

The Strategy of National Literature: Reason and its Impasses in Criticism of the Proletarian Literature Movement

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This paper clarifies the concepts and issues contained in the phrase "national literature," and answers the question of what national literature actually was. This is accomplished through a rereading of the controversies over national literature which arose in 1937 during the Japan-China war and in 1952 during the postwar Occupation, as well as the literary works contemporary with these, in the context of the logic of criticism of the proletarian literary movement, in particular the conflicted logic with regard to the relationship of "politics and literature."

Scholars of recent years have approached theories of national literature as situationally opportunistic debates set off by the times, that is to say war (the Pacific War and the Cold War), while judging negatively those aspects of the debate which functioned as literary theory contributing to the reproduction of nationalism/nationality. However, as this paper points out through examining it as a critical statement on the literary theories of the previous era, national literature theory was not simply an expression of nationalism but a conflicted debate which attempted to surmount the circumstances of the contemporary literary scene. At the same time, by clarifying the reiterations of the previous era perceptible in national literature theory and the relevant literary works themselves, this paper emphasizes that national literary theory was itself a debate contained within the limits of its era, and makes clear that the themes there left unresolved became factors in the next generation's debates (the issue of "overcoming modernity").

It is the purpose of this paper to position "national literature" as an ambivalent debate representing both the logic of the revolution, which was a successor to the proletarian literature movement, and the logic which cut the revolution off short.