

Modernisms after Modernism: the New Modernist Studies with Potential and Challenges

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[Abstract]

This paper aims to introduce the new modernist studies and investigate its significances and contradictions. In the 1990s, the genealogy of modernism and modernity reached an entirely new phase under the influence of globalization and postcolonial studies. Scholars began to expand the study of modernism and modernity in terms of space and time, modifying the scope of their research from a Western-centric modernism/modernity to that of other regions and periods. The new modernist studies enlarges the field without restricting its object to high culture, and thus achieved temporal and spatial diversity in its discourse. The movement was accelerated with the establishment of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) in 1999 and the ensuing publication of its journal, *Modernism/Modernity*. However, such approaches have the potential to distort domestic scholarship, for which Janet Poole serves as a good example when she wrote *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (2014), awarded in the following year by MSA. For she is quite different from Korean scholars in terms of the object of study. The new modernist studies are still important as they build the foundation for the expansion and diversification of modernism, but their follow-up studies will also

be significant.

Key Words: The new modernist studies, *Modernism/Modernity*, Modernisms, Korean modernism, Janet Poole's *When the Future Disappears* (2014)

Modernism generally refers to the cultural and artistic movement in Europe and the United States from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Given that modernism stems from the changes caused by modernity, it is not hard to understand why the study of Western society should put the focus on particular factors of rapid modernization such as industrialization, scientific and technical progress, the advance of social science, and a rejection of traditions. In this context, the modernism discourse usually excluded non-Western societies that did not meet the criterion of the rapid modernization, and their societies and cultures were often positioned as the Other in literary works.

This tendency started to undergo modification from the late 20th century. Scholars, who shed new light on modernist arts in terms of imperialism and colonialism, served to form a new awareness that non-Western countries also experienced rapid modernization. In the literary field, this trend was reinforced by the effects of globalization that affected to expand the scope of modernism studies through the circulation of literary works from the countries other than Western ones, and also influenced *The Norton Anthology*, one of the main anthology series in English literature. W. W. Norton and Company has long published various anthologies, usually focused on European and American literature, but from the 2000s, it started to publish *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Especially part one in Volume F of its third edition (2012) covers “Modernity and Modernism, 1900–1945”; acknowledging that experimental artistic movements permeated other geographic areas

beyond Europe and America, it introduces thirty writers which include not only traditional modernism writers such as T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce, but also Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryunosuke and Chinese writer Lu Xun.

Such a change indicates that the research about modernism is expanding and transforming. In the research of English literature and American and British culture, as well, it is necessary to recognize this new perspective on modernist studies and the need for further extensive comparative studies are pertinent. This paper aims to explain the formation of the new modernist studies. It will focus more on literary modernism than modernism as a broader artistic movement, investigating the link and difference between new and traditional modernist studies. I will first provide an overview of the traditional definition of modernism in the Western scholarship and how the new modernist studies were formed. In addition, the positive and negative possibilities of the change will be considered by examining Korean modernism studies conducted by an American scholar, Janet Poole, as an example of the new modernist studies.

In existing modernist studies, there is no exact standard of modernism but there is an obvious intersection in how different approaches define the time, concept and characteristics of modernism. Among literature dictionaries, *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* published in 1995 defines modernism as “the predominant artistic and literary movement between 1890 and 1945, with its most productive and innovative period being the 1920s and 1930s” (Childers and Hentzi). It cites 1922, the year of the first publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, as the acme of the modernism period. It exemplifies Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Bertolt Brecht as representative writers, and also mentions I. A. Richards in literary theory. In the third edition of *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008), modernism is defined as “the wide range of

experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature (and other arts) of the early 20th century, including Symbolism, Futurism, Expressionism, Imagism, Vorticism, Ultraismo, Dada, and Surrealism, with its key feature being “a rejection of 19th-century traditions and of their consensus between author and reader” (Baldick). The examples of relevant writers include Woolf, Faulkner, Joyce, Joseph Conrad, and Marcel Proust in the group of novelists; Eliot and Ezra Pound amongst poets; and Brecht and Luigi Pirandello as representatives of playwrights. Other literary dictionaries, as well, outline modernism as an artistic movement of the 20th century in Europe and America which is characterized by experimental attempts against tradition.

These definitions of modernism needed to be modified in the past twenty years. A new discourse emerged around the turn of the 21st century, and its main point is that the 20th century’s West-centric concept of modernism is merely one of many different modernisms. Of course, the diversity of modernism was studied even in the existing discourse. In “The Name and Nature of Modernism,” (1976) Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane illustrate the diversity of modernism as part of their definition. Comparing Anglo-American and Germanic modernism, they emphasize that modernism has different origins and consists of mixed or contradictory characteristics, and positively view diversity in that it expands the meaning of modernism (45-46).¹⁾ The research by Bradbury and McFarlane highlights varied aspects of modernism in their discussion, but their definition, time, region and characteristics do not largely differ from the elements of modernism that the dictionaries mention above. They, likewise, focus on variety within the boundaries of the literary trend in Europe and America for about 40 years before and after the 20th century.

However, modernism in the 21st century is readjusting to a new situation as it develops or expands from the previous one. This shift accelerated in the 1990s, during which modernism and modernity began to be referred to in plural forms—modernisms and modernities—so as not to localize but to *glocalize* them. The new approach to modernism begins with a new consideration of the modernity that influences modernism. For example, *Global Modernities* (1995) written by Mike Featherstone reviews modernity under the paradigm of globalization and the influence of postmodernism; it argues that the frame of analysis moves from a temporal frame to a spatial one and it is necessary to remove the inter-societal, state-centric perspective stemming from Max Weber. In the introduction, the author stresses the importance of globalization as the major theme of the book, and claims that not only expressions like “Europeanization” or “Americanization” but also “Japanization” or “Brizilianization” can be used, which shows the appropriateness of “global modernities” rather than a singular “modernity” (3). Also, in *Multiple Modernities*, published in 2002, S. N. Einsentadt also disputes the existing view on modernity. He asserts that modernity does not equate to Westernization, and the modernity of the West is not the “authentic” one, but simply preceded that of other regions (2-3).

Mike Featherstone and S. N. Einsentadt disparage the West-centric notion based on the antecedent research into imperialism and colonialism with a critical eye. In the case of Fredric Jameson’s “Modernism and Imperialism” (1990), he criticizes imperialistic aspects discovered in modernist writers, especially E. M. Forster, and compares them with James Joyce who was relatively free from imperialism as an Irishman. While modernism became a target of criticism, the study of solidarity between the oppressed under imperialism emerged. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy scrutinizes race issues in postcolonial studies. He disapproves of the nationalistic perspective, and instead, lays more stress

on solidarity among black people in the Atlantic areas based on their common ground of intellectual experiences.²⁾ There are also authors who newly define a modernism of specific regions. One example is Iris M. Zavala's *Colonialism and Culture: Hispanic Modernisms and the Social Imaginary* (1992). She identifies modernism in literature as resistance literature, and introduces the features of Latin American modernism as decolonization and anti-imperialism, giving similar examples of studies in other regions, such as the research of Rey Chow's Chinese modernism and Neil Lazarus's South African modernism. In this way, the study revolving around the relations between empire and colony builds a foundation for resistance to the existing modernist studies, and reveals the necessity for research on the modernisms and modernities in regions other than the West.

In this context, the publication of the books and articles about the changes to the existing discourse of modernity increased after the 1990s, and from the 2000s, the research on global modernisms and modernities proliferated. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, in "The New Modernist Studies" (2008), point out that the object of study expands temporally, spatially, and vertically. In other words, they demonstrate that the period can stretch from 1890-1945 to the middle of 19th century or to the late 20th century; the scope encompasses not only Western countries but the other parts of the world such as Asia and the Caribbean; and its focus extends from high art to mass media. In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), likewise, this expansion is at the center of the discussion. The author Mark A. Wollaeger states that the "old" modernist studies *were* losing favor, while postmodern critics targeted modernist canons for their political facets against liberty and its association with class division (8). He thus assesses the new modernist studies positively in that they question the formation of the canons and revitalize modernist studies by bringing the works from the non-Western countries into focus, and pave

a way for the old modernist works to be examined from various angles such as postcolonialism or feminism.

However, the expansion of modernism incorporates an internal contradiction in whether it is appropriate to call it a literary movement if the standards that act as the cohesive characteristics defining modernism blurs with the (seemingly) limitless expansion. Susan Stanford Friedman consciously exposes this issue in “Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies” (2010). She raises several questions that the new modernist studies confront during its transmutation, and tries to solve them by conceding some of them and asserting the inevitability of the change nonetheless. First, she confesses some conundrums. For instance, she admits that the study can colonize other fields through expansion (474). Also, she agrees that there are good works that can be incorporated into modernism despite its difference from Anglo-European ones, but disagrees with some selections in terms of quality (476). Nevertheless, she underlines the importance of the new wave of modernism because of the necessity that the West-centric aesthetic called high modernism should be modified in order to “provincialize” European and American modernism (487).

Friedman uses the term “planetary” for her explanation of modernism, and there are various adjectives attached before modernisms such as “multiple,” “transnational,” “alternative” for stressing its newness, and “Pacific,” “Mediterranean,” “Hispanic” for expressing regional characteristics. It is as difficult to piece together its common denominator as to integrate the names, but the Modernist Studies Association (MSA), founded in 1999, attempts to set a direction for research. The establishment of MSA followed the launch of the associated journal, *Modernism/modernity*, in 1994, which results in “an effort to restore the value of modernism by rejecting the opprobrium cast on it by the rise of literary critical postmodernism” (Wollaeger 9). It has published 85 journals from 1994 to 2016 (tri-annual publication from 1994 to 2000,

and quarterly from 2001), and consists of articles, essays and reviews with special issues at times.

The papers in *Modernism/modernity* indicate the proportions of modernist studies on global modernisms and modernities in modernist studies. If we categorize the subjects into the themes about existing modernism works (including those of other arts rather than only literature), global modernisms and modernities (including postcolonial and postmodern studies), and other subjects, the overwhelming majority of papers are still on conventional modernism/modernity, which accounts for around 80% of the total.³⁾ There are only a small number of articles in the journal about new modernism/modernity, with just over 12% of the papers deal with new modernisms and modernities.⁴⁾ In this category, the modernist studies concerning non-West countries such as Brazil and Egypt, and the papers theorizing global modernities and modernisms are subsumed. The last 8% mainly includes research about the Holocaust, and about race, especially regarding Zora Neale Hurston.⁵⁾ Even if the modernist studies expand in terms of themes and perspectives, it seems old modernist works are still deep-rooted subjects and the theory for the new field is being established.

Meanwhile, the MSA Book Prize, one of the main events of The Modernist Studies Association, has mostly gone to books about new modernisms in the past six years.⁶⁾ In 2015, the award-winning work, Janet Poole's *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (2014), explores Korean modernism in the 1930s during Japanese occupation. The fact that research into Korean modernist works under colonial rule becomes a part of new modernisms suggests that such a new approach can change the map of existing studies, possibly renewing the study of Korean literature in this case. In the interview with the Columbia University Press, Poole said that her stay both in Japan and Korea

motivated her to explore Korean modernism in the later part of Japanese colonization. She also mentioned that the title of the book was inspired by her impression of Korean literature in the 1930s, which was characterized by a sense of no possibility to escape from the past and the repetitiveness of daily life without a sense of future (Poole, "A Q&A"). She then expressed her intention to "[write] the creative works of Korea's writers into the history of global modernism" and "colonialism into the history of fascism" (Poole, "Faculty Members").

This is certainly encouraging in terms of the globalization of Korean literature which can gain a wider global audience and possible acknowledgement through the publication of an eminent scholar. However, Poole does not sufficiently reflect the discussion in Korea and misrepresents Korean modernism globally, and thus making her study a case that shows how the expansion of modernism into global modernisms can affect domestic research in Korea. Aligning Japanese colonialism with fascism, she emphasizes the colonial influence on Korean modernism. It is true that Japan's oppressive policies reaching a peak in the 1930s inextricably linked Korean modernism to Japanese colonization. Nevertheless, while she highlights Japanese fascism, she excessively investigates the effect of fascism in Korean modernist literature, and lacks enough examination into the effect of English literature grafted on Korean modernism writings, which is significant point in the modernism discourse of Korea.

Upon the premise that Korean modernist literature under Japanese Fascism is filled with hopelessness, "fueled by the sense of a disappearing future" with "[a loss of] idea, hope, [and] postcolonialism" (*When the Future* 12), the object of her study slightly differs from those of Korean scholars. She mainly deals with "persona non grata," namely, the writers who ended up in North Korea, but she does not provide any specific reasons for her selection (3). Even if they are fascinating to study for

the lack of records about their life and death after they left for—or stayed in, or were sometimes abducted to—North Korea, her particular focus on these writers creates a gap between her version of Korean modernism and the version of Korean modernism developed within South Korean scholarship that concentrates usually on the “Nine People Group (Koo-in Hwoe, 구인회)” and the writers under its influence.

The Nine People Group is a literary circle claiming to support pure art, which led the members toward modernist tendencies. According to the *Data Dictionary of Korean Language and Literature*, the movement began in August 1933 with nine members: Lee Jong-myung, Kim Yu-young, Lee Hyo-suk, Lee Mu-young, Yu Chi-jin, Lee Tae-jun, Cho Young-man, Kim Ki-rim, Jung Ji-young. When Lee Jong-myung, Kim Yu-young, and Lee Hyo-suk dropped out shortly after, Park Tae-won, Yi Sang, and Park Pal-yang joined the group, and Kim Yu-jung and Kim Hwan-tae filled the vacancy after Yu Chi-jin and Cho Yong-man left. The Nine People Group is closely connected to another literary circle in Korea, “Korea Artista Proleta Federatio (KAPF: a socialist literary group),” which led the literary realism movement after its foundation in August 1925. As for the two literary movements, Min-su Park states that realism in Korea flourished through the organized activities of KAPF (12), and the modernism that emerged with the decline of realism assumed a new aspect which was distinguished from realism with a negative perspective on its ideas, such as the objective observation of historical reality and the world view on the future based on the concept of continuity (24). This difference brought about controversies and conflicts between realism and modernism which continued until the 1980s. Therefore, the realism and modernism adopted in Korea are often recognized to be quite oppositional theories with different perspectives and approaches.

Although this demarcation of the two movements is essential in the discussion of modernism, Janet Poole’s book does not handle the distinction but just briefly

mentions KAPF during her explanation of some writers' backgrounds. In the case of the Nine People Group, she only mentions through the names of three books in bibliography. She, in this context (or lack thereof), chooses Lee Tae-jun, Park Tae-won, Choi Myung-ik, Im Hwa, O Chang-hwan, and Kim Nam-chun as modernist writers (12). However, except for Park Tae-won and Choi Myung-ik, the suitability of the rest of these writers for the category of modernism is open to question. First, in the case of Lee Tae-jun, although he was one of the founding members of the Nine People Group, it is controversial whether he is a writer of modernism or realism (Kang 31). Second, even if few scholars classify Im Hwa as a modernist writer because of the dadaism poems that appear in his early works for a short while, the main research on him is about his later participation in KAPF and the publication of his theory of literature, *The Logic of Literature*, which includes his comprehensive consideration about realism. Third, O Chang-hwan, who has rarely been studied in Korea, is only known to have participated in a poetry writing group, Siinburak (시인부락), with the famous poet Suh Jung-ju. The group was later called Saengmyungpa (생명파), and not much is known about its relationship with modernism in Korean academia. Lastly, Kim Nam-chun, as a significant driving force of KAPF, is noted for his theory of realism like Im Hwa. He even criticized modernism, arguing that its introduction in the 1930s in Korea negatively affected the production of realism novels (J. Lee 190). Poole's research, however, does not differentiate realism from modernism and, is thus, limited in reflecting the historical context of the Korean literary field of that time period.

Poole's insights and clear intention throughout her book contribute to the study of Korean modernist literature. As she mentions in her introduction, placing Korean modernism in the movement of global modernisms is important due to its distinctive

characteristics from European modernism, the value of which warrants new attention:

... scholars persist in discussing modernism as a purely artistic phenomenon intrinsic to the development of modern European literature, rendering it hard to recognize Korean modernism as such. Caught up in its own ideology, modernism has been considered a mere formal innovation or an artistic movement, defined as a reaction against traditional representational practices, regardless of the fact that it is modernism's privileging of the new that produces the concept of a traditional representational practice in the first place. Until recently, Korean modernist works have been recognized in terms of their proximity to European models and thus judged as later, inauthentic imports or incomplete attempts at mimicry. (14-15)

Nevertheless, the issue here is that Poole's study, with her debatable subjects, may end up assuming the position of authority on Korean modernism, and her English publication gains her a wider audience and easier access to global academia compared to the lack of Korean scholars' research entering larger discourse due to the language barrier. Therefore, besides the significance of her book and its subject matter, this is an example that implies the impact of global modernisms and the predictable problems that arise due to language, especially English, which is both a tool and an obstacle in forming a new movement of new modernisms.

In the recent book, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (2015), Susan Friedman says that she rejects the conventional approach to modernism as an aesthetic style of the late 19th and the early 20th century, but she tries to deal with the modernism that can apply to any modernities in the extended period (x). Considering the scope of her research that covers the modernisms and modernities before the 16th and after the mid-20th century, and the diasporic modernisms that include Aimé Césaire (1913-2008, a French poet and politician born

in Martinique) and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951~1982, a Korean-born, immigrant artist in the United States), the question can arise whether it is possible to attempt to define modernisms and modernities even with the expanded list of features.

Despite the increasing number of publications about the new directions in global modernisms, it is hard to find an appropriate definition that can integrate all the multifaceted aspects of the movement. Therefore, while the list of diversified and contradictory features constitutes the definition of the existing modernism with more characteristics and few similarities, finding the consensus about modernism seems to be a key challenge to the modernist studies in the global era. It appears irreversible, with the rapid modernization of many countries and the current of globalization, that new modernist studies will continue to expand during this period called “modern.” Meanwhile, cautions are also required and new discussions need ample debates so that misrepresented theories or arguments can be modified.

Notes

- 1) In their explanation, they state, “Modernism was ... an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old regimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear” (46).
- 2) A similar research is Elleke Boemer’s *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920* (2002) that addresses cross-national solidarity in the process of anti-imperial interaction at the turn of the 20th Century.
- 3) 65% of this classification is about general considerations of the West-centric modernism and modernity which includes political and critical perspectives of it. Examples include *T. S. Eliot Meets Michael Gold: Modernism and Radicalism in Depression-Era American Literature* (3.5) and *Ulysses’s Unanswered Questions* (15.2). 35% examines particular branches of European and American cultures, or more specifically music, architecture, movie, fashion and photography in the period of modernism, such as *The Role of Language in Modern Art: On Texts and Subtexts in Chagall’s Paintings* (1.2), *The Culture of the Tank, 1916-1918* (4.1), *Kurt Weill as Modernist* (7.2), *War Rations and the Food*

Politics of Late Modernism (16.4).

- 4) The articles in this category are *The Metaphysics of Coffee: Blaise Cendrars, Modernist Standardization, and Brazil* (7.3), *Egypto-Modernism: James Henry Breasted, H.D., and the New Past* (14.3), and Susan Friedman's *Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies* (17.3) which is cited in this paper.
- 5) Examples of each include: "Introduction: Holocaust representations since 1975" (20.1) and "Scholarship and the Modernist Public: Zora Neale Hurston and the Limitations of Art and Disciplinary Anthropology" (22.3).
- 6) The examples are Michael Rubenstein's *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* awarded in 2011, Christopher GoGwilt's *The Passage of Literature: Genealogies of Modernism in Conrad, Rhys, and Pramoedya* in 2012, Jeremy Braddock's *Collecting as Modernist Practice* in 2013, and Janet Poole's *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* in 2015. Refer to the MSA web page about Book Prize: msa.press.jhu.edu/prize/archive.html.

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국문초록

모더니즘 이후의 모더니즘들: 신(新)모더니즘 연구의 가능성과 당면 과제

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모더니즘 담론에서 일반적인 연구 대상은 20세기 초반에 유럽과 미국에서 나타난 실험적 문화 예술 운동이다. 그러나 현대화로 인한 변화를 모더니즘의 주요 원인으로 보는 만큼, 현대화가 일찍 진행된 서구 국가들과 달리 시기적으로 뒤늦게 등장한 국가들의 모더니즘은 연구에서 제외되거나 타자의 형태로 작품 속에 존재하였다. 이후 일부 모더니즘 작품에 나타나는 제국주의에 대한 연구가 활발해지고 서구 이외의 국가들의 현대화가 진행되는 가운데 20세기 후반부터 세계화로 인한 범세계적 연구가 가능해지면서 새로운 모더니티와 모더니즘 연구의 판이 짜지는 계기가 마련됐다. 새로운 모더니즘의 경향을 통합적으로 살펴보는 데는 여러 난제가 있으나, 1999년에 설립된 ‘모더니즘연구 학회’가 이러한 방향을 설정하는 기준을 구축하는 노력을 하고 있는 중이다. 이 학회는 1994년 *Modernism/Modernity*라는 학술지 창간에 이어서 설립된 학술단체로, 시들해져 가던 모더니즘 연구를 부활시킨 계기를 마련했다. 서구 중심을 탈피한 모더니즘 연구는 아직 상대적으로 부족하지만, 이 학회에서 주요 행사 중 하나인 모더니즘연구 학회 학술상의 최근 수상작은 주로 새로운 관념의 모더니즘들과 관련된 저서들이 강세를 이루었다. 2015년 수상작은 자넷 풀(Janet Poole)의 『미래가 사라진 때』로, 한국의 모더니즘에 관한 연구서이다. 외국 작가에 의한 일본 식민지 상황의 한국 모더니즘 작가 연구가 시사하는 바는, 이러한 새로운 모더니즘 연구가 비단 기존 모더니즘 연구의 지형도를 바꿀 뿐 아니라 한국 문학 연구의

판을 새로이 짜기도 한다는 사실이다. 새로운 모더니즘 연구로 인한 변화가 긍정적인지의 여부, 그리고 새로운 모더니즘이 공통된 특징을 명시 가능한 새로운 문예사조로서 기능하는지의 여부는 조금 더 시간이 지나야 알 수 있겠으나 서구 중심을 탈피하여 아직 '모던'이라고 불리는 시기에 세계 각국의 모더니즘을 발굴하고 재조명 한다는 데에서 유의미하다고 할 것이다.

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