
Korea's Literary Tradition

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Introduction

Korean literature reflects Korean culture, itself a blend of a native tradition originating in Siberia; Confucianism and a writing system borrowed from China; and Buddhism, imported from India by way of China. Modern literature, dating from the early 1900s, was initially influenced by Western models, especially realism in fiction and imagism and symbolism in poetry, introduced to Korea by way of Japan. For most of its history Korean literature has embodied two distinct characteristics: an emotional exuberance deriving from the native tradition and intellectual rigor originating in Confucian tradition.

Korean literature consists of oral literature; literature written in Chinese ideographs (*hanmun*), from Unified Shilla to the early twentieth century, or in any of several hybrid systems employing Chinese; and, after 1446, literature written in the Korean script (*han'gŭl*). *Hanmun* was the literary language of the scholar-bureaucrats who constituted the Korean elite from early times to the end of the Chosŏn kingdom. *Han'gŭl*, though promulgated in 1446, did not gain widespread acceptance as a literary language until the twentieth century.

Premodern Literature

The earliest surviving examples of Korean literature appearing in Korean sources are the *hyangga* (native songs). This diverse group of songs includes works with oral origins as well as those composed and written down by individuals, primarily Buddhist

monks and the Shilla warrior youth known as *hwarang*. Corresponding to Chinese Tang poetry and Sanskrit poetry, they have both religious and folk overtones. The majority are Buddhist in spirit and content. At least three of the twenty-five surviving *hyangga* date from the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C. – A.D. 667); the earliest, "Sŏdong yo," was written during the reign of Shilla king Chinp'yŏng (579-632). *Hyangga* were transcribed in *hyangch'al*, a writing system that used certain Chinese ideographs because their pronunciation was similar to Korean pronunciation, and other ideographs for their meaning.

The *hyangga* form continued to develop during the Unified Shilla kingdom (667-935). One of the best-known examples, "Ch'ŏyong ka" (879; "Song of Ch'ŏyong"), is a shaman chant, reflecting the influence of shamanism in Korean oral tradition and suggesting that *hyangga* represent a development of shaman chants into Buddhist invocations. Buddhism, officially recognized by Shilla in the sixth century, became the dominant system of thought in Unified Shilla, and exercised great influence over literature and Shilla art in general.

Hanshi – poetry composed in classical Chinese and following Chinese principles of poetry, but written by Koreans – became widespread among the literati of Unified Shilla (667-935). Stimulating the use of Chinese as a literary language was the rise of Confucianism, illustrated by such developments as the founding of the National Confucian College in 682, and the corresponding necessity of studying the Chinese classics. Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn (857-?), a renowned literati-statesman of Unified Shilla who also served in the government of Tang China, is the

first great Korean exemplar of *hanshi* whose poems have survived.

Contrasting with *hanshi*, a poetry of the literati elite, was a rich oral tradition consisting of lyric folksongs, shaman chants, myths, legends, and folktales. The diverse genre of folksong comprises work songs, ceremonial songs, and – most numerous – songs both happy and sad that deal with problems encountered in life. Among this third group is "Arirang," probably Korea's best-known folksong.

The literature of the Koryŏ kingdom (918-1392) is distinguished by a body of lyric folksongs, increased sophistication and diversity of poetry in Chinese, the prose miscellany called *shihwa*, and the appearance of *shijo*, a terse, intensely personal song that would be recorded and composed primarily in *han'gŭl* following the promulgation of that script early in 1446.

Koryŏ lyric folksongs, often called *changga* (long songs) or *pyŏlgok* (special songs), are a diverse collection of anonymous works such as Buddhist songs and shaman chants as well as songs composed by individuals. Their interest derives in large part from their dual nature: many of them survive as court music but originated in orally transmitted folksongs, and thus combine folksong onomatopoeia and rhythms with refinements in diction and music. Outstanding examples are "Kashiri" ("Would You Now Leave Me?"), a song of parting that is echoed in Korea's best-loved modern poem, Kim Sowŏl's "Chindallae kkot" (Azaleas), and "Ch'ŏngsan pyŏlgok" ("Song of the Green Hills"), which reflects the realities of peasant life.

Hanshi, poetry in Chinese, reaches an early zenith in the works of Yi Kyu-bo (1168-1241). Distinguished by their self-deprecation and their penetrating glimpses of rural everyday life, Yi's poems achieve a consummate balance of the universal and the particular. The brevity, revelation, and self-reference of his poems characterize many other *hanshi* as well. A different kind of Koryŏ poetry in

Chinese is the *kyŏnggi ch'e ka* (academic-style poetry), a formulaic but exuberant upper-class genre that celebrates the hopes of the new literati-bureaucrat class that emerged during the period of military rule. The first and best-known example is "Hallim pyŏlgok" (1216, "Song of the Scholars").

Prose writing achieved popularity with the emergence of *shihwa* ("talks on poetry"), collections of random thoughts on life and poetry. Meant to entertain, these miscellanies combine the factuality of public records with the more poetic language of essays. A good example is *P'ahan chip* (1260, *Collection for Dispelling Idleness*), a posthumous compilation of works by Yi Il-lo, one of the many literati who abandoned government service after the military takeover. This and other collections prefigure the early Chosŏn miscellany known as the *chapki*, which is weighted more heavily toward folktales and anecdotes.

Among the earliest examples of *shijo* are those of UT'ak (1262-1342). One of the best known of all *shijo* dates from the very end of Koryŏ. Written by Chŏng Mong-ju (1337-92) just before his assassination by men loyal to Yi Sŏng-gye, founder of the new Chosŏn kingdom, it sings of the writer's undying loyalty to the old regime.

Early Chosŏn is the designation for the period extending from the founding of the Chosŏn kingdom in 1392 to the Japanese invasions of 1592-98. The two most important historical developments affecting early Chosŏn literature were the promulgation of *han'gŭl* by King Sejong in 1446 and the adoption of Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology. Neo-Confucianism, with its emphasis on exemplary Chinese texts, meant that Korean literati would continue to study and use Chinese. In fact, because mastery of Chinese ensured their monopoly on learning, the literati continued for the most part to write in Chinese for centuries after the creation of *han'gŭl*. For its part, *han'gŭl* in theory gave all Koreans a literary language of their

own; in actuality, until the 1900s it was used primarily by women and commoners, most of whom were not literate in Chinese.

One of the first works written in the new native script was *Yongbi ŏch'ŏn ka* (1445-47; *Songs of Flying Dragons*), an *akchang* (set of lyrics and chants accompanying court music) celebrating the supposed virtues and moral authority of the Chosŏn founder and his forebears. Though Buddhism had been in decline since late Koryŏ, its surviving influence is seen in another *akchang*, "Wŏrin ch'ŏngang chi kok" (1449; "Songs of the Moon's Reflection on a Thousand Rivers"). The former work was composed by a group of scholar-bureaucrats, the latter by King Sejong himself.

For recognition and advancement Chosŏn literati wrote in Chinese; for their own pleasure and amusement, and to express their innermost thoughts, they wrote in Korean. Of the works they composed in *han'gŭl*, *shijo* are the most numerous. Most scholars believe that this short lyric verse form is a native tradition originating in Koryŏ. *Shijo* were originally sung, and still are today. Three of the greatest *shijo* practitioners are Chŏng Ch'ŏl (1536-93), Yun Sŏn-do, and Kim Su-jang (the latter two are discussed below). Chŏng is distinguished by versatility in the use of language, precision of syntax and diction, and the resentment of court intrigue that provides a recurring theme for his works.

The other major vernacular poetic tradition in Korea is the *kasa*. Appearing in the mid-1400s, *kasa* are longer than *shijo* and are variously narrative as well as lyrical. Chŏng Ch'ŏl, in addition to his accomplishments with *shijo*, is considered by many to have perfected the *kasa* form, as seen in his "Kwandong pyŏlgok" (1580; "Song of Kangwŏn Scenes").

Women have until recently occupied a low profile in Korean literary history. They almost certainly composed some of the traditional folksongs that

have survived, and they should be credited for much of the oral tradition that is inspired by native shaman beliefs and rites (in Korea most shamans are women). But not until early Chosŏn do we have examples of literature by identifiable women writers. In Chosŏn times and earlier, women were discouraged from educating themselves in Chinese. And even after the creation of *han'gŭl* gave Korean women an accessible literary language, the Confucian emphasis on women's place in the home made women reluctant to attach their name to their writings or to circulate them outside the home. It was left to aristocratic women such as Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (1563-89) and *kisaeng* (professional entertaining women) such as Hwang Chin-i (c. 1506-44) to lift the tradition of anonymity that blanketed premodern women's literature. Their surviving poems – *shijo*, *kasa*, *hanshi* – are an eloquent reminder of this muted tradition.

It is also in early Chosŏn that we see what is often considered the first example of Korean fiction: *Kŭmo shinhwa* (*New Stories from Golden Turtle Mountain*) by Kim Shi-sŭp (1435-93), consisting of five short romances written in Chinese. The *chapki*, or literary miscellany – a collection of random writings such as character sketches, poetry criticism, anecdotes, and folktales – developed around the same time. The *P'aegwan chapki* (*Storyteller's Miscellany*) of O Suk-kwŏn (fl. 1525-44) is a good example.

Surviving examples of folk drama suggest that a rich variety of dramatic works existed by mid-Chosŏn. The most important genre was the mask dance, a combination of song, speech, and dance that originated in local village festivals. These dances had no script; the "text" was transmitted orally by the common people. The dances consist of several loosely defined but related acts featuring stock characters and situations. The language is earthy and regional, though Chinese-derived expressions and refined Korean were sometimes added for variety.

Like much folk and oral literature, mask dances expose the foibles of the powerful and elite. The masks, typically made of wood or gourd, were vivid and expressive and meant for caricature. Masks for the Hahoe *pyŏlshin kut*, a mask dance probably inspired by a shaman rite for expelling evil spirits, have been dated to Koryŏ times.

Also serving as comic relief for the common people was the puppet play, which, like the mask dances, was performed in the open so as to be accessible to the people. Perhaps originating among Buddhist monks expelled from their monasteries by Confucian kings, the plays provided commoners with an alternative to the stern and highly structured Confucian society of Chosŏn times.

Even to a people who had weathered previous foreign depredations, the Japanese invasions of the 1590s proved especially destructive. The devastation also revealed the incompetence of the monarchy and the aristocratic bureaucracy. A backlash by the people was inevitable, and this reaction was felt in the world of literature. More people outside the *yangban* aristocracy began to write, more Koreans began to write in *han'gŭl*, and women's voices were increasingly in evidence.

It was against the background of the Japanese invasions and the feeble Chosŏn response that Hŏ Kyun (1569-1618) wrote "Hong Kil-dong chŏn" (c. 1610, "Tale of Hong Kil-dong"), usually cited as the first Korean fictional narrative written in *han'gŭl*. An account of a bandit leader with a popular following – a kind of Robin Hood figure – the work criticizes the injustice of a society that withheld privilege from illegitimate sons (of which Hŏ Kyun was one) and implicitly questions the legitimacy of a regime that fails to protect its people.

A variety of fictional works in *han'gŭl* followed: morality tales where good is rewarded and evil punished, such as *Hŭngbu chŏn* (*Tale of Hŭngbu*); accounts of military feats, such as *Imjin nok* (*A record of the Japanese invasions*); and love stories, such as

Ch'unhyang chŏn (*Tale of Ch'unhyang*). Many of these fictional narratives originated in the oral tradition, which along with the slight regard for fiction writing and individual creativity meant that authorship and date of composition are unknown in most cases. But even though literati tended to prefer poetry to fiction as a measure of their accomplishment in literary composition, fictional works in *han'gŭl* gained widespread popularity among commoners by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some 600 of these works survive, and others are still being discovered.

A new fictional form that appeared late in the 1700s was the *kajok sa sosŏl*, or family saga. These works are forerunners of the multivolume novels widely read in modern Korea. Typically relating the lives of several family generations, they were especially popular among palace women, who presumably could afford these lengthy works, which often numbered dozens of volumes. This length made it possible for the writers of family sagas to develop a variety of characters, unlike most other fictional narratives, which concentrated on a single protagonist.

In contrast to the variety of vernacular fiction that is solidly grounded in Korean soil are romances such as *Kuun mong* (c. 1689, *A Nine-Cloud Dream*) by Kim Man-jung (1637-92), which is situated in ninth-century Tang China. *Kuun mong* is often honored as the first Korean novel written in *han'gŭl*, but evidence increasingly suggests it was written in *hanmun* and that only *han'gŭl* translations have survived. The novel deals with the resolution of the protagonist's contradictory desires for worldly success and escape from worldly affairs. These romances, typically third-person narratives, gave rise in turn to the dream account, a first-person narrative in which the contradictions between Confucian ideals and social realities are played out free of the restrictions of a realistic environment. Dream narratives survive until the turn of the twentieth century.

Among the comparatively small amount of fiction written in Chinese, the works of Pak Chi-wŏn (1737-1805), a *shirhak* (practical learning) scholar, stand out. "Hŏ Saeng chŏn" ("Tale of Hŏ Saeng") and "Yangban chŏn" ("Tale of a *Yangban*") are penetrating satires of parasitic Confucian scholars. In these tales, exemplary characters are often drawn from the lower classes and imperfect characters from among the *yangban*. Though written in Chinese, these stories exhibit a natural style that departs from the formal conventions of previous prose writing in Chinese.

Writing by women was virtually unknown outside the home, but in the mid-1900s scholars began to discover a large amount of writing in *han'gŭl* by later Chosŏn women. This body of literature includes diaries, travelogues, memoirs, and biographies, but a great deal consists of long instructive *kasa* passed down from mother to daughter and kept for generations within the family. *Shijo* by *kisaeng* and other women survive as well. Also dating from this period is *Hanjungnok* (*A Record of Sorrowful Days*), by Princess Hyegyŏng (1735-1815), a series of memoirs about her long life in court that is especially well known for its account of the death of her husband, Prince Sado, at the hands of his father, King Yŏngjo. Other well-known works of palace literature include *Kyech'uk ilgi* (1613, *Diary of the Year of the Black Ox*), also a memoir, and the historical novel *Inhyŏn wanghu chŏn* (*Life of Queen Inhyŏn*). The author of the former work is thought to have been a palace woman; authorship of the latter is uncertain. All three works were composed in *han'gŭl*.

Hanshi – poetry in Chinese – would be written until the end of the dynasty, but poetry in Korean continued to be favored for its greater expressive potential. Yun Sŏn-do (1587-1671) and Kim Su-jang (1690-?), mentioned earlier, are the great *shijo* poets of later Chosŏn. Yun's *A Fisherman's Calendar* (*Ŏbu sashi sa*), a series of forty poems, is considered the finest expression of the *shijo* form. Like most *shijo*,

it portrays the poet and his subject – in this case the natural world and the changing seasons – in total isolation. Kim's *shijo* are distinguished by the poet's wit. Kim himself was not a scholar-bureaucrat of the aristocracy but a functionary, reflecting the increasing access of Korean commoners to the production of literature. It is perhaps mainly those common people who authored the great number of anonymous *shijo* – almost half of all surviving *shijo*.

Sasŏl (narrative) *shijo* is an expanded form of *shijo* that appears in the 1700s. Like the standard *shijo*, it was meant to be sung. Unlike most *shijo* written until then, it was the work primarily of commoners. These longer *shijo* are characterized by humor, earthy language, and honest expression of feeling. Most are anonymous.

As with *shijo*, more *kasa* were composed by women and commoners in later Chosŏn than in early Chosŏn. *Kasa* by Buddhist monks and *yangban* children survive as well. This increasing variety among writers led to a corresponding variety in the types of *kasa* they wrote: the *naebang* (inner-room, referring to the women's domain in the traditional Korean home) *kasa* previously mentioned, written primarily by women; accounts of journeys; *kasa* written in exile; and descriptions of everyday life. *Kasa* composed by commoners often describe the harshness of peasant life, criticize immoral individuals (and, by implication, an unjust society), or describe relations between the sexes.

Especially popular in the oral tradition was *p'ansori*, a narrative partly sung and partly spoken by an itinerant performer (*kwangdae*) accompanied by a lone drummer. The *p'ansori* performances, developing in the southwestern part of the peninsula in the late seventeenth century, appealed especially to commoners, who were familiar, for example, with the Hŭngbu and Ch'unhyang stories, which became part of the *p'ansori* repertoire. That repertoire eventually numbered thirteen texts, most of which conformed to Confucian values on the surface but

implicitly criticized the application of those values in real life. Standardization of these *p'ansori* texts over many decades of performance led eventually to publication of print versions of the stories thus performed. In the first decade of the twentieth century there flourished a dramatic form called *ch'anggŭk*, in which a group of actors performed a *p'ansori* story on a Western-style stage.

Modern Literature

The development of a modern literature in Korea was conditioned by two watershed events: (1) the enlightenment and modernization movement that swept East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century; and (2) the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. The first development gave young Koreans exposure to enlightenment ideals such as literacy, education, equality, and women's rights. Annexation inspired a wave of nationalism that finally legitimized han'gŭl as the literary language of all Koreans, and forced Korean writers to come to grips with the necessity of preserving their own language and literature in an increasingly repressive colonial environment. (In the last years of the Japanese occupation, until liberation in 1945, Koreans were forbidden to speak their own language in public or to publish in Korean.)

Modern Korean literature is dated by some to 1908, the year in which Ch'oe Nam-sŏn's poem "Hae egesŏ sonyŏn ege" ("From the Sea to the Youth") appeared, but by most to 1917, the date of publication of Yi Kwang-su's novel *Mujong* (*Heartlessness*). But whereas *Mujong* is considered distinctly modern in its use of language and its psychological description, Ch'oe's poem was of a transitional genre known as *shinch'e shi* (new-style poetry), which resembled traditional poetry in its use of a rhyme scheme but was new in its optimistic enlightenment outlook. Corresponding to *shinch'e*

shi as a transitional type was the *shin sosŏl* (new fiction), which flourished from 1906 to the early teens. Designed to appeal to the masses and distinguished from staid "old fiction," the new novels dealt with contemporary history, addressed real-life social problems, depicted intrafamily intrigues, or inspired patriotism through portraits of national heroes both in Korea and abroad. Yi In-jik (1862-1916) is the best-known writer of the *shin sosŏl*, and the novel *Hyŏl ūi nu* (1906, *Tears of Blood*, 1989) his best-known work.

The first generation of writers of modern Korean literature were for the most part young men born around the turn of the century who had received their higher education in Japan and had there been introduced, in Japanese translation, to literature from the West. There resulted an influx of Western literary models into Korea, primarily realism in fiction and symbolism, imagism, and romanticism in poetry. The new generation of writers tended to gravitate about new, mostly short-lived, literary journals in which they published poetry, short fiction, and essays (both critical and personal, the latter form termed *sup'il*). Novels maintained the mass readership they had enjoyed since late Chosŏn times, and continued to be serialized in newspapers, but came to be considered lowbrow entertainment by the literary elite. Important among the first generation of fiction writers were Yi Kwang-su for his enlightenment and nationalist agenda, Yŏm Sang-sŏp (1897-1963) for his psychological realism, Kim Tong-in (1900-1951) for his modernization of the Korean language and his art-for-art's-sake views, and Hyŏn Chin-gŏn (1900-1943) for his fictional slices-of-life of colonial Korea.

Early-modern poetry is best represented by Kim Sowŏl (1902-34), Chŏng Chi-yong (1903-?), and Han Yong-un (1879-1944). Kim (known better by his pen name, Sowŏl, than his given name, Chŏng-shik) utilized traditional Korean folksong

rhythms to produce lyrics of exceptional melody. His "Chindallae kkot" (1922, "Azaleas,") remains the best-loved poem of modern Korea. Chŏng was a master technician, drawing on both native and foreign sources for a rich bank of images in poems that often combine solitude, nostalgia, and nature. Han was a man of action, actively opposing the Japanese occupation, working to reform Buddhism, and attempting to instill in his readers a sense of their cultural identity. His best-known poem, "Nim ūi ch'immuk" (1926, "The Silence of My Love,"), resounds on a number of levels.

Proletarian literature was tolerated by the Japanese colonial authorities from the mid-1920s to 1935. This literature is cited today more for its historical interest than its literary value. After the Japanese put an end to the Korean proletarian literature movement in 1935, Korean fiction writers began looking to the past or the countryside for their inspiration. A variety of new voices appeared: Hwang Sun-won (1915-2000), Korea's most accomplished short fiction writer of the twentieth century; Kim Tong-ni (1913-1995), considered by Koreans the exemplar of a uniquely Korean ethos; Ch'ae Man-shik (1902-50), a writer of wit and irony who employed a direct, conversational style; Yi T'ae-jun (1904-?), a polished stylist; Kim Yujŏng (1908-37), who possessed an earthy, colloquial style rooted in the oral tradition; and Yi Sang (1910-37), an avant-garde poet as well as a modernist fiction writer. Their combined efforts led in the mid- to late 1930s to an early high point in modern Korean fiction.

Korean literature after 1945 has to a large extent been conditioned by the realities of modern Korean history. Korean literati from premodern times to the present day have often felt a need to bear witness to the times, and authors from 1945 on have been no exception. The literature of the 1950s and 1960s is a good example. Reacting to the devastation inflicted on the peninsula by the Korean War

(1950-53), writers produced poems and stories portraying not just a shattered landscape but traumatized psyches and corrupted values. The stories of Son Ch'ang-sŏp (b. 1922) and the poems of Kim Suyong (1921-67) are excellent illustrations. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there appeared a new generation of writers, educated in their own language (their parents' generation had been educated in Japanese, and the literary language of their grandparents' generation was more often than not Chinese). With little or no memory of the occupation period and a sardonic attitude toward the authoritarian rule that marked South Korean politics from 1948 to 1987, they produced fiction and poetry that display a more free-wheeling use of language and a powerful imagination. Fiction writers Kim Sŭng-ok (b. 1943) and Ch'oe In-ho (b. 1945) are good examples. Their contemporaries Ch'oe In-hun (b. 1936) and Yi Ch'ŏng-jun (b. 1939) are known for the intellectual rigor of their fiction.

The 1970s brought to the fore a collection of powerful voices that exposed the social ills attending the rapid industrialization pushed by President Park Chung Hee. There is no better fictional treatment of this subject than Cho Se-hŭi's (b. 1942) *Nanjangi ka ssoaollin chagun kong* (1978, *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*), perhaps the most important one-volume novel of the post-1945 period. Yun Hŭng-gil (b. 1942) wrote of the scars of the civil war and of citizens coerced into supervising "subversive" neighbors. Hwang Sŏg-yŏng (b. 1943) wrote of itinerant construction workers, urban squatters, and refugees from North Korea. Cho Chŏng-nae (b. 1943), in his ten-volume novel *T'aebaek sanmaek* (1989, *The T'aebaek Mountains*) took a revisionist approach to modern Korean history. The 1970s also marked the debut of Yi Mun-yŏl (b. 1948), perhaps the most important Korean novelist at the century's end. Yi is concerned with retrieving Korean tradition from the territorial division of the peninsula, the legacy of colonial-

ism, and the challenges posed by modernization and urbanization.

Among the most important works of modern Korean fiction are the multivolume novels called *taeha sosŏl* ("great-river fiction"). These works have precedents in the family saga of pre-modern times and usually feature a historical background and several generations of family life. In addition to Cho Chŏng-nae's *T'aebaek san-maek*, the most important examples are Hong Myŏng-hŭi (1888-?)'s *Im Kkŏk-jŏng* (1939), about a bandit leader of that name; Pak Kyŏng-ni (b. 1927)'s *T'oji* (1994, *Land*); Hwang Sŏg-yŏng's *Chang Kil-san* (1984), also about a bandit leader thus named; and Ch'oe Myŏng-hŭi (1947-99)'s *Honpul* (1996, *Spirit Fire*).

Sŏ Chŏng-ju, Shin Kyŏng-nim, Kim Chi-ha, and Ko Ŭn stand out among poets of the post-1945 era. Sŏ (1915-2000) is modern Korea's most important poet, a master of the Korean language who mines Korean history and culture and the Buddhist world-view to produce short, revelatory lyrics and longer prose-poems, all of them characterized by a sensuousness derived from the Korean soil and, earlier in his career, from French symbolism. Ko, Kim, and Shin have all exhibited a populist streak, and have incorporated the spirit of political activism in their poetry. Ko (b. 1933), a former Buddhist monk, is a passionate witness of the powerless. Shin (b. 1936) sings of farmers and workers in a verse enlivened by folk rhythms. Kim (b. 1941)'s "Ojŏk" (1970, "Five Bandits") was a courageous satire of dictatorship that, along with other works, resulted in a jail term.

Modern Korean drama, like fiction and poetry, was subject to considerable Western influence early in the 1900s. Among the earliest examples of modern drama is Kim U-jin (1897-1926)'s *San twaeji* (1926, *Boar*). Tomak (1932, *Piece*) by Yu Ch'i-jin (1904-73) marked the advent of a new realist

drama. Perhaps the most important contemporary playwright, O T'ae-sŏk (b. 1940), blends an innovative, Western-influenced style with texts drawn from Korean history and folklore recent and past. A good example is *Shim Ch'ŏng-i nŭn oe Indangsu e tu pŏn man ŭl tŏnjŏnnŭnga* (1991, *Why Did Shim Ch'ŏng Plunge into the Sea Twice?*).

The most noteworthy trend in Korean literature at the end of the twentieth century was the prominence achieved by women fiction writers. Long marginalized by the overwhelmingly male literary establishment, Korean women writers, building on the pioneering efforts of writers such as Ch'oe Chŏng-hŭi (1912-90), have since the 1970s gained both critical and commercial success through the technical and thematic innovations of such writers as Pak Wan-sŏ (b. 1931), O Chŏng-hŭi (b. 1947), and Ch'oe Yun (b. 1953). They along with the previously mentioned fiction writers Yi Mun-yŏl, Hwang Sŏg-yŏng, Yun Hŭng-gil, Cho Chŏng-nae, and Yi Ch'ŏng-jun and poets Sŏ Chŏng-ju and Ko Ŭn, are among the most important living Korean authors.

Thanks to a small group of dedicated translators, Korean literature has gained modest international visibility in recent decades. Poetry is better represented than fiction, and modern literature more than premodern. The short fiction of Hwang Sun-wŏn and the poetry of Sŏ Chŏng-ju are especially well represented in the West, and Yi Mun-yŏl's novels are commanding increasing attention abroad.

Diaspora literature – works written in languages such as English, Japanese, Russian, and German by ethnic Koreans outside of Korea – is flourishing. Yi Mirok's German language memoir, *Der Yalu Fließt* (1946; *The Yalu Flows*) and Richard Kim's English-language novel *The Martyred* (1964) are well known. In Japan, writers of Korean descent such as Yi Yang-ji and Yu Miri have captured the Akutagawa Award, that nation's most prestigious short-fiction prize. Young novelists such as Chang-rae Lee, Heinz Insu Fenkl, and

Nora Okja Keller have achieved commercial and critical success in the U.S.

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