



The Detective Appears: *Rethinking the Origin of Modern Detective Fiction in Korean Literary History*

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Abstract

This article rethinks the significance of the modern detective fiction genre in Korean literary history by focusing on Yi Haejo's (1869–1927) Ssangokjeok (Double Jade Flutes). Ssangokjeok (1908) has been appreciated as the first self-conscious detective story in Korean literary history. However, it is contradictorily viewed as a mediocre adaptation of Western detective fiction or as a transitional text between traditional crime fiction and the fully developed modern detective story. This view tends to dismiss the ideological ambiguity or cultural complexity exhibited in the novel as a narrative defect, eventually making the novel a flawed detective story. However, in reconsidering the broader cultural context of reading and writing Korean detective fiction beyond the boundaries of the genre itself, the novel captures our attention by helping us draw a more complex picture of modern Korean literature and rethink the Korean literary modern. From this perspective, we should understand the novel as a complex text reflecting the conflicting relationships between traditional culture and modern civilization. In particular, this aspect appears conspicuous in the portrayal of the novel's detective figure. Unlike modern detective heroes such as Sherlock Holmes, Detective Jeong devotes himself to fulfilling the function of modern enlightenment and social criticism rather than following the rules of popular fantasy for science and modern rationality. In this way, the novel suggests we must rethink the significance of fiction subgenres in Korean literary history.

Keywords: *Ssangokjeok* (Double Jade Flutes), Yi Haejo, the new novel, detective fiction, mystery, court case fiction, Korean literary history

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Yi Haejo 李海朝 (1869–1927) is renowned as a prolific writer of the *new novel* (*sinsoseol*), publishing more than 40 novels over about two decades between 1906 and 1925. However, relatively few know he published a detective story, *Ssangokjeok* (Double Jade Flutes). This novel, introduced as detective fiction (*jeongtam soseol* 偵探小說) by the author,¹ appeared in a series in the *Jeguk sinmun* from December 4, 1908 to February 12, 1909.²

In the late 19th century when the Western detective story was introduced to the East Asian reading public, detective story³ was translated as *tantei shōsetsu* 探偵小説 in Japan and *zhentan xiaoshuo* 偵探小說 in China.⁴ There is no clear evidence that Yi's writing of *Ssangokjeok* was actually inspired by reading the Western detective story or its Japanese or Chinese translations. However, this seems highly probable, considering the author was not only well versed in both Japanese and Chinese, but also engaged in translating Japanese and Chinese renditions of Western literature into Korean.⁵ After all, it was the author who categorized the novel as *jeongtam soseol*. For this reason, the novel is taken as the first self-conscious detective story inspired by the Western narrative form or “the origin of modern Korean detective

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1. Yi Haejo used this term for a headword before the title of the novel. Quite a few novels published by the author had different headwords in accordance with the subject or story type. For more details, see Bae (2012, 131–149).
 2. *Ssangokjeok* was reprinted in book form in 1911. In this article, I use this later version for analysis rather than the earlier one published in the newspaper.
 3. Herein, *detective story* mainly refers to the *classical detective story*, such as the Sherlock Holmes series. Later, a number of subgenres of detective fiction, such as the hardboiled detective story, spy thriller, police novel, and mystery thriller, were derived from the classical detective story. The term *mystery* has also been used instead of the term *detective fiction* in an attempt to place a wide range of subgenres of detective fiction under the same category.
 4. In the case of modern Korea, *jeongtam soseol* was used at first, but was gradually replaced by *tamjeong soseol* 探偵小説 after the introduction of Japanese renditions of Western detective stories in the late 1910s. It was also due to Japanese influence that the term was replaced by *churi soseol* 推理小説 in the 1960s. For more details, see Lee (2010, 81–109); Ko (2011, 146–147).
 5. Yi Haejo published *Hwa Seongdon jeon* 華盛頓傳 (Biography of George Washington) and *Cheol segye* (Iron World) in 1908. The latter is an adaptation of Jules Verne's (1828–1905) novel, *Les Cinq Cents Millions de la Bégum* (1879). Translated versions of this novel by Verne were widely circulated throughout East Asia. Its Japanese adaptation, *Tetsu sekai*, first published by Morida Shigen 森田思軒 in 1887, was followed by the Chinese version, *Tie shijie*, by Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, in 1903. For more details, see W. Choe (1986, 40).

fiction” in Korean literary history, as agreed upon by many literary critics (W. Choe 1986, 140; Ko 2011, 151).

In modern Japan, Kuroiwa Ruikō's 黒岩涙香 (1862–1920) translations and adaptations of Western detective fiction gained immense popularity in the 1880s, which has been regarded as the golden age of detective fiction. The first detective fiction boom driven by Ruikō was followed by the second boom with Edogawa Ranpo's 江戸川亂歩 (1894–1965) original detective stories in the 1920s (Saito 2012, 1–16). In modern China, in which the Sherlock Holmes series was first introduced to the public in 1896, detective fiction became so popular that the genre accounted for about half of all fiction translations published (A 1996, 217). In parallel to modern Japan, original detective stories by Chinese writers such as Cheng Xiaoqing 程小青 (1893–1976) led the detective fiction boom in the 1920s.⁶

More important, detective fiction was not simply read for pleasure in modern East Asia. In modern Japan, detective fiction was believed to “provide its readers with a hero who symbolized how Western knowledge could be utilized for the good of the nation” (Saito 2012, 7). This is because “by taking up matters of rationality, justice, and science among others, detective fiction positioned itself perfectly within the social evolutionary rhetoric of *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment)” (Saito 2012, 6).

We may find a similar cultural context of reading and writing detective fiction in modern China. Chinese writers might have had a strong motivation for translating Western detective fiction, because “it was a kind of writing ‘novel’ in both content and form: it was also read extensively by the educated classes in the West, the people responsible for the West’s progress” (Hung 1998, 156). Furthermore, according to Tang Zhesheng, “what detective fiction exalted was not rule by man but rule of law: what it demanded was not subjective conjecture but scientific evidence; what it valued was not the imperial power but human rights. The fiction form in which these ideas were depicted introduced ‘Western civilization,’ which the age needed” (Tang 2010, 594).

6. For more details, see Hung (1998) and Tang (2010).

In considering this broad context of reading and writing detective fiction in modern East Asia as well as in modern Korea, we may assume that *Ssangokjeok* was something more than a mediocre adaptation of Western detective fiction; it eventually emerged as an attempt to achieve modern enlightenment and progress. It is worth noting that contemporary Korean novelists, including Yi Injik 李人植 (1862–1916), who published the pioneering work of the new novel, *Hyeol-ui nu* (Tears of Blood), showed much interest in “narrativization of discourses on the law and crime” (Ko 2011, 150). Indeed, the crime or courtroom scene was depicted in more than 50 of 70 works of the new novel.⁷ Yi Haejo himself frequently used the crime motif in his novels published before and after the publication of *Ssangokjeok* (Ko 2011, 150). However, it was only this text that the author introduced to the public as detective fiction. Then we may raise a question: what is the difference between *Ssangokjeok* and other works of the new novel in terms of the representation of the law and crime? Although many contemporary critics have criticized *Ssangokjeok* as a structurally imperfect detective story, it seems obvious that the author was fully aware of the distinctive narrative patterns and elements characteristic of the modern detective story.⁸

Indeed, there have been criticisms of *Ssangokjeok* that the text, despite the author’s definition, is a flawed detective story full of various structural and ideological limitations or “aesthetic defects” (Im 1997, 154–157). Some critics have even argued that *Guisan* (The Mountain of Nine Suspicions),⁹ Yi’s novel centering on a murder mystery, seems more like detective fiction than *Ssangokjeok* (J. Yi 2009, 264). By and large, their disappointments come from the gap between the text and the Western detective story such as the Sherlock Holmes series, that is, from the fact that the text does not follow exactly what we conceive of as the established narrative conventions characterizing the detective story genre. As far as the genre of detective story is concerned, the focus in literary criticism tends to be put on its innovative

7. For more details, see H. Choe (2004).

8. Most recently, some literary critics such as Park Jin-young have reconsidered the significance of *Ssangokjeok* in Korean literary history. See Park (2018, 81–104).

9. This novel was serialized in the *Maeil sinbo* from June 22 to September 28, 1911, and republished in book form in 1912.

narrative structure rather than on its thematic concerns, such as its representation of law and crime. For this reason, the structural gap between *Ssangokjeok* and the Western detective story has been viewed by literary critics as “aesthetic defects,” making the work a literary failure.

Moreover, it is hard to find sufficient evidence of an instant public reaction to Yi’s detective story or an ensuing publishing boom of original detective stories in the Korean book market. Yet, we can note that a few years after its publication, Korean adaptations of Western or Japanese detective fiction attracted a wide readership.¹⁰ Then should we dismiss the text as a premature and failed literary experiment? Or can we understand it as an innovative literary attempt reflecting contemporary social phenomena, such as legal reform, the prevalence of crime and violence, and the growth of public interest in law and justice?

In this study, I will shed light on the structural ambiguity and ideological complexity in *Ssangokjeok* as a way of rethinking the significance of the genre of modern detective fiction in the broad context of Korean literary history, rather than examining it within the boundaries of the genre. In this way, by focusing on its *dialogic imagination* between the traditional and the modern, we may find the text provides us with clues to better understand the complexities and contradictions of the transitional period of Korean society from traditional to modern.

10. *Nugu-ui joe* (Whose Crime), a Korean rendition of a French detective story, was published by Eunguksanin 隱菊散人 in 1913. *Bakjwi usan* (Western-style Umbrella), serialized in the Joseon ilbo in 1920, is assumed to be a Korean adaptation of *Nugu-ui joe*. Choe Seong-yun (2013) posits the possibility that Yi Haejo wrote these two detective stories. *Jeongbuwon* (Chaste Wife’s Resentment), a Korean adaptation of Kuroiwa Ruikō’s novel, gained immense popularity in 1914. Furthermore, a number of publications of translated detective stories were followed by the 1918 publication of *Chungbok* (Loyal Servant), an adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes story by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930). For further detail, see Ju Ra Lee (2010, 81–109).

Between Old and New: The Emergence of *Ssangokjeok* and Its Cultural Context

In 1906, a section for serialized stories was established in modern Korean newspapers. It was by no means a coincidence that most Korean newspapers showed special interest in this serialized form of fiction in the same year. It was engendered by reinforced censorship after the Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty of 1905, known as the Eulsa Treaty.¹¹ Serialized narratives were needed for the practical reason of substituting copy for censored editorials or articles. Now the novel form attracted much attention from critics as a new literary form, in which “the mind of society could be represented” (*Jeguk sinmun*, May 4, 1907). It was in this changing political situation that the first work of the new novel, *Hyeol-ui nu*, came out. Yi Haejo also published a series of experimental works of fiction exalting the spirit of the time, the ideas of civilization and enlightenment, because he was employed as a fiction reporter for the *Jeguk sinmun* in 1907.

Without doubt, the rise of stories of crime and detection in modern Korean newspapers aligned with contemporaneous social circumstances. The unprecedented turmoil Korean society underwent after the collapse of the old regime eventually prompted a serious moral vacuum and a considerable increase in violent crime. Moreover, crimes and their sensational natures so inexorably interests mass media that crime as a topic for everyday news has constituted a part of our daily lives since the introduction of modern newspapers. Accordingly, public interest in crime increased with the routinization of crime reports in the newspaper.¹² The emergence of *Ssangokjeok* as a modern detective story is inseparable from these changing social and cultural contexts.

Ssangokjeok begins with a criminal case wherein Officer Kim (Kim Jusa) has his purse stolen. Detective Jeong (Jeong Sungeum) receives a special

11. Despite the enactment of the first censorship law in 1907, a number of Korean newspapers became subject to pre-censorship immediately upon the conclusion of the treaty due to their vehement denunciation of Japan. For more details, see Koo (2005, 199–228).

12. This also explains the new novel's great interest in the narrativization of crime and law. For further detail, see K. Kim (2015, 319–366).

request from Officer Kim for a private investigation of the robbery because the purse was secretly entrusted by Kim's father, the magistrate of Naju County, for him to deliver to the Ministry of Financial Affairs (Takji bu) in Seoul. In fact, a large sum of money in the stolen purse does not belong to his father but to the government because it was originally collected from the people as taxes. From the beginning, the "sound of *danso* flutes" (Haejo Yi 1911, 13) is given as a clue for Detective Jeong to solve the crime. However, for the detective who merely pursues wrong clues and false suspects, it remains a kind of "visible, but not decodable" clue.¹³ Jeong then involves himself in the murder case of Ms. Ko (Ko Sosa), nicknamed "female detective" (*yeo jeongtam*), who had been assisting Jeong's investigation. Now a murder suspect, Jeong is incarcerated with his colleague Detective Kim. After barely managing to free themselves from prison, they decide to resign their detective positions and go sightseeing in the Diamond Mountains. At this point, the crime investigation seems completely interrupted.

Unexpectedly, these ex-detectives now simple tourists are taken by surprise in the Diamond Mountains. Their assailants turn out to be the very robbers who stole the purse and murdered Ms. Ko. Still, Detective Jeong only vaguely notices the connection between the flute sound and the robbers. Then it is the omniscient narrator, not the detective, who explains the robbers, the brothers nicknamed "Double Jade Flutes" because they are excellent flute players. However, they are heinous criminals as well; they steal the purse from Officer Kim by using a purse machine (*gigye gabang*), later murder Ms. Ko and her servant to cover up their crimes, and even attempt to kill the two detectives and Monk Sambo, Ms. Ko's little brother, in the Diamond Mountains. Detective Jeong returns to Seoul to catch the

13. As for the different uses of clues in mysteries, Franco Moretti may provide us with interesting insights. According to Moretti, in the evolution of the mystery genre in late-19th-century Britain there emerged seven different types of mysteries in terms of clues, from mysteries without clues to mysteries with decodable clues. The Sherlock Holmes series belongs to the last (and most advanced) type, while mysteries with "visible, but not decodable clues" are placed second to last. Even though the use of clues in *Ssangokjeok* seems disappointing to us, Moretti shows that a surprisingly small number of mysteries produced in the late 19th century can be categorized into the last type. See Moretti (2013, 81–82).

wrongdoers when he belatedly finds out their true identities. He finally succeeds in arresting them by following the sound of their flutes.

How, then, is the adventure of the modern detective hero, Jeong, integrated into or dissociated from that of Sherlock Holmes? How is this modern detective story distinct from traditional crime fiction? As mentioned above, criticisms about the text appear quite contradictory. According to Choe Wonsik, for instance, it was the first modern detective story to adopt traditional *gongan* 公案 elements in the new novel form (W. Choe 1986, 140). Herein, *gongan*, originally derived from late imperial China, is a term designated for the genre of court case or traditional crime fiction. *Joseon soseolsa* (History of Joseon Fiction) defines it as “a genre of fiction emerging from the law court” (T. Kim [1933] 1990, 183). Afterwards, the term was replaced by *songsa soseol* 訟事小說 to indicate the genre of Korean court case fiction (Heonhong Yi 1997).

As far as modern detective fiction is concerned, high emphasis is put on its innovative structural design (i.e., its coherent narrative order, both aesthetic and moral), while loose connections between the traditional and the modern in the formative period are often ignored. Tzvetan Todorov’s “typology of detective fiction” is a prominent example:

Two entirely different forms of [narrative] interest exist. The first can be called *curiosity*: it proceeds from effect to cause, starting from a certain effect (a corpse and certain clues). We must find its cause (the culprit and his motive). The second form is *suspense*, and here the move is from cause to effect: we are first shown the causes, the initial *données* (gangsters preparing a heist), and our interest is sustained by the expectation of what will happen, that is, certain effects (corpses, crimes, fights). (Todorov 1977, 47)

In other words, detective fiction consists of two separate and symmetrical stories, *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, crime and investigation, adventure and detection, and past and present. However, as Moretti points out, the symmetry such as curiosity and suspense, detection and adventure, and a backward-looking narrative logic and a forward-looking one may be misleading because

adventure stories are “the most powerful form of storytelling from the beginning of time until today” (Moretti 2013, 84). Consequently, the attempt for “rationalization of adventure” in detective fiction could not really prevent the recurrence of adventure stories around the world. Before reflecting on the significance of the genre of detective fiction in modern Korea, it would be helpful for us to briefly examine the rise of the genre of detective fiction and its historical context in the West.

According to Stephen Knight, before the detective appeared, there were stories about criminals (Knight 1983, 267). Crime fiction without a detective, such as *The Newgate Calendar* (1773), shows “a clear lack of a system of investigation” (Knight 1983, 273), in which there is no special agent of detection, but instead the ideological apparatus of Christian conscience. Presumably, the emergence of the detective figure in crime fiction, such as Caleb Williams in William Godwin’s *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and the real professional detective Eugène François Vidocq in *The Memoirs of Vidocq* (1829), was to some extent indebted to the advent of the modern police system and the institution of the detective in modern Europe. However, it is difficult to find any clear evidence that the characterization of an amateur detective hero such as Sherlock Holmes was directly inspired by a real police detective and his investigating activities.

On the contrary, literary historians have found that the modern detective hero was for the most part a product of the literary imagination. As Julian Symons argued:

The idea that detective fiction could not be written until organized detective forces existed is logically persuasive but not literally true, for the first detective stories were written by Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), before a Detective Office had been established at Scotland Yard, and at a time when few American cities had any kind of police system ... it is a tribute to Poe’s inventive genius that his stories had so little to do with actual police operations. (Symons 1972, 34)

Michael Holquist also argued:

We must restate the reason for the seemingly tardy development of detective fiction. We said it had to wait for the historical advent of the institution of the detective. We must now add that the detective who made detective fiction possible was himself a fiction: detective stories have their true genesis not in Vidocq or any other real life detective. The father of them all, is, rather, Edgar Allan Poe's Chevalier Dupin. (Holquist 1983, 155)

According to Knight, however, the portrayal of the detective hero as an alienated intellectual in modern detective fiction was made possible only by the full development of individualistic bourgeois culture, in which:

Author and audience could believe in the subjective individual as a basis of real experience and could see collectivity as a threat, when rationalism was more than a tool of inquiry and had become a way of dominating the whole world, when professionalism, specialization, and rigorous inquiry replaced the values of affection and mutual understanding as a means of controlling deviance. (Knight 1983, 287)

Here, we see that the modern detective figure was not just a fiction but more importantly a product of a broader cultural context in which rationalism, subjectivism, and individualism emerged as central values. Such figures were products of what might be called *modernity*.

We may use those historical insights in reexamining *Ssangokjeok* within its own historical and cultural contexts. Apparently, *gongan* elements exhibited in the text are a key to understanding its structural and ideological ambiguities, which have usually been taken as aesthetic defects. Indeed, *gongan* elements appear persistently in modern East Asian crime stories even after the reception of the genre of Western detective fiction. For instance, apart from the influence of Western detective fiction, the genre of chivalric and court case fiction (*gongan xiayi xiaoshuo* 公案俠義小說), an asymmetrical combination of story patterns of adventure and detection, gained immense popularity in late-19th-century China. By reinventing the narrative tradition rather than rejecting it, the genre thrived all the more through modern mass media (Wang 1997, 117–182).

More remarkable still, *gongan* fiction, despite its advocacy of Confucian moralism, was not considered irrelevant to contemporary social phenomena. Genuine interest in crime and law is characteristic of the genre, which may have been compatible with modern newspapers. When the genre emerged as part of legal culture along with the diffusion of litigation culture in the late Ming period, it was not only aimed at pursuing *poetic* justice for popular fantasy but also at providing the general reading public with basic legal information. The realistic and detailed representation of the justice system made the genre function as a sort of popular legal manual. Even the fictional representation of law and justice in the genre, for instance, the spectacle of judicial power represented by a powerful and impartial judge character or the principle of moral retribution attained by the intervention of supernatural elements or divine justice, seems to have been viewed as tolerable for social criticism and moral education.

Long before the introduction of modern newspapers to East Asia, a wide variety of legal literature, such as crime reports, case records, and verdicts, were published and circulated within and outside of the Confucian government because the wide diffusion of basic legal information was considered so crucial to the maintenance of legal and moral order. The publication of celebrated actual legal cases in fictional form was encouraged by the government for moralizing effects.¹⁴ The famous *Janghwa Hongnyeon jeon* 薔花紅蓮傳 (Story of Janghwa and Hongnyeon) is a prominent example in which a real murder case was transformed into a fantastic tale featuring avenging ghosts, who would rather rely on the legal system than punish wrongdoers personally. As such, it is worth noting that the evolution of the genre of *gongan* fiction was as closely linked to public interest in crime and justice as to entertainment purposes.

Considering this cultural context, the emergence of *gongan* fiction in the newspaper cannot be viewed as anachronistic but in synch with the demands of the times. Indeed, this old genre emerged in Korean newspapers just

14. For instance, *Eunae jeon* 銀愛傳 (Story of Eunae), based on a true murder case, was written by Yi Deok-mu 李德懋 (1741–1793) under the orders of King Jeongjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800). For more detail, see DSGY (2011, 124).

before the introduction of the modern detective story: *Sindan gongan* 神斷公案 (Celebrated Court Case Stories), which was serialized in the *Hwangseong sinmun* from May 19 to December 13, 1906. We see that the text clearly acknowledges itself as *gongan* in the title. Unlike the new novel that was written in vernacular Korean, this text is written in a mixed style of classical Chinese with Korean suffixes (*hanmun hyeonto che* 漢文懸吐體). Although the seven independent crime stories constituting the work are apparently based on old narrative forms and motifs such as Chinese casebooks, *gongan* stories, and Korean folktales, the ultimate goal of rewriting old crime stories for the newspaper seems to have consisted not in evoking nostalgic sentiments from the past but in highlighting the inhumane, grotesque absurdity of the old regime and its inevitable termination. Therefore, the text may be seen as a modern reinterpretation of old narrative forms and motifs: in other words, they are “indigenous crime stories with the skins of Chinese *gongan* stories” (Jung 2010, 553).

As such, the influence of *gongan* or court case fiction in the development of the genre of mystery¹⁵ seems to have been persistent during the modern period. More remarkable is that even Yi Haejo, who introduced the genre of modern detective fiction to the Korean reading public through *Ssangokjeok*, returned to traditional crime fiction in 1912 by publishing *Guuisan*, a modern adaptation of a court case story. Thus, Yi’s “predilection for *gongan* fiction” is by no means invisible in his works of the new novel, as Choe Wonsik pointed out (W. Choe 1986, 103). Why then did Yi attempt to write a detective story instead of *gongan* fiction? It is probably because he understood the genre as a story of “modern detection” (J. Yi 2009, 252), that is, something crucial for modern civilization and enlightenment. Indeed, what distinguishes the modern Korean detective story from *gongan* fiction is a shift in focus from a crime or criminal narrative to one of detection or a detective.

15. Herein, *mystery* is the translation of the term *churi soseol*, which is more widely used than the term *tamjeong soseol* or detective fiction in contemporary Korean society to indicate a great variety of stories of crime and detection. Even traditional *gongan* or court case stories are categorized into *mystery*. For the definition of the term, see DSGY (2011, 19–22).

In fact, *Ssangokjeok* is closely linked to the advent of the modern police system and the institution of detectives. Detective Jeong is clearly depicted as “not a policeman in uniform but a *byeol sungeum* famous for undercover investigation for many years” (Haejo Yi 1911, 12). *Byeol sungeum* 別巡檢 is a policeman belonging to the *Gyeongmu cheong* 警務廳, a police department newly established after the Gabo Reforms of 1894 and modeled on the Japanese police system. Apart from a *sungeum* (uniformed policeman), a *byeol sungeum* usually engaged in undercover investigation. Accordingly, Detective Jeong differs from the traditional detective-judge or legal clerk (*hyeongni* 刑吏) often depicted in *gongan* fiction, even though he is not the same as a private amateur detective such as Sherlock Holmes. When we find this modern detective hero is not yet ready for some cerebral detective skills to intellectualize his adventure, however, we may wonder whether this is a detective story or not. What was the reason the author failed to create a detective hero comparable to Holmes? Was it simply due to the fact that a real private detective did not exist in modern Korean society as argued by critics (J. Yi 2009, 253)? Hereafter, I will endeavor to find the answer through a close reading of the text.

Does the Detective Appear?: Power, Ideology, and the Emergence of Modern Detective Fiction

The title, *Ssangokjeok*, refers to the criminals instead of the detective, which may give us the impression that the text focuses more on crime than detection. Judging from the fact that even Chinese *gongan* fiction usually places the judge's name in the title,¹⁶ the title here apparently implies the detective's ambiguous position in the text.

16. A number of works of Qing *gongan* fiction, such as *Peng gongan* 彭公案 (Court Cases of Judge Peng) and *Shi gongan* 施公案 (Court Cases of Judge Shi), reveal the detective-judge's family name in the title. In the case of the *Longtu gongan* 龍圖公案 (Court Cases of Longtu), “Longtu” is Judge Bao's appellation conferred by the emperor.

At the very least, *Ssangokjeok* sticks to the whodunit structure, a new narrative order established by modern detective fiction that delays the revelation of the criminals' true identities until the end. This suggests that the author was clearly aware of the generic essence of the modern detective story and its peculiar narrative convention of a backward-looking structure. The essence of the whodunit, however, consists in revealing the criminal's identity by relying solely on the detective's extraordinary intelligence for scientific detection and logical deduction. Detective fiction requires a detective who represents the power of an alienated yet confident individual intelligence by which the world is made completely explicable. Can we then assume Detective Jeong to be a modern detective hero relying on the armories of rationalism, intellectualism, and individualism?

Of course, Detective Jeong displaces the Confucian judge hero, a symbol of absolute judicial power, who investigates a murder case, arrests the murderer, and punishes the evil in traditional *gongan* fiction. Still, the detective hero is far from an alienated private detective portrayed as a symbolic icon of modern civilization.

As mentioned above, Detective Jeong is a *byeol sungeum*, a police detective placed within the contemporary police system:

The most significant task of a *byeol sungeum* is to solve every serious case through a swift detection like a ghost, which ordinary people cannot imagine. Moreover, a little neglect would not only put others in unbearable situations but also ruin the detective's own life. It would be very difficult for a detective to avoid the mistake of arresting an innocent person unless he were extremely cautious and intelligent. This is why even the famous Detective Jeong puts great efforts into his work, to the extent that he has his tongue split, whenever he tries to catch a thief. (Haejo Yi 1911, 20–21)

Detective Jeong is said to be extremely cautious to prevent the false arrest of the innocent (*yangmin ochak* 良民誤捉), which was presumably common in the premodern legal system. His prudence, however, may be seen as a mere excuse for intellectual ineptitude due to his inability to rationalize

his adventure. Hence, the detective, famous for his circumspection, never realizes that a business card in the purse at the murder scene was a forgery planted by the robbers who murdered Ms. Ko (Haejo Yi 1911, 44). Although *clues*, such as the sound of *danso* flutes and the business card, as essential elements for the modern detective story are given to identify the criminals and solve the case in the text, they remain undetected and indecipherable to the detective.

Compared to Western detective heroes, it is worth noting that Jeong appears far more akin to the real French detective Vidocq than to Holmes. Like Vidocq, who operates through the real police system while failing to be a hero “distinguished in manner and method by isolation and alienated intelligence” (Knight 1983, 294), Jeong is portrayed realistically by reflecting actual police operations in which conventional detective techniques such as hard work, information, undercover activity, and common sense are still widely used. Accordingly, his investigating activity is limited for the most part to chasing tenaciously after the criminals. There is no “swift detection like a ghost, which ordinary people cannot imagine,” as depicted above. We may wonder what details this detective story tells about modern detection’s reliance on scientific techniques, procured evidence, and ratiocination.

As far as rational detection is concerned, female detective Ms. Ko seems more capable than Jeong. Interestingly, it is Ms. Ko who stops Jeong from arresting the wrong suspects without hard evidence, asking him sharply, “How could you think like this even though you are famous for detection? I already heard your story [about the suspects], but what evidence did you find against them?” (Haejo Yi 1911, 36). Unfortunately, we cannot expect her ongoing adventure, in as much as she is soon murdered by the robbers.

What is the most problematic, however, is that the detective fails to deliver to the audience rational and systematic explanations about what has happened. Consequently, it is the omniscient narrator who explains everything about the criminals and their crimes instead of the detective, who barely decodes the given clues, including the most obvious clue, the flute sound. Accordingly, the only thing that can be expected from this diminished detective after the all-knowing narrator’s intervention is his final adventure in which he demonstrates his courage and devotion to defeat

these hardened criminals and bring them to justice. In Todorov's terms, after the narrator's intervention, the story is only read for suspense (from cause to effect), not for curiosity (from effect to cause). Judging from the fact that the author clearly understood the puzzle or whodunit structure and used it for his own detective story, we may wonder what caused his doubt about the absolute value of the detective hero's intelligence.

Nevertheless, just as in the new novel in general, the author is most likely to convey messages for civilization and enlightenment to the audience. From the author's point of view, modern detective fiction is a serious genre aimed at enlightening the masses. From the beginning, for instance, what may impress the audience is the modern urban landscape swiftly unfolding in accordance with various characters moving constantly from city to city by means of modern transport, such as steamship, train, and electric tram. In this manner, the text would help the audience formulate and expand their geographical perception of what constitutes the modern nation as a whole—that is, the Korean Peninsula:

Following his father's order, Officer Kim, a son of the magistrate of Naju County, went to Incheon to board the steamship according to the timetable. He went to Mokpo by ship to receive the collected money for taxes from his father and uncle. ... When Kim disembarked the ship at Incheon harbor, he caught the last train by the Seoul-Incheon railway. All the passengers got off in a hurry when they arrived at the stop outside the Southern Gate (Sungnye Gate). Not until Kim looked for his purse by his side as he got off the train, did he notice it had gone missing. (Haejo Yi 1911, 5)

This scene shows how Officer Kim loses his purse in the course of secretly carrying it with him from Mokpo to Seoul. His quick and uninterrupted movement at this scene effectively creates suspense, while the scene also provides the audience with a sense of contemporary reality through precise and realistic descriptions of different locations.

Another example demonstrates how to "narrativize" scientific discourses as well. After their resignations, the ex-detectives visit the Diamond

Mountains where they are attacked by the robbers, Double Jade Flutes. Monk Sangja (Sangja jung), so frightened at the sight of Jeong and his colleague hung from the tree with rope, tells the abbot that a goblin did that. The abbot says:

Oh, you fool! What is a goblin? Didn't you hear what Mr. An said about physics? He said electricity could generate foxfire (*doggaebi bul*). Of course, a goblin does not exist. But, judging from what you say, a very strange thing has happened. (Haejo Yi 1911, 79)

Although this short episode has nothing to do with the plot, it evidently shows how much the author as a news reporter is concerned with the wide diffusion of scientific knowledge.

As far as scientific detective techniques are concerned, however, it is not our detective hero who shows how to use the marvels of science or deductive power. On the contrary, it is those heinous criminals who skillfully use modern inventions such as guns (*yukyeolpo* 六穴砲) and a purse machine (*gigye gabang*), presumably a newly invented device for stealing, of which the mechanism remains completely mysterious to the audience (Haejo Yi 1911, 100). Considering our detective's limited intelligence, it is not so odd that he never discovers what the device is. Here, our detective hero is completely overshadowed by those cold-blooded professional criminals, who "are best at robbing the rich by using a great variety of mysterious devices rather than knives and spears" (Haejo Yi 1911, 99). The criminals' adventure, filled with terror and wonder, would be more likely to interest the audience than the detective's monotonous and futile pursuit.

Despite a clear lack of resources, however, the detective hero never relies on a supernatural solution or the intervention of divine justice, which had been frequently used as a conventional narrative device to solve mysteries in traditional crime fiction. In this way, our detective seems eager to support the idea of the "overthrow of superstition" (*misin tapa*), which the new novel enthusiastically promotes. But he remains completely powerless and unreliable without representing any symbolic power of rationality.

Not surprisingly, what most concerns the detective hero is not so much

the solving of mysteries as criticizing the backward government. We often find political messages delivered through the detective's voice. For instance, the text expresses strong criticism of the notoriously backward legal policy of *yeonjwaje*, an implicative system applied to students who studied abroad and their families at the time of the Korean Empire (Daehan jeguk 大韓帝國, 1897–1910). The detective persuades his colleague, who hoped for a reward for arresting suspects who had sent their children to Japan, not to arrest them, saying, “What kind of crime is it to send one's children to a foreign country for their studies? How could we parents who raise many children commit such evil?” (Haejo Yi 1911, 39–40). Herein, what seems more striking in this passage than the presumed attempt to appease Japanese censors is the supposedly dispassionate detective making an emotional appeal as a parent, a sharp contrast with the Western detective figure as an alienated individual detached from organic society, particularly the family.

Unlike so-called armchair detectives such as Sherlock Holmes, who often confine themselves to their private studies for their cerebral adventures, our detective hero is thrown into a dangerous world of contradictions, irrationalities, and uncertainties. As a consequence, when he admits his limitations and suffers from his own numerous errors and mishaps, his seemingly coherent story of rational detection abruptly turns into “an emotional story of ordeals,” which abounds in the new novel (Ko 2011, 157). In particular, through the depiction of an unbearable predicament, the incarcerated detective suffers from the disturbingly damaging state of prisons, depicted in great detail, and the malfunctioning prison system is condemned as “a school for robbers” (Haejo Yi 1911, 58). Without doubt, these descriptions can be read as discourses on legal reform.

Finally, the disillusioned detective, who eventually turns out to be an isolated individual following his resignation, is unable to rationalize to himself the resumption of his interrupted investigation. Only the coincidental and fatal encounter with the criminals in the Diamond Mountains forces the detective to finalize his adventure. And only thus does he bring the criminals to justice. It is worth noting that the use of coincidence in the story may have an anti-individualist effect. According to Knight:

A worldview that holds human beings can, and so should, control their actions in a comprehensible way, must reject sheer accident as a cause of events. Literary critics, dependent for their organized livelihood on the rational explanation of rational novels, have come down very heavily against coincidence. (Knight 1983, 284)

As such, despite the fact that Detective Jeong is a part of the real police system (or because of it), he is too ambiguous—or at best, average—to be a powerful detective agent and a means of restoring the social and moral order to a society in transition between the old and new regimes. Moreover, his near anonymity (in that he has no given name like other characters in the text) explains his dubious character only too well, considering that “a named individual hero or heroine” in the novel form signifies the myth of modernity that “a single individual, if clever and patient enough, can unravel the world of experience ... the world is comprehensible to a gifted single intelligence” (Knight 1983, 282–283). Thus, there remains the omniscient narrator to solve the mysteries and finish the story of detection on behalf of the uncertain and unreliable detective.

Perhaps, this is why Korea’s first modern detective story, *Ssangokjeok*, never gained popularity with its Korean audience. It failed to create a new detective hero who could fill the chasm between the old and new orders and assure public security for society in chaos. To bridge the gap, the recurrence of *gongan* elements in the new novel form seems inevitable. In this context, we may reconsider the genre of chivalric and court case fiction and its great success among Chinese audiences. This genre seems to have succeeded in diminishing the extreme tension between the old and new orders and satisfying the expectations of popular fantasy by creating outlaw heroes, who paradoxically break the law in the name of justice on behalf of the upright Confucian judge. Thus, “in the last decades of the Qing empire, at a time when China was beset with incessant foreign invasions and domestic rebellions, the Chinese reading public (and listening audience) took refuge in the world of chivalric and court case fiction” (Wang 1997, 117).

Compared to the genre of chivalric and court case fiction and its convenient compromise with popular demand, we may reassess Yi Haejo’s

experiment with the modern detective story despite his hero's various errors and confusion in *Ssangokjeok*. What matters most is that this first detective story was merely one of Yi's numerous literary experiments he attempted for the new literature movements of the period, and that many may be viewed as structurally imperfect and ideologically ambiguous. This characteristic may be understood not as a deficiency but as how Wang characterized late Qing literature, schizophrenic, in that "The traditional is supposed to be dying but still holding on, and the modern is said to be arriving and yet still invisible—an age of enlightenment but not an enlightened age, to borrow Kant's description of his own time" (Wang 1997, 23).

However, this schizophrenic feature does not make late Qing literature less modern or more traditional. Rather, distinguishing it from the Western model and the canons of modern Chinese literature, Wang argued that the appearance of the modern in late Qing literature cannot be seen as having followed a singular, inevitable format of evolution or revolution, but as a literature of a time in which many incipient *modernities* competed for fulfillment (Wang 1997, 21). Wang's views on late Qing literature might be helpful for a deeper understanding of *Ssangokjeok*, in that the text cannot be dismissed as an inferior or incomplete version of the Western model. The text is inevitably schizophrenic by reflecting on modern Korean society's experiencing "an age of enlightenment but not an enlightened age." Without doubt, the disempowered detective, disengaged from individualistic bourgeois culture, is not a deformed creature but rather a product of contextualizing the genre in accordance with the literary movements for "civilization and enlightenment." We may assume that his limited intelligence demonstrates the author's anti-individualistic worldview by putting more emphasis on the significance of collective efforts for social reform.

Concluding Remarks: Rethinking the Genre of Detective Fiction in Korean History

Ssangokjeok has been recognized as the first modern detective story in Korean literary history, yet it has been dismissed as an incomplete detective

story. However, the structural contradictions and ideological ambiguities exhibited in the text need to be understood not as aesthetic defects but as the consequence of violent conflicts between the traditional and the modern, and thus, as the outcome of a critical social consciousness. The text in its own sense is as original and complete as the Western model insofar as it represents what “the Korean modern” was.

Accordingly, we should reconsider the historical significance of the text within the broader social and political context of reading and writing the new novel in general, not simply in relation to the reception of Western detective fiction. When too much emphasis is placed on the role *Ssangokjeok* played in reconstructing a linear history of Korean detective fiction, it tends to be viewed as a transitional text bridging the gap between traditional crime fiction and the fully developed modern detective story. Although the author deliberately defines the text as a detective story, a series of experiments and innovations attempted in the text are never independent of but rather subject to a higher goal of representing the mind of society. Unlike the Western detective’s individualist consciousness and relative social and political disinterest, Detective Jeong articulates his keen political consciousness by criticizing government policies and evoking the urgent need for political and legal reform. Insofar as the detective figure is closely linked to the actual legal system, he is less reminiscent of the rational Western detective hero than of the traditional detective-judge in the courtroom in *gongan* fiction, in which references to law and justice appear as essential elements. These *gongan* elements appear persistently even in the later development of Korean detective fiction, such as in *Bakjwi usan* (Western-style Umbrella, 1920) in which a story of detection narrated by the detective is overlapped with a story of interrogation by the prosecutor (Ko 2011, 163).

In Korean society of the time, political issues were an unavoidable subject even for the genre of fiction supposedly intended only for popular entertainment. As often as not, Yi Haejo viewed the novel form as the essential literary medium for conveying political messages and enlightening the masses. In this sense, the author shows a firm belief in legal reform and genuine interest in the representation of the contradictions and violent

conflicts between traditional and modern law in a number of works of the new novel (S. Hong 2017, 153–176). In this way, *Ssangokjeok* reinvents itself as a serious narrative genre by closely reflecting social reality while experimenting and reinterpreting the Western model.

In modern Korean literary history, *Ssangokjeok* confirms that we need to reconsider the conflicting relationship between the traditional narrative form and the new novel form. The text clearly demonstrates that there exists only a blurred boundary between the traditional and modern, between rationality and irrationality, between entertainment and enlightenment, and between popular literature and high literature. Those crime stories such as *Sindan gongan* and *Ssangokjeok* that emerged through modern newspaper serializations cannot be considered as transitional texts shifting from the traditional to the modern, inasmuch as they already represent a mode of *plural modernities*, in Wang's terms. Popular genres such as modern detective fiction have been overlooked as insignificant and peripheral in Korean literary history. However, we may be able to draw a more complex picture of modern Korean literature by paying more attention to these genres. Ultimately, rediscovering and revaluing popular subgenres of modern fiction will lead to a remapping of Korean literary history.

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