

Special Feature

# 'Cultural Studies' as Interdisciplinary Literary Studies

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## Introduction

The Sanghur Society is a representative organization in studies of Korean modern literature. The agenda of the Society's symposium titled "A New Horizon for Korean Literature (Studies), Theory, and Text: Towards a Structural Change in the Production, Distribution, and Reception of Research" held on June 29, 2013, starts with the following comment:

The great paradigm shift in the study of humanities since the late 1990s now appears to have come to an end. During this time, studies in modern (*geundae*) Korean literature have experienced many changes including the shifts from nationalism to trans-nationalism; from literature to writing; from text-focused analyses to analyses on the medium and institutions surrounding the text; from debates based on literature's autonomy to the development of a common agenda based on a theoretical parameter. The subject period has also been expanded.

On the other hand, there have been concerns that the productive force of the paradigm shift is being exhausted. Despite the continuous expansion of the corpus of studies on Korean modern literature, there has been very little exchange or discussion regarding new agendas or methodology within academic conferences. Now we are at a new starting point where we should assess the significance of the paradigm shift that has occurred in the last ten to twenty years and renew another vision and methodology for Korean modern literature.<sup>1</sup>

The passage above makes an observation on the recent history in studies of Korean modern literature and suggests a new beginning. It argues that there has been a "great paradigm shift in the humanities since the late 1990s," and this paradigm shift has brought dramatic changes in studies of Korean modern (*geundae*) literature. Therefore, it suggests, we need another self-examination

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1. "2013 nyeondo yeoreum haksul daehoe annae imnida" (Conference announcement, summer 2013), in Announcement (*Gongji sahang*), Sanghur Society website, posted on June 11, 2013, <http://www.sanghur.org/bbs/zboard.php?id=notice&no=309>.

and a “new beginning.” I agree with most of this statement. In this paper, let us take this new research approach that has emerged from this ‘paradigm shift’ as ‘cultural studies’ (or *munhwaronjeok yeongu*, literally meaning ‘cultural-theory-based studies’)<sup>2</sup> and explore the past and the present of ‘cultural studies’ as an interdisciplinary scholarship.

For more than the last ten years, the boundary of subject matters in ‘Korean literary studies’ (*gugeo gungmunhak*) has indeed expanded significantly. Studies of Korean modern literature have experienced many changes and are still in the process of changing. However, the institutional structure and external norms within the field of *gugeo gungmunhak* have experienced little if any change. This gap between the content and the structure evokes anxiety. Facing this anxiety, the older generation of scholars or those with a particular position see these new research approaches as a confusion or diversion.

The Sanghur Society’s agenda also reflects this anxiety, though in a slightly different way. The Society has been a pioneer in the field, and yet has organized symposiums on the research history and methodology rather frequently. These disruptive self-assessments perhaps reflect discontent towards the fact that conventional studies on ‘the studies of literature’ (*munbakhak*) are never sufficiently discarded. On the other hand, they function as a compensation for the holistic and methodological ‘consistency’ new research approaches tend to lack.

But in the last ten years, have not more fundamental changes taken place not only in the status of Korean literature (*gungmunhak*), methodology, and research subject but also in culture among the researchers and their identity? These changes are directly connected to the changes brought to Korean society (▷ changes at the universities ▷ changes in the humanities) since the so-called ‘IMF-era.’ The impact of this era is so easily recognizable even in our brief self-reflection, and has been so frequently mentioned that now its topics are exhausted: for instance, the way ‘Korean literary scholars’ (*gungmunhakja*)

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2. Editor’s note: In the Korean original text, the author distinguishes three subtly different concepts which “cultural studies” signifies: *munhwaronjeok yeongu* for an interdisciplinary approach in studies of literature and humanities; *munhwaron* for cultural studies in the Western academia; and *munhwa yeongu* for cultural studies as it literally means. In this paper, all of these terms were uniformly translated as “cultural studies” with transliterations in Romanized Korean in the second or third cases.

and literary critics are employed or supported; the transformation in the process of writing and the system of struggle for recognition; or the very neo-liberalist 'regime' that regulates our bodies and micro-relationships. These problems also have profoundly influenced issues concerning interdisciplinary studies. But a discussion about the individual researcher's autonomy is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper instead explores the anxieties and the transformation studies of Korean modern literature and an interdisciplinary 'movement' through the lenses of 'cultural studies'.

## Advantages, Disadvantages, and Significance of 'Cultural Studies'

### *The Concept and Scope of 'Cultural Studies'*

'Cultural studies' (*munhwaronjeok yeongu*) refers to a new research approach that has incorporated cultural studies methodology into Korean literary studies since the late 1990s. This incorporation renewed the very landscape of studies of Korean literary history and opened up a new horizon for literary studies as an interdisciplinary scholarship. It was originally influenced by the Anglo-American branch of cultural studies (*munhwaron*)<sup>3</sup> and developed in line with the global 'Cultural Turn.' The status of cultural studies within the Korean academia and its historical identity are reflected in the following passage:

The change in the studies of literature (*munhak yeongu*) was an expression of the conflict felt by the generation that turned 20 under the '1987-Regime' and lived their 30s in the 2000s. It is also an attempt to embrace the desperate humanistic desires for new intellectual and human realities. On the other hand, it represents a leap and a cheerful attempt to escape from the old disciplinary framework called '*gungmunhak*' (Korean literary studies) handed down from the previous generation... Cultural studies newly investigated the modernity (*geundaeseong*) of Korean literature and restored contemporaneity of the past by exploring the origins of knowledge

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3. For discussions on the history and identity of cultural studies in England/America, see Stuart Hall (2011) and Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* ([2004] 2010).

and of the institutions of culture. Through self-reflection and criticism of Korean literary history, identities suppressed by nation (*minjok*), the male, and the elite-class were unveiled, and new images of the society and culture of the colonial period emerged by revisiting previously unexplored subjects such as institutions, discourses, and symbols. With the excitement of a pioneer, we measured and cast light upon the subjects and areas that the previous 'April 19' generation of scholars had felt reluctant to speak of. We had not only the support of friendly scholars from sub-fields in *gungmunhak* but also colleagues from other humanities disciplines joining our expansion and transformation. Although we were at times questioned and criticized, we learned willingly and were inspired much by our own efforts as well as by historians and social scientists who had adopted the new perspective. (Kwon and Cheon 2012, 552)

However, the scholars have not yet reached an agreement concerning the scope of and a name for 'cultural studies.' In my perspective, 'cultural studies' refers to (1) studies of Korean literature/literary history via a 'cultural studies' framework (*munhwaronjeok Hanguk munhaksa*); (2) studies of cultural history (*munhwasa*);<sup>4</sup> and (3) studies of practical culture (*byeonsil munhwa*). In other words, its scope expands beyond the new scholarship on literary trends and the literary history of Korea and also includes studies of modern cultural history, analyses of practical culture, and cultural criticism.<sup>5</sup>

These three areas of studies and their integratability sometimes cause confusion among scholars. Studies of literary history through the perspective of cultural studies, studies of cultural history, and studies of practical culture each has promoted new values and shaped its terrain within the humanities and literary studies of Korea. The integrations of the two or three (3C2) actively generate substantial research works. In what follows, we will look at each category of studies separately.

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4. Yu Seonyeong and some other cultural studies scholars use the term 'historical studies of culture' (*yeoksajeok munhwa yeongu*).

5. For discussions on advantages and regulations of cultural studies, following works [in Korean] were used as references: Kim, Dongsik, "Custom, Culture, Literary History" (2001); Cha, Hyeyeong, "A Critical Approach to 'Custom-culture Study'" (2007); Bak, Heonho, "Today's Literary Studies without Literature 'History': Some Thoughts in Studying Korean Modern Literature Today" (2006); Yi, Gyeongdon, *After Literature* (2009); Yi, Sanggil, "Aporia of Literary Studies" (2004).

## (1) Studies of literature/literary history in the cultural studies approach

As the passage quoted above argues, cultural studies represent a fundamental reassessment of Korean modern literary history. Consequently, not only works focusing on individual issues in the literary history but also those focusing on a more meta-reevaluation and criticism of the previously-written scholarship are being written.<sup>6</sup> The recently published *Literary History after Literary History* (Cheon et al. 2013) is an example of such work. This book criticizes modern literary history as a “system of elimination” “at the basis of the existing epistemology of Korean literary studies” which “ignores both underestimation and overestimation of popularity and does not accept ‘the Simultaneity of the Non-simultaneous.’” It “does not tolerate disruptions of national boundaries and subordinates literature’s boundary to the old practice of categorization according to genres.” At the same time, the book explores alternative forms of literary history, namely: “literary history of multiplicity, literary history as a network, literary history [approached] from below, literary history of a non-linear chronology, and literary study from transnational perspectives” (10-11, 55-56). It further looks at the “discourse on the boundaries of literature that the existing framework of literary history does not embrace” by considering such things as film and TV series. The book’s index page is reproduced below:

### Section 1: Different Perspectives on Literary History

Gwon Bodeurae (Kwon Bodurae), “Literature’s Diffusion or Literature’s Solitude: Looking at the Present Assessed through the Periods before and after the March 1 Independence Movement”

Cheon Jeonghwan (Cheon Jung-hwan), “‘Can a Subaltern Write?’: Different Views on ‘Literature and Politics’ and Restoration of People’s Literature”

So Yeonghyeon, “Revisiting the ‘Others’ in Literary History: From *a* Literary History to Literary Histories”

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6. In addition, *New National Literary Studies (Sae minjok munhaksa gangjwa)*, edited by the National Literary History Studies Institute (Minjok Munhaksa Yeonguso), is an exemplary work of integrated Korean literary history produced since the 1990s. These volumes show methodological transition from the past to the present.

## **Section 2: Reading Issues in Korean Modern Literary History from a New Questionary Framework**

- Yi Hyeryeong, "Rereading Novels from the Colonial Period: Colonial Narrative and Socialists in Yeom Sangseop's Literary Works"
- Sin Hyeonggi, "The Whereabouts of the 'Stories' from the 1960s, and April 19 and May 16 Reform Debates"
- Gwon Myeong-a, "Stories of Literature outside the Literary 'Community': Literature/Literary History between Archives and Life"

## **Section 3: Multiplicity of Literary History and Different Genres**

- Baek Munim (Baek Moonim), "History of Film and History of Literature: What Im Hwa said about Joseon Films"
- Yi Yeongmi, "Oral Literature/Written Literature: Towards a New Framework (*teul*) of Korean Literary History: *Barefooted Youth (Maenbal ui cheongchun)* and *Lady Camellia (Dongbaek agassi)*"
- Jeong Yeoul, "Reading a History Novel in Faction Republic"

Obviously, along with new theoretical waves in the humanities such as post-colonialism and gender studies, methodologies and research findings in closely related disciplines such as studies of popular culture, media, intellectual history and films were employed in the deconstruction and reconstruction of Korean literary history.

### **(2) Studies of the modern cultural history of Korea**

Cultural studies also draws our attention into new subjects of investigation, such as language, policy, discourse, symbolism, etc., which the already existing humanities disciplines and historical studies in Korea have failed to look into as well as "unexplored" areas, such as cultural history and intellectual history. We cannot ignore the major scholarly issues that have just been found or the ever-expanding world of academic investigation. Of course, this new horizon cannot be explored by the means of a single discipline. In fact, it "emerged from the intersection of the two waves: one, the 'literary studies' shift to cultural studies (*munhwa yeongu*)' and two, history's 'shift to language.' In other words, it was accidental but inevitable that the two major streams in the so-called 'national studies' (*gukhak*) met within the study of the 'cultural history' of the colonial

period. ‘History’s shift to language’ reflects ‘post-modern[ism]’ in historical studies in which understanding of history merely as a written description [of the past] is shifted to a focus on systems of communication and symbolism, narratives, and discourses” (Cheon 2007, 38-39). This became possible with the “adoption of the ‘cultural’ framework” to the field. Meanwhile, literary studies through cultural studies perspectives have produced scholarly works in close collaboration with existing scholarship on social and media histories. In other words, such interdisciplinary studies were conducted through studies of new scholarly discoveries in cultural policies, magazines, and newspapers as well as issues that are dealt with in social history including censorship, cultural autonomy, and spatiality/temporality. Their research findings were occasionally shared through collaboration.

### (3) Studies and criticism of practical culture

As a practical field of research, cultural studies by itself internalizes the need for engagement with and critique of cultural reality. This need has emerged since the 1990s when the influence of popular culture was greatly expanded. Studies and criticisms on popular culture in Korea have been led by a movement represented by the ‘Culture/Science’ (Munhwa/Gwahak) group since the early 1990s, and by various universities’ mass-communication departments. Their scholarship and criticism borrowed the theoretical frameworks of the Birmingham School, Althusser, Gramsci, and Socio-cultural theory. In particular, the ‘Culture/Science’ group engaged with cultural policies and popular culture by creating activist organizations such as the Cultural Action (Munhwa Yeondae). Yi Dong-yeon, a prominent thinker and activist of the ‘Culture/Science’ group summarizes the emergence and development of Korean ‘Cultural Studies’ in the following:

By bringing about a shift to a new perspective on culture, [it] developed a new trend that is distinctive from the humanistic (*immunjuuijeok*) approach taken by the existing literary studies. From the mid-1990s, this new tendency became known as ‘Cultural Studies’ (*munhwa yeongu*). Since the mid-1960s, British cultural neo-Leftist groups ... have attempted to overcome the limits of empirically based cultural theories by employing various methodologies including meticulous field research, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and feminism, instead of relying on ideological and



sentimental criticisms of the modern-day capitalist popular culture. This gave birth to a new practice model in the discourse of cultural movement. There are many similarities between how the field of Cultural Studies was introduced to the cultural environment of England and that of Korea. Cultural Studies questions literature-oriented discourse, single-discipline-oriented discourses, and the hierarchy of culture and arts. It is now being established as a new ‘signifying practice’ (*uimihwa silcheon*) against the crisis in the meta-discourse, the outdated practice paradigm, and the fixed academic structure (Yi 2006, 245).

**Table 1.** Context, Stance, and Issues in Korean ‘Cultural Studies’ (Yi 2006, 245)

Context	Stances	Issues
Academic Background	Humanities Stance	Criticism of disciplinary-divisionism and literature-centered approach within the fields of humanities. Survival strategies against the crisis of the humanities.
	Sociological Stance	Crisis and changes of Marxist political economy. Evolution of cultural sociology.
	Mass-communication Stance	Transformation/Neo-revisionism of Critical Communication Theory.
Pragmatist Arguments	Cultural Movement Stance	Preparing a practical basis for extending cultural movement into social movement and its differentiation from existing arts movement.
	Scholarly Stance	Criticism and reconstruction of disciplinary-divisions within academia.
	Popular Criticism Stance	Providing a theoretical basis for cultural criticism as popular and social criticism.
Theoretical Tendencies	Marxist Stance	Illuminating social production modes of culture and domination-revolution relationship. Emphasis on the role of culture as superstructure.
	Feminist Stance	Studying gender identity. Criticism of women as symbolism. Engagement into policies from a gender-based perspectives.
	Post-colonial Stance	Hybridization of ‘colonial’ and ‘post-colonial.’ New understanding and interpretation of cultural nationalism ( <i>munhwa minjokjuui</i> ). Reconstruction of East Asian cultural studies.
	Post-structural Stance	New approaches towards language, desire, power, and writing.

As the above table demonstrates, the overall landscape of cultural studies in Korea can be observed through the listed context, theoretical stances, and issues. Developments in studies of literary history via cultural studies (*munhwaronjeok munhaksa yeongu*) that emerged from literary studies since the 2000s, and that of modern cultural history can overlap on multiple levels with or be a part of these ‘stances’ or arguments. Furthermore, through studies of popular historiography of the real world, they often intersect with studies and criticisms on the practical culture (*hyeonsil munhwa*).

These overlaps are important as they reflect the natural stance of cultural studies and are profoundly connected to its’ conceptualization of the truth. Within ‘cultural studies,’ the borders between the ‘past’ and the ‘present,’ and between ‘academia’ and ‘real world’ are blurred. It strives to go beyond the traditional questions and disciplinary borders, and to be free in its writing and academic practice of humanities. To summarize, cultural studies is basically inclusive and trans-disciplinary. Cultural studies cannot be what it is without this perspective.

Therefore, cultural studies is in a particular proximity with other fields of scholarship, but it can never be equivalent with or fall under a major discipline such as Korean literary studies (*gungmunhak*), Western cultural studies, or even with tributaries within history such as history of everyday life and micro-history. Although it is closely related to studies of everyday customs (*pungsongnon* [*-jeok*] *yeongu*) and history of institutions, cultural studies cannot be identical to these studies.

Then, how do we define the identity of ‘cultural studies’? The common essence of this interdisciplinary range—encompassing histories of literature and culture, and criticism of modern culture—is analysis and criticism of ‘cultural politics’ (*munhwa jeongchi*). In other words, cultural studies observes and analyzes political aspects and structures of dominance reflected in cultural phenomena. Cultural studies has always been sensitive to ‘democracy from below’ and its culture found in history and reality, and sought ways to carry out intellectual action in resistance against commodification and marginalization of knowledge and cultural systems. These are the fundamental agendas of ‘cultural studies.’

The term ‘cultural studies’ also reflects the fact that it has originated from the field of Korean literary (history) and that it has been influenced by the ‘neo-leftist’ cultural criticism. But there is no need to limit our understanding with

this definition as long as we do not neglect critical thinking itself. Depending on the context, the terms ‘culture studies’ (*munhwa yeongu*) or ‘cultural theory’ (*munhwaron*) can also be used to refer to cultural studies.

### *Materials for Cultural Studies’ Inquiry*

On the surface, cultural studies appears to have originated and developed from an investigation of the subjects explored by studies of everyday customs. This is a misunderstanding because these ‘vernacular’ (*pungsokjeok*) subjects, which include courtesans (*gisaeng*), salons/cafes, dance, romance, sports, travel, and film, simply happened to stand out more ‘popularly’ among the subjects selected for exploring and rediscovering the essence of modernity. In fact, cultural studies began with the issues of socialism, reading, censorship, and print capitalism.

One of the issues we face concerns the expansion of new research subjects. The expansion itself cannot and should not be condemned. Considering the fact that existing studies on literature had attempted to demean literary history and to limit our view and subject by empowering mainstream literature and canonical texts, bringing a diverse range of interests into the field is something we should celebrate. We must not confine ourselves within a single discipline but strive to explore new terrains of inquiry and discover new research subjects when necessary. But under one condition—the expansion must be ‘political’ and self-reflective.

When we trace the discoveries of new research subjects within Korean literary studies (*gungmunhak*) up to today’s trendy, popular studies of sentiment (emotion) and history of concepts, it seems almost ‘apolitical,’ and the process of formation and transition of these subjects continued without coming to a full maturation. Why did studies on the literary field and mass media; institutional and colloquial histories; discourse and symbol; gender, body and sexuality; technology and science; or, more recently, history of knowledge, intellectual history, conceptual history, and emotional history<sup>7</sup> appear and become popular?

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7. I apologize for not being able to list all significant scholarship in the field but confine these few sources listed to recent or comprehensive studies. Studies on intellectual history include [in Korean]: Gu, Jangnyul, “Study on Acceptance of Modern Knowledge and Reorganization of Novel Recognition” (2009); and Bak, Sukja, *Era of Philistine-liberal Arts* (2012). On censorship during the colonial period, see Geomyeol Yeonguhoe (Korea Censorship Studies

Is there a material or ideological commonality that brings these diverse subjects together? Why are they important to the way we think and the reality we live in? We need to have a holistic answer for all these questions.

All these subjects each has its own significance but reflections on their transition and more inclusive discussions that bring them together remain insufficient. Underneath this insufficiency lies the institutional pressure that imposes ‘merger’ or the serious absence of a Korean humanities discipline—or the very absence of studies due to the prevalence of literarism (*munhakjuui*) and nationalism! But as long as we are aware of this, transitions and flows would have a certain value because the core of the humanities lies not within an ‘institute’ but in ‘freedom.’ This ‘freedom’ also means independence from neo-liberalism and legacies of the old system.

### *The Joy and Sorrow of Crossing Borders*

The issues discussed above are ‘literature’-centered ones. Nevertheless, cultural studies and other new research go beyond the scope and subject matter of the traditional ‘Korean literary studies’ (*gungmunhak*) and ‘Korean modern literary studies’ (*Hanguk hyeondae munhak*). This crossing of borders is both necessary and inevitable because it is linked to Korea’s ‘late-modernity’ (*hugi hyeondae*) and the current state of Korean humanities.

Some scholars feel reluctant or uneasy when facing the question of whether to endure such crossing of borders and overflow. The significant number of theses with the generic title of “*A* in *B* Literature (Novel)” seems to be a product of compromise. “*A*” can be anything but often ‘colloquial’ (*pungsokjeok*) and its significance is rarely understood. Perhaps this is because the theses focus on compromising rather than excavating the relationship or border between “*A*” and literature. At this, some feel an ‘existential’ threat.

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Group), *Colonial Censorship: Institution, Text, and Practice* (2011). On conceptual history, see Kim, Hyeonju, “The Trends and Results in the Study of Modern Conceptual Words” (2007); and Heo, Su, “The Present and Future of Korean Conceptual History” (2012). On studies of emotions (*gamseong*) or passions (*jeongnyeom*), see Gwon, Myeong-a, *Obscenity and Revolution: History of Public Indecency and Politics of Passions* (2013); Son, Yugyeong, *Structure of Emotion in Proletariat-literature* (2012); Han, Sunmi, “Political Unconsciousness of ‘Sorrow’” (2012) and others.

All such concerns and uneasiness are healthy and innocent. But if we are to really question the 'existence' in terms of identity of a scholar or the very practice of 'learning,' then we need to change the angle from which we approach and think about this question. In the very essence of writing and research or in life/death matters of a human being, there is no 'discipline' or 'thesis' or 'academic system.' Humanities can still be what it is, without questioning the fundamentals and enduring this challenge at all times. But we also need to be cautious of pitfalls—the customary rituals that are repeated under 'the name of scholarship' may have accompanied today's neo-liberal way of existence and the crisis of humanities/literature. The power of real subsumption is unlimited.

Moreover in reality, skepticism and uncertainties in many parts emerge due to the 'institution.' The existence (or *positivitat*) of an institution governs our minds. It is very difficult to have a free mind that is outside the confines of our institution. It is perhaps easier to escape the confines of 'time' and 'space' than to escape an institution. Imagine the future of 'Korean literary studies' (*gungmunhak*) or 'studies in the humanities/literature' from such a perspective. Or, more simply, think about the sterile educational environment in some of the private universities or universities outside Seoul or lives of the working class. When an 'institution' is well established, all the 'literary' and lofty worries would be dramatically reduced. In fact, half of these "existential" worries rise from the lack of rewards and anxiety about survival. We must see the irony in the fact that the power that creates 'institutions' does not come from the field of Korean literary studies itself but lies with the 'state' institutions such as BK or HK.

To sum up, although there remain many conventions, today's Korean literary studies show that an era has passed.<sup>8</sup> The new studies in modern literature produced in the last decade have contributed much to this development. The historical value of texts in Korean literary history has been reevaluated and Korean literary studies (*gungmunhak*) has been redefined as a meaningful faculty in the humanities in Korea.

The 'main opponent' of cultural studies is the neo-liberalistic reality itself and suppressive ideological 'contents' that are disguised behind economism, biologism or other academic masks. In other words, 'cultural studies' aims to be a name for the humanities or a type of criticism that requires critical

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8. For trends of studies on Korea's colonial period, see Ha, Jaeyeon (2013).

probing into the fundamentals. Certain limitations in thinking and passivity are expected because ‘cultural studies’ has originated from ‘Korean literary studies’ (*gungmunhak*) and thus has established its basis within the dogma of ‘Korean literary studies.’ These limitations and passivity are a subject of self-criticism. In addition, let me briefly outline the criticisms that have emerged against cultural studies. Although some of the criticisms have become outdated with the changes in the Korean literary scholarship and political conditions, I will be able to explain more clearly the perspectives and methodologies of cultural studies by revisiting some of them.

## Criticisms Concerning Cultural Studies

### *Textualism and Others*

There was an argument that cultural studies is subordinating Korea’s sublime literature under studies of history and sociology and reducing literature to mere documentation. This was one of the most commonly repeated criticisms.

Literary (and literary historical) texts are a documentation of history, a repository of humanistic thoughts, and subject of aesthetics. When we expand our horizon, we can see that only the new studies still treat and preserve literary texts as a subject of humanistic investigation. No one really talks about forgotten literary texts from a bygone era nor can their value be well recognized. The context of a textual aesthetic or even the aesthetic itself is no one’s subject of interest. Instead of Romanticist laudation of beauty or ritualized ‘hailing of literature,’ we must focus on questioning domination with the power of the humanities and beauty. We thus must ‘instrumentalize’ literary texts more radically and fundamentally. Only through this paradox can the power and thoughts of the humanities become more autonomous and can literature come into contact with the beauty (*mi*) and truthfulness (*jin*) again.<sup>9</sup>

It is rare that a new research trend itself meets blatant opposition. There has been an attempt in the scholarship to ‘return to the text,’ however, efforts

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9. Of course, philological approach and bibliographical studies will continue to be significant in Korean literary studies because they are essential parts of the study of humanities.

made have been inadequate. What is most interesting is the fact that these 'textualists' do not seriously question the essence of text itself. They do not engage the question of what separates *text* from *non-text* or what makes a *text* a *text*. They would not understand how many literary texts were revived by recent studies with skepticism about 'literature' (*munhak*) itself. We must simply look at what types of scholarship led the renewal of textual analysis and interpretation in Korean modern literary history: the studies of censorship and media, popular literature and popular culture studies, film literature and film history, and paradigms of reproducibility and discourse. These studies opened up a new horizon of textual analysis and new dimensions of aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> This proves that textual analysis cannot be independent of contextual analysis and that literature and its texts can be revived only through profound exploration of the ontology of a text and the context of a text's production and reception.

A significant part of studies of literature (*munhakhak*) involves footnoting. Interestingly enough, scholars of literature themselves sometimes confuse literature (*munhak*) and the study of literature (*munhakhak*). Certain literary texts have artistic merits. They achieve something other written text cannot achieve. In other words, there are certain things that only literature can do. However, this is not enough to justify the current literarism (*munhakjuui*). All literary scholars who venerate literary arts must revisit the relationship between the study of literature and a literary text's 'merits as art.'

Can literary studies return to 'text' or the good old days of 'Korean literary studies' (*gungmunhak*)? I repeat, it can never return to its good old home. The beautiful homeland was annihilated by antiquated, provincial landlords and the power of neo-liberalism. If there still is 'literature' there, it exists only under a different 'stance.' The 'restoration of Korean literary studies and return to text' would happen only if the entire institution and our current research support systems got dismantled, and today's 'crisis of the humanities' were replaced by something dramatically different, and all seditious studies and writings vanished from the universities and realms of the humanities, and scholarship became completely detached from its reality. But in reality, we probably will be first confronted with the closing down of 'Korean language and literary studies'

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10. See for example: Yi, Hyeryeong, "Can the Colonizer be Spoken?" (2010); or to thematic issue articles in *Minjok Munhaksa Yeongu* 51, published in May, 2013.

departments in university-corporations.

### *About 'Theories' of Cultural Studies*

There has been a criticism that cultural studies lacks a coherent theoretical/methodological identity. I would regard this as a complete misunderstanding and a reflection of ignorance. Such criticism is connected to many external reasons including 'political' issues and the (psychological) distances among disciplines.

I want to argue that the opposite is true. Cultural studies seeks a very profound and fundamental theory and methodology. For instance, is there a theory that can be used across *Reading a Book in Modernity* (Geundae ui chaek ikgi), *Play Football if You're a Real Joseon Man* (Joseon ui sanai geodeun putbol eul chara), *An Era of Popular Intellect* (Daejung jiseong ui sidae), and *Asking 1960* (1960 nyeon eul mutda)? What theoretical and methodological sense of identity can be derived from studies of censorship or literary field? How come studies of emotion and studies of censorship cannot share the same theoretical framework? Can we really call borrowing a few passages from a prominent thinker's or philosopher's book and juxtaposing them with some parts of a text an engagement with theory or methodology?

Let us think about what the critics mean by 'theory' from a different angle. Jumping to a conclusion, it seems the critics call a strong core of methodologies/world-views or a solid interpretational commonality that can be applied across studies in a discipline a 'theory.' The anxieties or complaints that there is no theory seem to result from its very absence.

Can there be a 'coherent' methodology in literary studies in its original meaning? The criticism suggests that there was a strong theoretical or methodological core in the study of literature. Was this really the case? *Yes* and *no*. What 'existed' as a theoretical core was not a methodology of literary studies, but it was a shared custom in the scholarship based on a certain ideology adopted by an interpretative community. In the past, there were three predominant ideological streams within Korean literature: formalism and rightist purism; the nationalist (or statist) literary perspective; and the Marxist literary perspective. Particularly the last movement was accompanied by a strong historicist ideology and literary science (Realism). As a consequence, for some scholars the dismantlement of the Marxist position and the subject 'modern



literature’ (*geundae munhak*) seems to be equivalent to the dismantlement of theory.<sup>11</sup> To elaborate, cultural studies seriously attempts to connect (with), inherit, and overcome the Marxist position. Cultural studies adopts the stance of post-modernism or post-modernity which attempts to dismantle the ‘authority of modernity.’ Moreover, it even doubts post-modernism. Thus it is post-post-modernist. Can there be any stance more ‘theoretical’ than this?

### *Some Thoughts on Historicist Methodology*

Here, let us discuss the concerns or problems regarding the new research raised from outside of the field of literary studies. Often, academism of writings and theses by scholars from literary studies are subject to skepticism by scholars from other fields. Is this problem emerging from the form we take in writing the truth or from our habits?

Here, I will use a monograph about Joseon peasants’ colonial experiences (Matsumoto 2011) and a thesis on land reforms by the Syngman Rhee government (S. Jo 2011) as examples we can use to think about academism internalized in this type of writing and the structure of truth that forms a ‘denotation.’ The former is written by a historian who takes the stance of colonial modernity (*singminji geundaeseongnon*) and the second thesis is by an economic historian who takes a colonial modernization (*singminji geundaehwaron*) stance. (Both works are written by authoritative scholars and are considered to be significant research in their respective fields.)

Both authors begin their investigations with a case analysis in order to digest the very ‘big questions’ such as coloniality and political characteristics of the land reforms. The former compares how industrial guilds in Japan managed credit (loan) differently from their counterparts in Joseon while the latter examines the processes of the land reform and political changes it brought per ‘*myeon/ri*’-level village. This type of thesis is quite common in the field of historical studies, in a way as an established methodology. Of course, the authors chose to look at these cases because they believed that the cases will

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11. This is similar to the argument of “senior scholars” such as Terry Eagleton and Gōjin Karatani. See Bak Heonho, “The Politicity and Historicity in Culture Studies: Current State and Reflection of Studies on Korean Modern Literatures” [in Korean] (2010).

reveal the ‘essence’ of coloniality (for the former) and land reform (for the latter). Is that true? Are they indeed employing a valid research methodology? In other words, can Rush-n-Cash’s business management and interest rates, or Anam-dong community center’s administrative process reveal the coherent truth about today’s capitalism in Korea or the essence of ‘domination-subordination’? Maybe and maybe not.

What we should pay attention to is the reasons these research studies are deemed to meet the methodological requirements in the disciplines of historical studies and economic history—in other words, the context of the complex, ‘cultural,’ and thus historical factors that define academism. For example, peer review became an institutionalized practice in Korea only in the last decade. This is a practice imported from Anglo-American academia. But who are these ‘peers’ and who decides who they are?

Trust in scholarly-ness is related to the paradigm of a higher dimension of knowledge or academic customs beyond a form of ‘thesis.’ Academic conventions incorporate our customs, psychology, and also common knowledge outside the academic world. This is true even in the (Natural) Sciences. The formation of ‘academic’ paradigms is structural. Once a scholarship goes beyond its particular disciplinary boundary, the study can no longer be deemed complete in all its logical conditions with objective causality. Scholars then (have to) rely on intuition or deduction, and other non-academic forms of inquiry. It becomes more dangerous when scholars miss the fact that causality or tangible evidence can also be a product of imagination or organizing thoughts.

If the aforementioned historical methodologies the authors employed are acceptable and valid, is this not because they confirm a certain metaphysical understanding that they have looked into a condition or a subject thought to be connected to a certain essence of economics and politics or the structure of ‘domination-subordination’? We can ask this question because the disciplines of Korean history and economic history indeed have fulfilled such a role (or so we believe). Both authors dealt with the changes of the state-led economic institutions in their studies, probably based on assumptions at the back of their minds that the ‘fundamentals’ of ‘politics’ are located within or emerge from such state-economic policies and organs, or that dealing with such aspects fulfills a quality of being ‘academic.’ This is interesting. If we take one further step, we can ask the question of where the essence of ‘domination-subordination’ should be discovered or whether ‘economy’ and ‘politics’ themselves are conventional

and structural 'confines of understanding.'

For this reason, so-called 'well-conducted' historical research uses officially published statistics or government-produced data. Or, we share such opinion. But how trustworthy is data produced by the government? Take the statistical data by the Government-General of Korea or Syngman Rhee administration for instance—are they not mere material for propaganda to be read and understood from the position of a shared bias? Still, we assume that such 'hard data' reflects truth while newspaper/magazine articles or poems/prose cannot be 'objective.' Perhaps as a matter of course, the so-called 'hard data' requires from us a different set of comprehension skills or a certain standpoint/insight on discourse/symbols. To give another example, in the field of Korean modern history there have been many significant scholarships that uncover the 'secrets' of the Korean War and other events in Korea's modern history based on the recently declassified documents from the U.S. Department of State and other such organizations of empires. What is the origin of such historical research methodology? And, what are the epistemological effects of these historical research works?

'Culture-politics' explored by cultural history is still treated with lack of understanding or attempts to peripheralize it. The idea that something political is manifested and realized through everyday life or culture is only superficially understood. Some still maintain the argument that anything having to do with 'culture' is apolitical. An analogy can be drawn between the current reception of gender studies theses which claim 'politics' for sexual and 'private' realms is received superficially and purely from the gender perspective, or the fact that a 'serious and legitimate' humanities and social sciences' thesis rarely has references to feminist theses.

### *The Truth and Institution in the Study of Literature* (Munhakhak)

Then, on what customs and objective (subjective) and tentative (traditional) 'negotiations' has the study of Korean modern literature been relying? These customs and negotiations are quite different from the praxis (*pilbeop*) of writing theses on classical literature. For instance, the 'Korean literary studies' major (*gugeo gungmunhakgwa*) began to develop immediately after the Liberation; and the 'modern literature' (*hyeondae munhak*) major developed its autonomy after the 1970s; while the author theory (*jakgaron*), in the Western understanding

of the term, began to form in the 1950s. Author theory and textual theory (*jakpumnon*) are the two major methodologies used in the traditional studies of modern literature, but author theory made a stronger case for a modern-style institution for studies of literature (E. Jo 2009; Kim Yeri 2013). The ways in which these theories (or a combination of the two) are written have hardly changed. I mean, this is the case on the pages of literary journals. But why do people find the previous style of author or textual theories *boring*? It seems the true value of author theory has declined for many reasons and problems. Also, why do some schools accept 'reviews' as research results whereas others don't? Is this only an institutional problem? What exactly is the 'system/structure of truth' in the study of Korean modern literature? How has its negotiation evolved and how will it further develop in the future? The answers will be complicated.

'Traditional' studies of literature and history have evolved by developing suitable methodology for the subject and by appropriating and extracting 'theories' from other disciplines in the humanities or social sciences. As a consequence of the building up of multi-purpose and diverse scholarly epistemologies and writing styles, a certain epistemological and interpretative forum has been created. First, it is evident that this main axis for negotiation/customs has collapsed in front of our eyes and that what we see now is a time of transition. Should we love this chaos? I rather would. We cannot go back to the past. This is not what ought to be but what it objectively is. Criticism and study of literature must change.

### *Methodologies in Cultural History*

The best way to escape this chaos and to overcome misunderstandings is to be more politicized in academic writing. But there are many ways and methods to achieve this. We must develop a method in keeping with the full liberation of subject matter and maintain an open and reflective attitude towards materials, so a diversity of necessary and usable methodologies from the past should be considered. Such principles are still necessary. To emphasize, a methodological effort is a mimesis (in a broader sense) of reality and truth which I understand as an effort that always stays open and in transformation. In terms of methodology, what is not accepted in other fields of the humanities is also not accepted in literary studies or cultural studies (*munhwa yeongu*). There are no such things as an aseptic laboratory, or premises based on deductive 'conditions' in the study of

literature, as in quantitative research or economics that methodologically takes after the natural sciences. This is the case across historical studies and other fields in the humanities. Then on the next level, there are the questions of writing and the customs of small communities. Of course, we need to carefully and sufficiently consider methodologies and perspectives of other related disciplines. Fortunately, Korean literary (*munhak*) studies and cultural studies are still very open-minded.

In any case, a study needs a theory and a standpoint, whether in 'historical studies of culture' or 'cultural history.' At the vanishing point of political histories (history of movement, history of literature) bloom histories of gender, everyday life, customs, institution, and emotion. 'Culture' can be a name for what must embrace all the flowering of these new histories. If 'cultural history' itself has to be the 'historical whole' as Johan Huizinga argues, 'cultural politics' should be a materialization that reflects this. Cultural politics suggests the emergence of subjectivation within a cultural class struggle and its national and transnational conditions. In the case of the colonial period, 'cultural politics' was decided by colonial modernity and construction of a modern subject. At this point, I want to ask again whether this 'colonial modernity' has functioned as a proactive and explicit theory in Korea's cultural studies. I do not mean to suggest the eclectic 'third category' of the colonial exploitation theory and the colonial modernization theory, or the implicit anti-identification discourses. Now that the idea of 'gray-zone' or the argument that "all modernity is colonial modernity" have become clichés, does not the methodology of associating 'culture' and 'colonial modernity' seem too loose? Such generic questions have to be revisited.<sup>12</sup> Of course, such questions have already been addressed in the processes of discussing the modern emerging from the rule of 'colonial state' or the 'masses' (*daejung*) and of describing cultural politics of the late Japanese colonial period. However, the effort that has been made to think about 'culture' through the images of 'colonial cultural constructs' and colonial capitalism has been insignificant. Consequently, development towards the introduction of a macro-theory in-between 'structure and subject' and 'phenomenon and its decisive-factor' has been slow. Conscious efforts and collaborations are required

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12. For an example of a study that sees coloniality as a constructive externality, see Jo, Hyeonggeun, "Colonial Differences and Variations as an Internal Outside of Modernity" [in Korean] (2007).

to remedy this problem.

Let me take some of my own works—written from the stance of cultural studies or cultural history as a framework—as an example to investigate this problem of methodology. First, is it necessary to have one, centralized ‘methodology’ in order to interpret *Reading a Book in Modernity* (Geundae ui chaek ikgi), *Play Football if You’re a Real Joseon Man* (Joseon ui sanai geodeun putbol eul chara), *An Era of Popular Intellect* (Daejung jiseong ui sidae), and *Asking 1960* (1960 nyeon eul mutda)? Can a coherent methodology be possibly employed in such diversely different subjects? Is micro-history or intellectual history a methodology or a stance? Each book contains an overarching stance (let us call this a ‘theory’) and a strong consciousness of methodology that each book employs in order to deal with its subject of investigation. *Reading a Book* borrows the viewpoint of Pierre Bourdieu and other thoughts from cultural studies as well as a method to analyze readership. *Play Football*, on the other hand, is written from a stance criticizing nationalism and based on a storytelling narrative. At the same time, both books explore cultural politics of the modern era from the perspectives of ‘colonial modernity’ and the ‘Simultaneity of Non-simultaneous.’

*An Era of Popular Intellect* claims ‘intellectual history from below’ and attempts to present an historical understanding by examining cultural history from a unique approach of my own. Such understanding, namely a ‘cultural history of intellectual gap’ (*jijeok gyeokcha ui munhwasa*) is reflected in the following argument:

Perhaps due to the combination of Confucian tradition and the way modernization was implemented, there is educational zeal (and through it, the desire for social mobilization) in today’s Korean society. Education redistributes (in)equality of knowing. In other words, although it seems that the society is moving towards educational equality, a certain system of intellectual gap is being reproduced. The ruling class passionately and covertly creates a system of ‘higher’ (*godeung*) education such as ‘prestigious’ (*myeongmun*) universities or ‘higher’ public exams, that reproduces the ruling class and dominance itself. The access to this system is very limited. Why don’t they let anyone enter college or graduate school for the education they want? Why do they charge such high tuitions or make the public exams so difficult? Such systems create a gap in intellectual knowledge that is no less serious than the literacy gap and place knowledge

at the core of dominance and inequality. (Cheon [2008] 2010)<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, because there has been no change in the basic mechanism of the gap and inequality itself but only in its content and the way it is produced, we may call this a 'cultural history of intellectual gap.' This understanding, I believe, is useful to capture the relationship between the masses and intellectuals, and the cultural/political conflicts between the classes. Thus, we can sketch a capitalist class-society reproduced by academic-eltism as is the case in Korean society. Also, we need to reconsider the status of literature in a modern bourgeois society because literature is closely related to the problem of inequities in literacy and writing through the course of education.

On the other hand, *Asking 1960* is a more eclectic book. It explores various scholarships on the Cold War period and 're-modernization,' and reveals the 'nowness' of the Park Chung Hee regime. Furthermore, similarly to other studies, it defines the status of literature within the framework of intellectual history. Although I cannot fully explore the role of 'modernity' in studies through cultural theory in this paper, I will briefly describe the emerging perspectives of the cultural studies on the post-Liberation era.

Recently, there has been a lot of activity in the re-examination of and research on the literary history and cultural history of Korea since 1945. More and more elaborate, high-standard research works that cover the periods up to the 1970s are being accumulated. But, to what end? Do they hold equal significance as the abovementioned 'explanations of origins' or the studies on colonial modernity? This trend can be understood as an extension of new studies on the colonial period, but at the same time, researchers are facing a task and subject that are drastically different from those of previous studies.

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13. Studies in the related fields [in Korean] include: Ju, Eunu, "Cinematic Representation of Colonial City and its Modernity" (2011); Yu, Seonyeong, "Colonial Modernity in Social Psychology: Stranger's Recipe for Modernization in Colonial Korea" (2012); Jeong, Junyeong, "The 'Primal Scene' of Colonial Education Policy in Japanese Empire" (2011); Kim, Yeongseon, "Patriarchal Construction and Aspects of Korean Colonial Modernity Seen through Discourses on Marriage and Family" (2010).

## (1) Aspects in reconstruction of cultural modernity

Schematically speaking, Korean ‘cultural modernity’ (*munhwajeok hyeondaeseong*) was constructed in two stages: first, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century and second, during the colonial period from the 1920s to 1930s. Cultural modernity was then reconstructed through a decolonization and war. In the case of South Korea, reconstruction of modernity can be understood in line with the Americanization and internalization of the Cold War mentality in culture and politics from the 1950s to 1960s; the explosive (re)formation of media culture and the masses; and the (re)construction process of the modern cultural system. As we can see, the cultural modernity in Korea settled in the 1960s and preserved its influence until the 1990s. Today, this ‘cultural modernity’ appears to have come to an end by the power of ‘post-modernity’ (*hugi hyeonda*). ‘Korean culture’ and ideas within/ of literature have changed dramatically due to the shift to a new form of media culture represented by the Internet, and the new phase of capitalism described in terms of globalization. Nevertheless, ‘modernity’ (*hyeondaeseong*) is still finding its way through. As a ‘middle-ground’ in this magnetic field, the period of the 1960 to 1980s leaves a strong mark.

## (2) Restructuring of literature and scholarship

Recently, there is a newly-emerging interest in intellectual history and the history of knowledge. The very establishment of the modern humanities and cognitions including literature, history, and philosophy became subject to this newly-emerging interest through issues concerning the construction of the first modern academic institutions, the renewal of academic language (such as in translation or concepts), and media and forms of expression. This probably has to do with calls for merging disciplines and that the self-examination of the academic institution itself has become a ‘practical’ issue. As a result, the reconstruction of the academic institution since the 1950s became a significant subject of interest. The relationship between a private individual or nation and scholarship has changed. Intellectual and academic history made another start under the influence of a new ‘globality.’ Thanks to the revolution at the outset of the 1960s, the novelty of the content and ideology of this new beginning has been preserved.



### **(3) The global Cold War and late colonial domination**

North Korea and South Korea are the biovular twin republics literally born under the post-World War II global order. It cannot be overemphasized how the two republics' governmentality and each republic's relationship with its own masses was novel to the Korean peninsula as well as being subjects of continuous scholarly investigation. Recently new light shed upon the Park Chung Hee regime and its historicity has been productive. Obviously, this is because the eighteenth Presidential Election fell on the year of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yushin Regime, and the fact that the person who represents the attempt to inherit some of the revitalizing reforms from the Yushin period eventually became the new president of Korea.

### **Conclusion: A New Formation of Identity and Interdisciplinary Studies**

Interdisciplinary studies does not simply refer to combining scholarships from field-A and field-B or borrowing subject matters and methodologies from field-C. The materialization of 'interdisciplinary studies' essentially has to do with how we write and express the humanities. In other words, qualities of a study and a scholarship are determined and expressed in the 'last instance' by the way they are written and expressed. Methods of writing and expression are determined and defined by a sense of identity and research culture held by those who work in the field of humanities today.

Focusing on literature, we can trace the formation of writing and autonomy from two perspectives and the relationship between the two: first, from the perspective of literary criticism; and second, from the perspective of scholarship-oriented writing.

As previously mentioned, today's Korean culture and institution of literary studies were established in the 1960s and 1970s, and harshly threatened in the 1980s, and then restructured after the 1990s. Even in the age of neo-liberalism as well as the 'end of modern literature,' they adapted well enough to maintain their power and authority. The process of this 'adaptation' is problematic. Is it healthy to have the hegemonic structure within this institution and current literary capitalism in Korea? The entry into the field already established by

existing cultural power and capital is more difficult than it seems, while all the goods possessed by publishing capitals (including history, fame, money, best-sellers, steady-sellers, marketing ability, heads of companies, stable jobs, intellectuals, senior writers, rookies, reading youth, critics, and authors) are monopolized. On the other hand, the ones on the other side grow so small and insignificant that we can hardly sense their existence. Even worse, such 'weak others' are losing their strength to take part in the 'bigger' market in such a dismal condition. It is becoming impossible to imagine something 'beyond' because this condition prevents something new from emerging. Here, what end would 'culture' and 'politics' serve?

We do not yet know what exactly the new mediology of literature that (should) exist beyond the old system looks like. Nevertheless, what a new 'literary institution' (*munhak cheje*) should do is more than uncovering 'good authors,' establishing examples for a new literature, and communicating with readers. It should also commit in dis/re-assembling or restructuring literature and a new mediology. This is closely linked to the engagement of the humanities/literature (*[in]munhak*) with the new civilization and realities of life. Even making decisions about this task is difficult: whether it should take place within the existing terrain of literature and monopolistic capital system or rather be approached from outside.

Considering the fact that 'practical criticism' (*hyeonjang bipyeong*) as a 'literature' or 'literary intellectuality' has been and will continue to be an important medium for communication with the real world, the separation and mutual dis-interaction between the research-writing system and criticism we see today is a serious limitation and grave mistake. This separation had a bilateral cause, but the new studies are also partially responsible for the gap that grew over the past decade.

To this end, we must open the new channel that connects literary/humanities studies and 'real-world (literature).' Sadly, however, the acute diagnosis that today's literary criticism has become 'zombified' sounds valid (Cheon 2003, 56). So, how can we change the quality of the medium and existence of the act of 'criticizing'?

Much discussion is needed to overcome the polarization of 'thesis-writing' and 'zombie-criticism,' but here, I want to at least emphasize this preoccupation of a majority of scholars to writing 'academic journal articles' is an extremely anti-intellectual and anti-literary attitude. Does not the monotonic, uniform

publication guideline for the ‘indexed journals’ manifest the very limit imposed on the entire fields of humanities as well as literary studies? The scholarship of humanities should penetrate not only the traditional forum of knowledge (writing and lecture) and outlets of communication other than ‘thesis’ but also into new media (blog and SNS). The interaction between the new media and literature should continuously be sought out and redefined. At the same time, we need a collective measure against this ridiculous condition that encourages (or forces) a majority of scholars to be caught up with publishing their works on a KCI or A&HCI thesis. We have to fight against the re-orientation of our ideas to the present boundary separating thesis and criticism, the publication guideline for scholarly journals, and English-driven policy; or need to adapt a strategy of ‘over-identification.’

Note that thesis-writing for publication in an academic journal is a significant part that creates and safeguards interdisciplinary barriers. Also, for scholars of the humanities who have to live with result-oriented competition under the neo-liberal academic institution, changing their sense of identity is crucial for the prospect of interdisciplinary studies.

Translated by  
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## Abstract

This paper examines the boundary and status of as well as issues surrounding ‘cultural studies’ (*munhwaronjeok yeongu*) as an interdisciplinary study and renewal of traditional literary studies. Basically, cultural studies is essentially inclusive and trans-disciplinary. Although cultural studies is in a particular proximity with other fields of research, it neither shares values with nor falls under major disciplines such as Korean literary studies (*gungmunhak*), Anglo-American cultural studies, or their tributaries including history of everyday life and micro-history. It observes and critically analyzes political aspects and structures of dominance reflected in cultural phenomena. Cultural studies has always been sensitive to ‘democracy from below’ and its culture, and sought ways to make intellectual action against commodification and marginalization of knowledge and cultural system. Until recently, this task has been fulfilled by studies of ‘cultural (*munhwaronjeok*) literary history,’ cultural history, or popular culture. This paper also outlines the methodology and perspective of cultural studies by discussing the issues and problems regarding textualism and other theories. It also argues that the neo-liberalist ‘Regime’ has profound influence on interdisciplinary studies in terms of how Korean literary scholars and critics are employed or supported; the transformation in the writing process and the system of struggle for recognition; as well as governing our bodies and micro-relationships.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, literary history, Korean language and literary studies, neo-liberalist university institution