

The Self Shrouded in Fog: The Layers of My Ethics in the Novel *A Trip to Mujin* and the Movie *Decision To Leave*

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Abstract: There are quite a few discussions about the connection between Park Chanwook's film *Decision To Leave* and novelist Kim Seungok's *A Trip to Mujin*. *A Trip to Mujin* is a novel that has already been adapted into movies and dramas four times, and it is evaluated that the narrative and expression style of modern Korean novels have changed since this novel was published. The male characters in *A Trip to Mujin* and *Decision To Leave* are all successful middle-class elites who are socially recognized and have stable families. They meet a special woman in what is described as the fog space of Mujin and Ipoh and face an urge to break away from the existing world or to break it down. However, *A Trip to Mujin*'s man escapes from the aspect of his desire self and returns to the family and workplace where his wife is located, returning to the ethical me. A man in *Decision To Leave* tries to get away from his existing life and plan a future different from that of a woman who resembles his original self, but fails. In the two works, the men are the figures of Odysseus who met the Siren, and they are characters who wander between his wife and other women and explore themselves. Accordingly, *A Trip to Mujin* and *Decision To Leave* can be said to be works with the characteristics of making women the other for the modern male subject who impulsively and returns between social ethics and personal ethics. The thoughts and wandering toward the existence of this modern male subject are effectively reproduced through an artistic device called fog, and the aspects of the multi-layered self are revealed or concealed in the fog, which can be said to be a metaphor for human conflict and agony toward me.

Keywords: *A Trip to Mujin*; *Decision To Leave*; fog; personal ethics; social ethics

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标题: 雾中的“我”：论小说《雾津纪行》和电影《分手的决心》中“我”的

伦理层级

内容提要：金承钰的小说《雾津纪行》数次改编成电影或电视剧，被评价为是改变韩国现代小说叙事及表现形式的标志性作品。与此同时，围绕朴赞郁的电影《分手的决心》的相关评论也不在少数。《雾津纪行》和《分手的决心》的男主人公都是得到社会认可、具有稳定家庭的成功中产阶层精英。他们在“雾”的空间遇到一个特别的女人，由此产生脱离现有世界的冲动。最终，《雾津纪行》的男主人公抛弃了欲望性自我，做出回归家庭和职场的伦理选择；《分手的决心》的男主人公则试图摆脱现有生活，与一个和自己相似的女性走向不同未来，但最终失败。在这两部作品中，男性们展示了如同遇到赛壬之后的奥德修斯形象，在妻子和其他女性之间徘徊。《雾津纪行》和《分手的决心》通过将女性他者化，描绘了在社会伦理和个人伦理之间挣扎之后，试图重新回归自我位置的现代男性主体。这种现代男性主体对存在的思考和彷徨，通过“雾”这一艺术装置被有效再现。“雾”体现或隐藏了多层自我，隐喻着人类对多重自我的苦恼。

关键词：《雾津纪行》；《分手的决心》；雾；个人伦理；社会伦理

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1. *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* and “Fog”

The novel *A Trip to Moojin* (1964) is evaluated in the history of Korean literature as a novel that formed a fundamental question about what kind of traits modern humans have.¹ The movie *Decision To Leave* (2022) is said to have provided an excellent answer to the question of how to express the reflection on existence and between the social and the individual in Korean film history in an aesthetic way.²

1 It is said to be a characteristic of Kim Seungok's novel in the 1960s, which uses individual emotions and conflicts as a motif and organizes works through the process of self-reflection of characters and creates living characters without big events and revealed lessons. Starting with Kim Seungok, who was evaluated as achieving the Miracle of Postwar Literature and Personal Discovery through the novel, it can be said that Korean novels have attempted to discover new styles and individuals. See Hyesun Chung, “Study on *A trip to Moojin*—Read *A trip to Moojin* again as a Space of Intemperance and Irresponsibility,” *Mokwon Korean Language Literature* 7 (2002): 225-226.

2 *Decision To Leave* topped the “Movie of the Year” category, which was selected by Korea's leading film magazine Cine21, with overwhelming support. *Decision To Leave* which received unusually enthusiastic and even support from 35 critics and reporters, “was praised as a film that went under the lullaby of Park Chanwook's film, a film that marveled at its smooth making and completion, and above all, the best joy that contemporary film audiences could feel.” See Song Kyungwon, 22 Dec. 2022. Available at: http://www.cine21.com/news/view/?mag_id=101690. Accessed 17 July 2023.

In all cases, contemporary art is bound to be reproduced by paying homage to, referring to, and transforming the superior art of the previous era. As director Park Chanwook has mentioned many times, the movie *Decision To Leave* was inspired by the song “Fog” by Korean singer Jung Hoonhee. However, this popular song was created with a motif from Kim Seungok’s novel *A Trip to Moojin*, and *A Trip to Moojin* was also adapted into the movie *Fog* by director Kim Sooyong in 1967.¹ To put it bluntly, *A Trip to Moojin*, a novel about a middle-aged man’s experiences and his thoughts toward me in a small, nameless provincial town in Korea, gave birth to a movie and song “Fog” will be.

Under these circumstances, we can assume that the cultural and aesthetic device “Fog” would have had a significant impact on the narrative completion of *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave*. The impulse and anguish of a male intellectual who stayed for a while in any local area of developing countries, who only regard the abundance of fog as special, leads to the psychology of a reunited lover in Ipoh, the fictional city of *Decision To Leave*.

I walk alone on this fog-filled street
 One shadow of you who was affectionate that day
 When I think of something, it’s a past memory
 Still, a heart that yearns for it
 where did that person go
 Lonely in the fog, I go endlessly (From the lyrics of the song “Fog”)

“You” and “that person” appearing in the lyrics of the popular song “Fog” above can be interpreted as having the same context as the self of another layer of the person in *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* or the object they love. This is because the two works contemplate the conflict between the multilayered selves in the confrontation between the modern society and the individual.

Accordingly, *A Trip to Moojin*, which has been analyzed by many commentators since the birth of the work, but still contains various questions, and *Decision To Leave*, inspired by this novel, are related to “Fog,” an aesthetic mechanism similarly reproduced in the two works. Therefore, I think analyzing the two works in relation to

1 *A Trip to Moojin* has been adapted into a film on three occasions. *Fog* (Filmed by Sooyong Kim, 1967), *Ecstasy* (Filmed by Moonjin Cho, 1974), and *Fog after Cloudy Weather* (Filmed by Pilhyong Im, 1986) are the works. In 1967 *Fog*, Seungok Kim wrote the scenario, and as the original author, he tried to visualize the novel as it was. See Yujung Kang, “Cinematization of Novels, Principles and Processes of Media Conversion—Focusing on *A Trip to Moojin* by Seungok Kim and *Fog* Filmed by Sooyong Kim,” *The Studies of Korean Literature* 40 (2013): 273.

fog is an attempt to deeply understand the narrative that the works want to convey.

2. A Special Perspective on the Divisive Subject

The reason Kim Seungok's *A Trip to Moojin* drew attention at the time was how a male intellectual's ego division between his desire and reality was controlled in the era of state-led development, in which the people were voluntarily called as subjects under the banner of modernization, and in the end, it is a novel that looks at it from a unique point of view without directly "criticizing" the re-embeddedness of the national discourse. *Decision To Leave* features an educated detective with the responsibility of defending society. This detective who feels alive at the scene of a murder case is a man who faithfully fulfills his duties and tries to live with human dignity.

Male characters in both works meet women who shake them. *A Trip to Moojin*'s main character, Yoon Heejoong's wife, is the daughter of the chairman of a mid-sized company and is trying to convince her shareholders to promote Yoon Heejoong to her directorship. Yoon Heejoong is a man with a sense of defeat who thinks that he has risen in the world thanks to such a wife. And In Moojin, his hometown, he shares her affection with Ha Insook, a female teacher who looks like him. Ha Insook wants to get out of Moojin, a city that is poor and impoverished in many ways, where only ignorant and cowardly men live. She asks Yoon Heejoong to take her to Seoul. However, even if Yoon Heejoong shares her affection with Ha Insook, she does not have the courage to abandon her life so far and build a new future with her. So he leaves from Mujin alone. Song Seorae in *Decision To Leave* is a woman who is likely to appear in pseudo-noir genre films featuring her detectives and beautiful women. In these genres of films, the woman suspected of her murder is a femme fatale who seduces her detective, and her man becomes agitated by her and withdraws her suspicions. But in the end, the woman was the murderer and the man blames himself for trusting the woman.

However, *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* look at the above-mentioned characters with a certain degree of "criticism removed." Yoon Heejoong lives with the guilt that he was not drafted because his mother hid it when all his friends from his hometown went to the battlefield when he was young. However, he is even more fortunate to meet his current wife, whose father is the chairman of a mid-sized company, and thinks that he is living with good results without any effort. Yoon Heejoong, who is oppressed by such a sense of social debt, thinks that Ha Insook is an educated and capable woman, but is not getting a chance in Moojin. Her is a woman who awakened her dormant instincts. So Yoon Heejoong agonizes over her act of salvation, which is to take her back to her Seoul. However, the reality of the

society they belong to is grim. So he leaves her with a letter from her.

Detective Jang Haejoon, who has been investigating crime suspects humanely, meets Song Seorae, a Chinese woman who is suspected of pushing her husband to death in the mountains. However, Jang Haejoon feels a crush on her when he sees that Song Seorae, who doesn't seem to be able to be so confident even by her background, is confident and not intimidated by anyone. Song Seorae feels special feelings for Jang Haejoon, who treats her more politely than anyone she has ever met in Korea. Moreover, Song Seorae's feelings for Jang Haejoon deepen after learning that Jang Haejoon covered up her crime even after learning that he killed her husband. However, Song Seorae commits suicide because Jang Haejoon said that he felt that his whole life was "collapsed" because he loved Song Seorae. to protect his world.

In this way, the characters in the two works can be said to be imperfect human beings living in modern times. Whether they are economically stable and socially recognized men or unrecognized women, they are wandering and swaying beings in the reality they encounter while meeting other opposite sexes other than their wives and husbands. At this level, there is room for dismissing the two works as stern reports that point out social reality. In the novel, Yoon Heejoong was born in a poor area, but received a little more education from her than others there. He met a wealthy woman in Seoul and joined the rich life of that woman, so she herself lived in the upper class. However, Ha Insook, who was educated at the same level as Yoon Heejoong, has difficulty entering the central realm of her society because she is a woman. She lives courting snobbish local men so she can survive in Moojin.

Jang Haejoon considered the job of detective a vocation and tried to maintain a relationship as a happy middle-class husband even by using artificial means. Then, feeling empty in his life, he meets a Chinese woman who came to Korea to keep his mother's will after overcoming countless adversities. She was able to enter Korean society safely thanks to her husband, a vicious civil servant, but she was beaten by him, suffered by her moneylender, and remarried to a third-rate gangster to survive. Such a Song seorae has never met a humane person. So, feeling love for Jang Haejoon, who respected her, she wants to enter another world even by killing herself in order to be remembered by him for a long time.

These *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* contain warmth toward the absurd reality and the people living in it. There is a sentiment in the two works to look at imperfect human beings as they are, because Kim Seungok and Park Chanwook did not try to observe the lives of human beings with ethical standards. Of course, there have been numerous novels and films that have described human

beings as beings who have multilateral desires and are easily shaken by the manifestation and suppression of those desires. However, the appearance of Kim Seungok in the dominant atmosphere of Korean literary world in the 1960s and the fact that Park Chanwook maintained an “ambiguous attitude” toward humans throughout the film are rare in the history of literature and film. Kim Seungok explores women’s desires that he did not want to see at all at the time, and Park Chanwook elaborately reveals the love between Jang Haejoon and Song Seorae, which seems impossible to achieve due to the concealed solid social structure, with tricks that twist the characteristics of cinematic genres.

The characters in these two works are similar to each other, so if you compare the novel and the movie with each other, you will be able to feel the specialness of the characters more deeply. Yoon Heejoong from *A Trip to Moojin* and Jang Haejoon from *Decision To Leave* appear to be living successful lives on the surface, but internally they have unresolved desires. However, they are weak men who cannot properly express their desires even when they encounter an opportunity to release them. Yoon Heejoong wanted to save Ha Insook from Moojin, and Jang Haejoon wanted to save Song Seorae from her reality, but eventually ran away from them. Song Seorae and Ha Insook also resemble each other. Song Seorae has the courage to become the second suspect in Haejun’s murder case because she wants to stay in Jang Haejoon’s world, and Ha Insook is an intelligent woman who senses that even in an uneasy meeting with Yoon Heejoong, an incident that can change her life can occur. In this context, we can lean on Sartre’s discussion and think about the relationship to others. Sartre argued as “The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom” (qtd.in Sojeong 214).

In this way, the two works tried to reproduce the self-division of modern subjects with a calm gaze by drawing characters who are fascinated by the magic-like time that unexpected events throw into human daily life and yet try to escape.

3. “Space of Fog” and Its Meaning

Decision To Leave begins with Jang Haejoon driving through the foggy city of Ipoh. Ipoh is home to the nuclear power plant where her wife works, and also where Jang Haejoon settles in to sort her confused mind after breaking up with Song Seorae. Along with Ipoh, the city of fog, the film is also obsessed with the popular song “Fog.” There are several scenes where the caregiver Song Seorae asks her grandmother to play the song “Fog” on her cellphone, and Jang Haejoon sings along

to “Fog.” The fog serves as a metaphor for the relationship between Jang Haejoon and Song Seorae. The fog effectively depicts the ambiguity of the relationship between Jang Haejoon and Song Seorae, who love each other but cannot accurately grasp the other’s intentions, and the imperfection of communication between the Chinese Song Seorae and the Korean Jang Haejoon due to language restrictions. And it symbolizes uncertainty that is not easily revealed. *A Trip to Moojin*’s Moojin is a place with severe fog. Moojin, an underdeveloped area and hometown that keeps reminding me of painful memories from childhood, is still an uncomfortable space for Yoon Heejoong. There, however, her servant, who resembles her, sings a song called “Fog.”

In the two works, the space of fog, Ipoh and Moojin, is where the lethargy and division of incomplete beings are directly expressed. Yoon Heejoong escapes from Seoul, where social status and responsibility are granted, and reveals her emotions and desires in the fog of Mujin. Jang Haejoon resents Song Seorae for committing the second murder to meet him and promises to conduct the investigation transparently, but he cannot stop his desire for her. Song Seorae commits suicide by burying herself on the beach in order to live forever in Jang Haejoon’s heart, leaving him with an unsolvable case. Unlike such a “space of fog,” Seoul can be said to be a space of deterrence that makes it impossible for humans to emit their multifaceted consciousness within the established system and forces them to exist only as functional humans.¹

A functional human is a human who must acquire the principle of identity that occurred in the process of modernization, and is a human who has eliminated the desire of a multi-layered subject. Individual subjectivity is bound to be excluded in a space where each person’s role and stance is captured in the social structure. In this dimension, Moojin and Ipoh which lack such clearly woven norms of identity, are spaces that inevitably accompany anxiety, confusion, and reservations with the possibility of choosing another principle. For Yoon Heejoong, Moojin is a “reserved” space where he cannot easily choose whether to build a new relationship with Ha Insook, leaving behind the world he belonged to. For Song Seorae, Ipoh is a chaotic space where the irony of having to make herself into nothing (无化) in order to protect the man she loves. Therefore, the fog of Mujin and Ipoh conceals the deviation of the characters and at the same time mediates instability and chaos.

We can interpret the characteristics of space in these works of Moojin and Ipoh based on the perspective of place ethics. In particular, we can analyze the

1 See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Taehwan Ha, Seoul: minumsa, 2001, 118.

ethical problems of the place expected from Nie Zhenzhao's ethical literary critic. "Ethical literary criticism in the context of the 'ethical turn' of literary criticism strives to restore the essential relationship between literature and ethics. Moreover, through developing beneficial concepts for ethical analyses of literary texts, rather than simply declaring the restoration of ethical values of literature, ethical literary criticism can provide a practical methodological toolbox for the current subject matter; ethics of place represented in literary texts" (Taehee 629). Accordingly, the discussion on the division of the ego and ethics in Fog's space will be conducted in more detail in the next chapter.

4. Multiple Selves Expressed in Fog

4.1 Sirens and the Odysseus Impulse

Quite a number of commentators have compared Yoon Heejoong in *A trip to Mujin* to Odysseus, who endured the siren's temptation and completed the voyage.¹ Korean literary critic Shin Hyeongcheol said that although Yoon Heejoong had the urge to be with Ha Insook, recovering his suppressed desires in daily life in Moojin, what brought him back to his place was his wife who took the place of his mother. And he said that characters corresponding to Odysseus (Yoon Heejoong) - Siren (Ha Insook) - Penelope (wife) appear in *A Trip to Moojin*. In this regard, Peter Brooks spoke in this Odysseus myth and Freud's *The Psychology of Dreaming of an Infidelity* (1912) combining the image of a neurotic man trying to double the object of sexual relations. He said that there is a master plot of "a structure that is delayed by another woman who represents the urge to die for the progress of the narrative that his wife is waiting for at the end" (Son 179).² Freud said that if there is a desexualized woman symbolized as a mother in men's twisted sexual fantasies, there is a sexually

1 The Siren, who appear in Greek mythology, are described as having the upper body of a woman and the lower body of an eagle or mermaid, and have a beautiful voice. The sailors who heard the siren's song were seduced by the sound and jumped into the sea. However, Odysseus, returning home after the fall of Troy, listens to the advice of her witch Circe to overcome the temptations of her sirens and blocks her sailors' ears. But he decided to listen to her song, so he tied himself to the mast and told her crew not to loosen the straps at all costs. Hearing the siren's voice, Odysseus was impelled to release his chains, but the sailors tied him tighter each time, and eventually Odysseus escaped the siren's temptation and was able to finish the voyage safely. Feeling insulted by Odysseus, the Sirens commit suicide.

2 Sigmund Freud, "The Psychology of Dreaming of an Affair," translated by Kim Jong-il, *Three Essays on Sexual Desire*, Open Books, 1996, 169. Requoted from page 171 Jeongsoo Son, "A Study on the Process of Feminist Transition of the Odysseus Masterplot in Modern Korean Narrative—Focus on the Counter Narratives against "Mujingiheng (雾津纪行)," *The Journal of Korean Fiction Research* 78 (2020): 169-193.

objectified woman on the other hand.¹ Ironically, the plot of Odysseus overcoming the seduction of another woman, the Sirens, in order to return to his wife Penelope is also the background in which Adorno and Horkheimer explain the birth process of a rational subject in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).²

The myth of Seyren and Odysseus “impulse and resistance to desire and death” is also in line with Nie Zhenzhao’s discussion that the Sphinx, with the human head and lion body, constantly learns between rational thinking and animal impulses, fiercely resisting instinct, and reborn as an ethical being. Human nature is the essential distinction between man and animals, with ethical consciousness being its external manifestation. When man acquires ethical consciousness, he is able to tell good from evil. As discussed earlier, this is best exemplified in the story of Adam and Eve. Likewise, the animal factor, though incompatible with the human factor, is not identical with the nature of animals. It refers to human beings’ instinct common to all animals with natural will and free will being its external manifestation. Animal instincts are essentially different from humans’ in the sense that they bear no moral consequences, while human’s natural will (motivated by libido) and free will (embodied as desires) are constrained and regulated by rationality and morality. As such, the dialectical relationship between animal factor and human factor indicates on the one hand the evolution process of human from apes, and on the other hand, rationality and morality are not born but acquired with constant learning and strenuous practicing. In this sense, man exists as an ethical being.³

The relationship between Song Seorae and Jang Haejoon in *Decision To Leave* can also be read that way. The siren seduces men with her voice and makes them jump into the sea. Although not sea, Song Seorae’s first husband falls down the mountain by her (she pushes) and dies, and her second husband drowns in a swimming pool. There is a scene where Jang Haejoon says to his wife, “Maybe I am a man in the sea,” and Jang Haejoon is also fascinated by Song Seorae. In addition, just as the shape of a siren is a human upper body and an animal lower body, Song Seorae is also a character symbolizing a “double self.” In the movie, Song Seorae’s clothes look blue-green to Jang Haejoon and green to others. Just as the sirens lure men with their voices, Song Seorae uses her voice to put Jang Haejoon to sleep, who suffers from insomnia, and her voice is recorded in a mixture of Chinese and Korean. (*In A trip to Moojin*, it is Ha Insook’s song that leads Yoon Heejoong to

1 Ibid., 171.

2 Ibid., 171.

3 See Nie Zhenzhao, “Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3 (2021): 388-389.

wander between the ethical desire of social self-maintenance and the ego chasing the impulse.) As such, Yoon Heejoong and Jang Haejoon are both Odysseus who are full of wisdom enough to deceive the god who knows well that he must return to where his wife is, but he is the type of person who shows impulsiveness in front of other women.

However, the two Odysseus show different options. Yoon Heejoong of *A Trip to Moojin* responds to Ha Insook's song, but in the end shows a model of realistic self-pursuit, escaping from the temptation of fulfilling desire and returning to her wife. Yoon Heejoong receives a message from his wife from Seoul, leaves Moojin before the day she wants her to come back, and quickly decides to delete her urge for Ha Insook, unites his divided selves and is reborn as a social subject. It is only when he is in Moojin that Ha Insook can be a siren to seduce Yoon Heejoong. On the other hand, Jang Haejoon of *Decision To Leave* accepts and rejects the fact that Song Seorae intervened in his life, but eventually accepts the conclusion that he cannot return to his wife and breaks away from the reality principle and plans a future with Siren. However, Jang Haejoon's siren chooses the impulse of death rather than love with him. Song Seorae, a seiren who has the fate of not dying, who has to seduce a man to the end and lead him to death, follows Jang Haejoon to Ipoh, but fails to win his heart and dies.

It is difficult to see Yoon Heejoong, who recovered her ethical self, and Jang Haejoon, who gave up being a social being, as ultimately different male figures in that they both succumbed to the temptation of the siren. It is because they make the siren and her wife the other in the process of choosing between moral recovery and self-pursuit. Because Odysseus in the two works confirms himself and re-establishes his world only through women (Siren and Penelope), and in the end, he cannot judge himself without a situation related to women. Accordingly, it can be seen that the modern subjectivity of men in *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* is achieved through their experiences with women.¹

Decision To Leave is not a direct adaptation of *A Trip to Moojin* like director Kim Sooyong's film *Fog*, but uses *A Trip to Moojin* as the starting point of its creation. *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave*, the main characters are intellectual males living in modern times divided by the capitalist spirit and system. *Decision To Leave* and *A Trip to Moojin*, more than any other works by Park Chanwook and Kim Seungok, show conflict aspects of how a male subject who wants to survive in a capitalist society controls his individual impulses and tries to

1 See Mihyeon Kim, "Modernity and Femininity—Focused on Seungok Kim's Novels," *Korean Novel Society, Poetics of Modernity in Korean Novels*, London: Yerim Communications, 2003, 389.

conform to the discourse of modernization. However, if you go deeper into the two works, you can see the difference in the emotional temperature of the male subjects who are integrated into the dominant social order. Moojin from *A Trip to Moojin* and Ipoh from *Decision To Leave* are spaces where intellectual men try to “deviate from the orbit” in order not to completely converge to the social norms surrounding them. By the way, Yoon Heejoong of *A Trip to Moojin* divides only in Moojin, escapes from that place, and returns to the modern subject again. On the other hand, Jang Haejoon of *Decision To Leave* more actively thinks about and accepts the crack between himself and reality, and maintains a critical gaze toward reality. Borrowing Derrida’s discussion, it is safe to view Park Chanwook’s achievements as a “Supplement” for the original work.¹

However, both works completed narratives in which a man reestablished himself as a social subject or escaped by cutting himself off from the space in which he fell in love with a woman who was an affair partner or not. In this “male-centered narrative,” the world of women is not realistically described and is represented like a surplus. Accordingly, the pursuit of ethics and impulses shown by the two male subjects cannot be dismissed as a complete ethical narrative in that it metaphorizes the universality of psychoanalysis and otherizes and damages women.

4.2 Conflict Between Individual and Social Ethics

As mentioned above, *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* tried to express the unethical love between men and women and the deviation of the subject through the artistic mechanism of “Fog” in a space where development has been delayed in modernization. This reminds us that the final judgment of the time when the two works appeared is “Ego and Ethics.” And in this context, both works show that “Ethics” is prioritized over “Ego.” Nie Zhenzhao, who has been researching literary ethics criticism as an important methodology of literary research in China, said the following in *Ethical Literary Criticism* (2014). From the point of view of criticism of literary ethics, all literary texts are close to the description of the moral experience of human society, and there is an ethical structure called the “ethical line” in all literary texts. And each “ethical knot” within the literary text is pierced or connected by the “ethical line” to form a complete ethical structure of the text. Thus, literary ethics criticism has the task of discovering the process of ‘ethical knots’ formed on the “ethical line” or resolving already formed “ethical knots” through the deciphering of literary texts.² From this perspective, Moojin and Ipoh

1 See Sohyoun Kim, “Soo-yong Kim’s Literary Film *Mist* (1967), Adapting Seungok Kim’s Novel *The Foggy Town*, is a Rare Case Dealing with the Contemporarin,” *Film studies* 43 (2020): 57.

2 See Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014, 7-10.

can be assumed to be “ethical knotted spaces” that produce the wandering and stability of the subject between personal or social ethics.

In *A Trip to Moojin*, Seoul is symbolized as a space of success. Yoon Heejoong, who has constantly put off his desires in order to learn the ethics of society and family and to acquire a greater ethical self, ironically asks what kind of true me he really is in his hometown of Moojin, which he so desperately wanted to leave. Accordingly, Yoon Heejoong, who walks an ethical tightrope between the upright me and not-me in Moojin, also describes modern men who try to grow while enduring the disappearance of their true selves. Yoon Heejoong’s divided life is closely related to the contradiction of the modern system itself.¹ *A Trip to Moojin* relegates Yoon Heejoong back to society, as if reminiscent of the “imaginary solution” that modern Europe’s “cultured novels” offered a solution to the problem of individual socialization. This is an index that embodies the indirect bourgeois ethics and shows that the modern figure² Yoon Heejoong considers the ethics mediated by the group between society and the individual as the main index for establishing his identity. Yoon Heejoong was able to get a glimpse of the duality of myself trying to satisfy the ideals of modern society and my desire to follow my inner desires in Ha Insook of Moojin. So, Ha Insook is like a fog that cannot be grasped even though it fills the space tightly, she is a person who symbolizes a multi-layered ego that is difficult to grasp about the reality and is like a mirror that reflects Yoon Heejoong.

On the surface, *Decision To Leave* seems to aim for the victory of “Individual ethics” (Song Seorae and Jang Haejoon’s love completion). However, through the death of Song Seorae, whose basis is ambiguous in the relationship between the two, a fundamental question is being raised about what kind of stance a human being between the social self and the desiring self should take and live. In the movie, Jang Haejoon gives up the social welfare of being an honest detective and maintaining a middle-class family in order to complete his ethics toward himself. Song Seo-rae’s suicide to make Jang Haejoon live “properly” as before he met herself is also like a dissonance that stands out in the flow of the film. The incomprehensibility of such excess makes us question whether the social deviation of Jang Haejoon and Song Seo-rae’s affair is to recover the desire of the ego.

Accordingly, *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision To Leave* tell us that the desire to confirm the true self of human beings buried in social ethics is a universal

1 See Sehwa Yim, “Growth and Aporia of the Young: Focusing on Son, Chang-Seop’s *The Road*,” *The Learned Society Of Korean Modern Literature* 41 (2013): 496.

2 Ibid., 496.

phenomenon that transcends the times. Nie Zhenzhao holds that “moral behaviors and moral regulations are based on the premise of ethical identity, which restricts the subject of moral behaviors to the extent, sometimes, of mandatory degree through ethical taboos”(264). However, the two works break away from the representation methods and narratives of the media at the time and destroy the illusion that only pursuing sincerity is the truth in the confrontation between the social self and the individual self. It is because human beings cannot inevitably live in a space where instinctive desires and collective truth are clearly separated, so “essential me” cannot be established easily, and it is said that trying to confirm it is futile.

Concluding the Discussion

From the above, it can be seen that the symbolic device of “Fog” in the novel *A Trip to Moojin* and the movie *Decision to Leave* appears repeatedly as a spatial background for novels and movies or as a metaphorical mechanism. Of course, the difference between the two works is inherent. However, the points of reflection toward humans and society that are aimed at through the texts of *A Trip to Moojin* and *Decision to Leave* are very similar to those that are not in the novel and are derived from the characteristics of the film.

While *A Trip to Moojin* created an edification that created the conflict and wandering of the ego between individual and social ethics in the village of fog, Mujin, *Decision To Leave* reconstructs the rhythm of Mujin in the novel with a visual metaphor. The nonlinear timeliness cast in the fog space contrary to the linear and mechanical spatiality of Seoul in the novel is reproduced in the Ipo in the film, and the male characters in the two works begin to question themselves in the fog space and have an unstable relationship by projecting themselves to the other woman. Through the representation device of novels and movies that describe unstable relationships with others, the modern subject is described as a ghost-like being floating in the reality where oppression and incompleteness of the past and present collide. It's like Hamlet, who faced the line of ethical tragedy after his father's original marriage appeared.

Hamlet continuously wanders (perfectly) his revenge for his father, who was killed by his uncle, and the ethical problems he faces. In the article “Ethical Literary Criticism: Basic Theory,” Nie Zhenzhao will probably commit serious incest if Hamlet takes revenge on his king and mother. But he noted that if he gave up, he would not be able to fulfill his moral duty and responsibility to avenge his father's death.¹ For

¹ See Nie Zhenzhao, “Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 192.

Nie Zhenzhao, it was a very important issue in ethical criticism that humans agonized between the issues of good and evil, duty and pleasure, loyalty and freedom.¹

Therefore, Yoon Heejoong of *A Trip to Moojin* living in the era of noble reason and Jang Haejoon's suspension and hesitation in the *Decision To Leave* are in line with Hamlet's hesitant behavior because he cannot solve the ethical dilemma.

Accordingly, the two works can be seen as effectively identifying the unstable self by relying on the ethical system surrounding the individual and society or not under the mechanism of "Fog."

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1 See Galin Tihanov, "On the Significance and Originality of Nie Zhenzhao's Ethical Literary Criticism," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 4 (2022): 560.