

Development of literature and its classification

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The great leader Comrade **Kim Jong Il** said as follows.

“Books should be arranged correctly according to their contents, only then can readers easily find the books they want.” (“Kim Jong Il Complete Works” Vol.7, p.279)

Literature covers all the recorded achievements, experiences and lessons gained through independent and creative activities of human beings; it is closely related with the writing and recording activities of the people.

The birth of literature

The first thing that contributed to the birth of literature is the development and use of scripts.

Human beings began to use and develop their languages in their struggle for transforming nature and society. In a certain stage of social development, they realized that phonetic language for listening and speaking alone was not enough for their communication, which led them to the development of scripts.

People’s linguistic life that had started with phonetic means began to expand to the use of scripts or symbols, another means of communication with which to write or represent what was spoken. The development of these marked a turning point in human life; it enabled them to record their own experiences and knowledge to be inherited to the coming generations. It, in turn, led to the birth of literature.

Another thing that contributed to the birth of literature is the development of various kinds of means for writing.

As the experiences and knowledge gained in their independent and creative struggle for transformation of nature and society were accumulated, people wanted them to be transferred to the new generations, which required not only the scripts or symbols but some means with which to write or record.

At the early stage of using scripts, people did not have right means with which they could write or record anything. They used, therefore, pieces of iron, ceramics, stone, animal bones, wood or anything with sharp point to write with, and leather to write on, and the natural paints to write in.

The ancient people inscribed, on the surface of rocks or of the containers made of iron, the experiences they gained in their struggle against natural disasters, the special events that occurred in relation with neighboring tribes or countries, or others; these are regarded as the earliest forms of literature.

The development in the creativity of human beings and that of science and technology increased the amount of things that had to be recorded, which promoted the development of means of writing or recording. With the age-long strenuous efforts to search, human beings eventually managed to make

paper, hair pencil and ink.

These inventions brought with them the great change in the writing or recording activities: people began to write or record all the happenings and events, experiences and knowledge of every aspect of human life using those means and materials; the written records were transferred from one place to another, and inherited from one generation to another. Such processes produced various kinds of documents and books with diversified and rich contents.

The progress in science and technology, information technology in particular, promoted the advent of e-books.

E-book refers to the knowledge, events and others recorded by using magnetic materials; it is often called “magnetic recordings”. It is known to have originated from the “chemical abstracts” which were stored on disks in a certain country in the 1960s.

It is not long since the first e-book appeared, but in some countries they produce more e-books in such forms of CDs and DVDs than paper books.

The emergence of e-books, which have ever larger storage capacity than paper books, helped to solve the problem of expanding stacks in the library to cope with increasing number of books every year; they made it possible to establish “the library without books”, “the digital library”. Thus, the libraries in modern times have far more collection of e-books than paper books.

The development of classification of literature

Generally speaking, the classification of literature has a history of thousands of years.

It has a particularly long history in our country in which the rapid development of science and technology and culture opened the period of full efflorescence of Korean culture in early times. The Korean ancestors classified the literature into the literary works including poetry, individuals’ comments, military science, medical science, astronomy, history, etc. Around A.D., they suggested the way of classifying literature into “7 categories”(七略) – 7-category classification system. By this system, the whole literature was to be classified into 7: the Classical Canon and its related books; political, economic, religious, and legal books; poetry works: the books on military science; the books on astrology and dynamics; and the books on medical and hygienic sciences.

Each of these categories was subdivided according to the origin, co-relationships, uses and scientific significances, so there were totally 38 subcategories. This classification system was later replaced by the 4-category classification system by which the whole of literature was to be classified into 4 – Gup(the first of the ten celestial stems [甲]), Wool(the second of the ten celestial stems [乙]), Byong(the second of the ten celestial stems [丙]), and Jong(the third of the ten celestial stems [丁]), each including the correlated books and documents. Gup included all books related with the Classical Canon, Wool the books on military science and individuals’ comments, Byong the history and geography, and Jong poetry works.

The 4-category classification system was modified and developed into another 4-category system – Gyong(經部), Sa(史部), Ja(子部) and Jip(集部). Gyong was equivalent to former Gup, which included all the books related with the Classical Canon; Sa was equivalent to former Byong, with all the books of history and geography; Ja, as equivalent to former Wool, included individuals’ comments; and Jip,

equivalent to former Jong, referred to the collections of all kinds of literary works.

Each of the 4 categories was divided into subcategories. According to the classification system used in “Universal Classification by 4-category system”, which was known then as the perfect classification system, there were 10 subcategories in Gyong, 15 in Sa, 14 in Ja, and 5 in Jip.

In 1776, this 4-category classification system was used to make a library catalogue in Gyujeongguk. In the period of Koryo, the work of classifying literature was the concern of the government, and all the books and documents were classified systematically.

The 4-category classification system had been used for long, though it was introduced with slight differences according to the size of library.

This system was based on the feudalistic Confucian ideas reflecting the interests of the feudalistic ruling class, but it represented to a certain extent the purpose of classifying literature, its class character, the level of development in the field of science and culture, etc.

The modern classification system in our country was first made and used in March, 1906, when the Taedong Bookshop was set up. In an attempt to overcome the limitation of former 4-category classification system, they classified the literature into 13 categories: history, geography, politics, legislation, sociology, philosophy, economics, agriculture, commerce, engineering, medicine, and military science.

In our country, the first decimal classification even down to orders was made in 1949. And this was adapted in the years such as 1953, 1958, 1961, 1964, 1975, 1986, and 1996. In 2000, “The Dictionary of Key Words for Classification and Reference” was made as a combination of the dictionary of key words for classification and the classification table for books and other paper documents.

Now in our country, all the libraries use this dictionary to classify the collection of books and documents.

The world has also an age-long history of literature classification.

Around 250 B.C., Kali Mask, one of the library scientists, who was working for Alexander Library in ancient Egypt, made a classified table of 8 categories, each subdivided in the alphabetical order of the writers. This table is regarded as the origin of classification used in modern libraries.

The classification made and used by Kali Mask was very simple and had many limitations because it was not made on scientific basis and the size of the library was still small, but it became the basis on which the libraries in different countries began to make their own classified tables.

In modern times, thanks to the rapid development of science and technology, the work of classifying literature began to be more active based on more scientific basis. A variety of classifications were made: a 5-category classification (theology, legislation, science and technology, literary works, and history) made in 1810 by Bouillot, a French idealist; the classification made in 1834 by Kazan University, Russia; the 7-category classification made in 1859 in Britain; and the decimal classification made by Melvil Dewey (DDC) in 1876.

In those days the rapid development of science and technology caused a sudden increase in press releases and accelerated the exchange of literature on a world-wide scale. This meant that the classification method should be improved further to ensure the unity of classification activity for exchange of books and documents between countries.

In 1895, the first version of the international decimal table for classification of literature was produced and, based on it, the International Association of Bibliography came up with the “Universal Decimal Classification” (UDC) in 1905.

This is regarded as the international decimal classification, for it was made by an international organization and is now used by many countries in the world as the basic classification.

The international decimal classification was made based on the decimal classification suggested by Melvil Dewey. He made it by classifying all sorts of science knowledge into 10 categories, each category into 10 classes, and each class into 10 orders, and then by giving them the decimal numbers. With this classification, it was possible to distinguish the fields of science and classify them, by using supplementary symbols, in many different ways according to the contents.

Now many countries in the world are using the international decimal classification to make their own national classifications.

As seen above, the classification of literature has gone through a long history of development before it becomes a science of classification.

As the classification of literature reflects the development of science and the size of literature of certain period of time, it may have some limitations as the times go by, which means that the classification for each country should always be renewed.

We should study further on the problems arising in classifying literature to improve and renew the classification as required by the times.

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