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Characteristics of Shamanism in Modern Korean Poetry: Focusing on Seo Jeong-ju's Poems

Jae-woong Yun
Professor, Dongguk University



Seo Jeong-ju (1915–2000) is considered as the master of modern Korean poetry for exploiting the distinctive sound and rhythmic structure of Korean language. Characteristics of *musok* (巫俗, shamanism) are unconscious elements that permeate the first half of his sixty-eight years of writing. Despite the decline of *musok* tradition as Korea accepted the Western notions of modernity, the remnants of shamanism have resiliently remained influential in various art forms and allows one to trace its cultural origins. This paper attempts to find such evidences from poems written by Seo Jeong-ju. Unlike Baek Seok(1912–1996) who uses shamanic elements as material for his literature, Seo approaches them in a different manner. During the Japanese colonial rule and post-liberation authoritarian regimes, he resigned himself to political pacifism that adapted to the existing system. Despite his brilliant use of florid poetic diction, his poems tend to summon the “glorious past” or be buried under “eternalism” that disguises the disregard of history. While the *musok* tradition subordinates humans as those who require assistance from supernatural beings on one hand, another strand upholds individual agency of the narrator as the center of the world. Later in his career, Seo develops further the concept of *pungryu*(風流), a sense of Korean traditional metaphysics and esthetics, into an advanced form of *musok*. I argue that Seo is the founder who embraced *musok* in Korean modern poetry by utilizing traditional ideologies in imaginative ways.

Jae-woong Yun is a professor of modern Korean literature education at Dongguk University. He teaches creative writing and modern Korean novels, and has published extensive books and articles on poet Seo Jeong-ju.

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