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The Mythical Imagination and Femininity in the Contemporary Poetry of Korea and Mongolia

Myoung-hee Yi

Konkuk University, Korea

Abstract: The comparative study of contemporary poetry in Korea and Mongolia is not begun yet, so it depends on Mongolia folklore or the study in linguistics. Especially, in the case of Mongolia, it is a little too much to the study of a heroic epic more than contemporary poetry, so then it is needed to introduce contemporary poetry and interpret. Nevertheless, S.Dulam, D. Chedeb, C.Daukdorjii and Sarolboing that was introduced in Korea shows the mythological discourse in the Mongolian traditional and imaginative faculty as the contemporary poets who are the representative of Mongolia.

There are close ethnic and cultural relevance between Korea and Mongolia, so most of the point of poetry takes similar story telling; narrative and the mythical imagination.

This article aims at examining a view of nature and femininity in the poems of contemporary women that is similar to the world of poetry in the three poetries including S.Dulam based on the mythical imagination, Namely, the contemporary women poets in Korea express ecological feminism as the mythical imagination.

The maternal that represents femininity is spiritual home of man

and the root of existence that man wants to go back ultimately. Therefore, femininity that appears commonly in contemporary poetry of Korea and Mongolia was presented the figure of maternal and the goddess of creation and healing

We expect that ecological view based on the imagination of women's myth may be the key for recovering the relationship between man and man, and between man and nature, which is exhausted by the industrial capitalism.

Keywords: Mythical Imagination, Femininity, Mongolia's contemporary poetry, D.Natsagdorji, Ts.Damdinsuren, D.Natsagdorj, Baek seok

1. Introduction

As the research on comparing the poetry of Korea and Mongolia is at its initial stage, the research is mainly focused on folklores and linguistics of the two countries. The studies on the poetry of Mongolia, especially, are concentrated mainly on heroic epic hence, Mongolia's contemporary poetry needs to be translated and introduced. However, such Mongolian poets as S.Dulam, D. Chedeb, C.Daukdorjji and Ts.Srolboing, those who can be seen as the representative contemporary poets of Mongolia, have already been introduced to Korea through 'Mongolia Contemporary Poetry Anthology'¹ by Lee an na, who is the head of Korean studies institution in Ullanbaatar.

The poetry mentioned above showed that contemporary poetry

¹ Lee an na. (2003). Moonji (Munhag-gwaJiseongsa), p.1~136

in Mongolia is also connected to fable-like imagination and ecological view of nature. This is because literature can be seen as acceptance of the 'relationship' of human with society, nature and it came from heroic epic of ancient society in which politics and ancestral rite have been very important in the society. In addition, Korea and Mongolia have cultural, racial affinity that the mythical or narrative imagination of their literatures was derived story telling. Shamanism and nature-friendly aspect, especially, are shown in contemporary poetry similar to each other as well. Recently, contemporary poetry in Mongolia has been introduced through <ASIA>, a quarterly published magazine and there have been comments and discussion on them shortly. However, there is still very little research which compared the literatures of Korea and Mongolia directly.

This paper was motivated by D.Natsagdorj and Ts.Damdinsuren', who I was introduced through 'A Study on the enlightening writing in the early modern period in Mongolia'² Ts.Damdinsuren', among the two, is both the most influential poet and novelist of Mongolia who inspired many contemporary poets in today. Most of the poets in the <Mongolia Contemporary Poetry Anthology> were born between 1940 and 1957, which is the period of realist, but they shows modern aspect. However, Ts.Damdinsuren was born before the contemporary poets in 1908 and passed away in 1986 and his pieces show more traditional lyricism.

C.Daukdorjji, who is the professor of Mongolian studies at the National Mongol University, described Ts.Damdinsuren as 'The most influential and representative writer who established the base of contemporary literature of Mongolia in twenty eight Bol'shaya

2 Go, Ja yeon. (2010). Inha Univ., p.1~138

Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya' in <Ts. Damdinsuren, the initiator of 20C's Mongolian contemporary literature> (Korea Critical Review, vol.71)³ C.Daukdorji, in his article, introduced and highlighted Ts. Damdinsuren as a poet whose poetry shows the aspect of oral literature. The [Old Mother] which is one of the most famous poetry of Ts.Damdinsuren in Mongolia and his other poetry shows the aspect of mythology and femininity.

In contrast, there was a Korean poet, who lived in similar period with Ts.Damdinsuren, whose pieces showed the aspect of nature. It is Baek seok (1912~1995) who is one of the 100 influential poet of Korea. Both Baek seok and Ts. Damdinsuren were commonly interested in Russian literatures, working as translators and their poetry reflect ecological nature. In addition, both writers influenced the literatures of their countries a lot. This research, however, focuses more on the fact that both writers' pieces show natural or traditional aspect through mythical or narrative imagination.

2. The mythical imagination and femininity appeared in contemporary poetry of Mongolia.

In 'A study on the enlightening writing in the early modern period in Mongolia', which has been mentioned earlier, Ts.Damdinsuren has been described as a writer who wrote various short folktale-epic. One of his pieces <Four short stories> was found to be similar to 'Panchantantra' of India. Folktale is a story which represent mind of people of the

³ Korea Critic Review. (2008, winter). vol.71, p.196

country well. The stories consist of narrative imagination. Among them, the mythical imagination of poetry of Korea and Mongolia are based on the folk belief stories including folktale and totemism. And the subjects appeared in the stories are described as ecological nature. The ecological nature refers to the nature before it has been destroyed by human that everyone could have seen in their early childhood and this nature can be seen as a place which nurtures creatures and is described as femininity or maternal image.

Ts.Damdinsuren's pieces are themed in nature and the examples are as follows: 「On the way」, 「Beautiful Plant」, 「Sightseeing」, 「Sweet Your Eyes」, 「Gray Elk」, 「The Song of Hunter」, 「The Land of Mongolia」, 「Boy Scout's Summer Training Field」, 「The Book of a Ship, Ranis」, 「My Love Like the Sun of Noon」.⁴ 「Old Mother」(1934) among them, which is a long poetry, shows the scale of oral literature, rhythm, score and rhyme refreshingly.

Mother, with white and white hair/ wish I could please her hurt mind even for a while/ as milk is put in a cup of tea (Part of 「Old Mother」)⁵ This poem describes the mind of mothers that is worried about their son/daughter lives away with short phrases and this seems to be similar to the poetry of Baek seok which describes the scenery of home town. Putting milk in tea is a tradition of Ts.Damdinsuren's home town and he uses this to remind the memory of his home town. The scene that home town reminds us mother and the mother is always worried about her children even after they grew up is described like a picture. The phrase below, also is of Ts.Damdinsuren, describes nature.

⁴ Lee, an na. (2003). Mongolian Contemporary Poetry. Munhag-gwa Jiseongsa. p.199

⁵ Lee, an na. (2003). Mongolian Contemporary Poetry. Munhag-gwa Jiseongsa. p.196

Water is clear/ but turns in to white changing to snow/ water is heavy/ but flies away vaporizing .⁶(Part of 「Sightseeing」)

At first sight, Mongolian poetry can be seen as un-artful as it describes the subject as it is as the phrase above does so. However, this is for describing the subject objectively through the author's eyes lightly excluding the heart line. The phrase shows the technique in absence of technique through showing the original image of nature. The other phrase in 「Sightseeing」 is as follows.

Like an white camel with burden lies/ like an wife with cow shit basket dancing on the way to home/ like a lion and a tiger are fighting each other . (Part of 「Sightseeing」). ⁷

The phrase above describes the scene of home town as it is as well. The phrases including 'like an white camel with burden lies' and 'like an wife with cow shit basket dancing on the way to home' describes the life in Mongolia as it is as the phrase ' putting milk in a cup of tea' does. The writer tries to describe the peaceful scene of his hometown through story of daily life. He shows his nature-friendly view directly by describing cumulus as a camel, wife, a lion and a tiger, could be seen in an old story, which people can see in their home town.

The scene that an wife carries cow or goat shit in a basket represent a peaceful home and a lovely and reliable women who is faithful to her

⁶ Lee, an na. (2003). Mongolian Contemporary Poetry. Munhag-gwaJiseongsa. p.200

⁷ Lee, an na. (2003). Mongolian Contemporary Poetry. Munhag-gwaJiseongsa. p.201

family as the cow or goat shit is used as fuel in Mongolia. That is to say, Ts.Damdinsuren tries to describe Mongolians' bravery and difficulties in nomadic life facetiously through such wild animal as 'lion and tiger'.

Let us turn to the contemporary poetry in <Mongolia Contemporary Poetry Anthology>. In Ts.Sarboing's poetry, the scene of Mongolia is presented through the memory of mother as well. Ts.Sarboing is a poet who is interested in folk belief and was born in 1957. He was interested, especially, in horse that the smell of domestic animals including horse reminds him of the memory of his home town (Lee an na, Mongolia Contemporary Poetry Anthology).

As the example above shows, mythical imagination is, in many cases, presented in ancient times through taste, scent, vision. Human remind memory of something through specific medium and past and present are shown through a story. The poem below can be seen as another example.

<Mother Pours the Sun into a Pot>

Mother pours golden sunshine/ in the gray wooden bowl/
drawing the sun up and down/ The sun spawns on both
cheeks/ when I drink the milk of sun/ Mother skims
Wooreum from the sun every morning/ and give it to me/ I
collect the sun early in the morning everyday/ and mother
tide the sun with rope after milking/ and let it to pluck grass
on Beoldeuk hill.

Milk is very important food for Mongolians. They serve visitors

with tea which is made of milk from a cow and a camel. As the poem says, mother is cooking healthy food for her family. In this poem, fresh foods are described with taste and vision in sunshine which reminds the readers of a piece drawing. The poem stimulates the reader's nostalgia. Every people, instinctually, want to return to their home town when they seek rest. Returning to root, it should be nature. The instinct that humans want to return to nature can be seen as returning to mother earth and mother's womb. Therefore, the nature appeared in the mythical imagination and place of the poem can be seen as the root in which humans want to return to. The root is the goddess of earth. The mother-related religious aspects including mother rock appeared in Mongolian literature are based on the mythical imagination.

The poem below is very interesting one that shows the Mongolian totemism among various mythical imaginations.

<The Sound of Deer>

It is known that the loud and beautiful sound of deer/ makes them live longer. / I heard that the deer is always with/ mouthpiece of golden Bure Saying from my old father/ by deer stone/ Altai Mountains, is lined up to the west with deer/ looks like a huge citrine deer/ This was an ancient shout/ echoed passing down to thirteen chains of mountains. /Khentii mountains, lined up to east with deer/ looks like a deer stopped after walking around/a female deer is hopping around/ on the twenty three valleys/ by the deer stone/ the son reminds his home town/ his father was pleased that he

heard the sound from Altai mountains/ when a huge deer makes sound/ He said the deer/ tries to make the thirteen mountains to feel comfortable/ Father was lost in thought as he heard the sound from Altai mountains/ when an wild deer makes sound He said the deer tries to remove/ enemies from the twenty five valleys The gods of mountains are making sounds for each other/ and sent a citrine envoy with spot on his face /Some ancient deer /made sounds for each other. Do not scare the envoy of Altai mountains greeting ahead of them/ let them pass the way out of danger from black trace. / As the deer stone make sounds, the deer stones which make more incited sound/ made sound far away where the end of front foot of thoughtful ancestors can reach/ The grandfather of ancestors is lost in deep though/ and sitting like an eagle depending on his knees./ Do not shoot deer of Khentii mountain cursing them. / do not evict them driving them to the crack of black traces. /To live until eighty/ to feel the cool of autumn/ citrine deer waits for the sound form old deer/ listening to sound from us/ like he wish to leave/ not because of his illness but for the olds' descendants/ The deer said he could forget the past times/ as he listen to the sound/ deer stones wear crown of moon and sun/ and have transcendental power/ which can bring ancient people to faith/ There is a reason for the loud sound from the huge deer/ which comes to light and fine autumn/ The praying of parents, who are very thoughtful towards their children/, have magical power My father and I left/ from the deer

stone I've been touched by the world/ as the distance that
dismount from the horse and leave there.⁸

*Bure: a sort of wind instrument

*Deer Stone: Deer is the ancient Mongolian totem that the people believed that deer bring a dead person to his hometown.

For Mongolians, deer is a general totem for most regions. Deer is considered as a holy in Mongolia and other places including Altai, Ohryanghae, Kirkiz , Lee an na(2005), The Life and Custom of Mongolians). The thought of deer as a purified existence, good sign, an animal which brings to soul to heaven hence, they considered deer as holy. The deer stone has been originated from the totem religion of deer.

The deer stone is a stone stand in front of grave and this represents Mongolians' view of soul as this means that a dead person returns to a deer after he dies. According to Lee anna, there is a picture of women wearing Mongolian traditional clothes with a spotted deer at the mouth of IkhTenger Valley of Beogeud Mountain which is located in south part of UlaanBaatar and this can be seen as the Goa Maral (red deer) which is the progenitor of Mongolians.

This means the totemism of deer which refers to maternity. The Mongolians' special mythical imagination about deer is, sometimes, presented as mother and women. The deer, which is a spiritual animal, appeared in Mongolians' poetry can be seen as the holy nature and mother-like existence which protect human being.

Also the author has been touched by this poem as it has been translated to Korean well. The underline part is to help you to understand

⁸ Lee, an na. (2003). Mongolian Contemporary Poetry. Munhag-gwaJiseongsa. p.164

the aspect of mythical imagination.

The main theme of this poem of which story is based on deer totemism is that if anyone hears the arcane sound from a deer, he will live longer. As it were, the sound of deer is spiritual and can be seen as life-giving water which can treat a person's disease. Deer in the poem, therefore, can be seen as a mystical creature. In Korea, deer is seen as a spiritual existence, eternal life and regeneration (1992, *The Dictionary of Korean Cultural Symbol*).

The deer is considered to connect ancient/ modern periods, myself and ancestors in Mongolia.⁹ Here I listened from my father about the story of Khentii and Altai mountains. And my father listened about the mysterious secrets of nature from a deer. The deer knows about the history of nature, universe which has been handed down since ancient periods and this deer is female. Maternity, which knows about secrets of ancient creatures, is life and the truth of universe. Truth saves life and the people who listen to the sound of the life will live forever. Accordingly, the mythical imagination of Mongolians' described femininity as life and maternity.

3. The Epical Imagination and Maternity Appeared in Korean Modern Poems

Baek seok is the Korean poet who tried to describe the scene of traditional home town as it is like Ts. Damdinsuren and Ts. Sarboing of Mongolia. Baek seok was born in 1912, in which new-style novel came out in Korea, at Jeongju, North Pyongan. Jeongju is the place in which

⁹ Lee, an na. (2003). *Mongolian Contemporary Poetry*. Munhag-gwa Jiseongsa. p.187

western new-style novel came out earlier and Kim eok and Kim so-wol, the Korean national poets, were born. That is to say, this is an important clue for studying Baek's literary inclination. And Baek's first novel was 「The Son and Mother」

Baek soek used to write a piece of poetry missing his home town and this is well described with mythical imagination in his poetry. That is to say, his poetry which describes the scene he has seen in his child hood is as the image of hill which is his hometown. The hometown was a place with interesting seasonal customs and life but could be scary for children sometimes. The food its scent which he used to have with his relatives in holidays was more than traditions but the ecologically healthy nature.

Below is one of his poetry.

On a holiday, I went to grandfather and Grandmother Jin's with my parents and my doggy followed me and I met my aunt, who work very well that she can make a role of hemp in a day and winks as she talks and her daughter, little daughter who has star mark on her face, they are from Village Shinri and there are many peach trees at the house which is little bit far from there.

The aunt who is from Tosan which is near the Christian's village and her daughter who became a second wife after marrying with 40years old guy at her age of 16 and her skin is colored with dark-brown and her nipple is darker and Seundongi who is her son... (Ellipsis) The night is deepening; mothers talk together at the warmest part of room laughing, children plays in the other room with Joajil and SSambangi...(paying together). We sleep until we can smell the scent of radish soup (Part of the fox village Family)

This is a scene show the relatives live in the fox village. The main character of the poem went to the house of the eldest son of the family and he has seen his aunt and her daughter who has chickenpox scar on her face and works very well and from new village (Shinri), her little sister. Also he met his 16 years old aunt, who is sexually attractive, from Tosan married with a guy who is 40 years old and gave birth to one daughter and one son. As the poem shows, the author, in his childhood, has seen the other women other than his mother interestingly. Imagine that how a child described a woman whose nipple is colored in black and leaps are dark-brown as sexy! The scene was described through view point of a kid with his playfulness interestingly.

His poem makes the reader to feel as if someone reads the poem by the reader. From the story village, which has been written with narrative imagination, the reader may recognize that his childhood was the happiest moment of his life although he had hard time at that time for the author, holidays were the only period of festival and plentiful time that he could eat lots of food and see other women other than his mother. Therefore, the scene of village which he saw going to his relatives with his mother can be seen as nature itself or the ecological nature in which there is peace and everything is in their position.

The space in which Baek seok put values in is his hometown in which tradition still remains.

An old guy who is more than seventy years old and live in an old temple in Suyang mountain was collected wild eligible green talking that/ a cow, which goes to graze when it is ill, is cleverer than human being

that he can find the grass which can treat his disease within ten steps from where it stands. (part of 「The cow at temple」, Ts. Sarboing)

Ts. Sarboing presents his mythical imagination through an animal story as 「The Sound of Deer」 does so in the poem above. The instinct can be seen as the healthiest voice for animals which hearken to the sound of nature. There is an overlap between the cow, which grazes grass when it is ill, and wild eligible green, which the cow may grazed. The old guy who is over seventy years old and eats grass can be seen as a spiritual existence which hearkens to the sound of nature. The old guy reminds me of ‘natural things’ but not artificial things which have been made by human being. The poem below described also grandmother as a tiger.

When I shouted at my mother like a wild horse riding my mother’s back, she used to give me peony with its lower branch, pear steamed which is used for ancestral rites hanging in the middle branch (Jongdae) and goose’s eggs which she treasures/ when my mother was pregnant me, the old grandmother had a dream that a huge tiger came into my family’s grave site and was pleased that my mother came from Seoul and the fact that I was born as eldest grandchild of her eldest nephew and was proud of me and treated me gladly.¹⁰ Part of < The tiger-like old grandmother beyond mountains, Baek seek >

*Flowers enlargement– Middle branch of plant

This poem, also, consists of a story of folktale or fairytale which starts from ‘long-long time ago....’ The poem shows that the main

¹⁰ Kim Hak-dong. (1988). Poetry of Baek seek, Saemoonsa.

character used lash out at his mother as he was young in his childhood. However, his mother gave him pear steamed which is used for ancestral rites with its whole branches although the period was Japanese Colonial era, in which most people were poor. And she gave his son goose' egg which was rare in that period. The 'I' in the poem is a noble son for my mother and she is a reliable existence as the mother earth which nurtures young creatures.

This is a story about happiness of a family that when mother was pregnant the 'I', the old grandmother had a dream that a huge tiger came into the family's graveyard and she was pleased that 'I' was born as the eldest grandson of the eldest nephew.

Tiger, which is [birɔm] in Manchu and [bars] in Mongolian, was considered as a totem as the myth of Dangun showed in Korea. According to shamanism, a tiger can defeat the devil and in folktale, it is a symbol which most people are afraid of. This poem shows a part of Korean baby dream of the forthcoming conception through the episode that Baek seok was born after the dream of a tiger.

Hence, the tiger can be seen as the son and the son can be seen as the tiger. The mother who gave birth to his son can be seen as an objective correlative which is related to hometown and the grandmother appears in his poem, also, is described as god of wisdom who knows the truth of the world.

That is to say, Baek's poetry consists of story which is made of mythical imagination with the memory of childhood in which enough stories about foods and daily life can be found.

The poetry of Baek seok is studied in Korea by many researchers focusing on the aspect of ecological and mythical imagination. Because

his poetry reminds the readers of Korea lost during the period of Japanese Colonial era through the memory of his affluent childhood. The mythical imagination can be seen as a reasonable poetic mechanism of a poet who regenerates the place of poorness through the memory of rich childhood. The poet wanted to remember and protect unchangeable ancient place, the nature, but not human's brutality and natural things, the truth of nature. The mythical imagination can be seen as the medium for integration and expansion of which place and time are not separated and communication. Therefore, a poet is both a shaman and messiah of the universe who brings us the truth and hope.

4. Summing Up

Mythical imagination presents the view of ecological nature. As it were, it refers to creature and esthetics of forest. Also, it refers to the nature which is based on universal view of life but not nature based on human being. Hence, the aspect of mythical imagination described as maternal things which direct the forest, femininity related ones or female deer which has the image and mother in the poetry of Baek seok and poets of Mongolia.

The term Ecology is the compound word of logos (study) and oikos, which is a Greek word (house, village and residential) was used E. Haeckel referring to 'the entire study of an organism of environment' for the first time. Therefore, becoming interested in natural and living things is a natural change in the modern period in which industrialization is accelerating and also is our duty. In this sense, the feminine image in

mythical imagination which represents living/ecological view of nature makes us to feel more comfortable by showing hometown.

Baekseok, who is one of the representative poets of Korea, protects the Korean traditional aspect a colony through mythical imagination reminding us of the torture of a colony. As the poetry describes the taste reminds of hometown, memory of mother and grandmother, the reader can have the will to live and hope. This can be seen as the realistic power of mythical imagination.

The Mongolian contemporary poets including Ts.Damdinsuren, C.Daukdorjji, Ts.Sarolgoing shows similar mythical imaginary aspect and femininity.

The Mongolian poets show femininity and ecological view of nature exposing mother in most part of their poetry to place them in juxtaposition with hometown and nature in which they want to return. In the paper, the poetry of Ts.Damdinsuren which is based on mythical imagination and of a contemporary poetess L.Ulziitugs will be reviewed. In addition, the view of nature and femininity of Korean contemporary poetesses will be studied together. Especially, godmother, which is the symbol of birth and the ecological/mythical imagination about nature have been presented as image of life and regeneration through original symbol based on goddess. That is to say, Korean contemporary poetesses present echo-femininity through mythical imagination. For example, the godmother of the earth is praised as Gaia or Nu Gua of China or goddess and is the prototype of fecundity which is full of ancient vitality and this reminds the reader of maternity through mythical or narrative imagination. The maternity which is represented as femininity can be seen as spiritual home town and the root of existence which we want to

return. Also, it is the strut which treats the torture of life and is the matrix of nature.

Therefore, the femininity appeared in Korean and Mongolian contemporary poetry in common can be seen as maternity and is described as the goddess of creating and regeneration. That is to say, human beings are regenerated and treated continuously through mythical imagination in the gap between painful reality and ideal.

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