

Tsuyoshi Namigata

Kyushu University

Japan

Can we build a bridge over the sea? Teaching Comparative Literature in East Asia

For several years starting in the mid – 2010s, I was involved in education on international student exchange between Japan and Korea, and between Japan and Taiwan, as the organizer of a short – term study abroad program for undergraduate students. In this program, dozens of students studied and stayed together for two weeks, traveling back and forth between Fukuoka and Pusan, Fukuoka and Seoul, and Fukuoka and Taipei. They discussed common issues in East Asia, such as the declining birthrate and aging population, the acceptance of foreign workers, and disasters. The students, who were very nervous when they first met, came to understand each other through classes and fieldwork and eventually became invaluable friends. I have seen them tearfully bid farewell many times.

While participating in this program, I have been asking myself whether it is possible to build a cultural bridge in East Asia through literature. I have engaged in literary research mainly in Japan and Korea, sometimes introducing Korean literature to Japanese students and giving lectures on Japanese literature in Korea. These classes and lectures were, of course, significant, but I have realized that we should have a broader framework rather than from the standpoint of the national literature of each country.

I believe that the framework of comparative literature is the perfect academic field to provide such an opportunity. In actual classes, I have encouraged students to discuss the possibility and problem of cultural exchange and friction through the novels written by Korean residents in Japan. In addition, from the perspective of reconsidering the history of Japanese literature, I have attempted to describe the history of the modernist literature within the framework of the East Asian region. In this presentation, I would like to discuss what comparative literature can do in East Asia based on these practices.