

Characteristics of the Origination and Development of Korean Literature of Critical Realism

Kim Chol Min & Jon Jong Hyon

Department of Korean Literature of Korean Language and Literature Faculty
Foreign Languages and Literature Faculty
Kim Il Sung University, Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Email: cioc1@ryongnamsan.edu.kp

Abstract This essay studies the characteristics of Korean literature of critical realism produced in the late 1910-1930s in comparison of those of European critical realism. It studies the literary trend of critical realism, the major literary trend of Korea, in the late 1910-1930s and ascertains that it is new flow with its new ideas and aesthetic principle quite distinctive from the outdated in the past. The origination and development of critical realistic literature in Korea turned out to be somewhat different from its counterparts in Europe in the light of socio-historical environment and creators' makeup. Although they both acutely criticized the reactionary and unpopular reality of the exploiting society, the Korean literature of critical realism is characteristic in that it reflected the reality of colonial and semi-feudal society, set the humiliated and poor working masses as the hero, sympathized with their lives as well as bitterly criticized the contemporary reality, harshly oppressing and exploiting them.

Keywords Critical Realism; Formation; Development

Authors **Kim Chol Min** is a researcher at the Department of Korean Literature of Korean Language and Literature Faculty, Kim Il Sung University, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. His main research area is Korean literature and Asian literary contacts. **Jon Jong Hyon** is Lecturer at the Foreign Languages and Literature Faculty, Kim Il Sung University, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. His main research area is Linguistics and British literature and American literary contacts.

Introduction

The literature of Korean critical realism identified with in comparison with others

on the account of origination and development. Literary legacies of the world reflect a variety of national life and movements of different countries at different times of historical periods and show creative wits and wisdom, genius and valuable experiences and lessons that had historically been accomplished. Critical realism, a literary trend formed during the development of modern history, was at a higher stage in the level of artistic generalization of reality than the preceding ones, and it criticized social contradictions of the time more sharply. As far as literary history is concerned, critical realism takes an important place along with humanism, classicism, enlightenment, romanticism, etc. "Critical realism became the main trend of European literature from 30s to 40s after romanticism" (Xiaohui Huang 2).

Modern capitalist society should have been a "realm of reason" as advocated by humanists or Enlighteners. "Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition. The goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom and happiness" (Duignan, *Enlightenment*). However, from the outset, the task of liberating the masses from new social restraints and oppression by the new social system was raised. But it is true that the transition from the Middle Ages to modern capitalism was an epochal turn in the history of human struggle for independence.

The rapid development of industry and science and technology directly means that man's independence in relation to nature has risen compared to the previous period, and the origination and development of the labor movement show that the consciousness of independence and creative ability of the masses in relation to nature have greatly increased. This in turn led to a new requirement of freedom from oppression and exploitation of capital that was at higher level than that of medieval period-the requirement of freedom from religious and identity restraint.

While humanism and enlightenment were criticisms of either the divine or the royal power which oppress and violate human beings, critical realism criticized capitalist reality as well as divine and royal power by showing how it violates human dignity and value. "Enlightenment thinkers were typically humanists who supported equality and human dignity. They stood opposed (in varying degrees) to supernatural occurrences, superstition, intolerance, and bigotry" (Sullivan, *What*). Humanism and Enlightenment insisted that only ideal human emancipated from the idea of worship of God and the monarch could possibly achieve happiness and retain its dignity, whereas critical realism asserted that those ideal men could not essentially enjoy happiness and freedom under capitalist society, thus criticizing its reality.

As Xiaohui Huang pointed out "The critical realism literature in nineteenth

century, is a splendid page in the bourgeois literary history and also an important heritage in the treasure trove of the world literature. ... They particularly expose and criticize the capitalist system which is widely involved in various fields. This causes the people's suspicion and dissatisfaction to the existing order, so it has great social significance" (4-5). This indicates that critical realism raised and described a higher level of human demand for independence than humanism and enlightenment described. Critical realism is common irrespective of the region and the country, in that it described the reality as it was but in socio-historical background and conditions. The tasks it tried to deal with vary from country to country, bearing certain characteristics.

First of all, it varies in the aspect of origination and development. In those countries such as Britain and France where capitalism developed, critical realism appeared and developed at the time when the bourgeois contradictions and corruption were fully revealed and the struggle of the working class and other popular masses was actively taking place:

Literary realism is the trend, began with 19th century French literature and extended to late 19th and early 20th authors, towards depictions of contemporary life, society as it was or is. (Wikipedia, *Literary realism*)

Industrial Revolution brought riches and power to Great Britain. At the same time, it also brought great evils with it. (Seaman 51)

The basic point of critical is to expose and criticize the evil social reality in humor or satire language. ... Along with the capitalist system, the social politics, economy and morality greatly changed as well. The value regulation and the free competition dominated the world and money can controlled everything. Facing the complicated social contradictions and the cruel reality, people became very serious about their life, and they analyzed social problems objectively in a critical way. (Che 128)

However, in those countries like Russia, it developed in the historical condition of the feudal serfdom as the capitalist elements were infiltrated to a considerable extent but not yet won victory. "...through the interpretation of characters such as Manilov, Gogol sharply criticized the characters of landlords, the exploiting class who oppressed their serfs those days" (Craevski et al 32). Actually, in different countries of the world, many works have been produced to sharply criticize the reactionary nature and corruption of the feudal autocracy, the exploitative nature and inhumanity of the feudal nobility and officials, and the social contradictions and

injustice.

It is said that literature in Victorian Age was characterized by a definite purpose to sweep away error and to reveal the underlying truth of human life (Moody 295). The question lies in how acutely and truthfully critical realism criticized the contradictions and absurdities of the social relations, regardless of what it dealt with, whether it is capitalist social relations or the feudal ones. The socio-historical circumstances and conditions at the time when critical realism appeared in Korea are different from those of Western Europe, where the development of capitalism started early, or Russia, which it started later, and from other countries of the world.

The literature of Korean critical realism has distinctive features different from that of European critical realism in its origination and development. It is mainly due to the different social and historical circumstances of the time and also to the literary traditions established in the past. This affected the literature as well as development of the society. The Korean critical realism, appeared in the 1910s focused on dissecting the contradictions of the colonial semi-feudal society and the absurdity of capitalist relations on the basis of the socio-historical circumstances of the time. They delved into the miserable life of the exploited and maltreated workers, peasants and intellectuals, and the class nature and inhuman atrocities of exploiting classes and plutocratic people.

Korean Literature of Critical Realism: Its Characteristics

The studies of the literature of critical realism conducted in the DPRK in the second half of the 20th century are reflected in many books. Un Jong Sop explored the origination and development of critical realist novels in the 1910-1930s in Korea and their characteristics, as well as the typical writers and works in Korea¹. Ri Kyu Chan conducted research into literary forms with the tendency of strong anti-Japanese, patriotic feelings in the modern period of Korea². Ri Jang Song, focusing on works of critical realist poetry, examined the growth and development of progressive poetry in the 1910-1930s³. Rim Tuk Gil made researches into the origination and development of critical realist play⁴.

1 Un Jong Sop, Study of the History of Modern and Contemporary Novels before the Country's Liberation. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1986.

2 Ri Kyu Chan, Study on the Anti-Japanese, Patriotic Literature of Modern Time in Korea. Pyongyang: Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, 2006.

3 Ri Jang Song, Study on the Development of Progressive Poetry of Modern Time. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1994.

4 Rim Tuk Gil, Study on the Development of the Progressive Drama before the Liberation of Our Country. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1996.

These studies have to do with the successes and experiences gained with the development of critical realism in all-out way in Korea. And the literature critical realism was here approached chiefly by literary forms and genres like poetry, novel and drama. This essay entitled “Characteristics of the Origination and Development of Korean Literature of Critical Realism” proves the existence of critical realism as a literary trend in Korea as well as the ideological and aesthetic achievements and historical stages of development of critical realism in Korea, which intends to excavate more of its successes both in ideas and arts so that the literature of critical realism in Korea adds to the development of world progressive literature, constituting part of valuable treasure of world literature abreast with other critical realistic works.

Art and literature is a production of history and social system in a certain period of times so this essay takes a history-based study in which the chief objects of study are a) the origination of the literature of critical realism and its stage of development, b) major themes and ideas, and representative writers with their masterpiece, c) the characteristics of the artistic interpretation. Critical realism came into being from the requirements of the specific reality of European countries in different socio-historical circumstances in the first half of the 19th century. At that time people had different views on capitalist society that had entered the first stage of its development.

Meanwhile, the bourgeois revolution erupted in France in July 1830. This revolution completely undermined the attachment to and expectation of capitalist society in such countries as France and Britain. With this as an occasion, the romanticism, which daydreamt that there could be beautiful human beings and noble ideals in the bourgeois society, lost its vitality. People got completely disappointed at the capitalist society. It became clear that capitalist society is not a “kingdom of reason” or a “fair society,” no matter who took power and what type of regime it was. People needed to have a correct understanding of the reality of the capitalist society in which they have encountered, and on this basis explore new ideals.

The same was true in the countries in the backward feudal society. Mere resentment and crying slogans were of no help in transforming backward realities. The reality required the explorer, not the comforter or the prophet, and the sharp analysis of reality, not vague and abstract dreams. Critical realism came into being in reflection of this demand. “Critical realism requires the writer to critically reflect on the social foundations of life that limit, oppress, disrupt, and bring about moral crisis” (Sobirova Zarnigor 191).

In Korea, critical realism developed in the socio-historical environment of

the colonial semi-feudal society as the country had been reduced to a foreign imperialist colony by the imperialist aggression since the beginning of the modern age. By the 1910s, the realist literature of Korea had developed into the one with a clear character of criticizing the society in the face of the changing historical circumstances under the colonial rule of Japanese imperialism. Before and after 1905, Korea became absolute colony of Japanese imperialism, which prevented the normal development of the capitalist relations that had been undergoing within the context of feudal society. The Japanese imperialists persistently resorted to political suppression, economic plunder and cultural obliteration, keeping Korea under its colonial rule. Meanwhile, the landlords and capitalists, who became the stooges of the Japanese imperialists, desperately exploited the workers, peasants and other working people.

Under these socio-historical circumstances, literature in this period could not merely advocate enlightenment nor insist enlightenment of civilization. The progressive writers turned their criticism to dissecting the contradiction of the colonial semi-feudal society and the absurdity of capitalist relations. They delved into the miserable life of the exploited and maltreated workers, peasants and intellectuals, and the class nature and inhuman atrocities of exploiting classes and plutocratic people. The style of sentence and method of interpretation of the work also overcame the old medieval ones and established unity of speech and writing. This shows that by this time literature was firmly oriented to applying the method of critical realism with strong character of criticizing the society on the basis of the new socio-historical reality.

Based on the changed socio-historical conditions and the literary environment, the literature in the 1910s developed into the one with a clear character of enlightening society, with a strong anti-Japanese patriotic spirit, along with a strong character of criticizing the reality. It is literature with a strong character of criticizing the reality that played a leading role in the formation of literary tendency of critical realism. Literary works with a strong character of criticizing the society aimed at exposing and attacking the contradictions and social ills of the colonial and semi-feudal society in various ways.

Examples include the short stories like “Han’s Life” (1914), “Pressure” (Pressure) (1917), and “The Sad Contradiction” (1918). The short story “Sad Contradiction” clearly revealed and criticized the cruel reality and contradiction of the Japanese imperialist colonial society through a truthful depiction of the mental distress of a petty-bourgeois young man who suffered uneasiness and psychological suffering, failing to figure out what to do and how to live in the harsh reality under

the Japanese imperialist occupation. But the novel did not illuminate a way out to escape from this social contradiction. The description of Chun Won in “Han’s life” and Yong Su in the “A letter breaking off relationship” were both devoted to exposing and criticizing the cruel reality of a colonial society, an exploiting society in which the destiny and value of man are governed by money. Through the destiny and character of the heroes, the works showed disaffection with the colonial semi-feudal society and the spirit of condemnation and protest against all the exploiting classes.

Literary works with a strong critical nature of reality created in the 1910s had characteristics that were different from those of the preceding period with regard to principle of reflecting reality. Realistic literature in the medieval period mostly criticized the contradictions and social evils of feudal society from the viewpoint and standpoint of rewarding the good and punishing the evil, whereas the realistic literature in Enlightenment age paid primary attention to criticizing the old feudal customs and evils that were against the modern idea of civilization.

However, modern literature in the 1910s set it as its main task interpretation to expose and criticize the contradictions under the colonial rule of Japanese imperialism. Therefore, the works created in this period were strong in both settings of the theme and interpretation of characters. This shows that the literature of Korean critical realism was created in the process of the literary creation of revealing and criticizing the reality in 1910s, and that the 1910s was when the literary tendency of critical realism was originated in Korea.

Critical realism, which occurred in the 1910s, developed drastically in the 1920s, forming a literary trend based on the new historical reality that was changing. In this period Marxism-Leninism was widely disseminated in Korea and the workers and peasants’ movement was widely developed, and proletarian literature developed vigorously in the latter half of the 1920s, and socialist realism was actively created with a new trend of thought. At the same time, critical realism formed the mainstream of progressive literature, reflecting the contradictory social reality of Japanese imperialist colonial rule. This means that socialist realism and critical realism were created and developed in Korea in the 1920s, forming the main trend. Whereas socialist realism generalized the reality artistically based on revolutionary standpoint of the working class and its main characters were forerunners of the proletariat embodied the socialist ideal, critical realism focused on exposing and criticizing social contradictions and corruption.

The literature of critical realism can be mainly subdivided into 2 categories. The first category is the creative activities, the whole process of which are generalized

with critical realism whereas the second one is those of “Singyonghyangpha” (group of authors with new tendency). In the 1920s it was Hyon Jin Gon and Ra To Hyang who played an important role in the development of the critical realism. Hyon Jin Gon (1900-1943) played a pioneer role in the development of literary tendency of critical realism in Korea and historical formations in the 1920s. His masterpieces include the short stories “The Poor Region” (1921), “The Lucky Days” (1924), “The Private Mental Hospital Director” (1925), and “Hometown” (1926). In these works, he vividly criticized the contradictions and exploitations of the Japanese imperialist colonial ruling society by portraying the lowest-class characters of society such as a young intellectual and a rickshaw man and showing their miserable destiny and mental sufferings suffered by the lack of money and power.

Ra To Hyang (1902-1927) is one of the typical writers who played an important role in the development of the literary tendency of critical realism in Korea in the 1920s. His masterpiece, “A servant’s child” (1923), sharply criticized the realities of a contradictory and unfair colonial society through the ill-fated appearance of a young boy, Jin Thae and the miserable living conditions experienced by the Jin Thae family. The short stories “Before knowing himself” (1924), “Dumb Sam Ryong” (1925), and “Ji Hyong Gun” (1926) all vividly revealed and criticized the unreasonable social reality of the times through the portrayal of the exploited working people suffering under the colonial rule. The creative activities of the “Singyonghyangpha” writers in the 1920s were of great significance in the development of the literature of critical realism in Korea. The “Singyonghyangpha” literary works—those created by the writers who started their creative activities with a new tendency different from those of the previous period—did not merely criticize the reality of the exploiting society, but analyzed the social contradictions and unreasonable reality and show the characters opposing the reality of the exploiting society.

The early proletarian literature created in the early 1920s was in the stage of shifting from critical realism to socialist realism in the light of the development of realism. The early works produced by the writers of the “Singyonghyangpha” with new tendencies, holding the banner of proletarian literature, had certain characteristics in the reflection of social reality, though they were still included in the critical realist literature in terms of their content. From the outset of their creative work, they set human relations and conflicts in acute confrontation and depicted the feelings of antagonism and resistance of the poor against the unfair social reality. However, the heroes’ rebellion in the literature of the “Singyonghyangpha” failed to escape from the framework of individual and spontaneous resistance, and he

vaguely portrayed the characters struggling for a new ideal. And some progress was made in the typification of human personality as compared to the past, but not yet went beyond the scope of critical realism.

Typical of the writers of the “Singyonghyangpha” who contributed to the development of critical realism in the 1920s are Choe So Hae, Ri Ik Sang and Ri Sang Hwa. Choe So Hae (1901-1932), a typical writer of the literature of the “Singyonghyangpha,” produced many works truthfully depicting through the bitter experience of life the miserable life and tragic destiny of the poor who were suffering from maltreatment, contempt, misfortune and hardships under the colonial subjugation of the Japanese imperialists. His masterpieces are the short stories “A record of escape” (1925), “The Death of Pak Tol” (1925), “Hunger and Slaughter” (1925), and “Red Flame” (1927). The main characters Mr. Pak, Pak Tol’s mother, Kyong Su and Old Mun are poor people who strive to live by diligent and sincere labor in the lowest stratum of colonial society only to suffer more misfortune and hardships, and who finally resent, curse and rebel against society in the course of maltreatment, contempt and disaster. This trend is common in the literature of “Singyonghyangpha.”

In addition, the literature of “Singyonghyangpha” includes the short stories “Rampage” (1925), “The Expellees” (1926) by Ri Ik Sang (1895-1936), “Into the ground” (1925) by Jo Myong Hui (1892-1942), and “The Poor” (1925) and “An agent and a bible woman” (1926) by Ri Ki Yong (1895-1984). Writers such as Jo Myong Hui and Ri Ki Yong later produced mainly works of socialist realism from the late 1920s, but before then, they had created a considerable amount of works of critical realism through the stage of “Singyonghyangpha” literary creation. Among the writers who contributed to the development of critical realism in the 1920s are such poets as Ri Sang Hwa and Kim Hyong Won. In their poems they acutely exposed and sharply criticized the contradictory reality of colonial society, expressing the lyrical hero’s resistance to unreasonable social reality and the aspiration and desire for a new society. Ri Sang Hwa (1910-1943) warmly sang of the lyric hero’s ardent love for the country and his ardent desire and aspiration to regain the lost country through the ardent thoughts and emotions of the lyrical hero who was deprived of the country in the lyric poem “Does Spring come in the Fields deprived of” (1926). Among the active writers in the 1920s were those who wrote many works with strong trend of socialist realism, such as Pak Phal Yang, Kim Chang Sul and Ryu Wan Hui, but also those who wrote “Singyonghyangpha” works, and some writers such as Jo Myong Hui, Kim Yong Phal and Kim Su San contributed to the development of critical realism in this period by writing many

plays with clear critical features.

Many novels were written in Korea in the 1930s that generalized the new socio-historical conditions and the reality of colonial society in a realistic way. The characteristics of the development of critical realism in this period are that the theme area of the work expanded, the methods of interpretation were explored in various ways, and a number of historical novels and satirical novels with strong characters of criticizing the society were produced. Historical novels include “Rim Kkok Jong” (1928-1937) by Hong Myong Hui (1888-1968), “White Flower” (1932) by Pak Hwa Song (1904-?), and “The tower with no shadow” (1938) by Hyon Jin Gon; and typical satirical novels is “Thaephyongchonha” (A peaceful world) (1938) by Chae Man Sik (1902-1950). Sim Hun (1901-1936) contributed to the development of critical realism in this period by writing the novels “The Eternal Smile” (1930) and “The Evergreen” (1935) with a strong socio-critical character. The Korean critical realism, which had been created and developed in the 1920s as mentioned above, developed steadily in the 1930s, with various forms and patterns, while representing broader content of life. The literature of Korean critical realism, developed in the 1910s and formed a distinct literary trend in the 1920s, and showed new looks and features in the 1930s through the historical environment of the Japanese imperialist colonial and semi-feudal society, was no longer developed because of the Japanese imperialists’ moves to obliterate national culture and suppression of progressive creative activities.

Reflection and Artistic Description of the Reality in Critical Realism Literature in Korea

Real life is the source of literature and the basis of artistic portrayal, and socio character along with ideological and artistic value of literary works depend on and defined according to what social reality they describe and how they describe human life. The literature of each country and nation has its own characteristics, which is of course the result of depicting the social reality of a country and its human life in conformity with national sentiments and aesthetic feelings. Critical realism also differs in its social reality and objects of description according to the country and nation, and this is a factor that makes the critical realism of one country and nation have distinctive characteristics from those of other countries and nations. It is one of the main features of the literature of Korean critical realism that it exposed and criticized the contradictions and absurdities, reflecting the colonial semi-feudal social reality in the period of Japanese imperialist rule.

In general, the characteristics of critical realism is to portray in a historically

truthful and vivid way the real life of a capitalist or collapsed feudal society where people are suffering from unlimited power of gold and the ferocious medieval oppression, but in detail what social reality they reflect and criticize depends on the peculiarities of historical development in each country and the character of the social system. The English literature of critical realism bitterly criticized the contemporary bourgeois reality in which gold emerged as king, finding the cause of social misfortune and all sorts of social evils in the bourgeois social environment. We can take Charles Dickens, a typical writer of English critical realism, as an example:

Dickens drew on his own childhood experiences of hardship and deprivation in his fiction, and many of his works are set in his native London. His novels are broad in scope and deal with all social classes, but they are particularly notable for their treatment of contemporary social problems, including the plight of the urban poor, corruption and inefficiency within the legal system, and general social injustices. (Oxford World Encyclopedia, *Dickens, Charles*)

Dickens realized the slyness and barbarity of “American democracy” through his American visit in the early 1840s and transformed the mild humor into a satire of anger, bitterly criticizing American egoism and British capitalism in his political essay “American notes” (1842) and the novels “Martin Chuzzlewit” (1843), and “Dombey and Son” (1848). “Between 1842 and 1858, he visited some Capitalist countries, such as America and Italy. Before his visit Dickens thought of the United States as a world in which there were no class divisions and the relations between men were humanitarian. But when he was actually there what impressed him most there were the rule of dollars and the enormously corrupting influence of wealth and power” (Sun 252).

The literature of French critical realism mainly criticized the social evils and contradictions created by capitalist social relations. The French literature of critical realism portrayed the depravity of man and the corruption of society by gold, the main contradiction of the bourgeois system, by delving into the reality of capitalism where the illusions of the bourgeois revolution were so shattered. For example, Balzac, a typical writer of French critical realism, in his set of novels “La Comédie humaine,” showed that the source of all contradictions in capitalist society lies in the conflict of material interests, that the class most thoroughly intertwined here is the bourgeois, and that the main characteristic of this class lies in selfishness and greed, and that, after all, because of its golden greed, bourgeois loses and destroys

everything moral.

Russian critical realism criticized the feudal relations, the social evils caused by serfdom. While critical realism in Western Europe mainly criticized the capitalist social evils caused by the power of gold, Russian critical realism chiefly criticized feudal despotism and the criticism of bourgeois was rather weak. It did not, however, praise the bourgeois civilization of Western Europe. While criticizing the despotic serfdom, they were also highly critical of the inhuman plunder of the bourgeois who grew up to be a golden worshipper. For example, Gogol, a typical writer of Russian critical realism, portrayed realistically the centuries-old backwardness of Russian life and irrational ignorance under the serfdom autocracy, vividly depicting not any historical event but the daily life of the ordinary people of Russia living under the serfdom autocracy. "The works by Gogol show the essential characteristics peculiar to the exploiting class of the times as well as that of Russian landlords in the time of serfdom" (B.D. Craevski et al, 1955:32).

In Korea, the 1910-1930s when critical realism originated and developed, were a period when capitalism failed to follow the path of normal development and feudal remnants were plentiful because of the Japanese imperialists' occupation and colonial enslavement policy. In order to strengthen the foundation of colonial rule over Korea, the Japanese imperialists made an investment of Japanese capital on a large scale, while protecting the landlords and preserving the feudal relations of land ownership in the countryside. Thus, in Korea the social and class composition was complex and the national and class contradictions were intertwined, and the working people were subjected to double and treble exploitation oppression by foreign imperialists, landlords and capitalists.

The literature of Korean critical realism reflected the actual life of the backward colonial and semi-feudal society in which the feudal relations of land ownership and exploiting system persist, failing to follow the path of normal capitalist development, and exposed and criticized the contradictions and absurdities of them, thus acquiring its peculiar characteristics different from those of other countries. The reflection of the colonial semi-feudal social reality in the literature of Korean critical realism and the criticism of its social contradiction and absurdity were first revealed in the depiction of the poverty, pain, misfortune and tragedy suffered by the Korean people due to the harsh exploitation and oppression of the Japanese imperialist aggressors and pro-Japanese elements.

Before the liberation, owing to the vicious censorship and harsh suppression by the Japanese imperialists, it was almost impossible in Korea to create and publish works which portrayed and directly exposed and criticized the brutal plunder and

fascist repression of the Japanese imperialist aggressors and their stooges against the Korean people. The works which sharply criticized the crimes of the Japanese imperialist aggressors and pro-Japanese elements could not be brought out or became available only when the “seditious elements” were removed after Japanese censor. In this situation, the progressive realists tried to embody the socio-critical character of the work and the spirit of exposing it to reality through a circumstantial narrative or implicit method in describing and criticizing the Japanese imperialists’ moves for aggression and forfeiture.

Ryang Kon Sik’s short story “The Sorrowful Contradict” (1918) is an example of the fact that since its origination the literature of Korean critical realism has focused on exposing the vicious nature of Japanese imperialist colonial rule over Korea. There is no Japanese in the novel, and even no word of Japan. Nevertheless, the work makes readers clearly feel the contradiction and irrationality of the colonial, semi-feudal social reality which was being crushed under the military rule of the Japanese imperialists. In this novel, portrayal of the scene of the police substation where a day laborer is examined by a sergeant plays a major artistic function in showing the breathtaking atmosphere and contradiction of the colonial semi-feudal society and revealing the crime-woven image of Japanese imperialist colonial rule. In this novel a drunken day laborer who was arrested in the police substation, with his waists fastened with a cord, bleeding on his forehead was well contrasted with a sergeant in police uniform with a sword at his side, sitting on a chair, hitting him on his cheeks while punish for delinquency. This contrasting sight is an artistic reminder of exploited and oppressed poor Korean people and the aggressive and class nature of the Japanese imperialists who have turned Korea into a colony and enforced the vicious military rule relying on gangster-like methods.

There the sergeant is a Korean who lives in the same neighborhood with the hero “I.” But the meaning of this interpretation of the sergeant wearing the uniform and with the sword worn by the Japanese imperialists is not just the individualistic expression of the pro-Japanese stooge but also the artistic expression of the military rule of the Japanese imperialist aggressors. The work exposes the contradiction of the colonial social reality through the contrasting depiction of the day laborer and the patrol sergeant and expresses complaints and antagonism against the colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists. The novel bitterly criticized the absurd realities of the Japanese colonial rule, where the vast majority of the working people are suffering from poverty and weaknesses, while a handful of the rich are becoming fatter and fatter day by day, through the interpretation of the a court lady-looking overweight woman, who is nearly 50 years old, with a face with too much powder

on, posture of her body wrapped with a unnamed and through the ugly incongruity of the woman's figure, clothing and colors.

The literature of Korean critical realism further intensified its criticism after the 1920s by exposing the contradictions and absurdities of the colonial and semi-feudal society by using various methods and by producing a number of works which denounced the crime of the Japanese imperialists' colonial rule that drove the Korean people into poverty and misfortune. Ra To Hyang's short story "Ji Hyong Gun" (1926), which truthfully described the promotion of class division in the Korean countryside, the ruin of peasant life and the miserable plight of the wealthy workers in connection with the infiltration of Japanese capital, Hyon Jin Gon's novel "Hometown" (1926) which revealed the contradictions and evils of the colonial semi-feudal social realities through the devastation of the Korean countryside and the destruction of peasant life caused by the Japanese imperialists' colonial rule and the infiltration and exploitation of Japanese monopoly capital, and Jo Myong Hui's novel "Newspaper and a prison" (1929) which criticized the contradictions and evil nature of the existent social situation of the colonial semi-feudal society, and revealed the criminality of Japanese colonial rule and economic plunder are all good examples.

Thus, the literature of Korean critical realism has its own characteristics distinctive from that of other countries in that it exposes and criticizes the brutality of Japanese imperialist colonial rule, the contradictions and absurdities of the colonial and semi-feudal society through the diverse description of the misfortunes and pains, miserable life and tragic destiny of the poor and humiliated Koreans of all strata. In the literature of Korean critical realism, the criticism of the contradiction and irrationality of the colonial semi-feudal social reality under Japanese imperialist rule is closely related to the expression of the anti-Japanese national consciousness. The literature of Korean critical realism had new ideological and artistic characteristics by embodying the anti-aggressive and patriotic traditions of national literature in conformity with the changing social reality. The strong ideological spirit of anti-aggression patriotism is an admirable characteristic of Korean literature which has a long history of development. The anti-aggressive and patriotic literary traditions of Korea was inherited and developed into critical realism through the literature of the Enlightenment period in modern times.

In the literature of Korean critical realism, the embodiment of the tradition of anti-aggression and patriotic literature appeared intensively in the expression of the anti-Japanese idea and national consciousness. The anti-Japanese national consciousness is based on the portrayal of the works of Korean critical realism

which exposed the evil nature of Japanese imperialist colonial rule and criticized the contradiction and irrationality of the colonial semi-feudal society. In the literature of Korean critical realism, exposure and criticism of the contradiction and vicious nature of the colonial semi-feudal social reality under Japanese imperialist rule and the expression of anti-Japanese national consciousness are inseparable. Without anti-Japanese ideological sentiment and national consciousness, literary works exposing and criticizing the crimes of the vicious Japanese imperialist colonial rule and the evils of the colonial society cannot be produced, nor can there be a depictive expression of the anti-Japanese national consciousness apart from the depiction of the viciousness of the Japanese imperialist colonial rule and the contradiction of the colonial semi-feudal society.

The question of whether to expose and criticize the contradiction and absurdities of the colonial semi-feudal society or to express the anti-Japanese national consciousness mainly depends on the thematic and ideological task of the work. It is, therefore, only a relative distinction whether the works criticize the social contradictions and absurdities or express the anti-Japanese idea and national consciousness in reflecting the corrupt reality of the colonial and semi-feudal society under Japanese imperialist rule. In the literature of non-colonial countries, expressing the idea of anti-aggression patriotism or national consciousness in general was not a major task. The same is true not only in countries like France and Britain, where capitalism had developed first, but also in those countries like Russia and Germany, ushered in capitalism later. Focusing on criticizing the foreign imperialists and expressing national consciousness while exposing the contradictions and absurdities of the colonial and semi-feudal society is one of the peculiar features of the literature of Korean critical realism that has developed under the realistic conditions of the colonial society.

In the literature of Korean critical realism, the anti-Japanese idea and national consciousness were expressed mainly in the resentment, hatred and revolt against the Japanese imperialist aggressors who inflicted misfortune and pains upon the Korean nation. Jo Myong Hui's short story "One Midsummer Night" (1927) describing the family background of the beggars and innocents who gathered on the police station in search for a place to sleep one summer night expressed hatred and antagonism against the Japs, informing the readers of the crimes of the Japanese imperialist aggressors who drove the poor Koreans into miserable destiny. In the literature of Korean critical realism, the portrayal of the love and yearning for the country and nation, the aspiration and desire for national liberation and independence, and the efforts to save the destiny of the Korean people groaning

under the colonial rule of Japanese imperialism constitute an important aspect of the expression of the anti-Japanese patriotic idea and national consciousness. Ri Sang Hwa's poem "Does Spring come in the Fields deprived of" (1926) is a peculiar work that clearly expresses anti-Japanese sentiment and national consciousness through ardent yearning for the country deprived of foreign aggressors, boundless love for the land of the country and resentment at those deprived of their native land. This poem described the nature figuratively to show emotions of the Korean people in a meaningful and emotional way who were deprived of their country, thus clearly reflected the patriotic feelings and national consciousness. It expresses the anti-Japanese idea and national consciousness in a peculiar way by singing with deep emotion of the resentment and antipathy of the colonial occupiers of the lyric hero - "I" full of yearning for the friendly people, obsessed with the beauty of the country. In addition, Sim Hun's "The Evergreen" where the author criticized the social contradictions and evils through the description of the rural enlightenment movement waged by young intellectuals under the circumstance of colonial Korea and expressed the anti-Japanese national consciousness and "Stupid Uncle" by Chae Man Sik who artistically expresses the anti-Japanese national consciousness while prejudicing the pro-Japanese treachery of the colonial stooges by satirical portrayal are good examples.

As shown above, the expression of the anti-Japanese idea and national consciousness while disclosing and criticizing the contradictions and irrationality of the colonial semi-feudal society under Japanese imperialist rule is one of the important features of the literature of Korean critical realism that developed under the socio-historical conditions of the imperialist colonies. The socio-class character and ideological and artistic value of literary works are defined according to who the hero is and how his character and life are described. Looking at the course of the development of realism, the portrayal of the characters and the picture of life are various in different historical stages and different countries.

In the literature of European critical realism, the main task of interpretation was to expose and criticize the greed, selfishness, inability and depravity of the exploiting classes, including the bourgeoisie, the aristocrat and the landlords and the harmfulness of almighty money principle. Therefore, the main characters were usually exploiting class. Typical of such literary works are the novels Eugénie Grandet, and "Old Goriot," in French writer Balzac's set of novels "La Comédie humaine." These novels show the harmful consequences of gold on human character in capitalist society dominated by golden almighty. The heroes of these works; Grandet, and Goriot, are widely known to the world as the misers who have

completely lost the mental and moral appearance of man because of their greed for money. The novel “Dombey and Son” by the English writer Dickens is a critical work of the social evils of the English capitalist society at the time when money dominated everything, showing Dombey’s cold-blooded mercenary character and the collapse of the family caused by it. In addition, Balzac’s novels “Disillusion” and “Absolute Exploration,” French Stendhal’s novels “Red and Black,” and English Thackeray’s novel “Vanity Fair” are also among them.

At the same time, there are some works criticizing the backward and corrupt realities of feudal society, the feudal aristocracy and bureaucrats. These kinds of works came mainly from Russia and other Eastern European countries. The Russian verse “Yevgeny Onegin” exposes and criticizes the corruptness of feudal society and the social incompetence of the nobility through the story of the spiritual and moral ruin of the feudal nobility. This is the first work in Russia to portray the “good-for-nothing person.” The “good-for-nothing person” is a young man of noble origin, who, in spite of being intelligent and knowledgeable with a certain critical attitude towards reality, is mentally and morally ruined, unable to do anything beneficial for he was taught and raised in the aristocratic environment. Such works in which this character is represented as the hero formed a series in Russian literature. Among these are Lermontov’s novels “The Hero of Modern Age” and Turgenev’s novels “The Shrine of the Nobility,” “Luzin,” “Father and Son,” Goncharov’s novels “Oblomov.”

A Russian author Gogol’s novel “The Dead Souls” and the comedy “The Inspect General” exposed and criticized the corruptness of the Russian aristocracy, landlords and bureaucrats during the 30-40s of the 19th century. “The progressive people who have ever read or heard of Gogol’s novel can notice that the writer revealed the social order ruling Czarist Russia at that time. They think his comedy ‘Prosecutor’ strongly criticizes the Czar Absolutist system itself, thus regarding the comedy as being positive” (B.D. Craevski et al, 1955:25). Like this, in European critical realism, mainly works that set the exploiting classes, including the bourgeoisie, aristocracy, landlords and bureaucrats, as the main characters, are in the majority.

The literature of Korean critical realism is similar to those of other countries in general principle of characterization and depiction of life. But it is different depending on which class and stratum the main character is from and in what viewpoint and standpoints they are depicted. It is one of the important features of the literature of Korean critical realism that the poor and humiliated working people have emerged as the hero and expressed warm love and sympathy while truthfully

describing their character and life in which they suffer all sorts of misfortunes and pains under severe exploitation and oppression and are opposed to social evils. Korean literature has produced many works reflecting the poor life and misfortune of the exploited and oppressed working people in ancient and medieval times, along with their struggle against corrupted and incompetent rulers and the wicked foreign aggressors. The excellent achievements and experience of the Korean classical literature, strong in social character and critical spirit of reality, were inherited and developed as required by the reality changed in the critical realist literature. The 1910-1930s, in which critical realism developed in Korea, was a period of national ordeals when the Korean people suffered the sorrow of the ruined people owing to the brutal colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists.

During the Japanese imperialist colonial rule, the all Korean nation experienced the sorrow and bitterness of the ruined nation, but the misery and sufferings of the workers, peasants and other working people of the lower class who lived in severe poverty and incompetence through the double and triple oppression and exploitation of the foreign aggressors, landlords and capitalists were even greater. In this socio-historical circumstance, the progressive realistic writers of those days paid deep attention to the life and destiny of the workers, peasants, working intellectuals and other lower-class people, and in their works they sharply revealed and criticized the contradictions and absurdities of the vicious social reality that forced the poor and the humiliated people into disastrous misfortune and pain. As a result, the Korean literary works of critical realism that showed the poor and humiliated people and the working people of the lower class opposing to social evils occupied the central position of human relations, and the criticism of social contradictions was applied in combination with sympathy for them.

The characteristics of the literature of the Korean critical realism, which set the poor and humiliated people as the hero and criticized the contradictions and absurdities of the vicious social reality while describing their life and destiny with deep sympathy, have already been vividly manifested in early works. In the 1910s, the works that helped the origination of critical realism, such as “Han’s life” (1914), a “A letter breaking off relationship” (1916), “The Sorrowful Contradict (1918), and, “Tanso,” and “The Poor Region” (1921), and “A servant’s child” (1923), which played an important role in the formation of the critical realistic literary trend of the 1920s, show these characteristics well. Kim Chun Won in “Han’s life,” Yong Su in “A letter breaking off relationship,” Yong Nam and his mother in “Tanso,” “I” in “The Poor Region,” Jin Thae in “A servant’s child” and others are either lowest class people such as servants, beggars or junior clerks and poor intellectuals

with no money to survive. They face the tragic fate of killing themselves after suffering indescribable hardships and difficulties due to lack of money. The writers condemned the social evils of violating, threatening and driving their lives to ruin, picturing with deep sympathy the tragic life and miserable destiny of the leading characters.

The characteristics of the literature of Korean critical realism of exposing and criticizing the social evils, setting the poor and humiliated people as the hero and describing their tragic life and miserable destiny became more vivid after the mid-1920s. The works of critical realism in the 1920s emphasized even more the portrayal of the lower-class people suffering from pains and disasters in the midst of poverty and absence of rights. In the 1920s it was proletarian writers such as Choe So Hae, Jo Myong Hui, Ri Ki Yong and Ri Ik Sang that played the leading role in seriously describing the life and destiny of the poor and humiliated working people. Such are Choe So Hae's short stories: "The Death of Pak Tol" (1925), "Hunger and Slaughter" (1925), "After the flood" (1925), and "Red Flame" (1927), Jo Myong Hui's short stories "Into the ground" (1925), "The Country folk" (1926), and the Ri Ik Sang's novel "Rampage" (1925) and "The Expellees" (1926). The heroes of these works are characterized by the fact that they are portrayed not as pessimistic, despairing and retiring in the face of misfortune and calamity in the poor and innocent position, but as characters who, in most cases, resent the wicked world and are opposed to social evil. At this time, amidst the atmosphere of rapid growth of proletarian literature, writers like Hyon Jin Gon and Ra To Hyang also produced such excellent works as "A Lucky Day" (1924), "The Private Psychiatric Place" (1925), "A Water Wheel" (1925), and "Ji Hyong Gun" (1926) that show the miserable destiny of the working people suffering misfortune and disaster from poverty.

The same was true in the field of poetry, where works depicting the life and destiny of the poor and the humiliated took a large proportion. Kim Hyong Won's poem "People Failed to See the Sunshine" (1922), Pak Phal Yang's "The Factory" (1923), "Ten Years in Poverty, and Sorrow" (1925), Ri Sang Hwa's "The Greatest Hunger" (1925), Kim Chang Sul's "Now, The First Winter" (1925), "Towards the Pavement" (1925), Ryu Wan Hui's "The Victim" (1926), etc. show that Korean literature of critical realism put its main focus on describing the social life of the miserable people, their feelings and resentment to the social evils. This feature in interpretation of characters and depiction of life, which had been embodied since the 1910s, lasted through the late 1920s and into the 1930s.

The literature of critical realism, which had continued to develop with the

proletarian literature in the late 1920s, developed further on the basis of the changing socio-historical realities in the 1930s. Kye Yong Muk's short stories "Old Choe" and "A Duck's Egg," Chae Man Sik's "A bandit," the play "An Intellectual and a Mung bean pancake," Ri Hyo Sok's "Town and Phantom," Om Hung Sop's "A Mullet," Han In Thae's "A Pay Day," "An Account of His Past Half," Kang Kyong Ae's "Dismissal"; and Hyon Kyong Jun's "Omari," etc. show that the literary works of those days also focused on portraying the poor and the miserable as in the former literature. Servants, rickshaw men, day laborers and casual laborers constitute a large proportion in the portrayal series of poor and maltreated characters depicted in the literature of Korean critical realism.

In case of British critical realism, the setting Oliver as hero in Charles Dickens' "The Adventure of Oliver Twist" is quite similar. As Min Lian pointed out "Oliver Twist, as one of the most famous works of Charles Dickens', is a novel reflecting the darkness, terror, violence and deception in London society in that time. As a typical representative of the poor group in the novel, the author used a large number of words and sentences describing Oliver's life experiences who has suffered so many misfortunes and unfair treatments since he was born, but did not lose his kind nature and perseverance" (Min Lian 1050). Jin Thae's family in "A Servant's Child," the hero of "Ji Hyong Gun," an old man Kim in "A Lucky Day, Yun Ho in "After Flood" and Kyong Su in "Hunger and Slaughter" all belong to this category.

The reason for that is because they suffered more misfortunes and difficulties than anyone else in the lowest stratum of the colonial semi-feudal society. Ra To Hyang's "A Servant's Child" vividly shows the plight and sorrowful feelings of the poor people through a truthful realistic portrayal of the miserable situation in which the hero, young Jin Thae, was scolded and beaten twice a day, and the poor life of his family in cold winter when his dad didn't earn a penny. In this novel, Jin Thae, the hero, is a 12-year-old son of a man servant of a principal Mr. Pak and he goes to the fourth grade of the primary school. It is the duty of his father to draw rickshaws, his mother to cook his master's food, and Jin Thae himself to wipe the yard. In a snowing morning in winter, Jin Thae poured snow on his master Mr. Pak's new shoes while wiping it away, which resulted in being scolded and hit to get a bruise by his father.

On the other hand, that evening, while coming back home after buying some rice and wood with the money he got by holding her mother's only property, a silver rod-like hairpin in pawn, he saw his school teacher. In order to avoid meeting him, he fled into the alley, and spilt the rice on the road, only to be beaten by her father and mother once again. While hitting his own son, Jin Thae's father is

eager to blame, scold and beat his master sitting in his living room and Jin Thae is much overwhelmed with grief. The work depicts delicately and truthfully the psychological experiences of the leading characters and showed the resentment and grudge of the poor toward those who make them tremble in despair, coldness and hunger.

The novel, however, failed to reveal what makes the diligent and hard-working people in the lowest stratum of society live under all sorts of maltreatment and contempt. “Jin Thae made no excuses. Beaten twice, he was anxious to blame and curse something. But he didn’t know who to blame or what to curse” (Han Mi Yong, et al 168). This is a manifestation of the immaturity of the level of consciousness of the hero Jin Thae and, at the same time, a limitation of the world outlook of critical realist Ra To Hyang. Thus, the Korean critical realism is distinguishable from the literature of critical realism in other countries in that it exposes and criticizes social contradictions and absurdities while truthfully describing the miserable life of the people suffering severe misfortune and pains in the colonial and semi-feudal society. As seen above, the literature of Korean critical realism mainly described poor and maltreated people and their lives. It is one of its important features that the works which set the poor as the leading characters and described their miserable life and destiny hold a majority.

Conclusion

The literature of Korean critical realism is one of the legacies showing the unique and excellent characteristics of national literature. By the modern time, the Korean national literature with a long history of realistic tradition entered a new stage of development by producing a number of excellent works embodying the characteristics of critical realism. Critical realism developed with the formation of modern literature in Korea, and it took a prominent place in contemporary literature before liberation and continued its lifeline.

The literature of Korean critical realism has its peculiar characteristics different from the literature of European critical realism because of the difference in the socio-historical environment on which it is based and the national characteristics of the literary tradition. The literature of Korean critical realism sharply revealed and criticized the contradictions and corruptness of the colonial and semi-feudal society in which money dominates everything by depicting the poor people who are despised and humiliated under Japanese imperialist rule at the center of the artistic system along with their miserable lives and resistance to the social evils.

It also made a contribution to achieving the full-scale development of modern

literature and establishing the contemporary literary genre in Korea by removing the old elements of medieval literature that remained in Sinsosol (novel of a new type) and Changga (song of a new type), etc. and vividly and truthfully depicting living man and his real life as seen in reality. Under the socio-historical conditions under the colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists, the literature developed in the 1910s and formed a distinct literary trend in the 1920s, embodying new looks and features in the 1930s. By the 1940s, the vicious moves of the Japanese imperialists to obliterate national culture and suppression of the progressive literary activities reached an extreme, which prevented Korean literature of critical realism from developing any further. The literature of Korean critical realism turned out to be significant in the history of modern literature before the liberation of Korea for its precious creative achievements and excellent ideological and artistic features achieved in the course of its development going through twists and turns under the colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists.

Works Cited

- B.D. Craevski, B. D., et al. *Russian Literature*. Moscow, 1955.
- Dickens, Charles. *Oxford World Encyclopedia*. Oxford UP, 1998. Available at: [https:// www.oup.com](https://www.oup.com) > (accessed Sep 14, 2022)
- Duignan, Brian. "Enlightenment." *European History*, 2018. Last updated Mar 28, 2018. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-Eur> > (accessed May 21, 2018)
- Han Mi Yong, Nam Ryon Suk and Ju Sol Hua. *Analysis of Literary Works*. Kim Hyong Jik UP, 2012.
- Literary Realism*. Wikipedia. Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism,par.1> > (accessed Dec 13, 2022)
- Sun Liwei. "The Analysis of Charles Dickens's Novel, A Christmas Carol-From the Essence of the Novel to Western Culture." 4th *International Conference on Literature, Linguistics and Arts (LCLLA)*, 2017.
- Min Lian. "Analysis of Dickens' Critique and Humanity Spirit in Oliver Twist Based on the Appraisal Theory." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 8, no. 8, 2018, pp. 1050-1054.
- Moody, William Vaughn. *A History of English Literature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943.
- Song, Ri Jang. *Study on the Development of Progressive Poetry of Modern Time*. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1994.
- Chan, Ri Kyu. *Study on the Anti-Japanese, Patriotic Literature of Modern Time in Korea*. Pyongyang: Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, 2006.

- Rim Tuk Gil. *Study on the Development of the Progressive Drama before the Liberation of Our Country*. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1996.
- Seaman, L.C.B. *A Short Social History of England*. London: Longmans, 1954.
- Zarnigor, Sobirova. The Realistic Genre and its Development in World Literature. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*. vol. 8,no. 3, 2019, pp. 189-192.
- Sullivan, Nate. "What Was the Enlightenment? Major Themes of the Enlightenment: Major Figures of the Enlightenment." *AP World History: Tutoring Solution*. Available at: <<http://www.history.com/topics/enlightenment>> (accessed May 21, 2018)
- Che Tingting. "Critical Realism in Little Dorrit." *The Frontiers of Society, Science and Technology*, vol. 2, no. 17, 2020, pp. 127-132.
- Un Jong Sop. *Study of the History of Modern and Contemporary Novels before the Country's Liberation*. Pyongyang: Kim Il Sung University Publishing House, 1986.
- Huang Xiaohui. "Charles Dicken's Critical Realism in David Copperfield." Available at: <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>>(accessed Sep 14, 2021)