

Garuda

금시조 (金 翅 鳥 Kūmsijo)

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Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé

Kojuk opened his eyes, feeling as if a powerful beam of light had suddenly swept over him. It seemed only a short while since he had heard the nearby church bell ringing for dawn prayers, yet now it was morning. The sun was shining directly onto the white paper covering the eastward-facing lattice door, and the wooden frame looked exceptionally black this morning. He turned his head to look about him and perhaps that little gesture stirred the air in the room, for a faint fragrance of ink crept into his nostrils. Was it Old Plum Orchard? No, it was surely Dragon Flying Phoenix Dancing, an ink from Taiwan that Professor Pak had brought back after a visit to South-East Asia last spring. The professor so valued the privilege of having been allowed into his studio several times a few years back that he had designated himself his special student. Since Kojuk was by then already confined to his sickbed, unable to wield a brush, the gift had inspired feelings of melancholy rather than of gratitude. The rather tactless Professor Park had remarked:

“At least, you can grind a little, place it beside your bed and savor the fragrance . . .” The words had been spoken quite sincerely yet he had scolded him, “What! For goodness’ sake! Am I already a ghost, to be offered incense?” but in the end that was what he had done. Taking as a pretext the colleagues or students coming to visit him, and not wishing to change the atmosphere that had surrounded him for nearly sixty years, Ch’usu ground the ink each morning at his bedside, and he enjoyed the fragrance of the ink as well as the admirable devotion of Ch’usu.

Judging by the smell of ink, Ch’usu had undoubtedly already been and gone. So the strong ray of light that had awoken him just before must have been the sunlight shining through the door she had opened on her way out. With those thoughts, Kojuk cautiously tried to raise himself. It was not easy, with one side of his body paralyzed. He was about to call someone, but changed his mind and lay back again. He had no wish to disturb the morning’s peace and quiet, and the solitude that was by now not in the least disagreeable, by formal greetings and unnecessary fuss.

Truly—Kojuk thought, staring absently up at the patterns of the plywood ceiling—how often have I experienced a morning like this in my life? With nobody, really nobody He recalled countless such days, from far back in his now hazy childhood. One morning when he had been five or six, lying all alone, he had found the sunlight shining fully on the door. Outside there had been a faint sound of muffled keening then his mother, dressed in white, her hair disheveled, had embraced him before collapsing in an apparent swoon. She came in just at the moment when he was about to burst into a noisy storm of tears, feeling he had been abandoned for far too long. There was another such day. He must have been seven or eight; he had gone to sleep with his mother the previous night, but he found himself greeting the morning all alone. There he grew afraid of the silence reigning in the room and was about to go outside when his grandmother came in and began to cry, embracing him.

“Alas, my little child. What will become of this poor child? That wicked woman! Unwilling to wait even until the three years of mourning are over.

After that, once he had moved into his uncle’s house he usually awoke alone in the morning. His aunt was constantly ailing, lying in another room. His uncle spent more nights out than at home. Inevitably, then, having fallen asleep alone in the room full of the smell of his uncle’s books, he likewise awoke alone each morning.

Once his thoughts turned toward his childhood, Kojuk could not help remembering the first day he had found himself projected, still a child, into a life like that which he lived now. It must have been fifty years ago, or was it sixty? Anyway, it had been the day his uncle had dragged him off at the age of ten to Master Sökdam’s old mansion.

How strange! Was this unexpected recollection, clear and vivid, of long-gone, completely forgotten times in the distant past another sign of old age? Increasingly in recent years, Kojuk had been able to recall Master Sökdam as he had been that day, clearly and vividly. At the time he would have been in his early forties, but in appearance he already looked like a near-destitute, aging scholar-gentleman.

“What’s to be done? Sökdam, I reckon I’m going to have to entrust him to you. If I were to go on living here, I’d take care of him, sharing the same gruel or rice. But as it is . . .”

Such were the words his uncle spoke. Under some kind of pressure, he had decided to go into exile abroad.

“I don’t want this child to be another burden on my wife’s family; I’ve asked them to look after my ailing wife as it is. You take charge of him. He’s my elder brother’s only flesh and blood, after all.”

Master Sökdam, however, who had been listening expressionlessly, instead of replying, asked:

“You keep saying Shanghai, Shanghai, but do you have any idea of what’s really going on there? They call it the Provisional Government, but people say they’re at their wits’ end, unable to pay the rent, all the time fighting among themselves over trivial things. In addition, there’s no guarantee that Master Ch’un’gang is still there, is there?”

“Is there anything so wonderful about what’s here? Anyway, will you take him? Or will you not?”

At that, Master Sökdam looked at him in silence for a while, then replied with a slight sigh:

“His food and clothing . . . I’ll take care of that, somehow. But that’s not all there is to raising a child . . .”

“Thank you, Sökdam, that will be all that’s needed. Don’t worry about teaching him. There’s no knowing where this wretched world is headed, so what kind of teaching can you give him? He’s already mastered the three characters of his name, that’s enough.”

After saying that, his uncle turned to him:

“Pay your respects to this gentleman. He is Master Sökdam. You must behave toward him like a father until I come to collect you again.”

In the end, his uncle never came back to reclaim him. Later, well over twenty years after, he heard a report that his aged uncle was among the members of the Provisional Government returning home but at that moment he was occupied away from Seoul and when he went up to Seoul the following year there was no trace of him.

Master Sökdam, a classmate and long-time friend of his uncle, was descended from a renowned Confucian scholar of the south-eastern region who was reputed to have

inherited the mantle of T'oegye. Sökdam was counted as one of the three great masters of the closing years of the Chosŏn dynasty on account of his vigorous calligraphy and elegant literati-style painting, but in actual fact he was more of a scholar than an artist, like the calligrapher Ch'usa, whom his teacher Ch'ungang had admired all his life long.

"Have you learned your letters?"

Once his uncle had left, that was Master Sökdam's first question.

"I have finished the 童蒙先習 *Tongmong-sönsŭp* primer."

"In that case, read the 小學 *Sohak*. If you don't read that, you'll never be any good at anything"

And that was all. After that, for several years he read the *So-hak* sitting among the master's small number of pupils, but he never took any notice of him. Finally, in the year he turned thirteen, the master took him without warning to the nearby elementary school.

"The times are changing. You're not too late; study this new learning."

As a result, his only formal education came from that primary school. No matter what happened later, looking back, it was obvious that from the outset the Master had never intended to include him among his pupils.

Whenever Kojuk remembered his deceased teacher, his gaze would habitually linger over the specimen of Master Sökdam's calligraphy that hung in a corner of his sickroom. Written at a time when life was far from easy, it had long been stored unmounted, so that the paper was discolored and the red ink of the seal had faded to a pale orange color, but the power of the master's brushwork lived on, sinuous as ever.

金翅劈海 香象渡河 *Gold-Wing cleaves oceans, Fragrant Elephant crosses rivers.*

Unfortunately, Sökdam had lost his only son to cholera, and he had never chosen any of his pupils to be his designated successor; as a result, Kojuk, having looked after Sökdam's house after his death, had inherited relatively many of his possessions. But while he was roaming around freely in the prime of life he had taken no care of them, there had been the upheavals of the war, and now he only had a few pieces of calligraphy left. Recently he had found himself lamenting: Soon I shall meet my master and what excuse am I going to offer for my blunders and unworthiness? Hidden within that there might also have been some repentance for his negligence of the Master's works. But this framed piece of writing was one major exception. For the Master's teaching, that all his life long he had disliked yet feared, had wanted to attain yet move beyond, was contained within it. Even now, when he could no longer wield a brush, he could feel Sökdam's stern glare lurking between the strokes of the characters in the frame.

When he was twenty-seven, having grown impatient for achievement, he left the Master's home without informing him. Putting it positively, it was in order to affirm himself, or putting it negatively, he was looking for opportunities to show off. And at least to himself the three months that followed were a successful grand tour. He was awarded the top prize in the Chökp'a calligraphy contest, received a warm welcome in the few remaining Confucian schools of the south-eastern region, including those of Naeryöng, Ch'önggha, or Tusan and occasionally lodged in the homes of the rich where he was regaled with every kind of delicacy. As he made his way back home after three months away, loaded down with all the grain he had received in lieu of payment for his works, having left pages of calligraphy or

painting behind him at each departure, his self-assurance was soaring sky-high. Master Sökdam's reaction was completely unexpected.

"Put all that down."

Blocking the gate, Master Sökdam first made the porter put down all the things he was carrying. Then he addressed him.

"Take off your brush-bag and put it on top."

It was a voice there could be absolutely no question of disobeying. Without understanding the reason, he took off his brush-bag and laid it on top of the packages of paper and grain. Next, the Master drew from his sleeve a match and set fire to it all.

"Master, what do you think you are doing?"

At that, Master Sökdam replied sternly to his agitated question.

"Since your uncle made the request, I will let you remain as a member of my household. But henceforth you are not to address me by the name of Master. I have never had as disciple a daubster who begins to hold the brush one morning then boasts of his skill the same evening."

After that, a full two years passed before he received his offended teacher's pardon. That was a testing time far harsher and harder to endure than when he had first been admitted as the lowest-ranking of his pupils. And the piece of calligraphy he was now gazing up at had been written and handed to him by Master Sökdam on the day he had finally received his moving forgiveness.

In writing, let your spirit be like that of Garuda who cleaves the blue ocean to grab at a dragon and soars with it in his clutch, let your intelligence be as thorough and solid as that of Gandhastin who splits a stream from below, then crosses it

When he looked back on it, even after a whole lifetime had passed, in Kojuk's memory the immensely difficult period of apprenticeship was still enveloped in a light which closely resembled an indelible grief and regret.

Perhaps on account of some kind of premonition, Master Sökdam had treated him with icy precaution from the moment his uncle had entrusted him to him. Despite the distinction of his family line, after several generations of scholars, the Master's inherited income had not been very great, and at that time he was mainly relying on the sacks of rice that his small number of pupils offered each spring and autumn, but none the less accepting this child had not represented such a financial burden that it could tax Master Sökdam's mind unduly. Moreover, later, even when he was grown up and had taken charge of providing for Master Sökdam, unable to support himself, the Master's attitude had not changed, suggesting that there was some kind of intrinsic problem.

The way Master Sökdam had obliged him to keep reading year after year the *Sohak* that other pupils finished in a couple of years and moved beyond, then had put him into the fourth grade of primary school at the age of thirteen firmly removing him to a place far distant from his own kind of learning, was surely linked with that attitude.

Yet equally incomprehensible had been his own feelings toward Master Sökdam. Throughout the Master's lifetime, he had kept being entangled in contradictory emotions, inexpressible admiration and equally intense hatred toward him. On looking back calmly, such feelings were far removed from any kind of inevitable logic, but he could locate more or less exactly the moment when they had begun to form clearly. It had been between the age of sixteen, after he had graduated from primary school and remained in Master Sökdam's home, and the age of eighteen, when he had formally begun studies with him. In

that period he had refused a relative's kind offer to help with school fees, so turning his back on the rapidly changing world and any aspiration for the new learning that corresponded to it, had taken over the management of Master Sökdam's unpromising household affairs. Since the sacks of rice brought by the pupils no longer provided enough food, he supplemented that by cultivating a few fields previously let out to a tenant, while sometimes walking twenty or thirty *li* to gather a load of firewood.

People found him laudable for doing so much, but in reality from that time onward an intense flame of love-hate had burned within him. Like the shade of a cloud passing over a spring hillside, like fields freshly washed by a summer day's shower, like a stream in an autumn valley, like a winter sky clearing after a snowfall, Master Sökdam's life had been calm, fresh, pure and quiet yet also tedious, forlorn and desolate, and had always inspired in him simultaneously an inexplicable admiration and an ominous premonition. When the Master was seated at his desk smiling vaguely and seemingly half-asleep, and his soul seemed to wander through some fluid world illumined solely by the twilight of past glories, or when, eyes flashing with surreal vitality, he wielded the large brush like a typhoon, or when in the shade of a musk-rose bush in the back yard with an unworldly dignity, far from any uproar, he fingered the *kōmungo*, or painted orchids, he seemed to be the very model of a dedicated life; but when he reflected on the housekeeping, on how, unless he looked after him, within six months they would have a starved corpse on their hands, or on the dilapidated house that nowadays nobody visited in the course of a year except for a few old men and the pupils who were now less numerous than his ten fingers, or on seeing the helpless expression with which Master Sökdam greeted him on his return from hard work in the fields, he had the impression that it was all a kind of cursed fate he had to escape from at all costs.

Yet what had finally dominated Kojuk's life had been the admiration and the veneration. As if it had already been predetermined when he had suppressed the powerful temptations of the new world and renounced the new learning, he had finally set about imitating Master Sökdam with a fervor that he himself could not account for. Calligraphy models written by the Master and left behind by departing pupils, spoiled pages of writing or paintings the Master had thrown aside, literati drawings scrawled for exchange with fellow calligraphers then left behind, such were his main models, although sometimes he made bold to take things directly from the Master's collection.

The paper and brushes he had used at first were such that they stirred a chill wind in his breast when he recalled them even many years later. Smaller characters he practiced in a sand-box or on a plank coated with oiled dust, using stubby brushes the Master's pupils had discarded after use, large characters he used to write with a broom made of hair from a dog's tail on the large stone tables for offerings lying in front of tombs, that he would then wash clean with water. The first time he obtained paper and brushes of his own was after he had given a bundle of pine-needle branches to the brush merchant and the paper seller, unknown to his master

Later, Master Sökdam is said to have censured that as Kojuk's cockiness, yet, in the light of their relationship, it is hard to believe that in the course of that difficult apprenticeship he not only never requested Master Sökdam to accept him as a pupil, but did not so much as give any indication of his ardent desire. But perhaps that was his artistic pride, the instinctive arrogance found in certain kinds of great souls.

Then a day came when Master Sökdam left home early in the morning and he was

left alone in charge; after tidying up the Master's study, he suddenly experienced a strange urge. It was the urge to see clearly in a single glance how far he had developed. The place where Master Sōkdam had gone was a Confucian poetry gathering more than a hundred *li* away, he would surely be unable to return within the day.

He prepared the writing table, started to grind ink in the Master's Duanxi ink stone. Following the Master's instructions, he did not splash so much as a drop of ink; then once the hollowed space in the stone was full of ink he took up some brushes his master had left aside when preparing his bag, and some precious Chinese paper.

First he copied the Twin Cranes Inscription [雙鶴銘] in the Yan style [顏體] in square characters. Whereas the great calligrapher Ch'usa had considered Oh-Yang Sheun's Inscription on the Sweet Spring at Chiu-ch'eng Palace [九成宮醴泉銘] to be the best model for learning the square characters, that was the model Master Sōkdam encouraged his pupils to master. As he grew accustomed to the brush and paper, his brush strokes came closer to the original. Next he turned to writing, also in Yan style, the Monument to Good Etiquette [勤禮碑] . . . it was an ever more arduous task, yet slowly he fell into a state of high rapture.

He was finally brought down to earth by the sound of an unexpected shout just as he had finished writing '永和九年 歲在癸丑,' the opening lines of Wáng Xīzhī's "Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion" [蘭亭序] which he had been practicing on his own.

"You scoundrel! Stop that!"

Lifting astonished eyes, he saw Master Sōkdam standing there, looking down at him, in the room that had grown dark without his noticing. The shout had been loud, but his face expressed inexplicable apprehension and resignation rather than wrath. At his side was Master Ch'oi, known by the pen name Un'gok but also by the nickname 'Sevenfold Gentleman' because of his all-round skills in poetry, calligraphy, painting, paduk, divination, medicine and music; he was looking mystified.

Covered in confusion, he scurried around gathering up the pages he had written, that lay scattered all over the room. Contrary to what he had expected, Master Sōkdam merely watched him absently. Un'gok spoke.

"Leave what you've written."

His words were addressed to Kojuk as he was about to go out carrying the pages he had written, after rushing madly about tidying up the room. Kojuk obeyed almost automatically. Driven by curiosity and excitement, he came back close to the men's quarters and listened to the voices filtering from the room.

For a while the only sound to be heard in the room, where lights had been lit, was the rustling of paper, then Un'gok spoke.

"So, Sōkdam, did you really not teach him anything?"

"Maybe he studied by looking over my shoulder, I have never taught him anything."

For some reason Sōkdam's reply sounded dejected and subdued.

"If that's the case, it's truly amazing. He must have the gift of heaven.

Sōkdam said nothing.

"Why have you not accepted him as a pupil?"

"Transmission should not be made to one who is not yet a person [非人不傳]—have you forgotten what Wang Youjun said?"

"Do you mean to say you reckon this young man so far from being a person that you

are unable to teach him?”

“First of all, that youth has too much talent. He knows nothing of points and stokes, yet he can form characters; he has never learned the twelve principles of calligraphy, yet he knows harmonization and spacing and turning. He’s a born penman whose talent blocks the root of the Way.”

“Such words are unexpected from so mild a person. Surely you can open up the root of the Way for him?”

“You think that’s an easy task? Besides, the boy is hardly likely to appreciate the fragrance of characters and the vigor of writings. Yet I must say, this orchid is certainly composed with quite charming elegance.”

“Don’t you think he’ll develop those qualities after he becomes your pupil? Go on, accept him!”

“At the outset the only things I agreed to provide were his food and clothing. I’d hoped that he would acquire the new learning and find a way to support himself on his own”

“Sökdam, why on earth are you being like this? Even someone with whom you have no relationship, if he comes asking for instruction, you can’t just send him away, you know. So what makes you treat so coolly this youth who has eaten at your table these last seven or eight years? I have heard that for several years past he has taken charge of supporting you. Don’t you feel touched by pity at such devotion?”

At that point, Un’gok’s voice filled with indignation. It seemed that he had already heard talk of his strange relationship with Sökdam.

“Don’t blame me too harshly. To tell the truth, I myself do not know why that child troubles me. Every time I see him, my only feeling is that some evil fate has brought us together.

Master Sökdam’s voice trembled slightly.

“Then what about this? If he’s a burden to you, send him to me at least once every three days. It looks as though it would be wrong for him to abandon this path now.”

“There’s no need for that. I’ll train him.”

What could Master Sökdam have meant by evil fate? And what made him suddenly decide to accept him despite saying such a thing?

The next day, Kojuk’s name was formally included among the pupils of Master Sökdam. That is not to say that there was some kind of solemn admission ceremony. That day Kojuk was going out of the front gate with an A-frame on his back as usual when Master Sökdam called out to him.

“From today you are not to go working in the fields.”

He spoke as if making some kind of passing remark. Then, casting a sidelong glance at Kojuk who was bewildered by the sudden command, he insisted in a louder voice:

“I’m telling you to take off that frame and go into my study.”

Such had been the ceremony marking the start of their destined relationship as master and pupil.

At the sudden sound of the door opening, Kojuk’s thoughts returned to present realities from the hazy past in which they had been roaming. Looking in the direction of the door with unfocussed eyes, he saw Maehyang coming in. He felt his back grow strangely cold as his sight cleared. How much resentment she must have felt, to come all this way . . .

Kojuk, filled with a feeling similar to remorse, gazed at Maehyang as she approached. No, it was not her.

“Father, are you awake?”

It was Ch’usu. She approached silently to examine his complexion and her face, devoid of makeup, betrayed intense concern. Summoning all his strength he tried to raise himself. Perhaps prepared for such a move, Ch’usu calmly helped him lean back. He could feel that raising himself was becoming more difficult with each passing day.

“Shall I bring you some fruit juice?”

She addressed him again but, instead of replying, he dumbly scrutinized her face then abruptly asked in a weak, hoarse voice:

“Do you remember your mother?”

Hearing his question, Ch’usu looked at him with a look of surprise. It might have been because, although she had been caring for him for more than seven years now, ever since the previous old woman had died, she had never once heard him ask such a question. In fact it had been longer still since his lips had last spoken Maehyang’s name.

“Only from photos”

Of course, poor child, entrusting the newly born baby to her family and going back to the kisaeng house, then, less than two years later, committing that foolish deed

“But father, why do you ask?”

“Just now I thought you were your mother coming in.”

Ch’usu said nothing.

“She was not the kind to make old bones, [yet,] there was no need for her to hasten things like that”

Seeing her father’s face fill with grief as he spoke, Ch’usu’s face, that had unusually tightened for a moment, softened again to its normal state.

“Shall I bring you some fruit juice?”

She repeated her question as if she wanted to change the mood. He replied, shaking off the thought of Maehyang:

“If you have some green tea ready, give me a sip of that.”

Ch’usu opened a window briefly to change the air in the room, then went out quietly.

What was that passion that spurred me on so violently as he drank the cool tea Ch’usu had brought, Kojuk recalled the first time he had met Maehyang. At thirty-five he had left Master Sökdam for the second time and spent the next ten years wandering from place to place.

It was during the years just preceding the beginning of the war between Japan and China in 1931, a time when there were still Confucian scholars, traditional schools were still a living reality, and regular poetry gatherings, literary contests and competitions were regularly held. Perhaps because he had been formed by Master Sökdam, who was even known as the Triple Master, being equally outstanding in poetry, calligraphy and painting, or on account of the fact that he had, despite the Master’s scoldings, had works accepted at several National Art Exhibitions, his travels had been relatively luxurious for such a depressed and impoverished period. Once a month or so, somewhere around the country he would find himself invited to take the seat of honor at a gathering, and in every county there remained at least one worthy prepared to pay him enough for a single work to cover a whole month’s journeying.

It was during the same period that he had paid a visit to Chinju. After ten days of

partying during some competition, he was cleaning his brushes and preparing to pack his bag when a rickshaw unexpectedly arrived before the house that had served as the venue for the contest to take him somewhere. It was not the first time such a thing had happened, so he quickly got in and was taken to what was then Chinju's finest restaurant. Waiting for him in a large room before a table groaning with food, he found half a dozen Japanese men and two Koreans. They were high public officials who appreciated calligraphy and enlightened local supporters of the Japanese.

Maehyang had been one of the kisaengs summoned to serve the group. When the party was at its height, the Korean manager of the government trading company who seemed to have organized it smilingly asked the kisaengs:

"So who is going to accommodate this gentleman tonight?"

At that, a burst of coquettish laughter arose from the kisaengs for a while, and then one of them came gliding forward; standing before Kojuk, she raised her long red skirt, revealing a silk petticoat that was white like fine paper. She might have been about twenty-two, her face was not particularly beautiful, nor did she display any very sensuous coquetry, yet something about her was strangely enticing. As he undid his brush bag, that he had brought with him, he felt the liquor he had drunk go rushing to his head.

"What's your name?"

"I am called Maehyang."

She replied pertly, seemingly oblivious of those around. It was he, rather, who was embarrassed.

"Plum-blossom fragrance? Then I shall have to paint a spray of plum blossom."

He made an effort to speak calmly, but he could not prevent the hand holding the brush from trembling. But what he could never understand was the picture of plum blossom that he painted. Perhaps from a feeling of shame toward the Master he had left behind, what was spreading across the girl's petticoat was not his own style of plum, but Master Sökdam's. The trunk dry and bent, with two plum blossoms on a gaunt branch that were still scarcely flowering buds. The accompanying text was Sökdam's, too.

梅一生寒不賣香 [Though its whole life is spent in the cold, the plum never sells its fragrance]

At a cursory glance, the phrase might seem to derive from Maehyang's name, but the statement that plum blossom refuses to sell its fragrance even though it spends its whole existence in bitter cold hardly suited the petticoat of an officially registered kisaeng toward the end of the Japanese colonial period. But it was what followed that had engendered a shame that, unbeknown to anyone, endured until the present day.

"Why is this plum tree so cold and lonely?"

When Maehyang asked that as he was setting his seal to the painting, he replied in a low, grave voice that only she could hear:

"Have you not noticed how Cheng Ssu-hsiao's orchids all have their roots exposed?"

Then to the curious onlookers he explained that it was because such plum trees blossom while it is still winter, but it seemed clear that Maehyang had understood him correctly: the exposed roots of Cheng Ssu-hsiao's orchids expressed his resentment and sorrow at the humiliation of his country under foreign occupation.

That night, Maehyang gave herself to him readily.

"You've made my petticoat wet like this on a cold evening, you'll have to look after

me tonight.”

After that, he spent four months with Maehyang. Those were months of which he only retained impressions of pleasure and sweetness, such as a memory of crossing a mountain pass bright with spring flowers, intoxicated with delight. Then abruptly their days together came to an end. Just as he was not a wandering scholar who consoled his humiliated country by art like Cheng Ssu-hsiao, so she was not a heroic kisaeng who leaped into a river embracing an enemy general as Non'gae had done during an earlier Japanese invasion. If he was nothing but a mere dilettante traveling about under the impulse of a passion he himself did not understand, she was just a kisaeng with a family of eight to support, her parents and six siblings.

They separated without hatred or rancor, as if they were putting into practice something they had agreed at the start. Maehyang went back to the kisaeng house. Kojuk set off for a friend's exhibition that was due to open in Chŏnju. It was their last parting.

The next year in the autumn he heard a report that Maehyang, after they had separated, had given birth to a daughter she said was his. At that time he was roaming from one temple to another on the western slopes of Mount Sŏrak, so without further thought he sent a note telling her to give the child the name Ch'usu [Autumn water]. Maybe the water in the mountain streams, limpid to the point of sadness, had inspired in him a premonition concerning the child's future.

It was only some years later that he heard Maehyang was dead. It seemed that she had become a wealthy man's concubine but, unable to endure his wife's harassment, she had drunk four ounces of fresh opium juice mixed with water, putting an end to her youthful life. Perhaps he was heartless, but the fact was that on hearing the news of Maehyang's wretched death, he felt no particular sorrow. His only thought was that a daughter of his had been born from that woman's body, and he briefly wondered where she was, how she was faring.

However, he only saw Ch'usu's face for the first time when she came to study in a girls' school in the town where he was living. Her uncle, provided with a fair income by reason of his sister's unfortunate demise, expressed his thanks by looking after the child, his only niece. As a result, Ch'usu experienced no particular hardships as she grew up. From time to time Kojuk would call in at the girls' school to meet his daughter. That was his way of consoling himself, as with the approaching of old age he was experiencing a growing need for affectionate relationships with his own flesh and blood.

After that, it was relatively late before father and daughter lived together in one house.

After the death of the old woman who had been living with him as his companion ever since he had settled in the town, opening a studio and moving into a small house, he found himself alone again and Ch'usu was also alone, having lost her husband in the Vietnam war, so she moved in with him. That had been seven years before, when poor Ch'usu was a mere twenty-six years old.

Kojuk swallowed down a bowl of gruel as if it were some kind of medicinal concoction, then struggled to his feet. Ch'usu, who was on her way out with the empty bowl took his hand as he stood tottering and asked:

“Will you be going out today?”

“I must.”

“You went out for nothing yesterday. Today you should send Mr. Kim to make the rounds instead.”

“I have to go myself.”

Since leaving the hospital the previous summer, over the past four months he had made the rounds of the galleries in the town center without missing a single day. He was intent on buying back any of his own works that became available. When he first began buying, he had no clearly formulated plan but now he was nearing a conclusion.

That was linked to a clear premonition of impending death. Doctor Chǒng, the doctor treating him, had calmly declared that he was completely cured but judging by various signs, his discharge from hospital had been a kind of death sentence. There was something about the endless succession of visitors, and the somber expression of Ch’usu as she cared for him, close as his shadow. His stomach, too, unable to deal with food properly, was a long way from Dr. Chǒng’s ‘complete recovery.’ There was none of the intense pain he had felt at the time when he was hospitalized. Yet he could not shake himself free of a feeling that his cells were collapsing one by one, starting from the tips of his toes.

“Is there still no news of Ch’ohǒn?”

Ch’ohǒn was the pen-name of the pupil Ch’usu had called Mr. Kim. The last pupil to receive a pen-name from him, he was a young man who had been lodging at the studio for several years past.

“He said he would be here in half an hour’s time. But stay home today . . .”

“No, I’m going out. Get my things ready.”

He threw a rather stern glance at Ch’usu, who kept trying to dissuade him imploringly, then slowly walked back and forth in his room. He had only gone a few steps before everything grew blurred and he began to lurch about. Ch’usu watched him with anxious eyes until he was back sitting on the floor, leaning against his rolled-up bedding, then went out quietly. His eyes were filled once again with his master’s calligraphy.

Was their meeting truly doomed by evil fate, as Master Sǒkdam had said? Even after accepting him as a pupil, their strange relationship had continued unchanged. Sǒkdam had been so parsimonious in his teaching, that Kojuk could not be free from the resentment lodged in his breast until he was middle aged. He started by learning the standard, regular style all over again and before he took up the brush, Sǒkdam made him memorize Ch’usa’s *Sǒgyǒl* (theory of calligraphy).

The rule governing writing requires one to become quite empty before moving. That is like the heavens, which have the north and south poles as their axis, then once the heavens are fixed round that unmoving point they move constantly. The rule governing writing is just the same. For that reason writing is effected by the brush, while the brush is moved by the fingers, and the fingers are moved by the wrist. So shoulder, forearm, wrist, all are moved by what we term the right side of the body

Such was the start of the text, some four hundred characters in length, that Kojuk was forced to memorize without omitting so much as a single character. Next he handed him a copy of a manual of Yan Zhenqing’s style that he had in fact, unknown to the Master, already copied out.

“If you copy this one hundred times, you will acquire the basics; if you copy it one thousand times, you will hear people say you can write well; if you copy it ten thousand times,

people may call you a great calligrapher.”

That was all his teaching. If anything at all had changed from before, it was probably only the fact that he could now practice openly and went once every two days to learn Chinese classics from Master Un’gok. Then, three years later, he had added only one remark:

“Hold your breath.”

That had been when he was lamenting that even after copying them out three thousand times, he still could not write the square style of characters properly.

It was much the same when it came to painting the Four Gracious Plants (plum, orchid, chrysanthemum and bamboo). For example, when it came to painting orchids, he had simply handed him a copy of Sökp’a’s volume of orchids he himself had made, saying:

“You cannot hope to become a Buddha overnight, nor can you catch a dragon bare-handed. It is only possible after much practice.”

Once again, that was all. Although he would occasionally inspect over his shoulder the orchids he was painting, he never once said a word teaching him in detail what to do.

It was not until his orchid paintings were nearly satisfactory that he added:

“Start on the left. You have to use the brush turned in the opposite direction for the rock.”

Besides, Master Sökdam took no particular pleasure at his pupil’s accomplishments. Nearly ten years after he had become his pupil, his skill gave rise to a quiet admiration even among his master’s friends. Yet whenever the Master heard such remarks, he would always reply briefly and sternly:

“He’s barely learned how to imitate.”

It is possible that his decision to leave the Master’s house when he was twenty-seven was also a rebellious reaction to such a cold-hearted attitude. Yet, strange to say, the more he heard the applause of the outside world, the more he longed to receive his Master’s praise. It may well have been that which brought him back to Master Sökdam’s side, and was the reason that made him endure nearly two years of contempt and abuse before receiving the Master’s forgiveness.

After he had returned to the housekeeping tasks of earlier times, laboring in the fields and bringing in wood, for two years the Master refused so much as to look at him. Once, driven by an irresistible impulse, he took up the brush unbeknown to the Master. It was done in great secrecy, but he detected it and spoke with the most cold-hearted severity:

“Go outside and wash. The smell of ink coming from your body is more intolerable than the smell of a whore’s make-up.”

Later, even after he had been forgiven and was once again practicing in the Master’s study, there had been no great change in Master Sökdam’s attitude. Indeed, as he grew older and his calligraphy matured, a kind of unreasonable anxiety seemed increasingly to be manifest in the Master’s frosty expression. It was rather Kojuk who grew ever more relaxed. He had been subject to the Master’s hostility and cruelty for nearly half his lifetime; it was not just that he had grown impervious or accustomed to them; he had reached a point where he deliberately did things that distressed and upset the Master, taking pleasure in his anger and complaints. His occasional participation in exhibitions and competitions was one example of that.

However, the day was approaching when their fraught relationship would finally break down completely, as the inexplicable causes of Sökdam’s anxieties about Kojuk, as

well as Kojuk's uneasiness toward his teacher, gradually revealed their true nature with time.

Fundamentally, no unity was possible between them because of what might be termed their approach to art, their concepts of calligraphy and painting. Master Sökdam's writing gave weight to strength, revered the inner spirit, the essential nature and principle. Whereas he esteemed beauty and strove to give expression to feeling and sense. In painting, too, Master Sökdam considered art to be an expression of the artist's heart while he claimed it was a depiction of things, and aimed at faithfulness to the subject, rather than to his own inwardness. A good example of that can be found in their famous quarrel over the plum and bamboo.

Among the Four Gracious Plants, Master Sökdam had always prided himself especially on his paintings of bamboo and plum. But with the annexation of Korea by Japan, a strange change occurred. Originally, in the paintings of plum and bamboo by Master Sökdam, which has been admired by the Regent Taewöngun himself as works of genius, leaves and flowers were thickly clustered, emerging energetically, but after the annexation they had gradually begun to wilt, grow parched and twisted. That became worse with age, until in the works of his last years there remained no more than three leaves on a stalk of bamboo, or five blossoms on a plum branch. To Kojuk, that was unsatisfying.

"Master, why have you plucked the leaves from the bamboo, stripped away the plum flowers?"

By the time he asked that, Kojuk was in the prime of manhood and Master Sökdam was no longer capable of his previous fastidiousness.

"What joy could the bamboos of a subjugated land have to produce thick foliage, what strength remains in the brush of a subject of a deposed regime to make plums blossom?"

"Cheng Ssu-hsiao painted orchids with their roots revealed to express the shame of occupied Sung China, Zhao Mengfu sacrificed his integrity and agreed to serve the Yuan dynasty, but I have never heard anyone say that Cheng Ssu-hsiao's orchids alone were fragrant or that the works of Zhao Mengfu were base."

"Writing and painting are expressions of the heart. Since we make use of outward objects in order to depict the heart, there is no need to be shackled by the actual appearance of things."

"If writing calligraphy and painting pictures were merely the means by which a scholar expresses his righteous indignation, surely they would be pointless? In that case, it would surely be shameful to be born a man then to spend a whole lifetime grinding ink and soiling paper. I may be wrong, but if the nation is as precious as you suggest, it would be more honorable to join the ranks of the independence fighters and die killing at least one enemy. In any case, sitting quietly in one's study plucking off bamboo leaves, stripping away plum blossoms, is to deceive oneself and deceive the thing itself."

"Not so. When it comes to being faithful to things, the roadside artist surely does far better. But their pictures are sold for a farthing and are later used to cover a hole in the floor, because they are shallow and vulgar. You are trying to give some kind of value to painting and writing as such, but unless they incorporate some lofty state of mind, all you have is black ink and white paper."

A similar contention arose concerning the nature of art. Once again, since Kojuk was now mature, it began with a question from him.

"Master, is calligraphy an art, a principle, or a Way?"

“It is a Way.”

“Why then do people talk of the art of writing and the principle of writing?”

“Art is the Way’s fragrance, principle is the Way’s clothing. If there is no Way, there can be no art, no principle.”

“It is said that when art reaches its height, it becomes the Way. So is not art the door opening on to the Way, rather than its fragrance?”

“Those are an artisan’s words. Everything has always to be within the Way.”

“Then you mean that before learning to write and paint, there first has to be a purification of body and mind?”

“Yes indeed. That is why Wang Youjun said that transmission should not be made to one who is not yet a person. Do you see what that means now?”

Already in his sixties and visibly aging, Master Sökdam’s expression suddenly brightened and he gazed intently at the face of this pupil who had ever been such a worry to him. But to the very end Kojuk failed to fulfill his master’s expectations.

“If forming the person has to come first, why are children of six or seven given a brush and made to draw strokes? If the Way comes before writing, how many people are going to be ready to take up the brush before they die?”

“It’s a matter of practicing artistic technique while waiting to enter the Way. If someone remains a whole lifetime at the level of technique, that is craftsmanship; if someone is able to take one step along the Way, that is art; if someone achieves perfect union of art and Way, that is a supreme state of being in the Way of art.

“That means that art is first and the Way comes later. But surely putting the Way first and repressing artistic spirit is to put the cart before the ox?”

Such had been Kojuk’s complaint for over half a lifetime, ever since he had first become Master Sökdam’s pupil. The Master’s response was equally sharp, perhaps on account of a feeling that the anxiety he had harbored ever since accepting him into his house had finally been confirmed.

“You wretch. Are you trying to prevaricate with frivolous words when you ought to be striving to make up for your lack of the vigor of writings and the fragrance of characters? Study is the path leading to the Way. But you have never had any interest in the classics, have never enjoyed reading works of literature. You have merely been training the tip of your brush and your wrist, imitating in a spirited fashion the venerable achievement of the ancients, so how are you any different from a mere artisan? Now here you are, without the least sign of shame, daring to criticize your forebears’ lofty spirit of achievement, you shameless wretch.”

So, finally, the day came when the ill-fated master and pupil turned their backs on one another. It was the year when Kojuk turned thirty-six.

By that time, Kojuk had a variety of reasons for being fed up. He was in a wretched state after the eight years of extremely arduous training he had undergone since being readmitted as Sökdam’s pupil. He was so completely absorbed in writing and painting that he almost never left his seat; as a result, in the summer his buttocks would fester unbearably, while in the winter his joints were so stiff that it was hard for him to stand up to bring in the little table with his meals. Disregarding Master Sökdam’s silent rebukes, he saw nothing, heard nothing that was unrelated to calligraphy and painting. He had previously spent almost ten years in constant training but until late in his life Kojuk used to recall those eight years as the most precious years of his life. If those earlier ten years can be seen as ten years spent

striving to reach Master Sökdam's level, those eight years were eight years of struggle to get free of Master Sökdam.

Meanwhile, his technique matured and his public reputation slowly grew in due proportion. Critical opinions vary but even now there are those who reckon that the writing and paintings done in that period, scintillating with talent and inspiration, are the finest among his life's accomplishments. But Kojuk gradually fell into an unfathomable state where everything seemed false and vain, rather like the solitude and emptiness that reign after a fire has gone out.

That sense of futility seemed to have a double origin. One was the way his prime of life had all flowed away to no avail amidst the dust of ink and paper. He had a wife, whom Un'gok had introduced him to, and two children, but from the beginning he had seen them as necessities like a chest or a writing table, and not as objects of passion. His youth, his hopes, his love, his aspirations, all had been entirely devoted to writing and yet more writing. But now his youth, fluttering pathetically at the tip of the branch like a single leaf left in late autumn, all that he had been pursuing, devoting everything he had, still seemed remote and perhaps for ever unattainable like a rainbow over a mountaintop

The other stimulus for his sense of futility was the problem he increasingly encountered as he matured as a calligrapher, the question as to whether he deserved an objective self-approval or not. As he gradually awoke from his feverish state of absorption, there was a question he found himself asking himself mockingly: What have I been doing, what am I doing? The meaning of his repeated question was different now from in the days when he had been contending with his teacher. Is it acceptable for a man once born on this earth to spend his entire lifetime grinding ink and playing with brushes? There are those who, in the struggle for independence from Japan, have gone overseas, who have fought and died or been imprisoned; others have concentrated on finance, accumulated a fortune, then relieved their needy neighbors. Others have enlightened their ignorant compatriots by cultural activities, yet others have devoted themselves to the new learning and served society by their knowledge. But what had he done with half his lifetime? His gaze had been entirely focused on himself, and even that laborious training of his earlier days, which he had previously considered sincere and significant, now seemed merely a flight from a dreary life, a subjective self-indulgence. An entirely self-centered life, alas, an entirely self-centered life

Then came that autumn day, the same year. Master Sökdam was already so old and frail that he sometimes remained confined to his bed; on that day, as soon as he had risen from his sickbed he brought out paper and brush. The brush and paper were both of the large size, which by that time he scarcely ever used. Kojuk, who had not put brush to paper for several months past, felt an irrational fury at the sight of the Master's tenacity and left the room as soon as he had finished grinding the ink. The true reason was that, somehow, the Master's very tenacity seemed to imply scorn at the pupil's irresoluteness. Still, after walking up and down in the courtyard for a while he was suddenly seized with curiosity as to how well the master was coping with his writing.

Entering the room, he found Master Sökdam panting, eyes closed, the brush laid down on the water holder. On the floor, apparently abandoned in the course of writing, was a page containing the first three characters of the saying “萬毫齊力” [you should give equal strength to each and every hair of a brush].

“They say that at the age of seventy-eight Su Zhai, Weng Fang-gang wrote the four

characters 天下泰平 [perfect peace under heaven] on a sesame seed. I am not even seventy, yet I didn't have enough strength to write those four characters in a single stroke. . . ."

As he lamented, Master Sökdam's face was filled with an intense sorrow. But on hearing those words, Kojuk's repressed fury came surging up again. To his eyes, the Master's expression reflected not sorrow but rather self-confidence.

"Supposing that you had written that in a single gesture, and Garuda had arisen from it, Fragrant Elephant come sauntering, what advantage would that have been to you?"

Kojuk did not realize that, as he posed the question, his face harbored a sadistic smile. On first hearing those words Master Sökdam, who had been sitting exhausted, his brow pearly with perspiration, looked stunned. Then as soon as he had grasped the true sense of his words, he glared at him fiercely.

"What are you saying? That is a truly sublime state that any calligrapher aspires to experience even if it is just once in a whole lifetime."

"But even supposing one attained that, what could it give us?"

Kojuk was relentless.

"You haven't even begun to climb Tai-shan, and already you're worried that once you reach the top there might not be yet higher mountains beyond it. Are you suggesting that the great sages who are revered by all the generations for their lofty attainments were all wasting their time?"

"They were deceiving themselves and they deceived others. If there is a Way in the act of daubing ink on paper, what on earth is it? If it's some kind of recondite mystery, how wonderful is it? If you are speaking of a Way, a butcher or a thief has a Way; if you are referring to complexity of meanings, there are recondite mysteries in the work of a craftsman or a blacksmith. Supposing one's name is handed down from age to age, while the 'I' no longer exists, and one's shell transformed into writing goes wandering amidst an unknown posterity, what use is that? Works may be preserved, but even the hardest inscribed stone is worn away by winds and rain, how much more than mere paper and ink? After all, when they were alive, such things could give their bodies no comfort, could offer no help to their naked, starving neighbors. In order to conceal that futility, that distress, they established a state which no one could attain or demonstrate, so consoling themselves and bewitching their neighbors and descendants"

At that moment, Kojuk, wracked by a sudden pain, fell prostrate, holding his head in his hands. Furious, Master Sökdam had seized the cover of his ink slab that was lying before him and thrown it at him. The maddened shouts of his old master rang in Kojuk's ears as he mopped up the blood that was spurting like a fountain.

"Wretch, I recognized the vulgarity in you early on. Get out. You should have been sitting at the streetside from the very beginning. You cleverly disguised your vulgarity but today it is manifest; if you go out on to the streets now, you can earn a generous measure of rice for every character you write"

In the end, that was their last encounter. Having left Master Sökdam's house that day, Kojuk next entered it only after the Master's body was already in its coffin.

That had happened more than ten years before, yet it was still with a vague feeling of pain that Kojuk touched the left side of his forehead where the scar, now covered with wrinkles, was barely visible. Yet the memory of the Master's face that arose with that gesture evoked, not hatred or fear, but yearning.

“Father, Mr. Kim is here.”

Once again, Ch’usu’s voice awoke him from interminable reminiscing. With that, the door opened and Ch’ohñ’s round face appeared. Whenever he saw him, this pupil awoke a particular feeling of affection, as if he were a late-born son. It might be because for the past year or so he had generously been managing the studio in his absence without asking for anything in return, but it was above all on account of his writing. Unlike other modern youths who, before they have learned to wield the brush correctly, scrawl in semi-cursive style, and write in cursive and seal styles although they do not know how to make points and lines correctly, Ch’ohñ deliberately spent three years practicing only the square style. Besides, he started calligraphy only seven years ago, but since he had spent every day of those seven years in the studio, it was no short period of time, yet at that spring’s collective exhibition by Kojuk’s pupils he had modestly submitted just two pieces written in square characters. His writing looked awkward yet it was full of a strange power, so that Kojuk was secretly moved by it. That was because it sometimes reminded him of Master Sökdam’s brushwork, which he found increasingly profound as he grew older, although in his own youth he had so stubbornly rejected it.

“Do you really intend to go out today, sir? I heard from your daughter that you seemed to be walking with some difficulty”

Quite forgetting the customary morning greetings, Ch’ohñ groped hesitantly for words. If Kojuk had still been as he was in younger days, he would surely not have endured his way of speaking, inarticulate to the point that it made him seem devious, but now Kojuk took no notice and replied gently.

“I have to bring everything back, even if there’s only one left out there. The city library refuses to give up the piece they have, you said?”

“Because it was included in the list of works received from the previous administrator, they said it was quite impossible.”

“Even though I said I would give them a work by Maegye?”

“The director of the library said that it did not matter who it was by, they could not alter their list.”

“These people are quite impossible. I shall be obliged to go and meet him today in person.”

“Are you really going out?”

“Stop chattering; go and call a cab.”

As soon as Kojuk made his request, Ch’ohñ silently went out of the room. His expression indicated the usual curiosity, but today too he refrained from asking the Master why he was so intent on getting his works back.

It was a balmy day. Leaning on his pupil’s arm, Kojuk got out of the car at the end of the alley where the galleries were located and began to visit them one after another. This was a pilgrimage he had often repeated in recent months.

“Aigu! Master Kojuk! You’re out again today? But nothing has come in. It looks as though everyone has heard that you are not well and is holding on to what they have.”

The gallery owners, recognizing Kojuk, greeted him in their various ways. Visit after visit proved fruitless. Finally, the fifth or sixth gallery produced a page of familiar writing. It was a scroll written in semicursive style. In the seal bearing his name, Kojuk remarked that

the 'Ko' was written 孤, meaning 'lonely', instead of the more usual 古, meaning 'old', suggesting that this had been written during the period after he had left Master Sökdam's house and gone roaming around for the second time.

"I'll give you an orchid by Master Un'gok in exchange; will that do?"

The owner looked quietly pleased at this proposal. It might be stamped with Kojuk's seal, not only were pieces stamped with the name using the 'lonely' character generally speaking not highly prized, the present piece was quite obviously a minor work. In addition, though there was no knowing the value of Un'gok's orchid Kojuk was offering, there had been a rumor among the art dealers that there was no loss involved in such exchanges with Kojuk.

"If that is what you wish, I agree."

Finally the owner spoke as if he was doing him a favor.

"Thanks. I'll send this young man down with the work a little later."

"No, we will send someone up. Or rather I will go myself. Will this evening be convenient?"

"Very well."

Thereupon he prepared to wrap the scroll.

"No need to wrap it. I'll take it as it is."

Stopping the owner, Kojuk stretched out a lean hand. Taking the scroll, he went and sat down on the sofa prepared for customers, where he unrolled it.

"I'll just rest here a moment."

He was not speaking to anyone in particular.

玉露磨來濃霧生

銀箋染處淡雲起

One drop of jade-pure dew rolls away, giving birth to a heavy mist,
From each silver-hued blade of grass a bright cloud rises.

Such were the characters written on the scroll he had unrolled. They were in the semicursive script of Huang Shan-Gu that he had been fascinated by for a while in those days, and had probably been done in exchange for a cup of wine, for the writing was extremely light-hearted. With that, memories of the period came surging back, not as yearning and not as remorse but bathed in a hue that looked strange in its serenity.

. . . . For a while after leaving Master Sökdam's instruction, Kojuk believed that it was the Master who had rejected him. Recklessly distributing paintings and calligraphy, he lived immersed in drink and women, convinced that he was taking a just revenge on his heartless Master. But it was not so. Gradually, as he grew accustomed to the plaudits of the roadside and the small change tossed to him by the vulgar, indulging himself in the various pleasures such things procured, he began to think that in fact it was he who had deserted his Master.

He slowly started to realize that the worldly compensations he was currently enjoying had nothing to do with the pursuits of half his lifetime and represented too paltry a reward for the harsh, bone-breaking training of days gone by. The traveling expenses or brush fees he received in exchange for his works might appear flattering, but essentially they were no different from the fees given to a kisaeng; the boisterous applause was nothing

more than the plaudits earned by troops of entertainers in the marketplace. All of that was like sea-water that leaves you thirstier the more you drink; it only added to the sense of futility he had already felt before leaving the Master.

What held him firmly captive in that time of profligacy and dissipation was the strange vicious circle between that awareness and the sense of futility. Base pleasures stimulated his sense of futility, and the futility called forth further pleasures.

In addition, the temperament he had inherited from his family, the quality so far repressed and controlled, played a major role. That was something he learned when he happened to pass through his home village. His father had been a profligate who squandered his considerable fortune on constant journeying, on wine, women and gambling, ruining his health until he died in his early thirties. His mother had been a wild-spirited woman who did not wait for the end of the period of mourning for her husband before taking off one night with a widower from a neighboring house. His inherited nature had remained asleep, stifled in early youth by his teacher's strict teaching and the desperate feeling that there was no other way by which he could find salvation, then once he was an adult by the weight of the ideal he had set himself. But when it was awakened, that blood could not be held in check but spurred him on. He roamed around, drinking and loving, like a madman.

Later, after the Pacific War had begun, when the Japanese initiated a brutal exploitation under which the entire country was reduced to utter penury, his persistent pleasure-seeking knew no pause. Just as there are people who profit no matter how strong a wind is blowing, in the midst of that turmoil there was a class that prospered, and they provided for his minimum needs, at least, if not as much as before. Pro-Japanese Koreans who made a fortune by their betrayal, cultured Japanese, at least a small number of merchants who were taking advantage of the war

Then Kojuk's moment came. At that time he was a guest in the home of a certain Hō, a pro-Japanese landowner who had been a petty government official in the old days, whose son occupied a high position in the Japanese government-general. There was no knowing when the father had been an official, but he had some degree of appreciation of writing and painting, and occasionally he enjoyed inviting calligraphers from near and far for parties. It was nearly the end of the Pacific War, when people were starving with not so much as a bowl of rice mixed with other cereals or a soybean cake to eat; a party with a decent amount to drink and a small sum offered to cover travel costs was no common act of generosity. Moreover, although he was known as a pro-Japanese landowner, he was not someone who went out of his way to solicit Japanese favors. He was simply under the particular protection of the Japanese government due to the fact that his son was holding a high post in it. Therefore, if they received an invitation most calligraphers would come along bringing their writing materials. Then, while Kojuk was staying with him, Master Un'gok paid an unexpected visit. Kojuk was delighted. Not only had Un'gok been one of Master Sōkdam's few intimates, he himself had had the good fortune of studying the Chinese classics with him for six or seven years. His marriage, too, such as it was, had been arranged by him, while it had been Un'gok who had best understood Kojuk when he left Master Sōkdam's home. Yet Un'gok's response to Kojuk's warm greeting was unexpected.

"Hmm, how can this Kojuk, who has no ancestors, no master and no family, deign to recognize a worthless old man like myself?"

Referring sarcastically to the fact that Kojuk had once rashly used the nickname Man of Three Nos, Master Un'gok rejected official Hō's earnest entreaties, turned on his

heels and left.

“It looks as though it’s time for Sōkdam to die. The way he keeps calling a wretch like you his pupil, expecting you to come back home . . . an ungrateful creature like you.

Those were words that Master Un’gok spoke to him as he was going out through the main gate. Ordinarily so affable and mild, Un’gok’s attitude on this occasion shocked Kojuk as if he had been struck on the head with an iron pounder.

Even without that, Kojuk had already begun to grow weary of his vagabond life. The loneliness and sense of futility that had first taken hold of him were not things that could be appeased by the sentimental melancholy of travel, the superficial admiration of the vulgar or the few coins tossed in his direction by shallow aesthetes, neither could they be glossed over by the ensuing shallow loves or intoxication. What was more, he suddenly found himself speeding past forty and his blood, that had once been boiling, began to cool.

It might well be that the journey to Mount Odae which he undertook soon afterward was provoked by a last surge of passion, similar to the flame that flares up just before a fire goes out. Following in the footsteps of Master Un’gok, he too bade farewell to official Hō, and set out along the road toward Mount Odae. He was counting on the hospitality of an old friend who was head monk in a mountain temple as he left, but that journey was not a mere continuation of his wayward life on the road. The return home to his old Master, of which he had been vaguely thinking, could be delayed no longer, but he felt that first of all he needed to purify himself somehow.

After safely arriving at the mountainside temple, he spent nearly half a year living like a meditating monk. But the layers of this-worldly dust accumulated over ten years, together with his long-lasting resentment toward his Master, could not be washed away easily. Even after a new spring had come, the prospect of going back to being Master Sōkdam’s pupil still did not bring any feeling of happiness.

Then, one day, having come down the hillside after helping a novice monk strip the inner bark from some pine trees, he was sitting on the stone embankment behind the main hall to cool off. His eyes were suddenly struck by a faded painting on the temple wall. At first he took it for one of the symbolic animals of the twelve horary signs, but on closer inspection it was not. The head was like a hawk’s, the body similar to a human being’s, but by its wings it was a huge, golden-hued bird.

“What kind of a bird is that?”

He asked the head monk who happened to pass by. He glanced at the painting then replied:

“That’s Garula, a huge, imaginary bird that is said to have the mysterious Cintamani jewel set in its head, to breathe out flames, to catch and eat dragons. It lives in the four seas of Mount Sumeru, and it is the fifth of the eight Guardians of the Buddha’s Dharma; it is also called Garuda, the gold-winged bird or the wonder-winged bird.”

He suddenly recalled the phrase “金翅劈海 Gold-Wing cleaves oceans.” It had been in a calligraphy that Master Sōkdam had written and given him as a warning that his writing was dominated by talent and artistic skill. But the Garuda that had lived in his mind so far had been nothing more than an abstract symbol. It had merely been a symbol of power, linked to his Master’s coarse, rough writing. But now, as he contemplated this faded painting, the bird began to come alive and move in his imagination. Just for a moment, he had the impression he could see that huge gold-winged bird flapping its wings, circling through the ninety-thousand *li* of the firmament, then cleaving the ocean depths with immense power,

seizing a dragon and soaring aloft. At that moment he understood what his Master had meant when he said that regardless of objective, outside approval or recognition of value, if just once in a lifetime one saw such a sight in his writing, that would be a sufficient fulfillment for his life

The following day, Kojuk packed and came down from the mountain. It was the year preceding the end of the war and Liberation.

The Master was already dead when he arrived. With feelings close to remorse, Kojuk recalled the day of his return to Master Sökdam's home. The space before the gate, that had been deserted in the Master's lifetime, was thronged with pupils and colleagues. No one welcomed him gladly, indeed no one spoke a word to him. Master Un'gok alone addressed him, his expression glacial:

"You are to write the funeral streamer to cover the coffin. It was his last wish. Do not include any official titles; just 石潭金公及儒之柩 Here lie the remains of the Scholar Sökdam Kim."

Then, bursting into tears, he continued:

"Do you realize what that means? In asking that you should write the banner he is saying that he wants to take your writing with him to the other world. It shows just how much Sökdam loved your writing. You stupid fellow"

At that same moment the love-hate relationship between Sökdam and Kojuk, master and pupil, that had lasted a whole lifetime, vanished without trace. Now Kojuk longed for one last glimpse of his master's face but the coffin was already closed, he was never able to see him again.

"Sir, don't you think it's time we should be going?"

Ch'ohön spoke cautiously to Kojuk, who was sunk in an endless flow of memories, the scroll open in his hands. Awaking from his moment of reminiscence, Kojuk slowly rose to his feet.

"We must be off."

Starting again, he was in the fourth gallery when suddenly everything grew blurred before his eyes and all the strength went out of his legs.

"What's wrong, Sir?" Ch'ohön asked, hurriedly wrapping his free arm round Kojuk to support him as he sagged loosely, leaning heavily on his other arm.

"I'm alright. Let's go on to the next one."

Kojuk spoke firmly, but that was all he could do. A strange shudder ran down his spine like an electric current, leaving his brow covered with beads of cold sweat. Once inside the fifth gallery, he began to lose consciousness.

"You ought to be going back home now. Even if you go on, you're not going to find any more of your works."

The owner of the gallery urged him but Kojuk, collapsing onto rather than sitting down on the sofa, still did not forget to tell Ch'ohön:

"Go and visit the rest on your own. If ever you find something, call me here."

Ch'ohön examined Kojuk's face briefly, then went out without a word.

"What do you intend to do with your works once you have collected them?"

After he had rested for a while, the color came back into Kojuk's face, his breathing grew regular, and the gallery owner spoke his question cautiously. It was a question that had been making the rounds of the galleries for months past. Kojuk had told no-one of his

intentions. That day was no different.

"I have a use for all of them."

"Have you decided to set up a Kojuk Memorial Hall, as the rumors say?"

A memorial hall! Kojuk smiled faintly. As he did so, an inexpressible feeling of desolation invaded his heart. How could you understand, even if I told you?

"That's not such a bad idea."

After saying that, he abruptly changed the subject.

"Is that an original work?"

He pointed at a scroll that he knew very well was not an original but a copy of a text written in seal characters by Ch'usa. 畫法有長江萬里 書藝如孤松一枝 "The art of painting is like a river stretching ten thousand *li*, skill in writing is like a lonely pine-tree branch." The original calligraphy by Ch'usa was one panel in a folding screen, so it could not be wandering around on its own transformed into a scroll.

"It's a copy done by a young man called Unbong; I took it, feeling it had some quality."

The owner looked up at the scroll as he spoke.

"Indeed . . ."

Kojuk recalled the name of Ch'usa as if vaguely recalling an old acquaintance while he regarded the scroll with a blank stare. How powerfully that colossal figure had once fascinated him.

After he returned to Master Sökdam's house, for almost ten years he never left it, guarding his master's former home. On the one hand he looked after the master's widow, now left alone, and the son Sökdam had adopted late in his life, and on the other he undertook a new course of studies. He began once again to study all the various writing styles that he reckoned he had already gone through before.

Starting with the Mao-kung Ting bronze vessel and the stone drum inscriptions, he collected once again rubbings of all the various inscribed stone tablets from the Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms and Western Qin dynasties; he once again scrutinized closely specimens of the handwriting of members of the Southern School, from Zhong Yao, Wei Guan, Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi, to Chih-yung and Yu Shi'nan, and of the Northern School from Suo Jin, Cui Yue and Yao Yuan Piao, to Ouyang Xun and Chu Suiliang. There can be no doubt that, judging by the achievements of his later years, Kojuk had gained increased scholarly depth. The world outside the doors of the house was swept by the fratricidal massacres that followed Liberation, but no amount of chaos could draw Kojuk away from Master Sökdam's old home.

It was during these years that Kojuk encountered anew Ch'usa, whose principles of writing he had been introduced to at the start of his studies with Master Sökdam. That towering figure at first kept emerging here and there along the way as he struggled onward, evoking an initial admiration before finally completely captivating him. It was something new that he had not experienced previously; this new captivation with Ch'sa came along with his new appreciation and admiration for Master Sökdam. It was not something the Master had ever claimed for himself in his lifetime, but it was clear that he had inherited the mantle of Ch'usa. The transmission had been indirect, admittedly, but the Master had surely been his last disciple. And if the Master had been so sparing with words when teaching, that was no doubt because he felt he had nothing to add to the teaching of such a gigantic figure.

Yet Kojuk's fascination with Ch'usa did not endure to the end. His artist's temperament, which had originally made Master Sökdam hesitate to accept him as a pupil and which he had then tried to restrain and repress, slowly began to resurface, albeit in a much sublimated form. The first thing that Kojuk could never accept was Ch'usa's view of art. From the point of view of Kojuk, who reckoned that art should be understood as art, Ch'usa's view looked like a confused blend of scholarship and art. The fragrance of characters and the vigor of writings might be subsidiary means of embodying beauty or one aspect of beauty, but they could never be beauty's essential constituent or its basis. If he nonetheless recognized in Ch'usa a great achievement, that was entirely due to his personal genius. Moreover, the Ching Dynasty method of studying the Chinese classics which underlay Ch'usa's ideas about writing and painting had finally thrown a severe frost on the barely begun stress on native values, and in those who came later without having that much scholarly depth, the Korean forms of writing and painting had degenerated to being a poor second to those of China without substance, which was another reason why Ch'usa was unable to maintain his fascination over Kojuk to the end. So Ch'usa might be a gigantic figure, glorious and venerable like Master Sökdam, but in terms of art he was not someone worth following as guide.

As the gallery owner had predicted, Ch'ohön came back about an hour later empty-handed. He explained that he had visited the remaining six shops but no work by Kojuk had come to light overnight.

Despite his protests, Kojuk obliged him to head for the city library. He was hoping to persuade the director to return the piece 勸學文 [An Encouragement to study hard] that they had. But that proved to be the end of the quest. The tone of his conversation with the inflexible director rose, and finally he fainted.

When Kojuk opened his eyes it was late in the afternoon. He was lying in his own room and sitting around him were a number of familiar faces, all with anxious expressions. Kojuk slowly turned his eyes and gazed at them. Beside an expressionless Ch'ohön two former pupils were sitting, and beside them was Ch'usu, who showed signs of having been crying, and who, seeing Kojuk's eyes were open, addressed him in a voice close to tears:

"Father, are you conscious?"

In reply Kojuk merely nodded his head and continued to look around him. Sitting beside Ch'usu was another familiar face. That was Nanjöng, the first pupil he had honored with a pen-name. The shameless rogue . . . Kojuk's gaze grew stern as he looked at him. Nanjöng had learned from Kojuk for almost ten years, from near the start of the time when Kojuk had enclosed himself in Master Sökdam's old home until just after he opened his own studio. There was a little more than ten years' difference in their ages, he had been already nearing forty when he began to study there; he had already mastered calligraphy to some extent, but he was a pupil of his at least in the sense that he had bestowed a pen-name on him. Then suddenly one day he stopped frequenting Kojuk and a few years later opened his own calligraphy school. Kojuk felt regret that a pupil should leave without so much as a word, but he was dumbfounded at what followed. Reports began to circulate that Nanjöng was presenting himself as Master Sökdam's pupil, claiming that Kojuk had been an older fellow-student, in whose company he had studied for some ten years. Kojuk flew into a blazing rage and went running to his school. He went intending to give a good scolding to this pupil who had falsely attributed a higher status to himself, but in the end he was reduced to

acknowledging Nanjong before a host of people.

“Aigu! My elder brother! What brings you here?”

Having started in that way, smiling broadly, in front of a crowd of students, he continued to the very end with, “Aigu! Elder brother” and, “When we were studying together” Later he filed a suit for contempt against Kojuk, who had insulted him before a number of people, asserting himself to be a student of Master Sökdam on the grounds that he had visited Master Sökdam’s house a number of times while he was alive. That had happened ten years before.

“Father, this gentleman has brought two of your bamboo paintings.”

Seeing the stern look coming into his eyes as he looked at Nanjǒng, Ch’usu quickly explained.

“Hearing that you were taking back your work, Sir . . . I have brought all I possess.”

There was no sign of the former slyness in this stammering Nanjǒng. He must be nearly sixty . . . and at the sight of the wrinkles that had come in the ten years since he had last seen him, Kojuk quietly closed his eyes. But the grudge in his heart was not so easily dissolved. A little later, when he had calmed his intense inner turmoil, Kojuk spoke weakly:

“It’s alright. You can go.”

“Then . . . I’ll leave them here and go.”

Nanjǒng spoke, leaving the room if he had no other choice, his expression somber. A weighty silence briefly filled the room. Then Ch’usu broke the silence again.

“Chae-sik phoned.”

“When did he say he was coming?”

“He should be here this evening. Shall I call Yun-sik too?”

“Yes, do.”

Kojuk replied so quietly it was like a sigh. Chae-sik was the only son he had had by his now deceased wife. Originally they had had a daughter as well, but she had died during the war, and only the son remained. Yun-sik was the son he had had by the last woman who had lived with him, his youngest child. Chae-sik was already forty-three, doing business in Pusan, while Yun-sik was just twenty, attending university in Seoul. He had not been a particularly attentive father, and normally if he thought of his sons it was Yun-sik he felt concern for. That might have been because he had lost his mother at the age of thirteen and had grown up under the care of Ch’usu, his half-sister. Exceptionally today it was Chae-sik’s face that came to mind, making his nose sting. Not the middle-aged man with his careworn face, but that of the sixteen-year-old he had found and brought home from wandering about, no better than a beggar. With that, the face of his wife came to mind, whom he had nearly forgotten for several decades.

Kojuk had been in his twenty-second year when he took as his wife the woman introduced by Master Un’gok. She was a distant niece of Master Ulgok, from the Kyǒngju Ch’oi clan. Her face was neither pretty nor ugly, and she was so good-natured that Kojuk could not recall a single occasion when she had shouted at him or opposed him. Yet from the very start their marriage was a less than happy one. That was because of the passion for writing and painting that had completely consumed Kojuk’s youth. Except for a very few days just after the wedding, Kojuk used to spend all day every day at Master Sökdam’s house and when he did come home his mind was far removed from household matters. Earning their living was something entirely left to her. His income was limited to an occasional payment for

a work or a sack of rice sent over by Master Sökdam, so that although his wife was always busy sewing or with other kinds of paid work, they never had enough food or clothing.

Nonetheless things were better while he was studying with Master Sökdam. With or without affection, he spent the nights under the same roof, had two children, a boy and a girl, and he sometimes did what needed doing as the head of the household. As soon as Kojuk left Master Sökdam, that too came to an end. He left home without a word about coming and going, and for nearly ten years as he went roaming around he virtually forgot about his wife and children. He was quite indifferent whether they were still living or dead and, regretfully to them, to Kojuk his wife and children had always been like nothing more than clothes he was obliged to put up with and wear no matter how inconvenient. They had merely been commodities or a necessary obligation, and for that reason he had been able to shake off and abandon wife and children, then forget them completely once he had left.

It was true that his wife had several times made visits to Kojuk after asking after him here and there. But on each occasion Kojuk had coldly ignored her, in a way he himself was later unable to understand. Perhaps it was caused by shame and an unfathomable anger at an occasion that forced him to face the naked truth of his life, rather than by any compassion for the difficulties she faced as she brought up their children. Just once, when she arrived at the inn where he was staying, carrying their daughter on her back, he had given her seven Wön and bought her a new pair of rubber shoes, but that had been less because they were his wife and child than from a kind of universal sympathy toward the naked and starving. His daughter on her mother's back had been trembling with fever while the rubber shoes on her dust-covered bare feet had split at the toes and kept falling off. And that had been the last time.

Unable to take any more, five years after Kojuk had left home, his wife took the two children and sought shelter with her own family. That had been in the year when Kojuk was living with Maehyang. The following year she had moved to Osaka, where her elder brother was living, and never came back. He had heard that she had remarried there, at her brother's urging, Judging from the fact that she had never sent for the children she left with her family, intending to send for them later, it seemed certain that the rumor was true. Kojuk finally recuperated the two children several years after coming down from Mount Odae and returning to Master Sökdam's home. At the time, Chae-sik was sixteen, the daughter eleven.

Kojuk never felt sorry about the way he had failed to care for his wife and children, and likewise he felt no resentment toward the wife who had abandoned him and their children. It was the same with all the many women who had briefly brushed against him in his life. It was not only the various Kisaengs who, like Maehyang, had lived with him for a time, or the two older women who had kept him company in his later years, but also the women calligraphers drawn to him by his art, who had been unable to hold him in an enduring passion. No matter what the women were, Kojuk treated them with the same lack of passion; it was as if that was the only way Kojuk could fulfill his destined life of solitude.

What have I loved really passionately, then? What did I spend my whole life trying to attain? After helplessly looking around the room, which the visitors had left one after another, leaving Ch'ohön sitting there alone like a wooden statue, Kojuk sank back into his memories, wrapped in a profound melancholy. Writing and painting, obviously. It was already clear that from the start he had been without any concept of family or ordinary life. Words like property or reserves were equally unfamiliar to him; he had also never pursued any kind of lust for power or fame. His style of living might at first sight seem unfettered and diverse, but in

actual fact the life he had chosen had been an extremely simple one. Remaining faithful to the strongest amidst the various urges that had taken hold of him, without being hindered by social conventions or moral condemnations: such was his manner of acting and it was the clue to a right understanding of him. Now the most intense urge, repeated throughout his life, had been the aesthetic urge, the pursuit of beauty, and being faithful to that had produced his writing and painting.

Yet in the end what has that been able to give me? Kojuk's feelings inclined to self-mockery as he questioned himself. Will that ever be able to give me anything?

As could be seen from his relationship with Master Sökdam, the first half of his life had been a period of intense agony, torn between two opposing conceptions of art.

In the East, the meaning of aesthetic achievement, otherwise known as art, had normally always been functional. It had first originated as a means of governing and afterwards had never been able to throw off the shadows of political power, while it was sometimes compromised by the desire for scholarly achievement or religious enlightenment. For example, notions such as loyalty or integrity became its usual subjects, while expressions such as 道骨仙風 'like a Taoist immortal' or 禪味 'transcendent taste' were habitually used in the same way as 'the fragrance of characters' and 'the vigor of writings' to indicate its lofty dignity.

Of course, until the start of the modern period the situation in the West was not significantly different. For centuries art adorned the palaces of kings and lords, always dependent on power and wealth, or else was devoted to the praises of God. But with the formation of modern civil society, the arts there have acquired autonomy, an acknowledgment of the artist's particular humanity, unlike the artist in the East who is still expected to be all things to all men.

In other words, they have freed art from powerful contingent values, acknowledging the social value of such artistic capacities as acute sensitivity or exuberant imagination.

By contrast, even the age in which Kojuk was born remained shackled by the East's traditional notion of art. Artisans mostly belonged to the lowest classes; their main characteristics were defined in derogatory terms, people saying that they were 'fated to vagabondage' or possessed by some strong 'disposition'. The essence of true art normally lay in scholarly things, and successful achievement was designated by such Taoist or Buddhist terms as 'Way' or 'Firm and Concentrated Mind. Master Sökdam might well have been the last person who remained faithful to such an opinion to the very end.

Seen from a western perspective, Kojuk was a born artist. But in Master Sökdam's eyes he never rose above the level of a superficial, vulgar artisan. If Kojuk's individuality had been a little weaker or if he had been born just a little earlier, the discord between them as master and pupil would not have lasted so long or been so acute. But Kojuk could not accept that his art should be constrained by anything but that essence, and the period, which was gradually moving toward a modern, civil society, was on his side. Most fortunately for their relationship, no less strong than the pupil's instinctive reverence for the Master's deep scholarship, the Master's affection for the pupil's inborn talent survived, so that a reconciliation was achieved, though belatedly.

However, although it may be said that Kojuk returned to the teaching of Master Sökdam, that was not the end of his mental roaming. By his additional ten years of seclusion, Kojuk attempted a reconciliation with his master's traditional vision of art, but in the end he failed. His incoherent absorption in and then inevitable separation from Ch'usa were the site

of that.

Then another twenty years . . . essentially a period of unending training, practice and fumbling, but have I obtained what I was seeking? With that, Kojuk fell into a swoon-like sleep.

When Kojuk opened his eyes again on hearing a strange buzzing sound, dusk had already fallen.

“Pain will begin soon. But we can block it.”

Someone was turning down the bedding as he spoke. It was Doctor Chŏng. Then the sensation of a syringe’s needle piercing the skin made him shiver like a cold wind. There were more and more people sitting in the room. Kojuk realized intuitively what that meant.

“Father! Do you recognize me? It’s Chae-sik.”

The moment the needle was pulled out, his son Chae-sik, grasped his hand, sobbing. There was no knowing when he had come. Even after he had taken him in at sixteen, Chae-sik had always acted like a stranger about the house, his eyes cold, and now with a shock the memory of the first time he left home came flooding back. It was the day after he had bought him a brush and ink-slab so that he might at least learn to write his own name. On the floor of his room lay the ink-slab, smashed, apparently with a hammer, until it was hard to find a fragment as big as a chestnut, the brush, whose stem had been split and spread apart like the ribs of a fan, and a handful of wool; the boy had disappeared without trace. After that, until he entered the army, he kept causing Kojuk trouble. He carried off works that he had not even had time to sign with his seal; he broke open the strongbox and plundered all he found there. On his return home after being discharged from the army, he had been slightly more subdued but after receiving enough money to buy a lorry, he vanished without trace. It was only after he turned forty, a couple of years before, that he began to come to visit Kojuk again.

“Yun-sik has come, too.”

Ch’usu pulled at the sobbing Yun-sik’s hand and clasped it round Kojuk’s free hand. Her eyes were grotesquely swollen. Pitiful children, each with a different mother! What a wicked father he had been. Will the little I have to bequeath you in any way make up for your father’s deficiencies? He had already divided his property among the three of them. The orchard on the outskirts of the town was for Chae-sik, the studio building for Yun-sik, and the house where he now lived would go to Ch’usu. He reflected that he had done well to give up the plan to use his remaining wealth to establish a prize. Now he had reached his life’s end, he had no desire to curry favor with a society with which he had never cultivated any sort of relationship.

“Come along, now, be quiet. This is no way to send someone off.”

A woman among the people sitting round calmed the three sobbing offspring. Then, taking both Kojuk’s hands in place of his sons, she quietly asked:

“Do you recognize me?”

Kojuk’s vision was blurred, perhaps because of the injection, but he focused with an effort and stared at her. It was Okkyo, a calligrapher. At one time they had been close enough to give rise to a widespread rumor that she was Kojuk’s mistress; now she lived quietly in the suburbs and had her own studio. Recognize her? Of course I do . . . But before he could speak, Kojuk was overcome by sleep.

Garuda was flying. Flapping vast golden wings that were several dozen *li* in breadth,

Garuda flew on above the blue ocean. Yet in the motion of his wings there was no trace of ferocity or vigor set on vanquishing the forces of evil and catching malicious dragons. He was entirely set on soaring in splendor toward a purer, more beautiful world. The Cintamani jewel sparkled brilliantly in his face, marked by an ineffable holiness, while from his lips issued red petals like flames which swirled like clouds above the blue ocean. And Kojuk was riding on his vast back, hanging onto a clump of feathers in his throat, striving desperately not to slip. Suddenly Garuda went soaring lightly aloft. As a strong wind arose, his body inclined to one side, until he was dangling from a single feather. The strength was gradually ebbing from his hands. Ah He woke; it had been a dream. He seemed to have been asleep for a long time, and just then he heard the clock outside in the hall striking four. Perhaps because the effect of the pain-killing drug had worn off, an insidious pain that he could neither define nor localize was circulating through his body, yet his mind was strangely clear.

Most of the visitors had left and gone home. All that remained were Chae-sik and his half-brother, who were leaning against the wall sound asleep, and Ch'ohñ, who was asleep with his face on the box containing his books. Kojuk quietly raised himself. It proved unexpectedly easy. The pain in his back seemed to have subsided a little. He suddenly remembered that something remained to be done.

"Sang-ch'öl!"

Kojuk called Ch'ohñ quietly by his given name. Belying the dull expression of his face, Ch'ohñ seemed to have sharp hearing while sleeping, for he raised his head without any need for him to call many times.

"Sir, Sir, is anything the matter?"

Even to his still sleepy eyes, Kojuk, his upper body propped against the wall, had a strange look about him. He raised himself quickly and approached Kojuk on his knees, intending to support him. But he stopped him with a gesture.

"Get out all the works we've recuperated so far from the wall closet and the chest."

"What?"

"I said you are to take out and gather together all my works, paintings and calligraphy, that have been recuperated."

Ch'ohñ immediately stood up and did as he had been told. When everything was collected together from the various places, there must have been well over two hundred works. Even with all the frames removed, they formed a large pile in one corner of the room.

"Father, what are you doing?"

Just then Chae-sik and Yun-sik awoke and questioned him curiously, rubbing their eyes. Kojuk's actions did not look like those of a sick man, so they seemed to have forgotten what Doctor Chǒng had said the previous evening. But instead of answering, Kojuk asked Ch'ohñ:

"Can't you make the light in this room any brighter?"

"I've seen a floor-lamp somewhere . . . I'll look for it."

Ch'ohñ went out without asking what Kojuk was doing, as usual, and soon came back with a lamp. With the room twice as brightly lit as before, Kojuk commanded Ch'ohñ:

"Now unfold those one by one and show them to me."

Wordlessly, as usual, Ch'ohñ did as he had been told. First came a piece of calligraphy done when Kojuk was in his fifties, in the style of Yu Shi'nan.

"It's based on something written by Boshi, but I failed to imitate his integrity (such as

virtue in practice, uprightness, erudition, diction). Put that on the left.”

The next work was a scroll painting of orchids

“I had repudiated Zheng Sixiao but was incapable of emerging from the shadow of Sökp’a Taewöngun. It’s not an orchid of the mountain, but neither is it an orchid of the heart. Put it on the left.”

Kojuk continued with his self-critique, one work after another. He was as rigorous and dispassionate as if he were evaluating works by some long-time enemy. Where calligraphy was concerned, if it was the copy of some famous model he pointed out weaknesses in the copying or the choice of characters, or otherwise, if it was an original work of his own, he blamed the workmanship and the vulgarity, and every work ended up on the left-hand side. Where paintings were concerned, the same held true. Adding his own severe estimation to the strictness of ancient rules, not one work was assigned to the right-hand side.

The task began as dawn was breaking and it went on until the morning sun was high in the sky. As Doctor Chöng was later often heard to remark admiringly, he displayed almost superhuman mental powers. As the morning wore on, more and more visitors arrived until finally the room was packed, with nowhere left for people to place their feet. Yet, awed by the solemnity of the occasion, no one so much as thought of trying to dissuade him from such an excessive expense of energy. For his part, Kojuk seemed unaware of anyone but Ch’ohön.

It was past ten before the classification was complete. Not a single work had been assigned to Ch’ohön’s right-hand side.

“Are there no more?”

Kojuk had been scrutinizing his works with eyes full of eager expectation; now he could see plainly that not one work remained in front of Ch’ohön’s knees but still he asked, his voice trembling strangely with anxiety.

“That’s all.”

Ch’ohön replied impassively. With that, a desolate expression came over Kojuk’s face while his head, that until now had been held high, bowed weakly and his body sagged downward. Supposing that something terrible had happened, a few people gathered round Kojuk with low cries. But Kojuk, his mind still fully lucid, was murmuring something to himself: So it’s never appeared. I had been hoping that I might see it at least once in my lifetime, yet perhaps I’ve known all along, from the very beginning, that it was an impossible hope. Perhaps that is why I have been postponing this task until the very last moment

So what was it that Kojuk had hoped to see at least once in the works accumulated over a whole lifetime? It was Garuda, the same golden-winged bird he had seen that night in his dream. When that bird had first come flying from Master Sökdam, it had been as a symbol of the strength or formal rigor found in the East’s principles of virtue. But as Kojuk had freed himself from the traditional approach to calligraphy and painting, which had finally been brought together in Ch’usa and had blazed up as one last flame in Master Sökdam, who had inherited his mantle, the bird too had assumed a new function. It had been transformed into a conceptual bird symbolizing Kojuk’s own independent, aesthetic achievement or artistic accomplishment.

Kojuk’s approach to calligraphy and painting was expressed in practice in various ways throughout his life, and became especially clear over the last twenty years, during which he had been training the following generation; it can basically be summarized in two ways. First, shunning the way in which traditional concepts had approached painting through

writing, he had attempted to approach writing through painting. If writing is nothing but the process of transmitting sense through characters, then there can be no point in devoting a whole lifetime to calligraphy. Even with a brush, a few months are enough to be able to transmit sense, and nowadays, with the appearance of simple writing tools such as pencils and ball-point pens, just a few days are ample for that purpose. Therefore calligraphy is not a matter of meanings but of feelings, and has to be understood as painting, not as writing. Especially, that explains why calligraphy only developed in the East, which uses ideograms as a means of expression, and not in the West with its phonetic alphabets. Nonetheless, even the paintings by literati were interpreted in terms of writing and remained in a subsidiary level of value because they were understood uniquely as writing despite the fact that from the start they were paintings. Such was Kojuk's contention.

Second, one characteristic feature of Kojuk's approach to calligraphy and painting was the distinction he made between depicting objects and depicting the heart. Depicting objects meant painting things as they were and leaving the expression of one's feelings and intentions to be dependent on the things depicted, while depicting the heart meant taking objects, then modifying and transforming them in the light of the painter's feelings and intentions, corresponding perhaps to the West's notions of figurative and non-figurative art. Kojuk maintained that the two had been completely mingled together in the traditional approach to calligraphy and painting, and stressed the distinction between them. As for calligraphers and painters, he reckoned that the relationship between the two was not a matter of inferior and superior, but merely a matter of choice, that such notions as the fragrance of characters and the vigor of writings were merely possible aspects of a depiction of the heart and could never be considered fundamental aspects of calligraphy or painting.

Therefore Kojuk's Garuda was a conceptual bird, arising from the sea of approaches such as his to calligraphy and painting, then soaring up toward an aesthetic achievement. Ever since he had reached an age where he was obliged to consider his own death, there had been one aspiration lodged in Kojuk's heart, to see that bird go flying from the tip of his brush. He believed that would show that his lifelong quest had not been in vain, and serve as a recompense for his solitary, melancholy life. But to the very end he had never seen such a bird. If he had sagged down weakly just now, it was not simply because he had exhausted his last reserves of strength.

The pupils and friends gathered around him thought that Kojuk would never wake again. But barely five minutes later he opened his eyes. Despite the dissuasions of those around him, he once again raised himself and called Ch'ohōn in a clear voice.

"Wrap all these together and take them out to the flower-bed beside the storage terrace."

Even Ch'ohōn, who normally never questioned his master's order, looked rather bewildered.

"For a whole lifetime I have fooled myself and other people with those things. I deluded myself that I was engaged in valuable work, I accepted people's admiration and respect as though I deserved them."

"What, I don't . . ."

"Of course there may be such lives. But it was not mine. Until a little while ago I ardently longed to see Garuda go soaring up from those things. I believed that would fulfill my life completely. But now I doubt that it would do so, even were I to see the bird . . . So do

as I tell you. If I leave these things behind me, later folk will be fooled too.”

At once Ch’ohñ took the bundle in his arms and went outside. There was no telling if it was because they understood what the Master really meant or because there was no disobeying his command, but not one of those present intervened to stop Ch’ohñ. For some time now, they had been overwhelmed by the strange kind of dignity and nobility enveloping Kojuk.

“Don’t shut the door.”

After Ch’ohñ had gone out, someone was about to shut the door but Kojuk stopped them. Then as Ch’ohñ was advancing across the yard he called out to him in a loud, clear voice, not at all like that of an invalid at death’s door.

“There, put everything down.”

There was a flower-bed beside the storage terrace, easily visible from inside the room. Ch’ohñ put down the bundle of works beside a few withered flowers and at once Kojuk spoke loudly to give another command:

“Set fire to them.”

At that the roomful of people grew agitated. Some attempted to pacify Kojuk, others went outside and seized hold of Ch’ohñ. It was all to no avail. Paying no attention to the people trying to calm him, Kojuk abruptly uttered a thunderous cry:

“Quickly now! Can’t you get them to burn?”

Ch’ohñ’s response was incomprehensible. For reasons he himself could not define his expression grew furious and he glared briefly at Kojuk, then roughly shook off the people trying to stop him and started the fire. Considering that in later times he went so far as to denounce Kojuk as a sham, it may be that his temperament, hidden deep within him and very similar to that of Master Sökdám, was rebelling against such a radical self-repudiation or excessive self-abasement. Paper and silk were dry as dry could be, some works had even had oil applied to them, so the pile was soon blazing fiercely. Sighing and groaning, muffled sobs and low cries erupted here and there.

To some people’s eyes, Kojuk’s entire life’s art was burning. To some, it was his grotesque sincerity that was blazing up, to others it was Kojuk’s very life that seemed to be burning. Few and far between were those few to whom the burning mound of paintings looked like nothing more than a mound of money. The last vestiges of the great master, reputed for nearly half a century, whose works had been solicited by two presidents, who had refused flatly to be part of the jury for the national art concours, were all being annihilated in a single blaze.

And then Kojuk saw it. Suddenly soaring up in the midst of the flames, Garuda, vast, with brilliant golden wings, powerful in flight.

Kojuk died at eight that evening. He had lived for seventy-two years.

Notes

The title: The Korean title, *Kümsijo*, is composed of three Chinese characters, 金翅鳥, meaning gold-wing bird. As explained in the text by a monk, at the moment when Kojuk sees

the painting on the temple wall, this is an alternative name for the mythical man-bird more usually known as Garuda or Garula, its Indian name. In Indian mythology, Garuda is used as a proper name but in Buddhist texts the name is often generic, there being multiple garudas. The Indian epic *Mahabharata* is the ultimate source of the references found in the story to the enmity between Garuda and dragons. There, the Nagas are snake-like beings who gain mastery over Garuda, engendering in him an enduring hatred. The identification of the naga with the dragon seems to be specific to China. The story suggests that there is a single such creature, therefore it seemed best to use the proper name Garuda for the title and in translating. The name Fragrant Elephant mentioned in the same context is the translation of the name of the bodhisattva Gandhahastin, one of the future Buddhas.

Ink: Chinese ink is sold in the form of solid blocks, sometimes perfumed, stamped with patterns and elaborately wrapped. Before a scholar begins to write or paint, the ink must be prepared. This is done by rubbing one end of the block of ink against the moistened surface of an ink-stone (ink-slab) the center of which has been hollowed out. A small quantity of water is poured from a water-dropper (usually made of porcelain) and more is gradually added to produce the required density of color. This task is often performed by a servant or pupil.

Calligraphers: The story refers to many famous calligraphers, almost all of them Chinese. Korean Confucianists prided themselves on their conformity to Chinese tradition. Their love of calligraphy was one example of this. Some of the oldest models of Chinese calligraphy are engraved on stone stele. Rubbings were made of these. The story also refers to textbooks providing copies of the different styles in which the Chinese characters could be written, some formal, some informal or cursive. The texts written were always in Classical Chinese, a language very different from Korean, and Korean absorbed a vast Chinese vocabulary.

The names of the great calligraphers are given in the text of the story romanized in the standard Chinese form. The Korean text gives the names in Chinese characters and in Korean pronunciation. The following list gives the Chinese characters of the names and minimal additional information where available.

Chinese calligraphers

Oh-Yang Sheun 歐陽詢 (557-641) served under the Tang Dynasty as a censor and scholar

Wáng Xīzhī 王羲之 (321-379) was also known as Wang Youjun 王右軍

Wáng Xiànzhī 王獻之 (344-348) the son of Wáng Xīzhī.

Cheng Ssu-hsiao 鄭思肖 (1239-1316) In the early Yuan dynasty (mid-13th century), he was one of the scholars of the former Sung dynasty who expressed their rejection of the Mongols in their paintings.

Chao Meng-fu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322) accepted the call to service by the Mongol government.

Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 709-785

Su Zhai, Weng Fang-gang 蘇齋 翁方綱 1733-1813

Huang Shan-Gu 黃山谷 1045—1105 was also known as Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅

Zhong Yao 鍾繇 (151–230) lived during the Three Kingdoms Period

Wei Guan 衛瓘 (220-291) an official in the Jin Dynasty

Chih-yung 智永 (557-589) a monk-calligrapher

Yú Shínán 虞世南 (558-638) praised for his integrity, also known by his courtesy name Boshi (伯施).

Suo Jin 索靖 (239-303)

Cui Yue 崔悅 ??

Yao Yuan Piao 姚元標 ??

Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641)

Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (597-658),

Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 1241-1318

Korean calligraphers

Ch'usa was the pen-name of Kim Chǒng-hŭi (1786~1856), the most famous calligrapher of the later Chosŏn Dynasty.

Sŏkp'a was the pen-name of Yi Ha-eung, better known by his title of Taewŏngun (1821–1898), father of King Kojong, the penultimate king of Korea before the Japanese annexation of 1910.