makeshift method of establishing a general realism or a general modernism and expect to solve the problem through an obscure reconciliation of the two sides, for example, by placing modernism outside realism in a passive way or searching for realistic aspects in the works that had been categorized as modern as a gesture of salvation.¹⁴ What

13. Praxis and Literature Editorial Board (1992, 18).

14. The view that misinterprets modernist Baek Seok as a realist is one of the clear examples. Though he is not simply a modernist, a comprehensive view that distinguishes his achievements and limits within his field in the modernism of the 1930s is needed.

remained was a breakthrough related to such troublesome issues.

At this point, we need to note that both the realism debate at the beginning of the 1990s and the modernism debate that followed originated from a series of theoretical works on realism and modernism developed by Paik Nack-chung. The series began with "Rieollijeum-e gwanhayeo" (On Realism) (1982), Paik also published "Modeonijeum-e gwanhayeo" (On Modernism) (1984) and "Modeonijeum nonui-e deotbucheo" (More on the Modernism Debate) (1985), and ended with "Minjok munhak-gwa rieollijeum ron" (National Literature and Realism Theory) (1990). With such publications, it is no exaggeration to say that his theory of realism is monumental. His position is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he hierarchically organized socialist realism and critical realism and was cautious of the abstract nature of the existing realism theory that had degenerated into the vulgarization of a reflection theory in general. On the other hand, he criticized postmodernism, which even mocked the proper modernism that had achieved a certain success during the conflict between realistic and modernist trends, as the breakdown of modernism itself. He independently argued for "the overcoming of modernism by realism, which embraces both (realism and modernism)"¹⁵ or a "self-reform of realism that can successfully defeat the challenge of postmodernism."¹⁶

However, the problem is that the instant such a creative realism theory leaves the world of critical discourse, it can easily fall back into the realm of "realism." Though it is difficult to abandon realism when looking back at the long struggle for recognition in order to restore this term, it is too loaded with ideological memories. In fact, Paik Nack-chung was already aware of this fact. He pointed out that "even the new realism theory that has been achieved after criticizing the existing socialist realism does not completely escape ideological characteristics," and when one arrives at the time when a capitalism antagonistic to any type of creative effort is conquered, "there may

15. Paik (1985, 473).

16. Paik (1991, 175).

not be a need to use such a troublesome and difficult word as 'realism.'"¹⁷ However, though realism theory needs reform—as the struggle is not yet over—the dilemma remains that, realistically speaking, realism's triumph over modernism may well lead back to the previous dichotomy. At the same time, however, it is difficult to accept modernism in a broad sense as an alternative. Though the sincerity of this idea is fully understandable, it might easily be reduced to a surrender to *geundae*. This is because the term "modernism" itself can easily make it impossible to think outside of *geundae*. For a person who does not think that capitalism is the end of history, overcoming realism by modernism is nothing but an oxymoronic proposition that cannot be fundamentally established.

Realism and modernism, which have been intertwined throughout their long ideological struggle since their introduction to Korea from the West, may be terms that have no hope of redemption, no matter how renewed and polished they are. Just as the colonial regime and the succeeding states created, promoted, and manipulated racial difference and tradition,¹⁸ realism/modernism also came under suspicion. When naming a certain object, and later when the name that has replaced the object forms a chain of the name, the name slips away from the object and the alienation of the object may deepen. The group identities of realism and modernism, which have been achieved through the effort to define realism and modernism amid their differences, be it symmetrical or asymmetrical, can easily be seen as either an imagined or invented sign. The doubt grows even further when actual works correspond to such group identity. As mentioned above, the canons of realism and modernism do not form an orderly line. The two fields frequent different time zones, as with the left and right wings. Based on the premise that the left and right wings are a relative concept that changes dramatically according to time, Giddens offers the example of free market advocates, who were left-

17. Paik (1991, 220).

18. In the postcolonial system of Korea where racial difference hardly existed, vicious regional differences and sentiments were created after Park Chung-hee.

ists during the nineteenth century but rightists today,¹⁹ which is the same in Korea's case. We have already seen how a great number of modernists of the 1930s who were non-leftists joined the pan-left after liberation. Though it is undoubtedly problematic to abandon the left and right, neither the dogmatic maintenance of the difference nor the partial amendment of both would completely solve the problem.

What is important now is a return to the object itself, rather than the creation of the object from discourse, by restoring a critical mind that can stop discourse from becoming metaphysics. In this regard, by leaving the invented identity of realism/modernism and coming closer to the work itself, one needs to focus again on the fact that the best works of modernism were produced when they leapt over the limitations of general modernism, just as the best works of realism were created when they transcended the boundaries of general realism. In other words, at the place where the best works are produced, "realism" and "modernism" have already reached a state of intercommunication. However, the moment these terms are chosen, it becomes fundamentally difficult to escape from being bound up in them.²⁰ Therefore, whether it is true realism or broad modernism, assimilation of one into the other cannot be a solution. Even if it is imagined, what is once produced does not disappear easily unless the karma that established the imagination terminates. In this regard, I believe that there is an acute need to return to the literary work in order to enable the intercommunication of the two. To be sure, "the work" in the proposition "return to the literary work" has hardly anything to do with the "work itself" of a formalism that has fallen prey to a certain existential fallacy that transforms "the work" into metaphysics. The goal of this return is to focus on a concrete or independent work. In other words, this constitutes releasing the realism/modernism debate that has been shackled within critical discourse into a more creative realm. Whether it is a debate on realism or mod-

19. Giddens (1999, 38).

20. This is not to say that these terms should be abandoned entirely as their usefulness simply cannot be denied when approaching the literary work. However, this is only the first matter of urgency not the last one.

ernism, such a change is vital when considering the writers' indifference and scorn concerning the debate. Especially in recent times, the division that took place, as if creation and critique are of two different worlds, can largely be blamed on the critics that did not look into the actual topography of the literary creation. At the same time, however, the usual practice by the writers that regards critique as something entirely separate is not completely free of responsibility. Baudelaire, creator of the term "modernity," declared, "All great poets naturally and fatally become critics. I feel sorry for those poets who simply rely on their instinct. . . . I think of poets as the best critics."²¹ Perhaps there are too many writers who give up the role of true critic and rely solely on instinct in our literary circles today. I would like to remind them that now is the time when the responsibility of creation is crucial. I look forward to new works that will realize the intercommunication of the images of Kim Su-yeong,²² which has again been divided into the "realism" and "modernism" after Kim Su-yeong. Furthermore, it would be even better if the re-territorialization of Kim Su-yeong was elevated to the search for a Korea-initiated alternative that deconstructs, rediscovers, and reforms the tradition of classical literature in East Asia, which frequently crosses both reality and fantasy, from the *minjung* perspective. When Korean literature reaches this state, it can be said to have truly overcome Kim Su-yeong.

In short, the confrontation between "realism" and "modernism" can be converged into the issue of how to survive the modern capitalism we face today. In Korean society, modernity is still something that needs to be achieved and simultaneously something that will end in catastrophe if it is not overcome. How are we to deal with the dualism of modernity? The intercommunication between "realism" and "modernism" is the first starting point of my immature mind as it

21. Yun (1998, 28).

22. For further information, see Yu (1999). However, that the author placed Sin Dong-yeop after Kim Su-yeong and coupled him with Hwang Dong-gyu may be problematic. Although Sin came after Kim, he precedes Hwang Dong-gyu. The national literature movement of the 1970s began with the aim to integrate the best of Kim and also the best of Sin.

moves toward solving this dual task. Based on this point, crossing the collapse of old socialism and the scramble for capital without stopping and searching for our own creative way of living may be the first step to take in the long journey of remembering the significance of 1989.

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GLOSSARY

<i>geundae</i>	近代
<i>ggyang</i>	故鄉
<i>gungmin munhak</i>	國民文學
<i>hyeondae</i>	現代
<i>minjung</i>	民衆
<i>nim</i>	님
<i>sasiljui</i>	寫實主義
<i>sin-gyeonghyang pa</i>	新傾向派