

# **ASPECTS OF KOREAN LITERATURE ACCORDING TO THE STAGE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH: FOCUSED ON THE VIEWS OF AMERICA**

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Abstract: The main topic of this paper is how the economic growth has changed the aspect of Korean novel in the viewpoints of the theory of W. W. Rostow. But the additional topic is Korean's viewpoint on American which had been reflected in Korean novels. Korea has made a long relationship to the United States since 1882. Korea have kept friendly and cooperative relationship to American. But sometimes the relationship was changed rapidly to the opponent or critical attitudes. It should be the universal phenomenon that the people of weak nations begin to have strong nationalistic feelings with the pace of economic growth and gather to show a strong enmity against the strong nation especially against the United States. According to this universal patterns, Korean admired American at first. But after rising to the stage of 'take-off', they began to turn to the opponent and critical attitudes. Finally at the age of high mass consumption, they will not compare to America any more because they belong to the similar economic situation. The economy of Japan, Korea and China rose up to higher level at the rapid speed. But the strong nationalistic feelings remained incessantly among their nations. The "European Dream" is one of the attitudes in which individuals find security not through individual accumulation of wealth, but through connectivity and respect for other nations. Our neighbouring countries and Korea must learn the attitudes of European Dream and try to establish this system in East Asia.

**Keywords:** stage of economic growth, Rostow, take-off, nationalism, age of high mass consumption, European dream

### 경제발전 단계에 따른 한국문학의 양상들: 미국에 대한 관점을 중심으로

**개략:** 본고는 경제발전 단계에 대한 로스토우의 관점을 통해 경제발전이 어떻게 한국소설의 변화와 연결되는지 고찰하고자 한다. 본고는 논의의 집중을 위하여 미국에 대한 한국인의 태도 변화를 중심으로 다루었다. 한국은 1982년 한미수교 이후 130여년간 미국과 직접, 간접적인 관계를 맺어왔다. 이러한 긴 역사 속에서 한국은 미국에 대해 대부분 우호적, 협조적인 자세를 보이지만, 어떤 역사적 상황에서는 대립적, 비판적 태도를 보이기도 했다. 특히 민족주의적 감정이 고조되는 시점에서는 미국에 대해 비판적인 관점을 유지하는데, 이러한 태도는 사실 한국에만 국한된 것이 아니라 경제발전 단계에서 겪는 보편적인 경험이라고 볼 수도 있다. 초기의 한국은 미국에 대해 선망의 시선을 보이지만, 민족주의가 고조되는 ‘도약’의 단계에서는 미국에 대해 경쟁적, 비판적 관점을 보이기도 하며, 대량소비사회로 진입하는 1990년 이후에는 미국에 대한 특정한 시각보다는 자본주의 일반에 대한 비판으로 변화되는 양상을 확인할 수 있다. 일본, 한국, 중국은 이웃나라이면서 급속하게 민족주의 단계에서 대량소비사회로 넘어가는 길목에 놓여 있는 나라들이다. 본고에서는 이들이 편협한 민족주의 감정에서 벗어나는 길이 평화와 공존을 제시하고자 하는 유러피언 드림을 아시아에서 실천하는 길이라는 관점을 제시했다.

**키워드:** 경제발전 단계, 로스토우, 도약, 민족주의, 대량소비사회, 유러피언 드림

### WYBRANE ASPEKTY LITERATURY KOREAŃSKIEJ W ŚWIETLE ETAPÓW WZROSTU GOSPODARCZEGO: NA PRZYKŁADZIE AMERYKI

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie wpływu wzrostu gospodarczego na ewolucję powieści koreańskiej w świetle teorii W. W. Rostowa. Koncentruje się na wizerunku Ameryki ukazanej oczami Koreańczyków. Początki stosunków Korei Południowej z USA datowane są na 1882 rok. W większości przypadków stosunki te były przyjacielskie, jednakże odnotowywano także podejścia krytyczne i mniej przychylnie. Jest to typowe dla poszczególnych stadiów rozwoju gospodarczego. Obywatele państw słabszych gospodarczo często przejawiają silne postawy nacjonalistyczne w stosunku do krajów silniejszych, takich jak USA. Podobnie było z Koreą. Początkowo Koreańczycy podziwiali USA, ale z czasem zaczęli widzieć wady amerykańskiego

modelu, co przełożyło się na coraz mniejsze i rzadsze porównywanie się do społeczeństwa amerykańskiego w obecnych czasach masowej komunikacji i społeczeństwa konsumpcyjnego. Jest to spowodowane upodobnieniem się sytuacji ekonomicznej w obu krajach. Mimo, że gospodarki Japonii, Korei i Chin szybko się rozwinęły, postawy krytyczne nie zanikły. Rozwiązaniem jest tzw. europejski sen, czyli postawa, w której jednostki znajdują poczucie bezpieczeństwa nie w gromadzeniu dóbr materialnych, lecz w budowaniu poczucia więzi i szacunku dla innych narodów. Autor postuluje, by w Azji nauczać podejścia tzw. europejskiego snu w stosunku do sąsiadujących państw.

**Słowa kluczowe:** etapy rozwoju ekonomicznego, Rostow, start, nacjonalizm, era zaawansowanej konsumpcji masowej, *europejski sen*

## 1. Preface

In 1960 W. W. Rostow published <The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto>, which proposed the Rostovian take-off model of economic growth, one of the major historical models of economic growth, which argues that economic modernization occurs in five basic stages of varying length: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, and age of high mass consumption. (Rostow 1960; 4-16)

It became one of the most important concepts in the theory of modernization and social evolutionism in Korea. The elite groups who led the economic development in South Korea served him as if he were a kind of Messiah. In addition, they inserted his theory into textbooks for children. He didn't mention the Korean economy directly, but according to his model, the Korean economic stages are thought to be divided as shown in the table below.

|                            |           |   |
|----------------------------|-----------|---|
| traditional society        | -1894     | Chosun Dynasty, Gabo Reformation, Donghak Peasant Revolution (1894).                    |
| preconditions for take-off | 1894-1960 | Colony under the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), Independent but divided nation (1948- |

|                                      |               |  |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--|
|                                      |               | present),<br>Korean War (1950-1953)  |
| take-off                             | 1961-<br>1988 | economic development program;<br>1 <sup>st</sup> (1961-1965), 2 <sup>nd</sup> (1966-1970),<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> (1971-1975). |
| drive to ma-<br>turity               | 1988-<br>1996 | Labor Movement (1986-1987),<br>Seoul Olympic Games (1988)  |
| age of high<br>mass con-<br>sumption | 1996-         | the members of OECD (Organization for<br>Economic Cooperation and Development)   |

There could be some different opinions about this classification of the periods. Some people can argue that Korea never have reached at the age of high mass consumption. It is my own private opinion which is suggested without help of precise economic data and theory. But most people agree that Korea's economy has advanced very rapidly among the developing countries.

It's not strange to emphasize the fact that Korea is not a fixed entity. It has changed continuously according to the change of social circumstances and mutual communication with other countries. Sometimes Koreans has been regarded as more inferior to others because they could not represent themselves (of course, they were too poor and powerless). They had to be represented by others. These insights can be found at the excellent viewpoint of the famous scholar from Palestine. It is Edward Said who said about the racial, religious, cultural and national identities: "Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other." (Edward W. Said 1979; 5). In his insights, the identity of Korea would be given in and for the Western world.

The main topic of this paper is 'Changing Aspects of Korean Literature according to the Stage of Economic Growth'. But the additional topic is Korean's viewpoint on American which had been reflected in Korean novels. It contains on the issues of how we view each other: Korea and the United States. It would be related to the view of Korean writers themselves.

## 2. Korean Novels in Rostovian Stages

One hundred and thirty years have passed since Koreans met Americans. During these times, Koreans experienced many tragic accidents but finally overcame them. According to the Rostovian take-off model (also called “Rostow’s Stages of Growth”), Korea has passed through the stage of economic growth similar to other countries. Rostow's model can be applied to the Korean history and Korean's changing viewpoints on American (Mansu Kim 2007: 204-211).

### 2.1. At the stages of preconditions for take-off

Chosun Dynasty (traditional Korean government) chose the diplomatic policy which meant a totally secluded, isolated, and closed country in the midst of 19th century. But It met some serious accidents and had to be forced to open its' territory. In 1882, the United States became the first nation which made modern treaty to Korean government. After that treaty, Korean government had to made many ‘unequal treaty’ to another strong countries. Russia, Japan, China, the United States and many European countries had fought each other to get the profits from Korea. At that time, China was too weak and United States was too far from Korea. The best policy which could be taken by Korean government is to seek a kind of power balance and to maintain the independent nation. Most Koreans believed that the United States could be the best friend or helper.

If you go straight eastwards from East Sea in Korea, you can reach to the place where the United States located. The country had originally belonged to the United Kingdom a hundred years ago. Washington who did not want accept the European’s domination and suppression has built an independent nation. Afterwards the descendant have kept the former king’s instructions and managed the nation with good manners. They did not cov-

et other nation's lands and peoples. Also they did not want to be engaged in other nation's political matters. (...) The nation was laid between Eastern and Western world. Owing to their strength, they always could help weaker nations and keep the justice which prevent the strong western world from dominating the weaker peoples. (tr. by Jo Il-mun, 2001; 26-27)<sup>1</sup>

This text was written by a Chinese officer of Qing dynasty in 1880. His view is not correct (For example, he describe American president as a King). Besides, it contains the interest of Qing dynasty that meant some fatal threats from Japan and Russia. At that time, Qing dynasty wanted America to be a helper or coordinator between Japan and Russia. But his view of America had a strong influence in Korean society. In this text, America has been regarded as a model of strong, rich, honest and democratic nation. He wanted America would help Korea and Qing dynasty without any imperialist's covets.

Korean novels at that period reflect the positive images of America according to his view. <Bloody Tears (혈의누)> (1907) written by Lee In-Jik (이인직) is known to be the first New Novel in Korea. Lee described America as the land of opportunity. <Heartlessness (무정)> (1918), written by Lee Gwang-su (이광수) is similar to this novel. Two works in this period took America as the land of paradise. The term of honey moon between Korea and America was long because there couldn't be any direct relations during the period of Japanese Occupation.

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<sup>1</sup> 조선의 동해로부터 곧장 가면 아메리카가 있으니, 곧 함중국이 도읍한 곳이다. 그 나라는 원래 영국에 속해 있었는데, 백 년 전에 워싱턴이란 자가 유럽 사람의 학정을 받기를 원치 않고 발분자립하여 한 나라를 독립시켰다. 이 뒤로부터 선왕의 유훈을 지켜 예의로써 나라를 세우고, 남의 토지를 탐내지 않고, 남의 인민을 탐내지 않고, 곧이 남의 정사를 간여하지 않았다. (...) 그 나라의 강성함은 유럽의 여러 대지와 더불어 동서양 사이에 끼어 있기 때문에 항상 약소한 자를 부조하고 공의를 유지하여, 유럽 사람으로 하여금 그 악을 함부로 행사하지 못하게 하였다. (조일문 역주, 2001; 26-27)

## 2.2. At the stages of take-off

After those long times, Korea could get the liberation from the Japanese's Colonial suppression in 1945. Korean writers managed to meet American immediately... The image of the United States remained still as the land of paradise. American was considered still as a kind, genuine and justifiable people.

But some Korean writers began to hate the opportunists who had taken advantage of Americans for their own selfish benefits. Of course, they didn't hate Americans themselves. But partial cracks started to be found between the two countries increasingly. The typical works are found in examples like *Mr. Bang* (미스터 박 1946) and *Captain Lee* (꺼삐딴 리, 1962). The ugliest opportunist was portrayed in the latter, Jeon Gwang-yong's novel, *Captain Lee*. In this short story, the protagonist, Captain Lee, is a doctor who has continuously obeyed the powerful nations. He obeyed the Japanese officers during the Japanese occupation. However, after the liberation, he changed his attitude and began to obey Russian soldiers who occupied the northern parts of the Korean Peninsula. Then after the Korean War, he changed his attitude again and followed the American officers. He is a typical character of someone taking advantage of the moment and circumstances. One critic described his character as a kind of chameleon.

In 1960s, an economic development plan was executed. Before long, in the 1970s, the Korea's economy--as determined by Rostow--was gradually entering the 'take-off' stage. Political leaders in Korea tried diligently to explain his compliment on economic growth achieved in Korea to the public. Regardless of the fact itself, it was the first time that the Korean people believed their ability and potential power to compete with other nation. They felt some energetic desire to challenge and overcome others.

As time passed by, Korean writers gradually began to have strong nationalistic feelings. Especially after the Korean War (1950-1953), they began to have negative images of the G. I. Joes (American soldiers) and the vulgar American mass culture. Sometimes they shouted the slogan "Yankee Go Home" in novels like *Shorty Kim* (슈리 킴), *Dung Land* (분지), *A Scream of Yellow Dog* (황구의 비명),

and *Shadows of Weapons* (무기의 그늘). Pak Wan-seo (박완서) and Hwang Seok-yeong (황석영) were the representative novelists in this time.

In 1978, Pak Wan-seo contrasted two characters in her novel *The One who met at Airport* (공항에서 만난 사람, 1978); a strong Korean woman and a weak American man.

Do you think I am doing like this for myself? Never. I am doing it for an American guy. Do you, a chap, think all thirty million Korean peoples manage to live with American's support? But sometimes there is the case that American can live with Korean's support. I am a Korean who supports an American poor guy. He is my husband and an American. I heard that she always shouted like this way. (Park Wan-seo 1995; 280).<sup>2</sup>

In this short story, 'Narrative I' recovered her national pride by supporting her American husband of no ability. Through the Korean modern history, America has been a strong and consistent helper of Korea. But in this story, Korean wife began to be a supporter of American husband. Even though it is a rare and special case, it is a miraculous reversal between the two nations anyway.

At this stage, Koreans managed to recover their national pride and identity. Koreans could have their vision and belief on their historical heritage and potential capacity. It is a kind of strong nationalism. Sometimes it contains the hatred or enmity against powerful countries such as America, Japan and China.

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<sup>2</sup> 내가 나 먹자고 이 짓 하는 줄 아느냐. 미국놈 먹여 살릴려고 이 짓 한다. 네놈들은 우리 삼천만이 다 네놈들 덕 본 걸로 알지만 한국 사람 덕으로 굶어 죽지 않고 사는 미국놈도 있단 말이야. 내가 바로 미국놈 먹여살리는 한국인이고 내 남편은 그 미국놈이다. 이렇게 호령을 하면서 뼈긴다는 거예요 (박완서 1995; 280).

### 2.3. At the age of high mass consumption

Some novelists began to consider the United States as two-faced; rich in material civilization, but cruel and uncertain in mental civilization. Thus it happened that America and its people began to have double images in Korean Novels. *Deen and Blue Night* (깊고 푸른 밤, first written in 1982) is the representative work of this time. A Korean visitor's thoughts on America are expressed in the following sentences from the novel.

On highway, everything was rolling at breakneck speed. Sometimes we fall in the mistaken senses that the rolling objects are not a vehicle but a road itself. (.....) The road seems to be a gigantic conveyer belt. The vehicle on that road seems to be the goods which have been assembled quickly. For Jun-ho who drives a car and for him who sees the map and tries to find circumstances, the only way to overcome the horrible mechanism is to keep their pace during the killing-like war. (Choi In-ho 1994; 375)<sup>3</sup>

The writer of this novel visited the United States to meet his friend. They traveled together and saw the high way in America. They felt that to ride a vehicle on the American high way was similar to be laid out on the conveyer belt system in the factory. They felt themselves as if they were a vehicle or machine. It is very important to know the fact that they already forgot the nationalistic thoughts and feelings of Korean themselves. Instead of them, they begin to be baffled with the feeling of awe in American capitalism.

Finally, two Koreans on this novel begin to enter the stages of high mass consumption. They are no more interested in the kind of nationalism which was a strong energy in their take-off stage. They

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<sup>3</sup> 고속도로에서는 모든 것이 맹렬한 속도로 굴러가고 있었다. 차가 굴러가고 있는 것이 아니라 도로 자체가 무서운 속도로 움직이고 있는 착각에 빠져들게 된다. (...) 도로는 거대한 이동벨트이며 그 위를 굴러가는 차들은 빠르게 조립되는 상품들처럼 보인다. 운전을 하는 준호나 실 새 없이 방향을 잡고 주위를 환기시키는 그나 무시무시한 메커니즘에 이기는 길은 살인과도 같은 전쟁에서 쓰러지지 않는 길이였다. (최인호 1994; 375)

already became cosmopolitans. They are not Koreans any more. They belong to the horrible mechanism which make human a commodity on the gigantic conveyer belt system. When they entered the age of high mass consumption, they thought themselves not as nationalistic patriots but as the victim of World Capitalism.

The novel <Shadows of Weapons (무기의 그늘)> (1988) written by Hwang Seok-yeong (황석영) focused on Vietnamese War especially in terms of capitalism. It dealt with Vietnamese, Korean and American. They all gathered at the battlefield to get the money. A Korean said to an American about the essence of that war like these.

I'd rather like to say that I am same to the Vietnamese. The conditions of life we've been through over the past century are same to those of all Asians. White people are fighting quarry bloody claws and teeth to bite each other like beasts at every continents. (.....) Ye soldiers were forced to come here at the dirty back alley, at the dark bar, at the cheap super market, at the garage oily in the bottom of the car. Why? Noble young gentlemen would not come here. You guys, ask to your entrepreneurs and your politicians who have served as a salesman of the rich. It is for them that you were dying at the battlefield of Vietnam like dog.

I know them well. (.....) The capitalist are trying not to retreat their realms according to their commercial principle (Hwang Seok-yeong 1988; book 2, 117-118).<sup>4</sup>

The protagonist said that war resulted from the interest of the capitalists. They regarded this battlefield as a beneficial and profitable market. They came here to get much money. But poor Americans came here to get small money. He said to himself "Dollar! It is the leader of the colonial imperialism. It is the certificate of being an

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4 (...) 나는 오히려 내가 베트남인과 같다고 말해버린다. 우리가 겪은 삶의 조건은 지난 한 세기 동안 아시아 사람이면 누구나 당해온 조건이다. 백인들은 사냥감을 다루는 짐승들처럼 여러 대륙에서 피 묻은 발톱과 이빨로 서로를 물어뜯었다. (...) 너희 병사들은 허겁스레기 같은 더러운 빈민가의 뒷골목에서, 어두운 바에서, 할인표를 오려 갖고 달려가던 슈퍼마켓에서, 기름투성이의 차 밑바닥에서 이리로 끌려왔다. 왜냐구? 도련님은 여기에 안 오니까. 너희들 기업가들과 그들의 세일즈맨인 정치하는 자들에게 물어보렴. 너희가 베트남의 수렁에 빠져 개처럼 죽어가는 것은 그들을 위해서야. 그런 것쯤 나두 안다. (...) 자본가들은 그들의 기업 방침에 따라서 이 발판에서 물러나지 않으려고 안간힘을 하고 있지 (황석영 1988; 하권, 117-118).

American.” In his novel, Korean did not hate all American. He hated not poor American but rich capitalists and politicians as their partner. Poor peoples are all friend regardless of their nationality. The only terrible target is the capitalist and their system of capitalism. At least, it was not related with nationalistic feelings.

## 2.4. Double Functions of Nationalism

The cities of modernism have double images; one is the land of paradise and the other is that of the hell (Alan Bullock 1991; 58-70). We have experienced the both sides of the modern cities. In the similar reasons, nationalism has double influences; one is love for their own country and the other is hatred against other nations.

In the take-off period, nationalism rendered strong energies to their people. The energies can be used for the achievement of incessant economic growth. Rostow has told about nationalism as following: “nationalism - reacting against intrusion from more advanced nations- has been a most important and powerful motive force in the transition from traditional to modern societies, at least as important as the profit motive” (W. W. Rostow 1960; 26). “But the maturity after take-off period is dangerous time as well as which offer new, promising choices. War arises from the existence and acceptance of the concept of national sovereign nations, as they pursued what they conceived to be their interests in the highly competitive, but also highly oligopolistic circumstances in which they have found themselves” (W. W. Rostow 1960; 108).

According to Rostow’s comments, it would be a tragedy that there is no friendship among the competitive and chauvinistic nations even though they achieved lots of economic growth. The aggression such as war, colonialism and nationalistic struggles would be a great obstacle to enter the stage of high mass consumption. In his viewpoints, most communist nations could not enter the stage of high mass consumption because they didn’t respect the democratic value. As far as they hold on the nationalistic and socialistic value, they could not

enter the stage of high mass consumption (this is the meaning of the subtitle of his book, 'a Non-Communist Manifesto'.

Fortunately, I think Korea manages to enter the stage of high mass consumption since 21<sup>st</sup> century. Recently many Korean writers begin to focus on the shadows of World Capitalism. At least they can pursue the new value beyond narrow nationalism. But the government, mass media and common people still insist on holding the narrow nationalism. I think the struggles between the neighboring nations come from such discrepancy.

### 3. Conclusion: Beyond Nationalism, Toward Asian Dream

Jeremy Rifkin describes the emergence and evolution of the European Union over the past five decades. He argues that the European Union, which he describes as the first truly postmodern governing body, is already an economic superpower and has the potential to become a full world superpower. According to him, the "European Dream" is one in which individuals find security not through individual accumulation of wealth, but through connectivity and respect for human rights. He argues that this model is better-suited to 21st-century challenges than the "American Dream". He explains Europe's opposition to the death penalty in a historical context; after losing so many lives to wars in the early and mid-20th century, Europe is opposed to state-sponsored killing as a matter of principle. He also discusses the European commitment to "deep play" a notion which is absent in the United States (Jeremy Rifkin 2004; 11-36).

In South Korea this book made a huge sensation and enjoyed unexpected popularity, because Roh Moo-hyun, the former (2003~2008) Korean president, read the book, then inspired by the author's idea and briefly planned his version in Asia. I think Korea, China and Japan could be grouped together like European Union. As E.U. have dreamed 'European Dream', three nations in Far East Asia could dream 'Asian Dream'. The first step to Asian Dream is to aban-

don their own nationalism because it means a kind of enmity or rivalry to other countries and cultures.

Let's come back to our topic. At first, Korean writers looked on the advanced nations as a helper. But in the take-off stage, they looked on the advanced nations as an enemy or a rival to overcome. Anti-American Literature (반미문학) became the mainstream of Korean literature in 1980's. But it gradually disappeared when Korean economy entered the post take-off stage (drive to maturity, and age of high mass consumption).

Through the history of Korean modern literature, the meaning and function of nationalism have been changed continuously. Nationalism in the take-off stage was a strong energy to build our pride and national identities. But after that stage, it worked as an obstacle to enter more matured society. As Korean economy advanced to the stage of the developed nations, Korean writers began to widen their views from narrow nationalism to cosmopolitan critic. Now Korean writers are interested in the aspects of postmodern society. Sometimes they enjoy the benefit of high mass consumption. Sometimes they criticize the threat of American style capitalism, Neo liberalism. Anyway, they are far from the neurosis of nationalism. Maybe most contemporary Korean writers dream of a cosmopolitan, Asian/East-Asian community. They dream of overcoming the narrow aggressive and chauvinistic ideology of nationalism. Choi In-hun's *Topic* (화두, 1994) would be a model for the investigation of such global societies.

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