

Reading Park Kyung-ni's *Kim's Daughters* from the Perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism: Focusing on Ethical Representation and Ethical Knots of "Otherized Subjects"

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Abstract: Park Kyung-ni was a Korean novelist who gained international fame with her epic novel *The Earth*. She mainly focused on the lives of an unhappy women in her literary works. This study investigates the multi-layered narrative of a family's tragic fate and unstable social system in *Kim's Daughters*. While *Kim's Daughters* opens with a shocking death, one should not solely focus on the superficial layer of this death. This is because, in the novel, the unethical incidents and political affairs that lead to death do not originate from a single relationship between the subject and the other, but rather represent otherized subjects in family histories and historical time. The ethical texts embedded in *Kim's Daughters* are appropriate to read through the lens of ethical literary criticism, which dissects each ethical choice model and analyzes the motivations and processes thereof. This study explores the (non-) ethical behavior and internal chaos of the characters in *Kim's Daughters*, and analyzes the intertextuality reflected in the specific modern Korean history and location. This study presents a new research methodology for reading the worldview of Park Kyung-ni by deconstructing the ethical problem and examining the ethical knots in the novel. Furthermore, by applying sub-concepts such as ethical standards, ethical environment, ethical selection, ethical enlightenment, ethical taboo, and ethical dilemma, this study illuminates the ethical issues that change between life and death and are inherent in the subjects or specific events of the novel.

Keywords: ethical literary criticism; Park Kyung-ni; *Kim's Daughters*; ethical representation; ethical knots; otherized subject

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标题：从文学伦理学批评视角解读朴景利的《金药局家的女儿们》：他者化主体的伦理表征与伦理结

内容摘要：凭史诗小说《土地》蜚声国际的韩国小说家朴景利，向来关注女性的生存困境，《金药局家的女儿们》也不例外。在该作品中，作者通过多层次的叙事结构，描绘了一个家庭的悲惨命运和动荡的社会环境。尽管《金药局家的女儿们》以震撼人心的死亡为开场，我们却不应只关注这种死亡的表层含义。因为在作品中导致死亡的不道德事件和政治事件的并非起源于主体与他者的单一关系，而是代表了家族史和历史中的他者化的主体。《金药局家的女儿们》中的伦理文本非常适合运用文学伦理学批评理论来解读，因为它剖析了各个伦理选择模型并分析其动机及过程。本文旨在探讨《金药局家的女儿们》中人物的(非)伦理行为及内部混乱，对现代韩国特定历史时期及场所的互文性展开分析。通过解构小说中的伦理问题及审视其中的伦理结，提出解读朴景利世界观的新研究方法。此外，本文还通过“伦理准则”、“伦理环境”、“伦理选择”、“伦理启蒙”、“伦理禁忌”和“伦理困境”等概念，阐明变化于生死之间的、存在于小说主题及特定事件之中的伦理问题。

关键词：文学伦理学批评；朴景利；《金药局家的女儿们》；伦理表征；伦理结；他者化主体

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1. Encounter between Park Kyung-ni's Novel and Ethical Literary Criticism

Park Kyung-ni (1926-2008), a Korean novelist who gained international fame with her epic novel, *The Earth* (1994), has mainly focused on the lives of unhappy women since her early short stories to the later long novels. In particular, the multi-layered narrative of a family's tragic fate and unstable social system in *Kim's Daughters* (1962), emerged in her novel, *The Earth*, resulting in a huge worldview synthesis. *The Earth* was written over a 26-year period from 1969 and deals with the family history of Choi Champan (vice minister) who lived during the late Joseon Dynasty rule and Japanese colonial period. This novel depicts the universal will of human beings embodied by Seo-hee, the only daughter of the Choi family, amid modern Korean history, including the Donghak Peasant Revolution, Eulsa Treaty, Sino-Japanese War, Gando Convention, and Manchurian Incident. This method of linking significant historical events and individual fates is similar to the layered narrative structure used in films by fifth generation Chinese directors or Taiwanese new wave cinema.

Similar to *The Earth*, *Kim's Daughters* opens with a shocking incident that results in death. It is clear that death intertwined with immorality is a dynamic motif that develops throughout this novel. Park Kyung-ni has said, "There is a lot of death in my works. Death in the works is usually the end to highlight life" (Park 141-143). It should be noted that one should not solely focus on these superficial layers of death. This is because, in the novel, the unethical events or political affairs that lead to death do not originate from a single relationship between the subject and the other, but rather form a part of the family histories intertwined with the historical background. Furthermore, the literary value of *Kim's Daughters* is that the downfall of a family caused by social change, as well as the fate of the characters, do not end in tragedy. Rather, the narrative moves forward due to the open dynamism of an irresistible succession of misfortunes driven by one character.¹

Various ethical texts inherent in the multi-layered narrative of *Kim's Daughters* are suitable for being read through the lens of "ethical literary criticism." Ethical literary criticism was proposed by Nie Zhenzhao to compensate for the limitations of ethical criticism proposed by Western literary critics. It is a critical approach that examines the different phenomena of life described in literary texts, namely, "Human-Self-Other-Society." This theory dissects each ethical selection model placed in a specific historical environment as complex ethical relationships, such as "nature", and analyzes the motives and processes of the ethical selection. The ultimate goal of such critical methods is to provide experiences and lessons for the advancement of human civilization by revealing the moral inspiration behind literary works and providing effective moral examples.²

As such, what ethical literary criticism seeks as a critical theory aligns with the purpose of this article that analyzes the (non-) ethical behavior and internal chaos of the characters in *Kim's Daughters*, as well as the intertextuality reflected in the specificity of modern Korean history and the location, Tongyeong. This is further linked to the author's intention to reveal, through ethical issues, the fateful relationships between the subject and other, human and nature, and individual and group. The main ethical texts of *Kim's Daughters* are as follows: a (non-) ethical layered narrative linked with complex events; the ethicality shown in the selective behavior of many characters; and the future ethical possibility presented by sharing human unhappiness directly in relation to modern history. This study presents a new research methodology for understanding the worldview of writer Park Kyung-

1 See Hye-kyung Lee, "A Study on the Tragic Worldview Appeared in Park Kyung-ni's Novel—Focusing on *Kim's Daughters*," *Korean Language* 84 (2020): 405.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking UP, 2014.

ni by deconstructing the ethical problems presented in *Kim's Daughters* through the lens of ethical literary criticism. Furthermore, this article can contribute toward solidifying and expanding the status of ethical literary criticism as an independent critical discourse.

2. The Ethical Literary Criticism and Ethical Structures of Literary Texts

The emergence of literary criticism that emphasized ethical morals occurred in the 1960s in the United States. The first theory was called ethical criticism and was represented by Wayne Clayton Booth. It was mainly concerned with the ideologies presented in the work and their effects on the reader. However, by the end of the 20th century, the value and moral content of literary works were seen as irrelevant, and the popularity of ethical criticism gradually began to decline. Meanwhile, in China, the popular literary criticism at that time showed a lack of ethics in form, literature, gender, and environment. This approach moved literary criticism away from the literary work and did not regard the literary text as important, except to prove critics' specific propositions. As a result, ethical literary criticism was born as part of the argument that the ethics and norms of the literary world should be kept as a strict criticism rather than an object of material desire.¹

Under the above-mentioned circumstances, since 2005, ethical criticism has been a major literary approach among Chinese academics under the name of literary ethical criticism. Ethical literary criticism is a critical theory that reads, analyzes, and interprets the ethical characteristics and functions of literary works from an ethical viewpoint. Ethical literary criticism regards a literary work as a product of morality, that is, it treats literature as an ethical expression of a particular historical context. This theory further states that literature is not only the art of language, but also the art of texts, and a unique mode of expressing ethics and morals. Essentially, literature is the art of ethics in which human beings invent the letter symbols to record their understanding of life and ethics, freeing themselves from the demands of ethical expression which gave rise to the first types of literature.²

Lim Dae Geun, who has discussed the academic value of the "Chinese School" of ethical literary criticism, considered the relationship between ethical literary criticism and literary ethics as follows. Ethical literary criticism is included in literary ethics, however, the former plays a key role in shaping and enriching the latter discourse. She states, "Literary ethics deals with issues in the literary field

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 17-25.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, "Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 189-190.

such as creation, reading, criticism, literary education, and literary awards from an academic standpoint, but ethical literary criticism is mainly interested in reading comprehension of literary texts” (Lim 194). Therefore, ethical literary criticism is a discourse that guides the ethical standards that human subjects in the social context cannot overcome and the ethical environment surrounding them, as well as brings the problem of ethical choice into the academic field.¹

Nie Zhenzhao, took the lead in establishing the Chinese School of ethical literary criticism and revealed the ultimate goal of the critical discourse as follows:

1. Chinese ethical literary criticism aims to effectively solve specific literary problems by converting literary ethics into literary ethical criticism methodology.
2. Chinese ethical literary criticism regards the didactic function of literature as the basic function of literature, and theoretically establishes its own position in ethical literary criticism.
3. The concept of ethical criticism in China was replaced with the concept of ethical literary criticism which was distinguished from moral criticism. This therefore solved the problem of literary criticism and the dissolution of history by changing ethical literary criticism from subjective moral criticism to objective criticism.
4. Chinese literary and ethical criticism has its own analyses including ethical environment, ethical order, ethical confusion, ethical dilemma, ethical taboo, and ethical selection. By establishing the terminology and discourse system, ethical literary criticism can become a tool that can easily dominate literary criticism.²

According to Nie Zhenzhao, literature is a distinctive expression of ethics and morals made in a particular historical period, with moral education as its main function. Therefore, the goal of ethical literary criticism is to unravel the ethical characteristics of literary works, describe the characters and their lives from an ethical viewpoint, and make ethical judgments about them. Additionally, by deciding between natural and ethical selection, it attempts to uncover the fundamental differences between humans and nature. He adds that while natural

1 See Dae Geun Lim, “The Academic Value of ‘Chinese School’ Ethical Literary Criticism,” *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 194-203.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 8-9.

selection allowed humans to physically evolve from apes, ethical selection is what separates humans spiritually from animals.¹

Nie Zhenzhao also places distinct emphasis on the ethical structure present within literary texts. An ethical structure identical to the ethical line creates a complete text where various ethical knots are connected by the ethical structure (ethical line) within the literary text. Therefore, while reading literary texts, ethical literary criticism emphasizes discovering or resolving ethical knots formed on the ethical line. This layered process of forming and dismantling ethical knots allows us to understand literary texts in various ways.²

Ethical structure is a textual arrangement constructed in the context of a person's thoughts and behaviors within the text. It consists of four structures: "personal relationship", "thinking activity (consciousness structure and expression structure)", "behavior", and "norm". Character relationships are a tool to store various ethical conflicts between characters, and thought activity refers to a character's logical thinking process, including the formation and development of emotions, logical judgment and reasoning, and the formation of will. Norm refers to an ethics of thought and behavior, without which an ethical structure of thought and behavior cannot be formed. Therefore, character relationships, thought activities, behaviors, and norms do not exist independently, but rather form an overall complex ethical structure through mutual cross desire.³

The ethical knot refers to the intensive embodiment of contradictions and conflicts in the structure of a literary work. The ethical knot constitutes an ethical plight and shows the basic ethical issues of literary texts. In normal circumstances, the ethical knot belongs to the horizontal structure of the literary text. Only when the ethical knot of a literary text is combined with the ethical line, can it constitute the ethical structure of narrative among literary works. Ethical knots in literary texts are related and linked together by ethical lines, and constitute the complete ethical structure of the text. (Nie 525)

Here, the ethical line refers to the linear structure of a literary text which generally belongs to the vertical structure of the text. The ethical line creates a complex ethical structure by stitching together one or more ethical knots in the literary

1 See Nie Zhenzhao and Shang Biwu, "Ethical Literary Criticism: East and West," *Arcadia* 1 (2015): 7.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 46.

3 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 519-520.

text. In any work, the problems of the leading ethical line, big or small, many or few, are intricately intertwined with each other and enrich the structure. These characteristics determine the length of the ethical line of a literary work and the degree of subordination of quantity.¹ Therefore, at first glance, the line of ethics can be perceived to be a concept similar to the plot because the central plot of a literary work is connected to the leading ethical line, and the multi-layered plots connected to the central plot are in contact with the secondary ethical line. However, the ethical line differs from the plot in that it is directly related to the issue of ethics emphasized by ethical literary criticism.²

Therefore, the complexity of a literary text is determined by the number of ethical knots constituting the ethical line and the difficulty of solving them. Furthermore, different ethical knots can have an inherent logical relationship between them and exist independently. Therefore, the task of ethical literary criticism is to interpret the fragmented ethical knots within the literary text. This is because the process of deriving specific ethical knots and advancing them to the ethical line and ethical structure is the task of reading and interpreting a literary work under ethical literary criticism. In other words, its goal is to understand the interaction of the relational networks of culture, history, and society, and prove that literature is the most vivid expression of real life and contains the general breath of an era.

This article analyzes the ethical issues in *Kim's Daughters* from the perspective of ethical literary criticism by deriving a plurality of ethical knots from the characters and events. For this purpose, the following section sets Kim Yak-guk, his wife Han-sil daek (Mrs. Han-sil), and their five daughters as “otherized subjects” and examines their ethical representations. Thereafter, we will derive an ethical structure formed from the relationships they have with others around them.

3. Representation and Ethical Knots of “Otherized Subjects” in *Kim's Daughters*

3.1 Ethical representation of otherized subjects

The characters Park Kyung-ni creates in *Kim's Daughters* are otherized subjects who have deviated from social ideology in the face of adversity in Korean modern history. Here, the otherized subject means a person who cannot act according to his or her will due to their surrounding people and circumstances but is gradually being

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 525-526.

2 See Hue Hoang Thi & Nguyen Nguyen Hoang, “Traditional Culture in Contemporary Vietnamese Poetry: A Perspective from Nie Zhenzhao’s Ethical Literary Criticism”, *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 1 (2020): 55.

othered and alienated from the central narrative. Kim Yak-guk and his daughters, referred to in the novel's title, are portrayed as independent figures of the middle class in Tongyeong city who go through an ethical structure of complicated ethical knots and face a miserable fate. In the first half of the novel, they insist on breaking bonds with others; however, in the second half, they discover new values to form reality through the relativization or diversification of others. Therefore, in this section, I will examine the ethical representation of subjects who are otherized in connection with ethical issues. Subsequently, in the next section, the ethical issues of otherized subjects will be analyzed using ethical knots and the ethical structure.

The character to consider is Kim Yak-guk's wife, Han-sil daek, who is not mentioned in the title of the novel. Han-sil daek, named Takbunshi, is the daughter of the wealthy Taksi and is located at the center of the novel. Nevertheless, Han-sil daek is most clearly otherized in her intertwined relationships with Kim Yak-guk, her five daughters, and the people around her. She comes across as a shadow of others and dies a tragic death for the sake of others. Han-sil daek is presented as a sacrificial figure devoted to her husband and children and is the universal representation of Korean women living in modern society. In the ethical structure of character relationships comprising numerous ethical knots, she only exists as an otherized subject who takes care of others. If we compare Kim Yak-guk's family to a single tree, it can be said that Han-sil daek is presented as an intermediary entity that connects the roots and branches.

Next, Kim Yak-guk is the son of Kim Bong-je's younger brother Kim Bong-ryong, who ran a pharmacy in Tongyeong, and his real name is Kim Seong-soo. He is portrayed throughout the novel as a lonely stranger due to the early death of his parents, despite having a wife and daughters. Later, Ki-doo, who is married to his fourth daughter Yong-ok, takes over the fishing grounds and ships, but when their newly purchased fishing boat sinks, the Kim Yak-guk family's influence sharply declines. Subsequently, Kim Yak-guk suffers from stomach cancer and he eventually dies. In this way, he is a symbolic figure representing the middle class in a fishing village that is completely ruined, and a lonely otherized subject who is erased by death. In the family tree, as the head of a family he represents the root of a tree, however, he is characterized as a dying being, accepting of the unpredictable family tragedies. In other words, Kim Yak-guk can be held responsible for the tragedy faced by his daughters as he imprisoned himself in both solitude and behavior.¹

Yong-suk, the eldest daughter, left home at the age of 17 and was soon

1 See Sang Jin Lee, "The Paradox of Destiny: The Tragic Human Figure in Park Kyung-ni's Novel," *Contemporary Fiction Research* 56 (2014): 393.

widowed. Subsequently, she is represented as a typical capitalist individual obsessed with money. In addition, she is imprisoned at a detention center after murdering her son, whom she had from an adulterous relationship with a married doctor at Charity Hospital. Later, she is released due to insufficient evidence, but is turned away by her family and becomes estranged. Despite this, Yong-suk, with her eloquence, shows her capitalist identity by enticing the people of the neighborhood with her wealthy life and by occasionally doing favors for her family. For Yong-suk, money becomes a symbolic medium with so-called pseudo-omnipotence. However, in a different interpretation, regardless of ethical issues, she may be considered the gendered representation of a woman who has been freed from men and has achieved economic independence.

Yong-bin, the second daughter, is a devout Christian who attends S college in Seoul and is represented as the most modernized among all the daughters. She builds friendships with Kate, a British missionary healer and evangelist living in Tongyeong and tries to overcome her family's misfortune by sublimating it to religion. Because of her rational and intellectual disposition, Yong-bin is the only child who gains Kim Yak-guk's trust. Unlike the other four daughters, Yong-bin is ethical and calm in everything she says and does. It is worth noting that Park Kyung-ni tries to overcome the tragic fate of many others and the circumstances of the times through the character of Yong-bin. Among the members of the Kim Yak-guk family sinking into darkness, Yong-bin is represented as an individual who does not surrender the will to get over tragedy. Therefore, Yong-bin can be said to be a willful person who seeks light in the midst of misfortune and connects the chaos of the present with a hope for the future. However, she lacks close interaction with her family members and is placed in the position of an otherized subject who has to overcome her family's misfortunes. Nevertheless, the setting of the novel reinforces her savior character and ethical representation.

Yong-ran, the third daughter, is the most beautiful among the five daughters and has strong sexual desires. She falls in love with a man named Han-dol, who works at Kim Yak-guk's house. When her sexual obsession and unethical behavior becomes known, she marries Choi Yeon-hak, a drug addict who is sexually disabled. However, while her husband is at the detention center, she has an affair with Han-dol again. When Yeon-hak returns and finds out about her affair, he murders her mother, Han-sil daek, and Han-dol. Yong-ran, witnesses the crime and becomes insane, wandering the streets in search of Han-dol. The author not only portrays her as an unethical character with a personality disorder and warns the readers about the consequences of her distorted desire, but also uses her tragedy to denounce the

violence of the patriarchal system.¹

Furthermore, due to her innocent and beautiful appearance, she is portrayed as a character growing up in nature, and through the words of the wise and rational Yong-bin, her instinctive behaviors are presented as fresh rather than evil.²

Yong-ok, the fourth daughter, is a devout Christian just like Yong-bin, and is devoted to her family. However, similar to Yong-ran, she marries without love and meets a tragic fate. Her husband, Seo Ki-doo, was in charge of Kim Yak-guk's household chores, and originally had his heart set on Yong-ran. However, he married Yong-ok at the request of Kim Yak-guk. Subsequently, Ki-doo's affections do not grow toward Yong-ok, and he spends many of his days outside of the home. When Yong-ok finds that her father-in-law has desires for her, she sets out to find Ki-doo in Busan. When their paths cross, they board a boat back to Tongyeong, however, an accident sinks the boat and kills Yong-ok and her young son. In this way, Yong-ok's sacrificial character and the morality represented by her tragic fate are very similar to that of Han-sil daek.

Finally, Yong-hye, the youngest daughter, is a character who occupies little space in the narrative. Brown haired Yong-hye, takes care of her father who suffering from stomach cancer and her sister, Yong-ran, who has gone mad. She is not presented as an individual who demands things for herself, but rather as an obedient daughter who follows the flow of the family history and is committed to her fate. Yong-hye, similar to Yong-bin, is not an externalized subject who gets caught up in a specific event or is erased by death. Therefore, if Yong-bin is a willful individual who overcomes the dark modern history implied by the ruin of the Kim Yak-guk family and enters modern history, Yong-hye is a passive participant in the trends of the times.

As we have seen so far, Kim Yak-guk, Han-sil daek, and their five daughters are represented as different types of subjects. Furthermore, ethical events are always associated with the representations revealed in entangled relationships with family members and others. Except for Kim Yak-guk, who is in a somewhat ambiguous position, the relationships of the family are defined by (Han-sil daek's) sacrificial behavior, (Yong-bin's) rational thinking, and (Yong-ok's) obedient behavior. Yong-ok's behavior occurs due to the behaviors of Yong-suk and Yong-ran which are intertwined with politics. This leads to a text structure based on the ethical structure

1 See Chae-Won Lee, "Romantic and Revolutionary Irony—Focusing on *Kim's Daughters*," *Literature and Imaging* 16 (2015): 471-472.

2 See Yun A Cho, "Original Guilty of Victims of Violence in the Novel of Park Kyung-ni," *The Study of Humanities* 41 (2011): 148.

discussed above: character relationships, thought activities, and behaviors. The ethical structure of the only excluded norm can be found in the social environment of modern Korean history that dominates the above three factors. One example is Yong-bin, who has received a public education and believes in Christianity and behaves rationally and normatively unlike other characters; another is that of Kim Yak-guk who meets a gisaeng (geisha) despite having a wife, yet is not portrayed as an unethical person.

As such, the four ethical structures appearing in *Kim's Daughters* progress to a completed narrative through the subdivided ethical knots corresponding to each structure. In the following section, we draw a concrete ethical knot centered on the representation of the above-mentioned figures.

3.2 Multi-layered ethical knots of otherized subjects

The ethical representations of otherized subjects dealt with in the previous section form an ethical structure through specific events as the characters engage with others. In this section, I examine the events that occurred in the relationships with others through the ethical structure of ethical literary criticism, focusing on the otherized subjects of Kim Yak-guk, Han-sil daek, and their five daughters. To do this, I analyze the lower ethical knots related to ethical standards, ethical environment, ethical selection, ethical enlightenment, ethical taboo, and ethical dilemma shown in literary texts. By dismantling the ethical knot inherent in the text of *Kim's Daughters* and connecting it to the ethical structure of character relationships, thought activities, behaviors, and norms, the ethical theme of this novel will be revealed.

To read *Kim's Daughters* through the lens of ethical literary criticism, it is essential to first understand the ethical environment presented in the novel. Unlike ethical criticism, ethical literary criticism does not evaluate a given literary work as good or evil based on today's moral standards. Instead, it emphasizes so-called "historicism", which explores the ethical values of a given work in relation to a specific historical context and a series of periods in which the text was written.¹ According to ethical literary criticism, the ethical environment refers to the ethical language environment, which means the historical time and space in which a literary work is located. Since the subject of a literary work is fictional history, ethical literary criticism must analyze and criticize a literary work in a specific ethical environment and perform an objective ethical interpretation of the work itself. This is because literature in a specific historical period has a fixed ethical environment as well as an ethical language environment, therefore both must be considered to

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, "Towards an Ethical Literary Criticism," *Arcadia* 1 (2015): 84.

understand the literature.¹

Regarding ethical environment, *Kim's Daughters* is divided into two parts based on time and space. The first part comprises Chapter 1 and the second comprises Chapters 2 to 6. Quantitatively, this dichotomous division is disproportionate, however, it becomes clear when considering the time and space in which the events take place. While the first chapter deals with the events of Kim Yak-guk's parents' generation, the latter chapters shed light on the Kim family in the 1930s, 20 years after the Korea-Japan annexation was signed on 22 August 1910. As such, this novel shows a disproportionate temporality of approximately two to three years in the first chapter, which covers a 60-year period. Furthermore, the title of the first chapter, "Tongyeong," provides the geographical background of the novel and acts as a mediator of the historical situation of the port opening period, implying space and time simultaneously.² Due to this dichotomous separation of time and space, the contents of the first chapter were completely removed from the film, *Kim's Daughters* (1963), based on this novel, where only the events of Kim Yak-guk family from the second chapter were in focus.

The first ethical structure to examine is the character of Han-sil daek, the wife of Kim Yak-guk. She interacts with Kim Yak-guk, her five daughters, and almost all of the characters associated with them. As described earlier, Han-sil daek occupies an important position in the relational structure of characters and is represented as the most strongly otherized subject in the entangled relationship with others. Until she is murdered by Yong-ran's husband, she always appears as a sacrificial figure. The first step in the ethical choice process is moral awareness, which depends on how suited an individual is to learn and use knowledge.³ Even in ethical literary criticism, ethical selection implies that human moral selection leads to maturity and perfection. At the same time, some individuals make two or more moral selections, but different selections lead to different results, and thus have different ethical values.⁴

However, Han-sil daek's behaviors are not enacted for herself, but always stem

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 547-548.

2 See Su-yeon Yoo, "A Study on the Correlation between Time and Space in *Kim's Daughters*," *Korean Language and Literature* 63 (2016): 263.

3 See Jihyeon Kim and Jeffrey Loewenstein, "Analogical Encoding Fosters Ethical Decision Making Because Improved Knowledge of Ethical Principles Increases Moral Awareness," *Journal of Business Ethics* 172 (2021): 308.

4 See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 532.

from a selection for others. In the time and space of Tongyeong, Gyeongsangnam-do, Korea, 20 years after the Korea-Japan annexation, the country collided with a wave of modernization, yet traditional notions of gender, family, education, religion, and occupation still remained. In situations related to Han-sil's daek, examples of ethical choice frequently develop, especially in relation to sexual and family issues. For example, when her husband, Kim Yak-guk, visits So-cheong, a gisaeng, Han-sil daek reveals an ethically selective responsibility and blames herself for not having a son.

Han-sil daek had made it impossible for their descendants to come to their precious family and not be able to have children. She was ashamed to see her husband and ashamed to see others. She secretly asked to husband how it would be to get other woman for his descendants, but Kim Yak-guk did not say anything. However, Han-sil daek only thought of the many daughters as the heavens. (Park 86)

After a son named Yong-hwan died shortly after birth, Han-sil daek lived more sacrificially due to the guilt of having five daughters. The same is true for the third daughter, Yong-ran, who is most troubled. In the end, Han-sil daek is completely erased from the narrative when Yong-ran's husband murders her. The quote below shows the scene where Han-sil daek is stabbed to death by Yeon-hak's axe while she was going to rescue Yong-ran.

Han-sil daek was beaten in the rain and seemed to be dreaming. [...] When she got to the front of the house, the rain poured even more torrentially and lightning flashed. [...] There was no sound. Han-sil daek relaxed a bit and wiped the rainwater that ran down her face and shook the private door. "Yong-ran! Please open the door!" [...] Han-sil daek struggled to hold onto the private door. The door swung open, dark shadows. [...] Han-sil daek felt something pouring over her head. "Oh! Save me!" Han-sil daek collapsed. Han-dol and Yong-ran, who had been sleeping deeply in this commotion, woke up. They saw Yeon-hak wielding an axe. Yeon-hak saw them too. With a smirk, he approached. The axe held in the eyes of Han-dol is nailed. (Park 332-333)

As seen in the quote above, Han-sil daek dies while trying to rescue her daughter from her husband. We can discuss the ethical selection exhibited by her behavior at this moment; however, the problem is that her ethical choice, represented by the

ethical responsibility of sacrifice, ends in death. Therefore, is this ethical selection correct? Here we fall into a kind of ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemma, one of the ethical structures of ethical literary criticism, is a paradox and consists of two moral propositions. In other words, choosing one of the two results in a violation of ethics, or universal moral principles.

Further, the premise of an ethical dilemma is that one of the two correct options must be chosen because, when a selection is made, the ethical dilemma is fully revealed. This also means that both selections have moral properties and are both right selections. No matter which option is selected, ethically, all of them violate the ethics of another protest, and there is no choice but to form a moral paradox. Therefore, even if the choice is moral, the consequences of the choice are bound to be immoral.¹ In the case of Han-sil daek, she concentrates on the latter, choosing to prevent her daughter's affair from being discovered and at the same time save her from Yeon-hak. In this way, even though both options had all the moral attributes mentioned in the premise of the ethical dilemma, choosing one term leads to the immoral result of the ethical self-dying and the unethical saving of her daughter.

Second, we consider the ethical structure shown in the character of Kim Yak-guk. Kim Yak-guk is a key figure who is intertwined with almost all the characters, similar to Han-sil daek. With a calm and gloomy personality, Kim Yak-guk is seen as a solitary figure even though he enjoys the position of the head of the household and when he meets a gisaeng named So-cheong. Along with this personal family history, the life and death of Kim Yak-guk are placed in a double narrative interwoven with the historical background. He comes from a family that has lost their financial wealth. His mother Suk-jeong committed suicide, and his father killed Wook, the son of Mr. Song from Gamaegol. Both his wife Han-sil daek and fourth daughter Yong-ok died before him, and Yong-ran, his third daughter, became insane. The downfall in the life of Kim Yak-guk is shown to be a part of the wave of change sweeping through Korea at this time of the transition from pre-modern history to modern history. The following quote shows the attitude of Kim Yak-guk while facing the miserable situation of his times.

On August 29, 1920, when Seong-su was thirty-two years old, the shameful Korea-Japan Annexation Treaty was announced. The Korean Empire finally announced the end of its troubled fate. Kim Yak-guk (Seong-soo) did not show any emotion in the midst of such great fluctuations. The older brother in-law,

¹ See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 523-524.

Jung-gu, chased after him with bare, bloodshot eyes and cried out, but Kim Yak-guk treated him with a heavy silence. (Park 71)

Kim Yak-guk does not impose his values or beliefs on his family or those around him. He always occupies a kind of spectator position, illuminating others objectively from a third person's point of view. However, he actively intervenes in the relationships of others, which is evident in the incident where Yong-ran has an affair with Han-dol and Kim Yak-guk drives him out of the house. This behavior is different from the rather passive, fragmented, and serious attitude exhibited by Kim Yak-guk throughout the novel. In the act of visiting a gisaeng almost every day, an ethical structure regarding a kind of ethical taboo is presented. At the same time, the ethical dilemma he feels due to these behaviors is evident.

For Kim Yak-guk, who endured alone in the desolate Sarang room, the atmosphere in So-cheong's room was very soft and cosy. Moreover, in his eyes, who only treated Han-sil daek with no manners as a woman, So-cheong's appearance was resolute and beautiful. But his heart doesn't agree. It was strange. That said, he had no desire to get out of his seat. It's like being sunk in a bathroom, but it's a tired feeling that doesn't want to move. (Park 178)

The ethical structure shown in the narrative of the eldest daughter, Yong-suk, can be analyzed in terms of thought activities and behavior. The thought activities are connected with her values of being blindly obsessed with money, and regarding behavior, her murder of her child born from an unfaithful relationship creates ethical knots. First, we consider Yong-suk's thought activities. In the novel, the women of Tongyeong at the time contributed to their family earnings by doing business that fit their own fractions. Yong-suk's husband dies not long after her marriage and she becomes a widow, however, she increases her wealth by selling whole dried fish and playing interest games. Meanwhile, when Kim Yak-guk's new boat is wrecked and the family suffers great economic hardship, Han-sil daek goes to Yong-suk for financial help. However, Yong-suk is busy addressing only her own interests. In the future, she does help her family, but as discussed above, she is presented as an unethical individual with a materialistic attitude.

Along with these thought activities, it is worth examining the ethical knots in Yong-suk's behaviors. She becomes pregnant after having an affair with a doctor at Charity Hospital, where her son Dong-hoon was being treated. Subsequently, she is afraid that her brother-in-law will drive her out and steal her money, therefore

she throws the child into a pond and kills him shortly after birth. However, once the doctor's wife finds her brother-in-law, Yong-suk and the doctor are eventually arrested. She is later released due to lack of evidence, and further argues confidently with those who gossip about her. This bizarre incident leads not only to Yong-suk's impure political relationship, but also to the ethical taboo of infanticide.

Taboo was a key element responsible for maintaining ethical order in the early days of human civilization. Furthermore, as various taboos were formed along with the development of human civilization, they became an unwritten law for maintaining social order.¹ Human instincts are continuously suppressed by civilization, and among them, the most thoroughly suppressed ones are corruption and murder. Non-compliance with these taboos is a motif that induces the tragic ending of a novel or movie. Although such incidents appear several times in *Kim's Daughters*, Yong-suk's policing and infanticide are representative of taboo cases.

Yong-suk went up to the front door of the police station and looked around the whistle crowd. Then she kept her head upright and put her feet forward. [...] "Am I guilty of killing, why?" With a shout, both hands flashed up. The crowd unknowingly takes a step backwards. "I know how to die without avenging myself! Even if I chew and eat all of you, I won't satisfy!" (Park 235-236)

The fourth ethical structure we will look into is that of Yong-bin, the second daughter, who is the most noteworthy character in *Kim's Daughters*. Yong-bin's ethical structure can similarly be observed through her thoughts and behaviors. First, Yong-bin shows a social identity that is different from other characters in many aspects. On the one hand, as a woman who actively accepts modern culture, she shows her identity as a devout Christian. Also, as an intelligent woman who received a higher education in Seoul at that time, she is presented as an individual who rationally reflects on the tragedy of the family history. On the other hand, she has the identity of a fragile woman who is worried about her mismatched love with Hong-seop and her unstable future. Nevertheless, Yong-bin does not blame others or external circumstances for the tragic situations of the individuals and families. Rather, through religious and metaphysical thinking, shown in the quote below, she regulates her inner suffering and outward behavior.

Hong-seop bowed his head. Yong-bin turned around without a word. Then she

¹ See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 521-522.

stepped down the stairs in an upright position. The moonlight poured over her face. Her face was wet with tears, but she did not bow her head. (Park 229)

Ms. Kate, I am not going to pray. You cannot call on the Lord with a heart full of hatred and resentment [...] I'm sorry, sir. I will come back when I have peace of mind. (Park 233).

Yong-bin's ethical structure that shows these thought activities and behaviors is connected with ethical enlightenment. According to ethical literary criticism, human beings can have ethical consciousness only after undergoing ethical enlightenment, after which they can enter the stage of ethical choice as discussed above. In the case of children, it is said that in the stage prior to ethical enlightenment, they are essentially indistinguishable from animals. In the process of learning, reading, and writing, children's intelligence and life skills are strengthened, and they then enter the process of ethical selection. All human beings, not just children, need knowledge for ethical selection and ethical enlightenment.¹ Of all the characters in the novel, Yong-bin is the one who best demonstrates ethical enlightenment. Her gender identity as a woman positions her as the only savior who believes in a hopeful future different from the hopeless present, interlocking with a social identity of someone that has received higher education and practices the Christianity.

Yong-ran, the third daughter, is placed in the most radical and complex ethical knot. The other characters surrounding her include her mother Han-sil daek, Han-dol who is a servant of the Kim Yak-guk family, Ki-doo who originally intended to marry her, and Yeon-hak who is her husband and a drug addict. Her outstanding beauty, bewitching figure, and sexual greed are factors that construct her unhappiness in life. Rumors about her premarital relationship with Yeon-hak spread throughout the town, resulting in an unwanted match and extreme violence. Unable to forget her love for Han-dol after her marriage, Yong-ran meets him again one day and cheats on her husband with him. Yeon-hak finds out about this and kills both Han-sil daek and Han-dol. Yong-ran, who witnessed this incident, is eventually driven mad. As such, ethical knots found in her character's relationships and behaviors are mainly related to ethical taboos and are similar to the aspects of those examined in Yong-suk's ethical structure above. However, while Yong-sook's ethical taboo is mainly related to ego-centered thought activities, Yong-ran's case stems from relationships with others.

¹ See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 517.

The axe held in Han-dol's eyes is nailed. The axe rotated in mid-air. In an instant, Yong-ran's body soared. She was running and Yeon-hak ran after her. Yong-ran steps on the collapsed Han-sil daek and runs out of the private gate. [...] The day has come and Han-sil daek was in front of the private gate, and Han-dol was lying next to the wall. The water in the yard was dark red. One or two lives have come to an end. [...] Around this time, Yong-ran was wearing a torn skirt and was diligently walking to the new site where the morning market was taking place. "Hi, have you seen my Han-dol?" (Park 333)

Taboo is an element directly connected to the ethical standards emphasized in ethical literary criticism. Ethical standards are the ideal goals that humans must uphold in their lives and are the results of one's own creation over a long history.¹ Therefore, taboos and ethical standards show the same orientation, which is also reflected in the desire of humans to build an ethical society. However, as psychoanalysis has proven, humans have a desire to deviate from and oppress what is taboo. Works of art represent such unconscious desires in various ways. In *Kim's Daughters*, human desire can be observed through the taboo events related to Yong-suk and Yong-ran.

Next, we consider the ethical knot derived from Yong-ok, the fourth daughter of Kim Yak-guk. It is derived from her relationships with her husband, Ki-doo, and her father-in-law, as well as her behavior toward them. Yong-ok, who has an obedient personality, marries Ki-doo, who originally intended to marry Yong-ran, and has a son. However, Ki-doo remains compassionate for Yong-ran, and does not give his heart to his wife, whose appearance is described as shabby due to the housework she performs. She never complains to her husband who rarely stays at home, and subsequently evokes desires in her father-in-law. One evening while she was sleeping, her father-in-law rushes in and touches her chest, and she bites his arm and knocks him down with a mortar spatula.

Yong-ok felt the blood rushing through her body in an instant. She hit the shadow's chest with her fist. The clogged mouth was opened, but she did not make a sound. Because the shadow was an inspiration from her father-in-law. Yong-ok bit the arm of the old beast that was approaching. "Who, who sees? Oh no one knows. Hold on..." The fierce struggle between the female fox and the old wolf was fierce in the night—in the veil of the night. Yong-ok rolled

1 See Dae Geun Lim, "The Academic Value of "Chinese School" Ethical Literary Criticism", *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 196.

around and sprinkled the ashes from the brazier she could get on to her face.
(Park 379)

Finally, Yong-ok boards the boat bound for Busan with the son, but cannot meet her husband due to crossed sea routes. However, when she hears from Ki-doo's friend, Mr Kim, that her husband has returned to Tongyeong, she gets back on board the night merchant ship. Unfortunately, the ship sinks off the coast of Gadeok island, and when it is salvaged, Yong-ok and her children return to Tongyeong as corpses. Examining her father-in-law's attitude toward her tragic death reveals the dual morality of human beings: relief and remorse, as follows:

Ki-doo falls down on the pedestal. He roars and beats the floor. After picking up the telegram quickly and reading it, Yong-ok's father-in-law's expression was close to relief for a moment. Yong-ok's death only buried his shame forever. But the next moment, the veins on his forehead swelled up. It was because of the fear of unavoidable remorse. (Park 399)

The youngest daughter, Yong-hye, does not have a special ethical knot in the novel. However, Yong-hye's behavior is linked to the ethical value of family love that is depicted in her act of taking care of her father and Yong-ran. In ethical literary criticism, ethical values are the edification values and suggestive values of literature, and collectively refer to both positive and negative moral values.¹ Yong-ok is the most lightly treated member of the family, but along with Yong-bin, she shows positive moral values.

So far, this article has elucidated that many characters in *Kim's Daughters* are wiped out by death or illness due to certain events or relationships with others around them. However, the author does not end the novel's narrative with a tragic situation, but rather with the universal will of human beings to look toward a hopeful future. This can be said to be the author's thematic consciousness shown through Yong-bin's character. Through Yong-bin, who leaves Tongyeong at the end of the novel, Park Kyung-ni transcends all tragic situations and foreshadows the positivity of the future to come. The unique literary value of *Kim's Daughters* is found at this point. Therefore, this novel can be said to be a narrative of hope and human will to overcome unpredictable tribulations, going beyond factual statements about tragic events and relationships with countless others.

¹ See Nie Zhenzhao, *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, translated by Kim Soon Jin, et al, Seoul: HUINE, 2022, 517.

“Baby, come on board.”

Merchants protruded from the ship like beans.

“Good-bye, eldest mother, good-bye.”

Yong-bin and Yong-hye waved their hands.

The ship was slowly pushed out of the pier. Water poured out from the waist of the boat.

“Boo-woong.”

The ship announces departure. Faces receding, gas lights, shouts.

At Tongyeong Port, the curtain is slowly lowered.

There was Yong-hye’s face as white as an evening primrose on the deck railing, and Yong-bin’s silent weeping in the cold air.

Spring is not far away, but the wind is cold. (Park 415)

As seen in the quote above, Yong-bin’s departure from Tongyeong is an active behavior to heal her emotional wounds. This is an expression of the will to lead a concrete and creative life, and it encompasses the meaning of active departure to overcome the decline of the family and the realization of the cause of national liberation.¹ As such, it can be seen that the numerous ethical knots in the literary text of *Kim’s Daughters* result in the transcendent ethical line of hope. In addition, hope is symbolized by the time and space of Tongyeong Port, the parting from home, and the coming of spring. It is a paradoxical moment as the tragic ethical knots converge to a hopeful ethical line.

This study has considered the text of *Kim’s Daughters* from an ethical point of view through ethical literary criticism. Analyzing a work through the lens of ethical literary criticism allows us to investigate the implications of literary texts from a new ethical perspective. This is because the process of deriving ethical knots goes beyond the primary goal of ethical text analysis and allows us to grasp the ethical line (ethical structure) that the knots are connected to. Therefore, ethical literary criticism can be understood as a theory that allows the analysis of an ethical narrative by expanding the linear text and ethically interpreting its multiple layers.

In the text of *Kim’s Daughters*, ethical knots were derived from Kim Yak-guk, Han-sil daek, and their five daughters through individual ethical events and the collective fate of a family. In this way, using ethical literary criticism to link

1 See In Kyung Kim, “Exploring the Way of Thinking and Identity of Female Characters in Park Kyung-ni’s Novels - *Drifting Island, Kim’s Daughters, Market and Battlefield*,” *Korean Language and Culture* 66 (2018): 192.

the ethical line across the multi-layered ethical knots is the same as the process of reading the ethical structure inherent in the literary work. Thus, ethical literary criticism does not stop at witnessing the tragedy revealed in the individual ethical knots of *Kim's Daughters*, but also leads to the ethical line of universal human will and future-oriented hope.

4. The Necessity and Continuity of Ethical Literary Criticism

In this study, ethical issues appearing in *Kim's Daughters* by one of Korea's leading writers, Park Kyung-ni, were explored based on the ethical structure of ethical literary criticism. Most of the characters in this novel were tragically otherized in Korean modern history and erased from the narrative through death or specific events. Summoning otherized subjects in the novel can be said to be one of the ethical roles of ethical literary criticism. Accordingly, this paper expanded the academic critique of literary ethics by illuminating the ethical issues inherent in the otherized subjects or specific events that are changed from life to death.

As previously stated, the goal of ethical literary criticism is to deconstruct and combine the multi-layered figures in a literary text from an ethical perspective to construct the ethical norms of the real world, the source of literary works. Dae Geun found ethical literary criticism suitable for both synchronic and diachronic contexts. According to him, ethical literary criticism emphasizes the process of analyzing specific texts and is not an abstract methodology to study literature. This is the point connected to the synchronic expansion of the ethical literary criticism he refers to. Furthermore, ethical literary criticism can seek a diachronic expansion because classical, modern, and related literature deals with the history of literature. Due to the simultaneous expansion of these synchronic and diachronic contexts, it is revealed that ethical literary criticism is a universal theoretical methodology.¹

This study analyzed *Kim's Daughters* through multi-layered ethical issues and drew the ethical knots that occur centering on the four standards of ethical structure in the novel: human relations, thought activities, behaviors, and norms. Furthermore, by applying sub-concepts such as ethical standards, ethical environment, ethical selection, ethical enlightenment, ethical taboo, and ethical dilemma, an integrated use of ethical literary criticism was attempted. It is expected that this article will not be limited to a single case of ethical literary criticism that analyzes literary texts but will have multinational academic applications and be seen as a significant attempt to criticize ethical issues in Korean literature.

¹ See Dae Geun Lim, "Ethical Literary Criticism and Korean Literature: An Introduction," *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2021): 187.

Humans live in relationships with countless others in the world. A literary work is an art genre that represents the intertwined aspects of such groups through words. This is because a literary work encompasses a thought and relationship between humans and all objects in the world. This entanglement of others can only progress toward coexistence and symbiosis in reality through literature when considering the universal common sense of ethics, that is, the ultimate object of ethical literary criticism. Therefore, the ethical critique of the concrete relationships of the entities inherent in a literary text is nothing more than understanding the world we live in here and now and the people in it.

Humanity's common desire for coexistence is a goal shared by ethical literary criticism, which seeks to recall this desire from literary works to reality in a modern society where ethical consciousness is gradually diluted. Therefore, ethical literary criticism emphasizes the need for a practical discourse that reinterprets the relationship between literature and ethics as texts for modern people in chaos and disorder. In addition, to perform these functions, academic continuity through the expansion of research is required. It is the responsibility of writers who create literary works, their readers, and scholars who criticize them to gain insight into the ethical issues of literary texts pursued by ethical literary criticism and mediate them into the real world. This is the ultimate goal of ethical literary criticism and exemplifies why ethical literary criticism has inexhaustible academic continuity and is needed in our times as a critical discourse.

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