Analyze the Characteristics of the Development of Modern Literature in China, Japan, and Korea from the Perspective of Comparative Literature

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Abstract

This article examines and records the modernization process of the three East Asian countries from two aspects: writers and readers, speech, and media, with the social ideology closely related to historical development as the center. It also clarifies how the development of modern literature in China, Japan, and South Korea is closely connected with the social conditions at that time. Although the political situation of different countries is different, the direction of democratization based on nationalism shows consistency and historical inevitability. Therefore, it can be said that the modern literature of East Asia was born in the process of oppression and resistance from the West, in other words, it was westernized in a way of xenophobia. The research on the history of modern East Asian literature must step out of the shadow of Western literature and explore and sort out the literary history with East Asian characteristics that are different from the modern West.

Keywords

Modernity, Literary history, Literary study

Introduction

When discussing the modernity of modern literature in the three East Asian countries, comparisons can be made from different aspects such as literary propositions, conscious themes, text images, speech composition, creative methods, and ideological schools. However, it is not easy to achieve a rigorous structure in all aspects and enrich the content. Therefore, this paper aims to focus on the influence of Western literature on East Asian literature and conduct comparative studies on the modern literature of the three East Asian countries from different perspectives.

1. The spread of Western literature

In the process of Western literary thoughts spreading to the east, they spread to China, Japan, and South Korea through different paths. However, the development of their literary thoughts in various countries has similarities since then. Of course, unlike China and South Korea, Japan is an active and spontaneous acceptance of modern civilization and ideas, and it is directly influenced by Western literature through studying abroad. Intellectuals such as Natsume Soseki used their thoughts to introduce their ideas into Japan (Fuji, James A., 1997). In contrast, Chinese and Korean intellectuals mainly came into contact with Western thoughts through the translation of Western works and original works in Japanese translations. However, in the West, it took 200 years of hard work for literary and artistic thought to gradually develop, but it only took 20 to 30 years to spread in the East (Malima, Yoshimasa, 2015). This inevitably brings confusion in the understanding of Western thought. From this point of view, China, Japan, and
South Korea are very similar. Moreover, in the process of translating western works to these three countries, the errors in the translation have become more prominent. When the writers translated classicism, romanticism and realism, due to the lack of time sequence, all kinds of works were published at the same time. Therefore, the thoughts of the works of this period were chaotic, and their versatility was brought into full play.

2. The cause of the confusion of modern literary thought in China, Japan and South Korea

The reason why the modern literary thoughts in China, Japan, and South Korea are extremely chaotic can be explained by citing the following three points.

First, the literary and artistic trends of China, Japan, and South Korea did not arise from normal historical changes, but were purely the result of disorderly imitating Western cultural trends. After modern development in western countries, romanticism resisted classicism, while realism and naturalism resisted romanticism. In contrast, various literary and artistic trends of thought appeared almost simultaneously in the three East Asian countries. For example, in Korea, the realism of Creation started as a purely text movement that negated the Enlightenment (Shin, Gi-Wook). In China, writers advocate ethics and absorb new ideas in all aspects. The specific historical situation in China determines that realism takes the mainstream position, combining with practical traditions and utilitarian purposes. The Realism, which is dominant in Western modern literature, played a role in China at that time, and literary groups have absorbed the creative techniques of Realism (Kishner, Jonathon, 2012). From the May Fourth Movement to the 1940s, realism, as a tributary, influenced literary works and their creative spirit to some extent. However, as far as the cultural background is concerned, the resistance consciousness of the Western Realist writers is contrary to the traditional Chinese rebellious consciousness, and the Realist has not achieved localization (Smith, Michael Peter, & Thomas Bender, 2017). The same happened in Japan. After the Meiji Restoration, realism developed before romanticism and naturalism, and the combination of classicism and realism emerged (Smith, Michael Peter, & Thomas Bender, 2017).

Second, there is a misunderstanding of the concept of literary and artistic thought. In China and South Korea, because the translated works and theories depend on the Japanese translation of the original, the problem of retranslation is very obvious. Both countries interpret realism and naturalism as the same concept, while romanticism uses decadence instead.

Third, the unconscious and blind pursuit of literary and artistic trends. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the proletarian cultural camp. In China, as writers of the late romanticism returned from studying in Japan and Europe, radical proletarian controversy took the lead in literature (McDougall, Bonnie S., & Kam louie, 1997). The confusion and errors of this trend of literary and artistic thought are reflections of the special modernization process in East Asia. When considering the special fate of the three East Asian countries, this can also be said to be an inevitable result. When discussing the issue of writers and readers of modern literature, the comparison of time is particularly important. The character of writers and readers after modern times has undergone tremendous changes compared with before. The reason can be attributed to the universality and popularization of education. In Japan, the University of Tokyo was founded in 1877. In China, new measures were implemented after the Reform Movement of 1898. The Peking University was founded in 1898. In Korea, Wonsan University was founded in 1883, and Pai Chai University was born in 1885.

3. Cultural Change in Asian History

In China and South Korea, the new education after the enlightenment was almost monopolized by Christian schools, and then, private schools spontaneously emerged (Jin-yu L.I.U., 2004). They introduce new educational methods and expand their educational opportunities. As part of the educational enlightenment movement, specialized schools, private schools, government schools, etc. appeared (Jin-yu L.I.U., 2004). It mainly teaches new ideas and new technologies from the West, expands the scope and influence of Western culture, adds a new readership, lays the cornerstone for the formation of a new culture, and contributes a huge force to the popularization of spoken language. In China, after the May Fourth Movement, textbooks of vernacular Chinese began to be popularized and promoted. South Korea issued an elementary school order in July 1895 to form a modern elementary education. (Jing-fang, L.I.U., 2009). With the first Sino-Japanese War as a starting point, the government announced the adoption of textbooks in which both Chinese and Chinese were mixed. In the 5th year of Meiji around 1871, the government announced the school system and conscription system (Beasley, William, 1972). The military assumes the responsibility of an educational institution and takes collectivism as the keynote (Beasley, William, 1972). This is dif-
fferent from China and South Korea. In short, the rise of new education has brought about the popularization of oral literature and has cultivated a new class of writers and readers.

The problem of language and writing is the key to the popularization of literature. Due to the long-term use of Chinese characters in the three countries of China, Japan, and South Korea, which are also in the Han cultural circle, the popularization of modern literature will inevitably produce language and writing problems. In China in the 1940s, the illiteracy rate reached more than 80% (Zhou, Minglang, 2000). After the colloquialization of classical Chinese, the education of Chinese characters became a real problem. The main achievement of the New Culture Movement is the promotion of vernacular Chinese, and its importance is beyond doubt. The resulting modern Chinese formed a language system centered on vernacular Chinese and built a popular educational foundation. Chinese characters are also transformed from ideograms to phonograms to some extent.

In Korea, before and after the Sino-Japanese war, the revival and popularization of Chinese language, the introduction of the same style of classical Chinese, and the use of sentence reading were implemented successively, all of which had a significant impact on the formation of new literature. The appearance of famous books such as *Journey to the West* has become an important turning point in the development of notation. After that, the notation of characters began to rapidly develop Korean culture.

In Japan, in the early days of the Enlightenment, with the expansion of social movements, some radical propositions such as the abandonment of Chinese characters emerged. After 1880, oral literature was born. The characteristic of writers and readers after modern times is that the development of the city is closely connected with the popularization of the media. The popularization of printing technology makes novels enter the field of commercial circulation. It not only makes a large amount of supply possible, but also changes the relationship between writers and readers, leading to the appearance of authors' anonymity and literary commercialization. In Korea at the end of the 19th century, the launch of "Independent News", "Gyeongsong News", etc. laid the foundation for the formation of modern Korean literature.

In China, the rise of business journalism was centered on Shanghai in the late Qing Dynasty, where mass media and publishing industries emerged and developed and expanded. In Southeast Asia at that time, European missionaries published magazines for missionary purposes. The real rise of the media was the "Daily Times" founded by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao at the end of the 19th century (Vittinghoff, Natascha, 2002). They used the media to promote the enlightenment, but for commercial purposes, they could not play freely. The development of modern media has completely changed the level of writers and readers. In ancient times, the creators and appreciators of literature belonged to the scholar-official class. With the rise of the New Cultural Movement, the readership of the media continued to expand, and the writer class also changed from the scholar-official class to the intellectual class. Since then, professional literary magazines have the dual characteristics of commerciality and enlightenment at the same time. This characteristic became more obvious after the emergence of literary and artistic quarterly magazines in the 1930s.

In Japan, intellectuals headed by Fukuzawa Yukichi, in order to promote the idea of civil society, formed the Ming Rokusha, and launched their official newspaper "Ming Roku Magazine" to carry out the people's thought enlightenment (Swale, Alistair, 2003). He published *Out of Asia Theory*, advocating to break away from the already backward Asia and move closer to Western civilization, which played a pivotal role in the birth of modern Japan. Since then, reformism based on the concept of creating a Western-style civilization was born. Later, Tokutomi Soho set up the Friends of the People's Society, founded the "The people's Friend" magazine, and advocated the concept of populism (Swale, Alistair, 2003). As a result of the successive unfolding of this series of movements, it has brought hope to young people who dream of getting ahead in society, and enlightenment ideas can be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people.

After Japan sent troops to China in 1931 and forcibly occupied the three northeastern provinces, the so-called Manchurian Incident, the situation in China has also undergone tremendous changes. Left-wing literary and artistic groups were forcibly disbanded, and the rise of urban culture followed (Liu, Ping & Krista Van Fleit Hang, 2006). Non-political literary thought has developed rapidly. Under such a cultural background, the creation of pure literary magazines has also grown rapidly. Therefore, it can be said that with the formation and development of urban culture, the prosperity of literary media has come as scheduled.

When it comes to the writer level of modern literature, the role played by overseas students from China, Japan, and South Korea cannot be ignored. Almost all modern literary writers have had the experience of studying abroad. Especially in Japan, intellectuals from overseas students have direct contact with Western culture and have contributed to the modernization of their own literature. Similarly, in China and South Korea, foreign students sent by the
government returned from their studies and took the lead in the creation and publication of news and magazines. Since then, translations of political novels and Western classics have also come out through their hands. The ancient intellectuals passed the imperial examinations, jumped into the dragon gate, and entered the literati class. In modern times, due to the popularization of new-style education, middle-class writers have appeared on stage.

The writer's ideology also changed during this period. For East Asian intellectuals, the 20th century was a period of transition from the traditional literati class to the modern intellectual class. Since Dong Zhongshu, the government has consciously introduced the class of scholar-officials in order to restrict the class of capable officials (Arbuckle, Gary, 1991). Under this historical background, traditional scholar-officials have long been influenced by democratic consciousness, and as the founders and heirs of spiritual culture, they always have a sense of political mission. However, entering the civilized period of the 20th century, along with the demise of the imperial examination system, the way literati was born and established also changed. At the same time, due to the layer-by-layer penetration of the Western modern value system, the emerging intellectual class began to deny traditional values and generally accepted Western values. The writers of this period possessed the dual characteristics of ancient and modern writers at the same time. They are not so much professional writers as they are appropriate thinkers or revolutionaries with the qualities of writers. They do not have a clear art classification. If necessary, any art category may be involved.

4. Conclusion

In summary, in East Asia, the development process of modern literature is closely connected with the social conditions at that time. Although the political situation of different countries is different, the direction of democratization based on nationalism has shown consistency. Literature is the first to bear the brunt and is inevitably affected by the social conditions at the time. However, there is of course controversy as to whether it can develop on its own. Modern East Asian literature was born in the process of oppression and resistance from the West. Therefore, it can also be said that the use of xenophobia is Westernized. In Japan, in order to form the national character of a modern country, the description of its modern literary history focuses on the development of the country's literature. In China, due to the national system and policies, the history of literature centered on ideological tendencies or ideologies has existed for a long time. Since Korea was unable to wake up from the nightmare of colonial times and national divisions for a long time, it was not until 1980 that the history of literature that emphasized national consciousness was published.

In the development process of modern literature, Japan was the first to embark on the road of comprehensive Westernization. Of course, its role as a model for China and South Korea cannot be ignored. However, with the arrival of the new era of globalization, we need to find a new theoretical framework that can reflect the contemporary cultural environment to record the history of literature. Today, with the trend of internationalization, the capital, intelligence, and culture of modern society are rapidly merging. The cultural dissemination between countries eliminates the gap between time and space, but it also loses its continuity. The future history of modern literature cannot stop at simply explaining, evaluating and distinguishing the cultural phenomena of the country, but should extend the research scope to the broad subject of East Asian culture and literary history. In other words, we must step out of the shadow of Western literature, discover and sort out the literary history of East Asia that is different from the modern West. On the basis of perfecting the literary history of the country, retaining the individuality of their respective literatures, the research focuses on transcending the literature of the country and national literature, and creating a new starting point for a broad literary history of the three nations.

References


