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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SIJO,

a Form of Short Korean Poem

by Richard Rutt,

(盧大榮 神父)

Priest of the Anglican Mission

[page 1]

**Acknowledgment**

Since this paper was originally given before the Society on 4 December 1957 it has been completely rewritten, and a number of fresh examples added to it. I hesitate to associate other people’s names with it, lest their reputations should suffer from its shortcomings, but many people have helped correct and emend what I have written. In particular, Professor Cho Yun-je (趙潤濟) of the Sŏnggyun’gwan University gave me most generous help and guidance. Mr Ed Wagner, of the Harvard-Yengching Institute, corrected some of the historical details, and Professor P’i Ch’ŏn-dŭk (皮千得) of Seoul National University, and other friends have corrected some of my mistaken translations, which I should otherwise have let pass in ignorance. But they are in no sense guarantors of the work as published.

I have not provided a paraphernalia of footnotes and precise references, because they seemed to me to be inappropriate to the scope of the paper. It is essentially an *oeuvre de vulgarisation*.

Pyŏngt’aekkun Anjungni

Church of the Holy Spirit

May 1958

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SIJO**

A Form of Short Korean Poem

I. Introductory

I pretend to be no more than an amateur of Korean studies, and would never have presumed to offer a paper on any Korean poetry but for two reasons: first the importance of the sijo (詩調) in Korean literature, and second the fact that next to nothing has ever been written on the subject in English.

The importance of the sijo is unquestionable. Probably no form of verse has been more used in this country. I hope to indicate how its shape and style are a natural product of the Korean language. But, more than that, the whole repertoire of several thousand verses, as preserved in the classic anthologies, forms a detailed poetic commentary on Korean history since the fall of Koryŏ. The sijo was the vehicle of political comment and of social comment: it reflects [page 2] both the heart and the mind of the nation throughout the Yi dynasty. At its best it shows loyalty and devotion, and—in the country of confucian impassivity—intense passion; at its worst it shows a mechanical formalism, that clever and lifeless juggling with the simple symbolism of plum blossom, chrysanthemums and seagulls which are so often the westerner’s idea of what oriental poetry is — pretty, but not profound.

Yet at its best, kings were not ashamed to compose sijo. Canonized sages, ministers of state, even admirals, and almost all of the great hero patriots, have added to the corpus, and generally with songs of poignant beauty.

Today there are some signs that with the waning of the old fashioned Chinese poetry contests, the sijo composing contests may take their place. Last October at the Presidential Paegilchang, (白日場 or outdoor poetry contest), in the Songgyun’gwan (成均館) grounds it was interesting to compare the old men composing Chinese poems under the zelkowa trees with the young men, even schoolboys, composing sijo under the pines. Yet it was noticeable that the band of sijo writers was much smaller. It seems to be generally admitted that it is fundamentally harder to write good sijo than to compose passable ruled Chinese poems (律詩 or 四律). I find the same in the countryside. Korea is fairly liberally scattered with old men who can turn an impromptu Chinese poem, but they say that the sijo, though written in Korean, is harder because its meaning must be deeper. Only once in an old-style village school have I had the old teacher offer to call for a kettle of wine and then sing me one of the old songs. And the rural scholars insist that many a sijo singer, even in the old days, did not understand the meaning of his songs.

But if it is hard to compose sijo well, it is not because they are not known. During the last thirty years Korean scholars, led by men like Ch’oe Nam-sŏn (崔南善) and Cho Yun-je (趙潤濟), have produced an enormous literature on the subject. Every middle-school boy can now recite several classical examples, the cheap decorative panels of wallpaper in han’gul are nearly all sijo texts, and you have only to murmur the opening phrase of a famous poem at a city bus stop to have the shoeshine boys finish it triumphantly. [page 3]

In view of the importance of the subject it is surprising that it has not been treated more in English. Indeed, little has been published on any aspect of Korean literature apart from Bishop Trollope’s paper on “*Some Korean Books and their Authors*” (Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, Vol XXI, 1932), which he would have been the first to admit is but a brief sketch of the field. Indeed it is almost entirely concerned with books written in Chinese characters. He gives a translation of just one sijo—the famous reply of Chŏng Mong-ju (see p. 15), but he gives no account of the genre, and regards this example as a lapse in the dignity of a Confucian scholar. He seems even to be unaware of the circumstances of that almost legendary composition.

There are a few references to sijo in various books on Korea. In Mr. Younghill Kang’s *The Grass Roof*, the form is not mentioned by name, but several translations are worked into the text. Mr. V. H. Viglielmo of the Harvard-Yenching Institute published some ten translations, without any descriptive notes, in *Korean Survey* during 1955 (Vol. 4, No. 2, Feb 1955 and No. 7, Oct 1955), later followed by a few more, very slightly commented on by Sŏ Tu-su (Vol. No. 8. Oct 1956). Pyŏn Yŏng-t’ae (卞榮泰), one time prime minister of Korea, published a group of translations and some notes on the poets in his *Songs of Korea* (Seoul YMCA Press, 1948). But the best work I have found on the subject in English is an article by Peter H. Lee in *East and West* (Year VII No. 1, Rome, April 1956, pp. 61-67). He says there that all the translations he gives were previously printed in the *Hudson Review* (Winter 1955, Vol VIII, No. 4) but this I have not been able to see. The article is very condensed, but it does describe the sijo at its best.

I read all these with great profit, and in spite of searching, have not been able to find more, though I know that Mr Peter Hyon of Paris broadcast some translations on the B.B.C. Third Progamme in 1956 and is to publish some more in “*Encounter*” (London) this year; and I believe that a few others have published occasional translations in various magazines. However, I have relied here on a number of Korean sources which I list at the end of this introduction. Some of them are frankly school books, intended for high - [page 4] school and university students, and these have been of particular use in helping me to understand the archaic language of many of the poems. Such as is original in this paper—and hence most likely to be at fault—is my own application of Western critical standards to the consideration of the poems.

I have made no attempt to go to the great libraries and consult the classic editions. For a beginning it is sufficient, and as much as I am capable of, to give the sijo a fair introduction. It has great potentiality for giving pleasure to foreigners as well as to Koreans, but it needs to be promoted a little.

In writing about poetry there can be no substitute for the original text. That alone carries the inspiration, the mood and the skill of the poet with its unique power to move the hearer. But in this case translation is a necessity, and I have ventured to present my own.

Of the previous translations mentioned above, I find none completely satisfactory. Mr. Pyŏn turns the songs into rhymed six-verse stanzas, with the flavour of an English ballad. The verse is competent without question, but the poems seem to me to have been de-Koreanized. Mr. Kang’s translations I find both flat and precious, although he tries a variety of metrical treatments.

Mr. Viglielmo and Mr. Lee translate into six line free verse stanzas, unrhymed, and I gather that Mr. Hyon does the same. These are by far the most satisfactory.

In face of the difficulties even the most skilled craftsman might quail in the effort to transpose the delicate confections of the Korean poets into the English language, in spite of the fact that English is as supple a tongue as the world has ever seen. So I make no claim for literary merit in the translations which I offer. I hope they are not actually misleading. I have done my best to make them an accurate translation not only of the sense, but also of the figures of speech of the originals, so far as this is consistent with ready intelligibility.

As a diversion for candlelit evenings in a Korean village I have also tried to impress on these versions the shape of the Korean poems. This means as far as possible keeping the syllable count and pauses of the original, even [page 5] if the actual rhythm is elusive. I believe that verse loses much if there is no discipline of form in the translation, and this seems to be the best way to approximate the feel of the originals. But I have frequently found the task too difficult, and many of the translations do not correspond accurately with the Korean syllable patterns.

Proper names are a problem in translation. Sometimes they involve a pun that is more evident if they are translated, but very often they are better left intact, with their poetic overtones explained in annotations.

But it would be unthinkable to publish the translations without the texts. Sijo texts are full of variants, as any traditional literary forms must be. Being incompetent to begin textual criticism I have not tried, but have reproduced the poems in a written form which I believe will be most acceptable to foreigners with some knowledge of Korean. There is no question of the “original form” of a sijo when written down, because the poems are poems to be sung, often composed impromptu, and even among the classic anthologies some use Chinese characters and some do not. I believe that as they are reproduced here they will yield the greatest profit to the greatest number, and effect the best general introduction to the subject.

One word for those who cannot appreciate the Korean texts. The translations may often, or always, appear flat and anything but lyrical. Such people must be assured that perhaps only by attempting to compose a verse form can one learn how delicately its classical exemplars are constructed. The elasticity of the sijo form is as deceptive as the great sijo are captivating. Theirs is a beauty which is hard to catch. I have read passable, even charming English poems written by Koreans. I wonder when, if ever, I can hope to read even a tolerable sijo from a foreign pen.

**Select Bibliography**

洪雄善, 朴魯春: 古詩歌註解 A school book with brief notes on the chief kinds of Korean poetry and texts. [page 6]

方鍾錢: 古時調精解 Gives detailed notes on the poems and where the original texts can be found. Primarily intended for university students.

爾豪愚, 尹啓鉉: 今名時調精解 Gives very full commentaries on the poems, including modern spelling of the texts, and many Chinese translations. Intended for high school and university students, it is the best general introduction to the texts now readily available.

李能雨: 李朝時調史 A detailed discussion of the development of the sijo, concentrating on its subject matter.

鄭註東, 兪昌植: 靑丘永言 A modern edition of the original anthology of the same name, but with very full analytical notes.

趙潤濟: 國文學史, 韓國詩歌史綱 , 鋒國詩歌研究, 國文學槪說 These books by a great pioneer of the study of Korean literature contain valuable articles on the sijo form.

金思燁: 李朝時代歌謠研究 Contains a long discussion of sijo.

李秉岐, 白鐵: 國文學全史 Contains brief and lucid notes on the sijo and its development.

李在秀: 尹孤山研究 A study of the paramount master of the form.

柳世基: 時調唱法 Deals with the musical performance of the poems.

This list is necessarily selective. The tendency of the [page 7] Korean writers is to concentrate on questions of form, history, or elucidation, without venturing much into the criticism of technique or emotion. All the above books were published in Seoul, though some have been through various editions. All are in print in 1958.

**II. The Form of the Sijo**

Yi Un-sang (李殷相), a contemporary poet and himself an exponent of sijo, has described the sijo as being a “Form without form, and formless though formed” : which is as much as to say that there is considerable freedom of treatment of the basic pattern by the individual. If there were no formal discipline, the thing would not be verse at all, but merely a kind of prose.

Korean scholars have devoted much energy to the analysis of large numbers of sijo in order to establish the exact nature of the basic pattern.

It is agreed that a sijo is a stanza of three verses, and that each of the verses has a major pause in both sense and rhythm about the centre. This is not quite the same as a caesura in Latin or English verse, because it can never be syncopated with metrical feet. In fact the sijo has nothing that can be accurately termed a metrical foot, for although each half of a verse tends to have a secondary pause, its position is variable, and some Korean writers ignore it in their descriptions of the basic scheme of the sijo metre. In the case of the third and last verse alone is there always a definite structural pause within the first half verse.

Korean verse does not use accentual stress nor syllable length as a metrical unit, although accentual stresses contribute much to the charm of the sijo rhythms. To this extent it is different from classical western verse forms. It differs from Chinese and Japanese verse forms in that it does not adhere to a strict syllable count, although the only way of describing the metre is in terms of syllable groupings with approximate syllable counts.

The most convenient table showing the basic pattern is that of Professor Cho Yun-je (趙潤濟). The Roman figures [page 8] indicate the norm, or ideal number of syllables in a group, and the Chinese figures the minimum and maximum that can occur.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 初 | 二 3 四 | 四 4 六 | 二 4,3 五 | 四 4 六 |
| 中 | 一 3 四 | 三 4 六 | 二 4,3 五 | 四 4 六 |
| 終 | 三 3 三 | 五 5九 | 四 3 五 | 三 3 四 |

Yi Un-sang suggests another scheme which does not give any ideal pattern but shows the limits of the numbers of syllables in each group and gives very slightly different results.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 初 | 2 - 5 | 3 - 6 | 2 - 5 | 4 - 6 |
| 中 | 1 - 5 | 3 - 6 | 2 - 5 | 4 - 6 |
| 終 | 3 | 5 - 9 | 4 - 5 | 3 - 4 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 初 | 6 — 9 | 6 — 9 |
| 中 | 5 — 8 | 6 — 9 |
| 終 | 3 5 — 8 | 4—5 3—4 |

Professor Yi Pyŏng-gi (李秉岐) gives a significantly different pattern because he prefers to ignore the secondary pauses in the first two verses. In many poems these pauses are so slight as to be virtually nonexistent. His scheme is also a corrective to the other two in that it indicates that the maximum for each half verse is not so great as the sum of the maximums of the component quarter verses. For example, with reference to Professor Yi Un-sang’s table above, if the first group has as many as five syllables, the second will not be more than four.

A comparison of these three tables will show the metrical limits within which the writers of sijo have worked. There is, however, a tendency for some groups to remain [page 9] constant or to maintain certain relations to one another:

a.) The first group in the last verse is invariably three syllables, and has a pivotal importance.

b.) The fourth group in the last verse is most commonly three syllables.

c.) The fourth group in the middle verse and the third group in the last verse are most

commonly of four syllables.

d.) The first group in the first line is usually shorter than the one following.

e.) The second group of the last line is never less than five syllables.

The relative weights of each group of syllables are one of the chief means by which the sijo achieves charm of rhythm. In order to show the normal distribution of this weight, or relative proportion of the groups to each other, it seems worth while to reduce the above tables to a much simpler form:

3 , 4 : 4 (or 3) , 4;

3 , 4 : 4 (or 3) , 4;

3 : 4 - 4 : 3.

The first two verses have similar rhythm, the first and third quarters being lighter than the second and fourth.

The last verse is different. It is drawn out in the second quarter, but abbreviated in the last group of the whole poem. This achieves a conclusive effect by slowing up the rhythm of the last verse in the long second group, but compensating for this extra weight and clinching the whole composition in the very short last group. This last group has something of the effect of the rhyming in the couplet at the end of a Shakespearean sonnet.

The punctuation in this table will also suggest the relative values of the pauses. The comma in half verses is the lightest, briefest pause and may amount to no more than the word difference between a subject-noun and its verb. The colon at the half-verse is a break between complete conceptual phrases, which do not, normally, complete an idea, but require the ensuing half verse to finish [page 10] the sense. The semicolon on each verse indicates the completion of the sense and the absence of any enjambement between the three verses.

The colons in the last verse indicate pauses similar to those in the previous two verses. The first group in this verse is most frequently an interjection or strongly differentiated noun, and the last group a form of the verb 하다 which often has the effect of putting the rest of the poem into virtual quotation marks and adds very little to the sense, save that forms such as 하노라 may indicate the person of the speaker and 하리라 may indicate the tense, although either sense may be implicit in the poem before this last word is reached. This is so much the case that when the poems are sung in the traditional style this last group of syllables is dropped altogether (see below p. 87).

The central pause in the last verse is of variable character. It may be similar to either the half or quarter verse pauses of the previous lines.

The metrical form of the sijo is most commonly supported by the sense structure of the poem. This bears a close resemblance to the pattern used in strictly ruled Chinese poems composed after the T’ang dynasty models. It is also very similar to the form of the Shakespearean sonnet.

This structure is most commonly written in Chinese by Koreans as 起承轉結 although other characters of similar meaning are sometimes substituted.

In the Chinese poems there is a fourfold pattern of verses and one verse, couplet, or stanza occupies each of these four divisions of the sense structure. In the sijo there are only three verses, so the two last sense divisions have to be combined into the third verse.

The first verse (起) is the statement, or enunciation of the theme. In sijo it may take the form of a question.

The second verse (承) is the development of the theme, and may answer the question of the first verse, or further elaborate it.

The first quarter of the last verse is the twist or turn (轉) which leads into the conclusion (結) and is more closely connected with it than with what goes before. If [page 11] the first two lines have asked a question, the last line will answer it. Or the last line may be a neat comment and frequently has a witty turn.

Much interest centres in the twist (轉). Most commonly it is a three-syllable interjection. Otherwise it is likely to be a noun sharply differentiated by some such grammatical form as the old nominative ending in 야 or 이 야, or by a striking change in imagery invoking the introduction of a startlingly fresh idea. For example in “When this frame is dead and gone” (below p.16) the second line establishes the imagery of trees in summer by using the summer name of the Diamond Mountains, so that the image of driven snow at the beginning of the third verse comes as a sharp contrast.

The above description applies only to the standard form of sijo, called in Korean *pyŏngsijo* (平時調). There are two other forms. The medium sijo, or *ŏssijo* is expanded, most often in the middle line, sometimes in the last line, and very rarely in the first. It is not always distinguished clearly from the long sijo or *sasŏlsijo* (辭說時調) which is almost formless, though it retains a three-verse structure as a general rule and always ends with the three or four syllable final group of the normal form. These longer forms belong to the period of popularization of the sijo and seem to be less esteemed by the Koreans, although there are a fair number in the anthologies. In this paper I am confining my attention almost exclusively to the standard form (平時調).

**III. The Style and Language of the Sijo**

There are not wanting those Korean scholars who hold that the sijo should not be considered as a purely literary form because it is essentially a lyric for singing, so intimately connected with its melody that it has no legitimate existence apart from the music.

Historically it is undoubtedly true that sijo were songs. Some of the great anthologies are arranged according to the melodies to which the poems were sung. Mr Hong Wŏn-gi (洪元基), who is one of the most celebrated contemporary intepreters of the art, tells me that nine styles of singing are now recognized by professional singers: 1) 平時調 2) [page 12] 中舉時調 3) 羽調時調 4) 辭說時調; together with a *chirŭm* or falsetto type of each of these styles and 9) *yŏch’ang* (女唱) *chirŭm* or women’s falsetto. These do not represent distinct melodies in the western sense of that word so much as styles or manners of singing the poems. It is self-evident that some of them refer equally to the form of the poem (see above p.11), others refer to the poem’s mood, but oddly enough the “falsetto” form is not necessarily the more delicate. It may also be used for the most belligerent, as for example, Kim Chong-sŏ’s “North wind” poem (see below p.40).

It is beyond my scope and my ability to describe the musical aspect of sijo, but I may be permitted to note an impression of the singing. It is a solo performance accompanied by drum and wind instruments. Many of the syllables are prolonged to an extent which makes understanding difficult, and the song progresses with sharp emissions of breath on the strongly accented initials of many of the syllables—a technique which has been described as “dynamic” To the foreign ear the suggestion of urgent yearning with the tone production of “a voice soaked in tears” tends to reduce all emotion to one limited range, but it is certainly consonant with the prevailing mood of sadness in so many sijo.\*

But however important music may be historically to the nature of sijo, today many Koreans write sijo without hope of ever hearing them sung, and so many Koreans enjoy sijo from a merely literary point of view that we are amply justified in following their example. Sijo may be a song, but its lyrics are worthy to stand alone.

The prevailing mood of the sijo seems best described by the Portuguese word *saudade*. I find myself irresistibly reminded of Portuguese lyrics when reading Korean poems. There is not the sadness of tragedy, but an all-pervading sadness that delights in itself and breaks out in lyricism. There are gay sijo, there are satiric sijo, there are even drunken sijo. But the drunken is often maudlin and even the rustic poems are mostly the works of exile, while satire always nurtures its own brand of sadness. *Saudade* is rarely very far away from the sijo. Peter Lee says that the soul of the sijo is not wit, but sensibility. The clinching phrase of the last line, brilliant though it may be, rarely [page 13] bears the whole work off as a merely intellectual pleasure. The emotionally charged twist (轉) is enough, as a rule, to see to that. The hearer is left more impressed by the mood of the poem than by the facts related, even when the mood is crystallized into some telling image.

\* See also postscripta 3 and 4 below pp. 84 and 87.

A fairly extreme example of this is found in the song by the minister Yi Cho-nyŏn (李兆年 1268-1342), one of the few sijo of the Koryŏ period:

Pallid moon and pear blossom,

midnight and the milky way—

Even the cuckoo

tells my heart the news of Spring.

This feeling is like a sickness:

it prevents me from sleeping. (Text 9)

Or in a poem from the golden age of the sijo by Kim Sang-yong (金尙容 1561-1636):

The raindrops come pattering

heartlessly on the paulownia.

My sorrow is great

and the sound in the leaves is sad.

After this, would anyone have the heart

To plant trees with such broad leaves? (Text 55)

Kim Sang-yong was Right Associate Prime Minister at the time of the Manchu invasion. He fled to Kanghwa Island with the crown prince and the royal ancestral tablets and at was there that he blew himself to pieces with gunpowder rather than capitulate.

There is rarely a sijo which has no symbolism, which can be taken at its face value; but often the symbolism is simple, even trite. The pine, the bamboo, the moon, all play their usual oriental roles as symbols of good qualities in man. The most famous example of all this is doubtless the Five Friends cycle of Yun Sŏn-do (see below p.28), but [page 14] there are plenty at all periods. The nineteenth century poet An Min-yŏng (安玟英) sings:

“Tell me, chrysanthemum,

why you avoid Spring’s orient breeze?”

“I had rather freeze in rain

beside a fence of dry sticks.

Never would I consent to join

with all the vulgar blooms of spring.” (Text 77)

(The “orient breeze” of Spring is a reference to the identification of Spring with the Eastern quarter of the compass in the Chinese cosmogony.)

The symbolism is often reinforced by a reference to classical literature, which may need considerable explanation to anyone not familiar with the Confucian canon.

Thus Sŏng Sam-mun (成三問 1418-1456) writes:

As I gaze on Shouyangshan,

I regret Po I and Shuh Ch’i.

Rather than starve to death,

would they dig for bracken ?

Even though it was nothing but weeds,

upon whose land did it grow? (Text 19)

Shouyangshan (首陽山 Korean:Suyangsan) is a mountain in Shen-si where Po I (伯夷 Korean: Paegi) and Shuh Ch’i (叔齊 Korean: Sukche) retired to live on herbs after the fall of the Yin (殷) dynasty rather than “eat the grain of Chou (周),” the conquerors. These two were praised for their loyalty and purity of mind by both Confucius and Mencius, but Song Sam-mun swears to surpass their constancy by dying rather than eat even the weeds that grow under the reign of his country’s usurping king, later known as Sejo (世祖) but then known as Prince Suyang (首陽). Song punned upon the prince’s name and the name of the mountain. [page 15]

Another example is provided by a beautiful sijo of Pak In-no (朴仁老), better known as Nogye (盧溪 1561-1643). Together with Chŏng Ch’ŏ1 (see below p.44) and Yun Sŏn-do he makes the three most highly regarded of Korean poets. He was a military official who distinguished himself during Hideyoshi’s invasion of Korea.

Fresh red persimmons in a dish

are beautiful indeed.

Though they are not pomeloes,

yet I could still pocket them.

But I have no-one to enjoy them,

So they make me sad. (Text 47)

The reference is to one Lu Su (陸續) of the later Han dynasty, who at the age of six was offered three pomeloes, but tucked them into his coat to take them home to his mother. Nogye is reminded of the story of the pomeloes by the sight of the persimmons, and so recalls that his parents are dead, and his chances of expressing filial piety with gifts are all past. It becomes a very touching and pathetic salute to his parents’ memory.

I am not capable of identifying all the numerous quotations and allusions to Chinese poetry with which the sijo are replete. But with time the use of the same images and metaphors and the harking back to the same classics was one of the things that stifled the sijo in the Yi dynasty’s nadir.

It was not only the classics that were quoted-earlier sijo were quoted as well.

One of the earliest sijo now regarded as authentic is that of Chŏng Mong-ju (鄭夢周) called P’o-ŭn (圃隱 1347- 1392), who is one of the canonized sages whose tablets stand in the Confucian temples of Korea.

Though this frame should die and die.

though I die a hundred times,

My bleached bones all turned to dust, [page 16]

my very soul exist or not—

What can change the undivided heart

that glows with faith toward my lord? (Text 12)

(See also below p.36)

Half a century later Sŏng Sam-mun (see above p.14), apprehended for plotting against the usurping Prince Suyang, said:

When this frame is dead and gone,

what will then become of me?

On the peak of Pongnae San

I shall become a spreading pine.

When white snow fills heaven and earth

I shall still stand, lone and green. (Text 20)

Pongnaesan(蓬萊山) is the summer name of the Diamond Mountains, which fact points the contrast with the blizzard in the last line. The opening phrase deliberately re-echoes the opening phrase of the previous great poem of loyalty. Together they are probably now the best known of all the classic sijo.

But P’o-ŭn’s poem is again echoed by one of Sŏng Sam-mun’s co-plotters, this time in the last line.

A raven in a snowstorm

may look white, but he stays black.

Can night extinguish

the brilliance of her jewels?

What can change the undivided heart

that glows with faith toward my lord?(Text 22)

(The phrase translated “brilliance of her jewels”(夜光明月) has a double reference. Korean commentators say that 夜光 and 明月 are the names of phosphorescent stones, but it might equally well refer to the shining of the [page 17] moon itself which cannot be extinguished by the darkness of the night, while another quite possible translation would be “firefly moon.”) As P’o-un had died for the Koryŏ dynasty, so Pak P’aeng-nyŏn (朴彭年) was prepared to die for his lawful king.

In this matter of quoting from earlier poems the sijo approaches most closely to the short Japanese poems called variously tanka (短歌), waka (和歌), haiku (非句) and haikai (非諧). Since these Japanese forms are generally much more widely known among westerners, and Korean writers sometimes call the sijo tanka (Korean tan-ga), it may be well to compare the two forms a little.

The Japanese form, whether in the 31 or 17 syllable length, is always strict and rigid about its syllable count, whereas the sijo has much more freedom. This and the greater length give the sijo very much greater scope of expression.

The longer Japanese form has, it is true, in the last two lines, a final structure bearing a very similar relation to the earlier part of the poem as the last verse of the sijo does to the first two. But the Japanese verse has the device of the “pivot word,” which has two different meanings, one belonging to the earlier part of the poem and one to the latter, sometimes resulting in grammatical dislocation. The sijo has no such artificialities.

Although the writers of sijo might echo the phrases of earlier poets, it never looks like plagiarism, whereas the westerner often finds it difficult to take seriously the way in which the Japanese use the same device. A classic example, quoted by Professor Keene in his little book “*Japanese Literature*,” (London, 1953, p.15) is that of Buson’s:

Tsurigane ni On the temple bell,

tomarite nemuru resting, asleep,

kocho ka na a butterfly.

Shiki capped this with:

Tsurigane ni On the temple bell, [page 18]

tomarite hikaru resting, glowing,

hotaru ka na a firefly.

There is here an entirely different spirit from the spirit of the Korean poem. The Japanese is understated almost to the point of becoming prosaic. The more limited resources of the Japanese syllabary and the extreme constriction of the form make the waka much more impressionistic than the sijo, but also much slighter. Moreover, the Japanese poets show the stronger influence of Buddhism and the fatalism that contributes so much to the Japanese spirit. One should not expect the same pleasures from sijo that one gets from haiku. Their apparent similarity of form is far less important than their basic difference of conception: and each is admirably suited to its own language.

Another point which they have in common, and which they also share with much Chinese verse, is the fact that they were, and are, freely improvised. This seems to be a quality of oriental poetry which the West today has lost. There was a time when any educated man was expected to be able to turn a passable elegiac couplet at short notice. But when the sijo were improvised, they were immediately delivered to be sung-though not necessarily by the composer. Herein lies a sharp distinction, from the Korean point of view, between the sijo and the Chinese character poem. The Chinese character poem has at least half its appeal to the eye: the sijo appeals directly to the ear.

Even though the sijo, with its average of 45 syllables, is longer than the Japanese tanka, it is still short enough to impose a great economy on the composer. Perhaps it is this quality that has led Peter Lee to call the sijo the Korean epigram. But it seems to me that the epigram is essentially that intellectual kind of short poem which the sijo is not. The sijo is much more essentially a lyric, though much of the charm of the lyric comes from its being *multum in parvo*.

Quite the readiest way of packing much into a few syllables in Korean is to use plenty of Chinese characters. Some sijo are thus virtually Chinese poems, with scarcely more than the grammatical particles in Korean. King [page 19] Sukchong’s (肅宗 reigned 1675—1721) autumn song is an example of this sort of composition:

Autumn streams are blue like the sky,

dragon boats float on the streams.

Pipe and drum combined

dissolve away ten thousand cares.

We also with all the people

will rejoice in mutual peace. (Text 2)

At the other extreme are poems written almost without a single Chinese character. The learned U T’ak(禹倬 1262 —1342) of the Koryo dynasty writes a song of old age with only one Chinese word in it, and that one that has become naturalized Korean:

In one hand I held a stick,

and in the other I grasped a thorn.

I tried to bar the road of age with thorns,

and to keep white hairs at bay with the stick.

But white hairs knew better than I,

and came by a short cut. (Text 8)

However, the vast majority of the poems obtain their grace of diction from the gracious interplay of the smooth pure Korean words with the more sonorous expressions of Chinese derivation.

The language has its peculiarities which are best noticed by reading some of the texts. They do not amount merely to archaism, but to a fairly constant set of poetic forms. Korean scholars have paid considerable attention to these features, especially to the forms used at the twist(轉). (See above pp.10 and 11).

One cannot fail to notice exclamations like 어즈버; the frequent use of 님 meaning either liege lord or lover, and sometimes perhaps both; and the frequent ending 하노라 which fixes the mood of the poem strongly by throwing [page 20] it into the first person, generally singular, but leaves this fixing till the very end of the poem. (It is significant that when the poem is sung this word is left off. The intensely personal music seems to render it unnecessary.)

Questions are very common in the formation of verbs in these poems. This gives many of them their gently soliloquizing air, as though direct statement were too crude for poetry. Perhaps these should often be translated as statements, because Korean conversation is still studded with reflective questions where the English speaker uses a plain statement.

Puns occur, and can be serious or deliberately comic. For instance Wŏn Ch’ŏn-sŏk’s (元天錫):

Who was it said that the bamboo

was twisted by the snow’s weight?

If the stem be bowed,

can it be green under the snow?

Maybe so—when times are bitter

are you alone still loyal? (Text 14)

Here there is a play on the word *chŏl* (節) suggesting both the bamboo stem and loyalty. He is really singing about his own loyalty to the fallen Koryŏ dynasty, and indeed refused all efforts of the Yi King T’aejong to honour him with high rank.

But more noticeable than punning as a device in the sijo is that playing with sounds, especially in verbs, which comes so easily in an agglutinative tongue and adds so much to the lilt of the rhythm. This is delightfully illustrated by the county prefect Yang Sa-ŏn’s (楊士彥 — 1517-1584):

Though they say, “The hills are high,”

yet they are still below heaven.

By climbing, climbing, climbing more,

there is no peak cannot be scaled.

But the man who never tried to climb, [page 21]

he says indeed: “The hills are high.” (Text 37)

But it needs a closer study of the Korean texts than I can make here to bring out the musical effects which assonance, onomatopoeia, alliteration and grammatical juggling can produce in the Korean language, and generally do produce in a good sijo. The reader of the Korean texts will discover them for himself, in infinite variety, from the most obvious to the most subtle uses.

Withal it is a most natural form of verse for the Korean language. However the form crystallized, it crystallized around the genius of the speech. The basic elements of the three and four syllable groups are still the normal unit of construction for those who construct political and other slogans: They slip easily off the tongue and they stay steadily in the mind. In fact they provide the natural rhythmic basis of Korean speech, except when it becomes inflated with politeness or awe (and the sijo is concerned very little with either of these things, though if needs be it can express them without morphological inflation). And the ornamental devices are equally native to the language, and owe little even to Chinese influence.

The sijo has been called the glory of Korean literature. At least it is utterly and profoundly Korean in style and in language.

**IV. The Subject Matter of the Sijo**

The subject range of the sijo is as wide, almost, as human experience. But not quite, because religion scarcely occurs at all in the classical sijo. The reason must doubtless be sought for in the climate of the times. The *hyangga* (鄕歌) of Silla had been Buddhist and deeply religious, but the sijo is a product of the Yi dynasty, when Buddhism was proscribed and Confucianism ruled men’s minds. Confucianism does not breed the kind of mysticism that produces religious poetry. My search has been anything but exhaustive, but I have come across only one religious sijo, and that is anything but mystical. It is anonymous.

“Namu Amit’abul, Namu Amit’abul,”

can make any monk reach Buddhahood? [page 22]

“The sage says:” “Mencius says:”

can lead anybody to the Right Path?

But, I find, Path or Buddhahood,

are they not both hard to attain? (Text 78)

(Namu Amit’abul (南無阿彌陀佛) is an invocation much used by Buddhists in Korea. It is particularly connected with the Pure Land (淨土) sect. The Korean pronunciation is not an absolutely accurate transliteration of the Chinese character. The meaning is “I confide in Amit’a Buddha.”)

Confucianism, however, has producea its due measure of philosophical sijo, such as this gloss on the key phrases of the opening chapter of the Great Learning(大學) by the minister of state, No Su-sin (盧守愼 1515—1590):

This car of polished virtue,

over what mountains can it pass ?

It may scale the peak of understanding essences,

and reach the pass of perfect knowledge—

But softly! Travel as it may,

it still cannot reach the hall of the pure heart. (Text 3)

The original Chinese key phrases are the car (明明德 “to illuminate shining virtue”), the peak (物格 “to understand the nature of things”), the pass (知止 “to know the limit” or “to know when to stop”), and the hall (誠意 “to make the will sincere”). No Su-sin was a great opponent of Chu Hsi’s (朱熹) brand of Confucianism (see below p.42) and this poem is one expression of his views. He preterred the less pedantic school of Wang Yang-ming (王陽明), with its emphasis on practical self-knowledge.

Of course the influence of Confucianism will be felt in many less explicitly doctrinaire ways. The cabinet minister No Chin(盧稹 1518—1578) sings a song on his mothers birthday which is replete with Confucian cultural echoes: [page 23]

Golden crow in the sun,

stay and hear what I have to say:

You are the filial bird,

a very Tsengshen of birds,

And today for my sake, I beg,

linger a while in mid-heaven. (Text 38)

Tsengshen (曾参) was a disciple of Confucius, noted for his filial piety. There is a legend that there is a three legged crow in the sun; this is the golden crow of the poem. The phrase “filial bird” (反哺鳥) means a bird that “feeds its parents in return”, and refers to the belief that young crows regurgitate their food for their parents.

But the other cardinal relationships were also lauded. Chang Kyŏng-se (張經世 1547 - 1615), the magistrate (縣令), on retiring from the “red dust” of urban life, was yet concerned about his loyalty to his king:

Awaking from a dream of red dust,

twenty years are as yesterday.

I am like a horse

loosed in a fair field of green trees,

Forever stretching out his neck

and neighing for his master. (Text 44)

Red dust (紅塵) is a regular phrase for wordly cares, and is of Buddhist origin.

This brings us close to the songs of the simple life and escape from the factions of the court which form a large bulk of the total number of preserved sijo. Some of them are best considered in connection with the political history of the country and the great names among the poets, but the tone is set by Kim Kwang-uk (金光煜 1579 - 1615)：

I left all the documents

and papers that tire me out, [page 24]

And went for a ride,

whipping the clear autumn air.

Did ever any bird newly freed

savour freedom more than I do? (Text 57)

Kim Kwang-uk was one of the upright men who suffered in the bitter factional strife of the reign of Kwanghae-gun (光海君). He held cabinet rank.

Carried one stage further this gives us the songs of rustic life, so reminiscent of our western *bergeries*, which are not always of the pleasures of retirement, but sometimes of the social joys of the village. Thus the singer Kim Yu-gi (金裕器) in the early eighteenth century:

This morning well go fishing,

tomorrow well go hunting,

The next day have a picnic,

the day after set up a kye.

The fifth day well have archery,

and each bring his own bottle. (Text 68)

(The kye (契) is not necessarily a business association, but it is some sort of cooperative club, of which many kinds exist in the villages to this day.)

But the same genre had made its appearance much earlier, as in this example from Hwang Hui (黄喜 1363 - 1452), who was one of King Sejong’s prime ministers (領議政):

Are the chestnuts falling fast

in the vale of russet jujubes?

The crabs are already

crawling in the rice stubble.

Let’s go and buy a sieve to strain new wine

and drink with these good things. (Text 16)

[page 25]

The mention of the bottle introduces another great class of sijo—the drinking songs. A good anonymous one is:

Ten thousand acres of sea

could not wash away my cares;

But just one bottle of wine

will drown them all this very day.

In this way Li Po of old

gained long slumbers, worry free. (Text 80)

No Chin (盧稹 see above p.22) becomes even more expansive:

Everlasting hills and dales

conceal between them everlasting springs.

If you pour wine into those springs

they will become eternal vats.

Take from them and fill your goblets

and may you drink of everlasting life. (Text 39)

But Kim Ch’ŏn-t’aek (金天澤 18th century), the famous singing policeman and anthologist (see below p.32), became almost practical when he sang:

I gave my coat to the boy

in the wine shop and pawned it.

Now I look up at the sky,

I address the moon, I say:

Well and now ! what about Li Po?

What would he do in my case? (Text 69)

The genius of Li Po, finding a thousand poems in a glass of wine, proliferated in the sijo collections.

But other states of mind than drunkenness moved the poets. A poem usually attributed to the Kaesong kisaeng Hwang Chin-i (黃眞伊, early 16th century) has a keen psychological ring:

[page 26]

This is all my doing!

I did not know I’d miss him so.

If I had bid him stay,

I should have spurned him, but now—

I sent him away. And, ah me,

I did not know he was so dear ! (Text 29)

It is an interesting comment on the difficulty of translating the Korean forms of affection into English that another tradition ascribes this poem to the King Song-jong (成宗 reigned 1470-1495), in which case the reference might be to a dismissed minister.

These are but a few of the headings under which sijo might be classified as to subject matter. They do not by any means cover the whole range; we have not yet considered those whose chief inspiration is political comment. But these are best considered in their historical setting, where much of the richness of the sijo repertoire is revealed.

V. Cycles and Anthologies

The sijo is so short that it clearly stood little chance of publication before the days of literary magazines wanting space-fillers at the bottom of their pages. Inevitably sijo had to be anthologized from the manuscript scrolls of the singers. But, equally inevitably, the sijo came to be composed in sets, and strung together in cycles.

There are many such cycles, and some are very famous. The striking thing about them is that the individual sijo each has a quite independent existence. In modern anthologies sijo are extracted from the cycles and printed separately, without the pleasure of the reader being in the least spoiled.

One should at least mention the names of the most famous cycles. Chŏng Ch’ŏl (鄭澈), better known as Song-gang (松江 see below p.44) wrote the Songs of Instruction (訓民歌) and Pak In-no (朴仁老, Nogye 蘆溪 see above p.15) wrote the Songs of the Five Relationships (五倫歌)，from which two quotations are worth while: [page 27]

When man and wife are wed,

it is a precious union.

He calls, she comes, they say,

so heaven and earth keep harmony.

So be it: as Meng Kwang was wont,

wives should revere their husbands. (Text 48)

“He calls, she comes” (夫唱婦隨) is a quotation from the familiar Thousand Character Classic (千字文), while Meng Kwang (孟光) was a famous character of Chinese tradition who habitually reverenced her husband profoundly before every meal.

The second stanza is the final one of the cycle. It is practically a quotation of the first sentence of the Tongmong P’ilsup (童蒙必習) which had been written some 50 years earlier, and which became one of the most widely used of Korea’s traditional primers.

Among the countless creation,

only man is truly great,

And his true glory

is knowledge of the Five Bonds.

If a man does not know these five bonds,

he is all but a brute beast. (Text 49)

The Five Bonds or Relationships (五倫) are the five cardinal relationships of Confucian social morality- They are the relations between ruler and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and the mutual relationship of friends.

There are many cycles of nature poems, and several about the joys of angling. Famous among these are the Tosan Sibigok (陶山十二曲, 12 Songs of Tosan), of T’oegye (退溪 see below p.43), and the Kosan Kugok (高山九曲, Nine Songs of Kosan), of Yulgok (栗谷 see below p.43) in the great period of Neoconfucian development when the art of the sijo reached its zenith. [page 28]

Later on Kosan (孤山 see below p.53), hailed by some as the greatest of all sijo writers, produced Sanjung Sin’gok (山中新曲, New Songs Amid the Mountains), Obu Sasisa (漁父四時詞, The Fisherman’s Calendar), and the famous Ouga, (五友歌), the Song of the Five Friends. And one might also mention the Maehwasa, (梅花詞), the Songs of the Plumblossom, by An Min-yŏng (安玟英 see below p.57).

The Song of the Five Friends is a composition of great charm and deceptive subtlety of expression. But it is not to be taken at its face value — sijo very rarely are. It uses the familiar symbols of nature as a comment on mankind.

五 友 歌

If you ask, how many friends have I:

water and rocks, pine and bamboo ;

The moon rising on Eastern hills—

that also makes me happy.

Now I ask, beyond these five friends,

what good is there in having more?

水

The clouds’ colour is good they say,

but often they are leaden;

The breezes’ voice is clear they say,

but too often they cease to blow.

And I say that the waters alone

are always good and ceaseless.

石

Why do flowers blossom,

and just as quickly fade?

Why does the grass grow green,

while it yellows and withers away?

Can it be that only the rocks

are quite immune from all this change? [page 29]

松

On warm days the flowers bloom,

on cold days the leaves fall,

Yet, pine, how is that you

are untouched by frost and snow?

I am sure that it must be

because your roots reach to the Nine Springs.

竹

This one is not a true tree,

neither is it a grass.

Who made it grow up so straight?

And why is it so clean inside?

I like it for these two qualities,

and for being always green.

月

Tiny object floating on high,

giving light to all the world,

Could any other light

shine so brightly in the dark night?

What you see you do not tell of.

Can I say you are my friend? (Text 6)

Yulgok’s Nine Songs of Kosan have quite a different charm, that of a richer and more baroque imagery. They typically manage to spread out the nine songs over the four seasons of the year.

高山九曲

Kosan’s Pool of Nine Songs

is unknown to most people.

I built a reed house there, [page 30]

and my friends come to see me.

In this place I muse on Mui’s beauty

and can study Master Chu.

冠 巖

Where shall we find the first song?

The sun shines on the Crown Rock,

The mist moves over the grass,

The landscape is a picture.

The wine cup is under the pines,

and I wait for friends to come.

花 巖

Whereabouts the second song?

Late Spring by the Flowery Rock:

Luxuriant waves of green leaves

have borne the flowers away.

This loveliness is hidden from the world.

How can I tell of it?

翠 屛

Where shall we find the third song?

Leaves cover the Emerald Screen.

The birds are alighting

and singing in the foliage.

Light breezes brush the rocks and pines

and summer’s peace is gone.

松 崖

Where shall we find the fourth song?

The sun sets over the Pine Bank.

The rocks are reflected perfectly [page 31]

in the waters of the pool.

Tree and springs make irrepressible joy

rise up within my heart.

隱 屛

Where shall we sing the fifth song?

The Secret Arbour is good.

Cool and delightful

is my study by the water.

Here I can work to my heart’s content

and make poems of moon and breeze.

釣 峡

Where shall we find the sixth song?

Fisher’s Gorge has broad waters.

There I and the fish

and who else besides can delight.

At evening I shoulder my rod

and walk homeward by moonlight.

楓 巖

Where to sing the seventh song?

Autumn is best at Maple Rock.

Lightly the delicate frost

embroiders the hanging rocks.

Alone I sit on the cold stone,

and I forget to go home.

琴 灌

Where shall we hear the eighth song?

The moon shines on the Tinkling Brook.

There I will play on a lute

with jade pegs and a golden bridge. [page 32]

Singing the old world poems,

I am happy, though alone.

文 山

Where shall we find the ninth song?

Winter has come to Munsan;

The fantastic rocks

are buried under the snow.

Nobody comes here for pleasure now.

They think there is nothing to see. (Text 4)

The drift of these poems is obvious enough. Two references need explaining. Mui (武夷) is a famous scenic spot in Fukien. Master Chu is, of course, Chu Hsi (朱熹), or, to the Koreans, Chuja (朱子), the Sung dynasty teacher of whose synthetic, formalised, highly metaphysical and quasi-mystical interpretation of Confucianism Yulgok was an enthusiastic promoter. Kosan itself is near Haeju(海州).

But the poems which did not form part of cycles were inevitably collected into anthologies, and it is not surprising to discover that this work first began to be undertaken seriously in the 18th century, at a time when the composition of sijo was beginning to decline into a repetition of the trite and the mechanical.

The first, and perhaps still most famous of all the collections, was that made by Kim Ch’ŏn-t’aek (金天澤 see above p.25) in 1727, called *Ch’ŏnggu Yŏngon* (靑丘永言) —the Eternal Words of the Blue Hills. (Ch’onggu, or Blue Hills, being a poetic sobriquet for Korea). It contained 998 poems, arranged according to melody. Another collection, of over 1000 sijo, was published under the same title by Ch’oe Nam-sŏn (崔南善) in 1930.

The next was *Haedong Kayo*, or Songs of the Eastern Sea (海東歌謠), Haedong being another name for Korea. This contained 883 poems, collected by Kim Su-jang (金壽長) in 1763.

1764 is the date of the *Kogum Kagok*, or Hymns [page 33] Ancient and Modern (古今歌曲) of Songgye Yŏnwŏrong (松柱烟月翁). This had the poems arranged according to subject matter, with Chinese translations, and also included some kasa (歌辭), a longer form of Korean poem.

About 1863 came *the Namhun T’aepyŏngga* (南薰太平 歌) of 230 poems all printed, in plain Korean characters. But in 1876 came the *Kagok Wŏllyu* (歌曲源流) with 800 sijo in mixed script arranged in order of melodies, by Pak Hyo-gwan (朴孝寬) and An Min-yŏng (see below p. 57).

The *Taedong P’unga* (大東風雅), of a mere 311 poems, arranged by melody, appeared in 1908, and in 1913 the first collection using the 가나다 syllabary order for its arrangement was called *Kagok Sŏn* (歌曲選, Selection of Songs) and contained 596 poems.

Finally, and by no means least, Ch’oe Nam-sŏn’s *Sijo Yuch’u* (詩調類聚), a compendium of previous anthologies with 1145 songs, appeared in 1928. It classifies the songs according to their subject matter. This fantastically industrious scholar also edited several modern editions of various of these anthologies as well as compiling his own. Detailed descriptions of these anthologies, their editions and their places in the great libraries can easily be found in Pang Chong-hyŏn’s “Explanations of Old Sijo”(方鍾鉉 古時調精解).

**VI. The History of the Sijo**

Literary historians are always at great pains to show where poetic forms came from, and never seem able to imagine that somebody just invented the thing and it caught on. Much has been written on the origin of the sijo, and though none of it is finally conclusive, it is but just to enumerate the various theories which have been proposed.

There are theories that the sijo is derived from Buddhist poems of Ming, or from shaman songs. The social and religious history of the sijo would not lend much colour to these theories, but there is no need to dismiss them as utterly worthless.

On the other hand,the theory that the sijo form was an accidental discovery made in the course of translating [page 34] Chinese poems is scarcely really adequate, although the similarities of structure have already been noticed.

The Silla period had a form of Korean poetry, in which the purely Korean words were written in *idu* (吏讀). According to some critics, especially Yi Pyŏng-gi (李秉岐), this Silla poem, the *hyangga* (鄕歌), always had essentially three lines, and it developed into the sijo during the Koryo period. He insists that the ejaculations, such as 어즈버 and 두어라 in the last line of the sijo correspond to the 阿耶 and 阿耶也 of the hyangga, by way of the Koryŏ tan’ga (短歌) or short poem. Or the tan’ga can be postulated as a separate origin of the sijo.

The earliest known reference to the word sijo (時調) is in the Koryo Dynasty Annals (高麗史), where there is reference to a kind of song called Sin jo (新滴) having been produced by one Kim Wŏn-Sang (金元祥) in the time of King Ch’ung-yŏl (忠烈 1275—1308)(高麗史 卷125 列傳 金元祥)\* A reference in the Tongguk T’onggam (東國通鑑), a history of Korea compiled in the 15th century by Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng (徐居正) and using the Koryŏ annals as one of its sources, refers to the same Kim Wŏn-sang as composing sijo (時調). (東國通鑑卷40 忠烈王 22午 7月) The confusion about the first syllable of the word is really most unhelpful, but these two references do add up to a suggestion that it was in the middle of the Koryŏ period that the form first crystallized and was called new (新), somewhere about the 13th century of our era. The slight change in the name in the second mention has not been satisfactorily explained. The problem is not really susceptible of clearer solution, because the earliest sijo had a purely oral existence—so far as we know —until the invention of the Korean alphabet in 1446.

The structure of the poem—the larger body and the shorter tail—is certainly similar to the hyangga of the previous dynasty. It is reasonable to suppose that the sijo was thus a refinement of the hyangga, while the kasa (歌辭) represents a development by which the short tail of the poem was dropped and the body considerably prolonged. The fact that the sijo has frequently been called simply tanga (短歌) or “short lyric,” tends to support this view. The kasa was also called changga (長歌) “long lyric”

\* See also postscriptum 2, below p. 83. [page 35]

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the word “sijo” is found again. We have musical notation in Chinese characters headed “sijo” in Sŏ Yu-gŏ’s (徐有榘) lmwŏn Kyŏngjeji (林園經濟志) (遊藝志 卷六 洋琴字譜), a famous work on gardening and agriculture. And there is a famous Chinese quatrain in the Kwansŏ Akpu (關西凑府) of Sin Kwang-su (申光洙), which is a collection of songs and antiquities made for a governor of P’yŏngyang in 1774.

The verse goes:

初唱聞皆說太眞 至今如恨馬嵐

一般時調排長短 來自長安李世春

This has frequently been described as the first use of the word sijo in Korea, and on the strength of it Yi Se-ch’un has found a niche in many school textbooks as an exponent of sijo. This depends on understanding the meaning of the latter half of the passage as being that Yi Se-ch’un (李世春) came from Seoul (poetically called 長安) singing vernacular (一般 as opposed to literary or Chinese) songs which were arranged (排) according to their length (長短) a not unreasonable interpretation considering that this was the age of the anthologists.

Professor Cho Yun-je, however, suggests another interpretation. He suggests that since this quatrain is one of several describing a party and giving the names of a number of musicians, it means that at first there was a long song about Yang Kwei-fei (楊貴妃) the famous royal concubine of the Tang dynasty in China, also known as T’ai Chen (太眞), and long after the song, the tragedy of Ma Wei (馬嵬), where Yang Kwei-fei was finally slaughtered, lingered in the hearers’ hearts; but after this there were some ordinary sijo sung, and they were accompanied on the double ended drum (長短) by Yi Se-ch’un who came up from Seoul.

This passage is not really of any great importance in the history of sijo, but since it occurs regularly in Korean treatments of the subject, it seems worth while to explain it.

It certainly became more usual to use the word “sijo” [page 36] after this time: but it did not appear in a book title until Ch’oe Nam-sŏn so used it in this century (see above p. 33).

Anyone likely to be really interested in posing this question of origins more deeply will probably be able to refer to the Korean sources for himself. But all the conclusions of the Korean scholars themselves contain large elements of conjecture: the truth probably is that all the influences mentioned above played their part in the genesis of the sijo form.

**a. The End of Koryo**

Some books contain a rather dubious sijo by one Ulp’aso (乙巴素) of the Three Kingdoms period, and dub it a sijo of the gestation period. But the more generally accepted early sijo date from the latter part of the Koryo dynasty. Some have been quoted already (pp.13,15,19).

There is another ascribed to U T’ak (see above p. 19):

Spring breezes melt the mountain snows,

pass by quickly, and then are gone.

How I wish they would hover,

briefly, gently, over my head,

Melt away the frost of creeping age

that greys the hair on my neck. (Text 7)

The rest are political, and refer to the period of strife during which the Yi dynasty emerged.

For instance, the famous song of loyalty of Chŏng Mong-ju (see above p.16) is said to have been called forth at a party by the taunting song of Yi Pang-wŏn (李芳遠), the son of the rising General Yi, and later King T’aejong (太宗):

How about coming this side?

What about staying that side?

Entangled with the rank weeds [page 37]

of Mansusan, how will you fare?

We too, if we were thus entangled

we might dally a hundred years. (Text 11)

(Mansusan (萬壽山), west of Kaesŏng, had the royal tombs of the Wang dynasty of Koryŏ). The Korean text has a tone of unprincipled levity, which I am hard put to express, even approximately, in English.

The Yi historians, and the temper they have bequeathed to modern Korea, have given us an unfavourable picture of the latter days of Koryŏ. Yet that dynasty which managed to produce such masterpieces of art in the midst of brutal foreign invasions and in spite of a corrupt hagiocracy, could inspire tremendous loyalty from great and good men, even in the days of its decadence. There is little trace of hatred and perverted luxuries in the songs of the Koryŏ loyalists.

In the midst of the upheavals, the minister of state Yi Saek (李墻 1328—1395) wrote:

The white snow has left the valleys

where the clouds are gathering.

Whereabouts shall I seek

the cheering sight of plum blossoms?

I stand here alone in the dusk,

and do not know where to go. (Text 10)

Then when the tragedy was over, and Kaesŏng was no longer the gracious capital of the Wangs, Kil Chae (吉再 1353 - 1419) sang:

I ride back to the city

that was queen for five centuries.

Hills and streams stay as before,

but the men are gone for good.

Was it then nothing but a dream,

that shining moon, that age of peace? (Text 13)

[page 38]

But, most touchingly of all, Wŏn Ch’ ŏn-sŏk (see above p.20) returning to Manwoltae, the Full Moon Terrace, recalls the elegance of the capital in one of the most moving of all the sijo:

Fate is full of ups and downs;

here’s autumn hay on Manwoltae.

The herdboys’ pipes are heard

where kings ruled for five centuries.

If I come here in the evening,

I cannot restrain my tears. (Text 15)

**b. The Tanjong Story**

The early years of the Yi dynasty produced their own sijo in honour of the new peace and prosperity, especially as it flourished under Sejong. But the great affair that thrilled the nation, and still deeply moves Korean children, was the affair of Tanjong, the murdered boy king.

Sejong (世宗) was succeeded in 1451 by his son Munjong (文宗), a frail man who died two years later, leaving his twelve year old son Hongwi (弘暐) to reign in his place. But Munjong’s younger brother (the boy’s uncle) Prince Suyang (首陽 see above p.14), saw his opportunity to turn the princeling out and usurp the throne. This he succeeded in doing in 1456, becoming in fact a good king in many respects, later designated Sejo (世祖). A number of loyalists rallied to the boy’s cause and prepared to reinstate him, but the plan was discovered by the usurping uncle. Six of the loyalists were executed (死六臣). In June 1457 the boy was exiled to Yŏngwŏl (寧越) in Kangwŏn province with the downgraded title of Prince Nosan (魯山). Four months later, the boy’s existence was thought to be a danger to the new king, and his death was decided upon. Poison was sent for him to drink.

According to the unofficial chronicle called Pyŏngja Rok (丙子錄), the story goes that the lad saw a messenger arriving from the court and put on his royal yellow robe and his crown to receive the message in a fitting manner [page 39] The man bearing the hemlock was so overcome by the youth’s pathetic dignity that he broke into tears, and fell on his knees in the courtyard. One of the men who had been attending the exiled king thereupon strangled the boy with an arrowstring. It was late afternoon and there was a tremendous thunderstorm.

The murder in the mountains on an autumn evening, the youth of Tanjong (端宗 this dynastic title was conferred on him some two centuries later), and the martyrdom of the loyalists were bound to create a legend—not at all dissimilar from the legends that covered England after the disappearance of Richard II.

But this story has left a literary heritage. It is a vast enough heritage, but we are only concerned with the sijo which it contains. Most of the six martyred loyalists are attributed with sijo—which are now inscribed on an elegant granite pillar on the little hill top where five of them are buried, overlooking the River Han at Noryangjin (鷺粱津), near the railway bridge south of Seoul.

The most famous of the loyalist songs are those of Sŏng Sam-mun, already quoted (see above pp.14,16), and that of Pak P’aeng-nyŏn (above p.16), But Yu Ung-bu (兪應孚), a military official, also wrote of the usurpation:

So they say there was a gale,

and frosty snow fell last night?

And the spreading pines

were all broken and overthrown?

In that case, how about the flowers?

What chance have they to blossom? (Text 23)

By the pines he meant the court officials, like Sin Suk-Ju (申叔舟), the great linguist and ambassador, who had gone over to Sejo’s side. The flowers, of course, are the ordinary folk of the nation.

Yu Sŏng-wŏn (柳誠源), an official of the Confucian temple and school in Seoul (成均舘) and another of the [page 40] martyrs, sang of his distaste for Sejo:

I lie back on the grass roof,

pillowing my head on my guitar.

I like to dream

of the holy king’s reign of peace.

At the gate a fisherman’s pipe

trills a few notes and wakes me. (Text 24)

The holy king’s reign of peace was Sejong’s. The few notes are said to be the news of the assassination of the Left Associate Prime Miniser (左議政) Kim Chong-sŏ (金宗端 1390 - 1453) by order of Sejo. This Kim Chong-sŏ had won military renown on the northern frontier and had himself composed sijo:

The North Wind moans amid the bare boughs,

the moon shines coldly on the snow.

I stand, sword in hand,

on the fort at the frontier.

I whistle; the sound re-echoes:

let any attack who dare! (Text 18)

This song of national pride refers to the northern land boundary of Korea. The poet was nicknamed “the tiger”, and Prince Suyang had him murdered even before he had deposed the young king. In view of all this another sijo of his has added interest:

Plant the banner on Paektusan,

wash our horses in the Tumen’s flood!

Soft-hearted courtiers!

Do we not quit ourselves like men?

Rouse yourselves! Whose portrait

will first get hung in the Pure Mist Hall? (Text 17) [page 41]

(The Pure Mist Hall (凌煙閣) was a gallery of portraits of meritorious men erected in Tang China.)

But the most touching of the series are those about the boy king’s exile in Yŏngwŏl. Wŏn Ho (元昊), who was not executed but because of his loyalty to Tanjong went into retirement, wrote of a stream that flowed down from Yŏngwŏl:

Listening to the brook last night,

I thought it was crying sadly.

Now, thinking it over here,

I see it was bearing the king’s tears.

If only that water could be turned back,

it should carry my tears too. (Text 25)

Yi Kae (李端), who was a literary official like Wŏn Ho, but, unlike him, one of the martyrs, sang of the sorrow of the night:

That candle burning indoors,

to whom has it bidden farewell?

While its outside drips with tears,

does it not know that its heart burns?

Just so I, my king left a thousand li back,

I burn inside, and I weep (Text 21)

There is, however, a variant of this last verse, which reads:

The candle weeps just as I do.

It does not know its burning heart.

But perhaps the loveliest of all the Tanjong poems is that of Wang Pang-yŏn (王邦衍), who was the young security force official who later carried the poison to the boy. [page 42]

Ten thousand li along the road

I bade farewell to my fair young lord.

My heart can find no rest

but I sit beside a stream.

That water is like my soul:

it goes sighing into the night. (Text 26)

And to round off the picture, I cannot forbear to quote the poem ascribed to the boy king himself. It is really a Chinese poem, in a slightly expanded si jo form.

The cuckoo calls, the moon hangs low over the mountains.

I am longing and lonely, leaning on this parapet.

You cry mournfully, and my heart is heavy:

If you did not call, I should not be sad.

Go tell man, he is a passing guest—

Let him not go up in March, when the cuckoo calls,

to the moonlight silvered pavilion! (Text 1)

**c. The Great Period—the Sixteenth Century**

The sixteenth century, from the reign of Chungjong (中宗 1506), saw the vigour of the Yi dynasty begin to decline because of the warring of the court factions. But it was a time when the production of sijo was vastly increased, and when some of the finest sijo of all time were written. This was the time when the Chu Hsi (朱熹) school of Neo-Confucianism was becoming firmly entrenched. This is the time of the philosophical sijo, when the songs of nature and country life began to be composed, because Neo-Confucianism involved something very like a “nature mysticism” and the attainment of knowledge by contemplation. It is also the time of the emergence of the drinking songs. The great names of the period are some of the greatest names of all Korean literature. We can scarcely do more than recall the names and quote examples here and [page 43] there which will shed light on the temper of their thought.

First one must place that great pair of canonized sages, both Rectors of the Confucian College (成均舘) the cabinet minister (判書) Yi I (李琪 1536—1584), better known as Yulgok (栗谷) from the nature of one of his favorite haunts, and Yi Hwang (李滉 1500—1570), likewise better known as Toegye(退溪), who consistently tried to avoid public office, We have already heard something of Yulgok in the Nine Songs of Kosan (above p. 29).

In T’oegye we shall find similar preoccupations, very charmingly expressed:

Only I and the seagulls know

Ch’ŏngnyangsan’s thirty-six peaks.

The seagulls are chatterers

but falling flowers tell the most tales

Peach petals, do not float down!

The fishers will know where we are. (Text 34)

Ch’ŏngnyangsan (淸凉山) is in North Kyongsang province near Andong (安東).

Or, in more moralizing vein:

Even fools can know and can do;

is not life easy then?

Yet the sage cannot know it all;

is not life difficult then?

But easy or difficult, it all

makes me forget I grow old. (Text 36)

Or, more metaphysically:

The green hills—now what of them?

Are they green eternally?

Flowing streams—now what of them? [page 44]

Night and day, do they never stop?

We also, without conclusion,

evermore green shall we be. (Text 35)

Then the great U-am (尤菴)，whose normal name was Song Si-yŏl (宋時烈 1607—1689), another follower of Chuja, is credited with:

Blue mountains gently gently,

green waters gently gently,

Hills gently gently, streams gently gently,

and between them I too, gently gently,

In the midst gently gently, this body growing older,

gently gently shall it be. (Text 65)

(There is some doubt about the attribution however. It sometimes is credited to Kim In-hu (金麟厚 1510-1600) who, like U-am, is also a canonized sage in Korea.)

But another of U-am’s songs reflects the troubles of that partisan age when a king’s whim could make such a loyal subject and great thinker as the poet take hemlock at Chŏngŭp (井邑) in 1689.

My lord, please think again

of how you trusted me.

The heart that used to love me,

where is its love set now?

Had I been thus despised from the first,

should I now have been so sad? (Text 64)

Then the high ranking minister Song-gang(松江), whose civil name was Chŏng Ch’ŏl (鄭澈 1536—1593) and who is more celebrated for his composition in kasa form, also wrote sijo. Here is a sombre picture postcard of Kyŏngju:

Silla’s eight hundred years

saw that tower built straight and tall. [page 45]

The voice of the massive bell

makes the tower ring with its sound.

And so the mountain arbour

seems lonelier in the dusk. (Text 33)

Of like spirit had been the privy councillor Yi Hyŏn-bo (李賢輔 1467—1545), using the familiar image of red dust for political life, in this song from the cycle Obuga (漁父歌), Angler’s Songs:

I look down through far green depths,

then look around at piled blue peaks.

O how pitiful

is the world with its red dust!

And moonlight makes these lakes and streams

even more solitary. (Text 27)

Nor must we forget to mention in this period Pak In-no, already quoted twice (above pp.15 and 26), and the opponents of the Chusi school of Neo-Confucianism like No Su-sin (see above p.22).

But perhaps as attractive as anyone at this this time was the kisaeng of Kaesŏng, Hwang Chin-i (黃眞伊, see above p.25) who wrote songs of charming lilt. Possibly the most famous of all her poems are these two:

The hills have stood from of old,

but streams are never ancient waters:

Day and night they flow on—

how can they ever endure?

Famous men are like the rivers:

they pass and then cannot return. (Text 28)

The second has a story attached. Hwang Chin-i’s literary name was Myŏngwŏl (明月), Bright Moon. There was in Kaesŏng a man called Pyŏkkyesu (碧溪守) who boasted that he was not susceptible to female charms. Chin-i punned [page 46] upon his name, altering the last character, so that it should mean Jade Green Stream (碧溪水). She then waylaid him as he rode across Manwoltae on his donkey, and sang:

Jade green stream, you should not boast

of running quickly through the blue hills.

Once you come to the sea

turning around is very hard.

The bright moon shines on these bare hills.

Why not stay and rest awhile? (Text 30)

Some say that he tumbled from the donkey: all say that he took a cup of wine with the lady.

Many came to visit her. But Im Che (林悌 1549—1587) came too late:

Green grass covers the valley.

Do you sleep? Are you at rest?

O where is that lovely face?

Can mere bones be buried here?

I have wine, but no chance to share it.

Alas, I pour it sadly. (Text 50)

Toegye’s disciple, Kwŏn Ho-mun (權好文 1531—1597) wrote a cycle of 18 poems called Songs of Leisure Han’go Sipp’algok (閑居十八曲). By contrast to his master, he sings of social joys:

The day has drawn to dusk,

there is nothing to do.

Close the pine grove gates,

let us lie under the moon;

Let us completely recreate

our worldy-dusty minds. (Text 41)

[page 47]

Or, again:

The wind is wholly clear,

the moon is peerless bright,

There’s no speck

in the garden of pine and bamboo.

Let us make it brighter

with lute and piles of scrolls. (Text 40)

This is an urbane simplicity, where music and poetry enhance the pleasures of nature: but whenever we find pine coupled with bamboo we suspect symbolism. This kind of poetry has the seeds of a coming mechanicalism, the foretaste of decadence that must follow so great a flowering.

But there is nothing whatsoever decadent about the work of the Lord of Admiralty (海運判官) Cho Chon-sŏng (趙存性 1554—1628). His most famous work is a group of four sijo called Hoagok Sajang (呼兒曲四章), Four Songs to a Boy, written when he had retired to Ch’ungchŏng province after the troubles in which King Kwanghaegun (光海君) had deposed Queen Inmok (仁穆):

Rooting on the Western Hills (西山採薇)

Come, my lad, gather up your basket.

Day dies on the western hills.

New-born ferns will wither

away overnight, will they not?

And what if there were no green ferns,

what should I eat everyday ?

Fishing in the East Brook (束澗釣魚)

Come, my lad, bring my straw cloak and hat.

The East Brook is swollen full.

On my long fishing rod [page 48]

Well fix a hook without a barb.

Hey you fish! Don’t be afraid!

I am only out for sport.

Ploughing in the South Field (南畝躬耕)

Come, my lad, get the porridge up.

Much work waits in the South Field.

I wonder with whom

I can ply my clumsy hoe?

Yet you know, the very ploughshare

depends on royal grace.

Drinking in the North Suburb (北郭醉起)

Come, my lad, get the cow ready.

Let’s go North and drink new wine.

With rosy countenance

I’ll ride home in the moonlight—

Hey nonny! The likes of old King Fu

will ride again tonight. (Text 5)

Sin Hum (申欽 1566—1628) was a prime minister (領 議政) also involved in the troubles of Kwanghaegun’s reign, and less a poet of rustic life as lived by the real countryman than of the cultured gentleman’s life in retirement. He could turn pretty verses in his retreat near Ch’unch’ ŏn (春川) during his period of disfavour:

So be my roofbeams short or long,

my pillars slanting or crooked,

Do not mock my hut

because it is so tiny,

For the moon and the mountain vines,

do they not all belong to me? (Text 52)

[page 49]

And also:

Snow covers the mountain village

and buries the stony road.

Do not open the wicket

because no one will come to see me.

But at night the moon shines brightly;

Can I say it is my friend? (Text 53)

This was capped by the kisaeng Ch’ŏn Kŭm (千錦):

Night covers the mountain village;

a dog barks in the distance.

I look out of the wicket

and see only the moon in a cold sky.

What can that dog be doing,

barking at the moon and the bare hills ? (Text 54)

Even the minor figures produced memorable poems. Here is the civil servant Song Sun (宋純 1493—1582) in the office on a winter morning:

The morning is cold and frosty,

yet yellow chrysanthemums

Overflow their golden bowl

and bring Spring to the Jade Hall.

Do not dream of peach and plum blossoms

but consider the King’s will. (Text 31)

It is said that king Myŏngjong (明宗) sent the flowers to the archive house requesting a poem. The people there were unable to write one and got Song Sun to do it for them.

Yi Hang-bok (李恒福 1555—1618) who had been prime minister under king Sŏnjo (宣禪) left a poem which is touching and, in Korean, exceedingly beautiful: [page 50]

O cloud stopping to rest

on the top of Ch’ŏllyŏng pass,

This lone retainer’s

bitter tears are like your rain.

Would that you might take them away

and rain them on the palace. (Text 45)

Yi Hang-bok was passing through Kangwŏndo on his way into exile for having opposed the deposition of Queen In-mok (仁穆), when he came to Ch’ŏllyŏng (鐵嶺). The story goes that this song was taken back to Seoul, and was sung to the King Kwanghaegun (光海君) while he was drinking. It moved him to weep.

This tone, however, is lowered in songs like this carousal of Yi Hang-bok’s great friend, Yi Tŏk-hyŏng (李德馨 1561 —1613):

The moon is swollen full,

suspended in a jade sky.

Cola winds might long ago have dislodged it.

It might still fall.

But just now I want it to shine

on my tipsy guest’s golden cup. (Text 46)

Yi Tŏk-hyŏng was also at one time prime minister, and won considerable military fame during the Japanese invasions.

But more worthy of the times, and more like the great masters, is Cho Sik (曹植 1479—1571) with his praise of Chŏllado:

So this is Chirisan.

I heard much of Yangdansu.

The shadow of the mountain

sinks into the petal-laden stream.

Tell me boy, where is the Peach Heaven?

I wonder, is it here? (Text 32)

[page 51]

Chirisan (智異山), actually called Turyusan (頭流山) here, and its famous double stream, Yangdansu (兩德呆), are beautiful enough to recall Murŭng Towŏn (武陵桃源), the legendary Chinese paradise with the eternal peach trees.

Finally, another metaphysical poem, by Sŏng Hun (成渾 1535—1598), another of Korea’s canonized sages (ten of the eighteen of them lived in this period):

The blue mountains utter no word,

the waters flow without form.

The clear breeze cannot be bought,

the shining moon has no owner.

Among these I can live free from sickness,

I can grow old without ageing. (Text 42)

**d. The Invasions**

The Japanese invasion of 1592 (壬辰傻亂) and the Manchu invasion of 1637 (丙子胡亂) produced a series of poems which are worth considering by themselves.

Notable among the poems of the Japanese invasion, perhaps only for the name of its author, is this one attributed to Admiral Yi Sun-sin (李舜臣 1545—1598), that remarkably gallant and humble man whose military skill saved not only Korea, but also China, and changed the course of Far Eastern history, if not of the world.

By moonlight I sit all alone

in the tower on Han San isle.

My sword is on my thigh.

I am beside myself with care.

From somewhere a shrill piping sound

thrills and pierces my bowels. (Text 43)

Han San(閑山) island is not far from Pusan, between T’ongyŏng and Koje (巨濟). The poem is highly impressionistic, and the suggestion that it is an elegy for his dear [page 52] friend Chŏng Un (鄭零), lost in the battle of Pusan, goes some way to explain it, but Korean commentators say that the poem tells of the worries of a commander-in-chief.

The country had not recovered from this war before the Ming (明) dynasty in China gave way to the new Manchu dynasty of Ch’ing (淸). Korea was reluctant to take a new master, and the Manchus sent an army to ensure that she should. The war centered in the terrible siege of Namhan Sansong (南漢山城) and ended in a truce which many thought was traitorous. Two princes were sent to Mukden (奉天) as hostages. The elder, Prince Pong-nim (鳳林), later to become King Hyojong (孝宗), wrote a song on the way:

Have we passed Ch’ŏngsŏngnyŏng yet?

And where is Ch’ohagu?

The north wind is icy cold,

this endless rain—what use is it?

Who will show me the way back

to the place where my beloved king is? (Text 59)

(Ch’ŏngsŏngnyŏng (靑石嶺) is a pass in Manchuria in the province of Shengching (盛京省). Ch’ohagu (草河溝) is nearby.)

But as they crossed the boundary, the prime minister Hong Sŏbong (洪瑞鳳) sang:

When we said farewell to them,

our tears might have been tears of blood.

The waters of the Yalu

were certainly not all clear green.

In the boat the old white-headed oarsman said:

I never saw the like. (Text 60)

And while they were away there Yi Chong-hwan (李延焕 1633—1663) wrote:

[page 53]

Tell me, on this day of bitter wind and snow,

tell me, messenger from the North,

How is the face of Prince So Hae,

how cold is he now?

In his fatherland, a lonely retainer

who cannot die, cannot check his tears. (Text 58)

And the loyalists continued to regret that Korea had capitulated. The ageing Kim Chin-t’ae (金振泰) could sing:

My great sword hangs on the wall

and it is rusting over.

I am old and losing strength,

but I stroke it with frail fingers.

Ah, ah me! Shall I ever see

our Manchu shame blotted out? (Text 72)

**e. The 17th and 18th Centuries.**

The line of division between the 16th and 17th centuries’ sijo is not a clear one. The Neo-Confucianism of the 16th century did not disappear, but gained ground: the 17th century’s preoccupation with rural life and domesticity had its forerunners in the poets of retreat and such rustic songsters as Cho Chon-sŏng. (see above p.47).

The greatest poet of the period is unquestionably Yun Sŏn-do (尹善道1587-1671), known as Kosan (孤山), whose cycle, the Song of the Five Friends, has already been quoted (See above p.28). His longer cycle, The Fisherman’s calendar (漁父四時詞), is reckoned one of the peak achievements of all the sijo writers. Here is a spring song from it:

Is that sound the cuckoo’s call?

And is that green the willow’s fronds?

The fishermen’s hamlet

is hidden in evening smoke. [page 54]

Come my boy, the new fish are rising,

let’s bring out the old nets. (Text 62)

And then winter:

When the clouds have cleared away,

the sunshine is bright and warm.

Heaven and earth are unrolled,

and the sea looks ageless.

The boundless, boundless expanse of waves

is stretched like shimmering silk. (Text 63)

The most famous of all the rural poems is that of Nam Kuman (南九萬 1651—1733), yet another of the Korean Prime Minister poets:

Does the dawn light the east window？

Already larks sing in the sky.

Little boy cowherd,

How comes it that you are not up？

In that field over the hilltop

when will you plough those furrows？ (Text 66)

But Seoul still had its poets. The famous Kim Su-jang (余壽長) describes a scene that is the same today : the Kyŏnghoeru (慶會棒), or Hall of Happy Meetings, the great colonnaded banqueting pavilion in the lotus pond behind the Kyŏngbok Palace, with its background of the two mountains Inwangsan (仁旺山) and Anhyŏn (鞍峴):

Kyŏnghoeru and its pinetrees

are spread out before the eye:

Inwang and Anhyŏn

have become a great green screen.

In the dusk snowy white egrets

are fluttering up and down. (Text 71)

[page 55]

Yi Myŏng-han (李明漢 1595-1692) recalls the tones of earlier periods in a touching poem. He was one of those who went with the princes to exile in Manchuria.

I cling to your sleeve,

heed my tears and do not leave.

The sun has already

sunk beyond the distant hills.

If you trim the flickering guest-room lamp,

and stay awake, you’ll know my pain.(Text 61)

The county prefect Chu Ui-sik (朱義植) at the court of Sukchong (肅宗) shows the beginnings of preciosity in allegorizing:

Forbearance is the house site,

respect and loyalty the pillars.

If all is cemented

with modesty and courtesy,

Though there come four million years of storms,

can there be fear of falling? (Text 67)

There was a flourishing poetry in the court of Sukchong, and this is the time when the lengthy sasol sijo (see above P.11) begins to flourish, when the common folk begin to adopt the form.

From this time sijo declines, the court generally sophisticating it until it was to reach the point in the nineteenth century when the life had practically gone from it altogether. Here come the overworked images ana the pretty conceits, a much shallower kind of poetry, and at the same time, the beginning of the work of compiling anthologies, especially in the intellectual revival during the long reign of Yŏngjo (英祖 1725—1777).

The archer turned lutenist, Kim Sŏng-gi (金聖器), used the seagull image to achieve nothing more than a pretty effect:

[page 56]

White seagull sleeping in the grass,

do not wake up and take fright.

I too am idle,

like you I’m a wanderer.

Later on, when nothing is doing,

I will come and chat with you. (Text 73)

The anthologist Kim Ch’on-t’aek (金天澤) uses the same image:

Stay white gull, let us talk awhile.

There’s no need to be afraid.

Tell me where it was

you gazed upon beautiful lands.

If you will but tell me precisely,

I will soon up and go with you. (Text 70)

And Yi Chong-bo (李鼎輔 1693-1766) takes up the old theme of loyalty, using the well-worn pun on chŏl (節 see above p.20).

How comes it, chrysanthemum,

when orient spring has long since passed,

Leaves fall, heaven freezes,

you alone are in full bloom?

Can none but you vanquish the frosts

in solitary loyalty? (Text 74)

We are coming to a stage when the vitality of the sijo seems to have been played out. This is a time to collect and transcribe, to compose dilettante set pieces, to tinker with clichés. We are in the wake of Korean Confucianism’s last intellectual fillip. Poetry has rigidified, and the sijo has followed the trail of the Chinese character poem, into formalism. [page 57]

**f. The Nineteenth Century and After**

In the nineteenth century the process is complete. The country goes into contented slumbers behind its hermitage walls. It is all set to spend eternity in punctiliously fulfilling the cycles of court and domestic ceremonial, and even entertainment consists in the rehearsing of the old formal pleasures.

The work of anthologizing goes on. And Chinese character translations of the sijo appear in the anthologies during the Kojong (高宗) period.

Only one poet’s name stands out, An Min-yong, already quoted (see above p.14). But he is a poet of flowers and flowerets, matching the style of the painters of the age, and can be unbearably artificial:

“Peach blossom, explain to me,

why do you first don pink cosmetic,

Then in drizzling rains

sadly pour so many tears?”

“I am sad because the springtime

will so quickly pass and go.” (Text 75)

The “Songs of the Plumblossom” (梅花詞) are ten in number. They contain verses such as:

Immature and twisted branch,

I did not believe your promise.

But I see you have kept faith

with a few handfuls of blossom.

When I come with a candle to tend you,

the faintest fragrance floats on the air. (Text 76)

Here we have oriental poetry almost on the brink of parodying itself in terms of the common western misconception of its scope.

Yet the sijo continued to be written, even though it [page 58] lacked the inspiration of its first centuries, the perfection of its greatest period. Large numbers of what were collected into the anthologies were anonymous, like this typical piece:

Stay, o wind, and do not blow.

The leaves of the weeping tree by the arbour are all fallen.

Months and years, stay in your course.

The fair brow and fresh face grow old in vain.

Think of man: he cannot stay boy for ever;

There’s a thing that makes me sad. (Text 79)

But there is no need to lament the decline of the sijo in the nineteenth century. The history of this poem has been an accurate reflection of the history of Korea. When the country was vigorous her sijo were good. When Korea’s faults showed, they were mirrored in her sijo.

The sijo is still the distinctively national form of poetry. Sijo were written by patriots in Japanese prisons, and I have seen pleasant sijo written by Korea’s young hopefuls, today’s schoolboys.

Perhaps the most famous of modern composers in the genre is Yi Un-sang(李殷相). Yi Kwang-su(李光洙 1892— ), missing since the Korean War, the best known of contemporary Korean novelists, and a leader of the new literary movement of the Japanese period, has also used the sijo form. Here is an example of his:

Pirobong is glorious,

but do not ask me how grand.

Man’s eye cannot encompass it

so can his lips describe it?

Should you wish to know Pirobong,

then go, I say, and see it. (Text 81)

Pirobong (昆盧峯) is the highest peak of the Diamond Mountains, [page 59]

It will be interesting to watch how the acceleration in the impact of the West on Korea will affect the sijo. I noticed at last year’s Paegilchang (see above p. 2) that many of the sijo writers were writing linked groups of sijo, not cycles in the old sense, where each stanza had an independent existence of its own, but poems where several sijo were welded into a whole, much in the way in which the three lines are united in the traditional si jo form itself. Thus three sijo become a single poem:

As I savour the ancient pride

and glory of our annals,

I see the soldiers driven back,

the sea of iridescent blood,

I see the confusion of defeat,

the drums throb in my ears.

Each page, each paragraph,

reveals the hero’s careworn face.

Distracted souls, marshal your thought,

and here learn religiously:

The riven spirit of the land

soon must be restored and healed.

The heroes are no more:

the country seethes in chaos.

A kindred divided,

with hearts aching for re union,

Calls out in its distress,

cries aloud for a saviour. (Text 82)

This was the work of 45-year old Chŏng Hyŏn-min (鄭顯珉), a schoolteacher of Chŏlla Namdo. The subject set for the competition by His Excellency President Rhee was “Thoughts on Reading of the Invasion of 1592” (讀壬亂史 [page 60] 有威). It has several points where the languge is reminiscent of the classical sijo, yet in many respects it has an utterly modern feeling. Even though one does not expect the greatest poetry to be produced under competition conditions, the poems written on this occasion may be taken to indicate the trend and potentiality of the traditional forms.

So maybe it is on some such lines that the form can be further developed and exploited.\* But even if it is not, the sijo already written are a heritage of which Korea can be justly proud, and which she should spare no pains in letting other people know about. The sijo has delicacy as well as discipline, and it still has power to move. I cannot forbear to end with a poem which I think will move any man, even the foreign sojourner, who has ever made his home in Seoul. It was written in the 17th century, during the trouble following on the Manchu invasion, by Kim Sang-hŏn (金尙憲 1570—1652). He had refused to accept the shameful peace, and the Manchus were taking him back to Manchuria with them.

I must go, o Samgak San!

We’ll meet again, o River Han!

Today I must leave

my native hills and well-loved streams.

The times are all out of joint.

Who knows whether I’ll return? (Text 56)

\* NB also postscriptum 1 below p. 83.

[page 61]

**Appendix**

**Korean Texts**

These texts will serve two purposes: for those already familiar with the subject they will serve to identify the Korean originals and provide a check on the translations; for those who have no ready access to Korean publications, but some acquaintance with the Korean language, they will provide an opportunity to savour the original poems.

Since the first class of reader will be indifferent as to whether the Chinese locutions in the poems are reproduced here in Chinese character or not, and many who can use the texts in the second way are not familiar enough with the character to read mixed script easily, it has seemed better to reproduce the poems in plain han’gul, explaining some of the difficult or unusual Chinese locutions in the notes given in the course of the English text above. For similar reasons, it has seemed best to use contemporary spelling: the archaic forms of the classic anthologies are merely irritating to those who are not accustomed to them, they pose difficult problems for editorial decisions which I am not competent to make, and they are easily available in cheap editions in Korea.

However, a few of the examples quoted are so Chinese in idiom as to be completely unintelligible in han’gul. These are given first, in both mixed script and plain han’gul.

After these are grouped the cycles of poems which have been translated *in extenso*.

The number after each translation in the English text refers to the serial number of the Korean text in the appendix.

The Korean texts are given in approximately chronological order. Precision is impossible because the dates of composition are mostly unknown. The author’s name is given under the last of the poems attributed to him.

[page 62]

1. 蜀魄啼 山月低하니 相思孤 倚樓頭l라

爾啼苦 我心愁하니 無爾聲이면 無我愁ㅣㄹ랏다

寄語人間 離別客하니 愼莫登 春三月 子規啼

明月樓를 하여라 (端宗大王)

촉백제 산월저하니 상사고 의루뒤라

이제고 아심수하니 무이성이면 무아쉴랏다

기어인간 이별객하니 신막등 춘삼월 자규제

명월루를 하여라 (단종대왕)

2. 秋水는 天一色이요 龍舸는 泛中流ᅵ라

,蕭鼓 一聲에 解萬古之 愁兮로라

우리도 萬民 데리고 同樂太平 하리라 (肅宗大玉)

추수는 천일색이요 용가는 범중류이라

소고 일성에 해만고지 수헤로다

우리도 만민 데리고 동락태평 하리라 (숙종대왕)

3. 明明德 실은 수레 어데메나 가더이고

物格峙 넘어들어 知止고개 지나더라

감이야 가드라만은 誠意舘을 못 갈네라 (盧守愼)

명명덕 실은 수레 어데메나 가더이고

물격치 넘어들어 지지고개 지나더라

감이야 가드라만은 성의관을 못 갈네라 (노수신)

4. 고산구곡

고산구곡담을 사람이 모르더니

주모복거하니 벗님네 다 오신다 [page 63]

어즈버 무이를 상상하고 학주자를 하리라

일곡은 어디메오 관암에 해 비췬다

평무에 내 걷으니 원근이 그림이라

송간에 녹준을 놓고 벗 오는 양 보노라

이곡은 어디메오 화암에 춘만커다

벽파에 꽃을 따워 야외에 보내노라

사람이 승지를 모르니 알게 한들 어떠리

삼곡은 어디메오 취병에 잎 펴졌다

녹수에 산조는 하상기음 하는 적의

반송 수청풍하니 여름 경이 없에라

사곡은 어디메오 송애에 해 넘거다

담심 암영은 온갖 빛이 잠겼에라

임천이 깊도록 좋으니 흥을 계위하노라

오곡은 어디메오 은병이 보기 좋아

수변 정사는 소쇄함도 가이 없다

이 중에 강학도 하려니와 영월금풍 하올이라

육곡은 어디메오 조협에 물이 넓다

나와 고기와 뉘야 더욱 즐기는고

황혼에 낚대를 메고 대월귀를 하노라

칠곡은 어디메오 풍암에 추색 좋다

청상이 엷게 치니 절벽이 금수로다

한암에 혼자 앉아서 집을 잊고 있노라

팔곡은 어디메오 금탄에 달이 밝다 [page 64]

옥진금휘로 수삼곡을 노론말이

고조를 알리 업쓴이 혼자 즐겨 하노라

구곡은 어디메오 문산에 세모커다

기암괴석이 눈 속에 묻혔어라

유인은 오지 아니하고 볼 것 없다 하더라 (율곡 이이)

5. 호아곡

서산채미

아이야 구럭망태 거두서산에 날늦거다

밤 지난 고사리 하마 아니 늙었으랴

이 몸이 푸세 아니면 조석 어이 지내리

동간조어

아이야 도롱 삿갓 찰화 동간에 비 지거다

기나긴 낚대에 미늘 없은 낚시 매어

저 고기 놀라지 마라 내 흥겨워 하노라

남묘궁경

아이야 죽조반 다오 남무에 일이 하다

서투른 따비를 눌 마주 잡으려뇨

두어라 성세궁경도 역군은이샷다

북곽취기

아이야 소 먹여 내어 북곽에 새 술 먹자

대취한 얼굴을 달 빛에 실어 오니

어즈버 회황상인을 오늘 다시 보와다 (조존성)

6. 오우가

내 벗이 몇이나 하니 수석과 송죽이라 [page 65]

동산에 달 오르니 긔 더욱 반갑고야

두어라 이 다섯 밖에 또 더하여 무엇하리

구름 빛이 좋다 하나 검기를 자로 한다

바람 소리 맑다 하나 그칠 적이 하노매라

좋고도 그칠 뉘 없기는 물 뿐인가 하노라

꽃은 무슨 일로 피며서 수이 지고

풀은 어이 하여 푸르는 듯 누르나니

아마도 변하지 아닐 손 바위 뿐인가 하노라

더우면 꽃이 피고 추우면 잎 지거늘

솔아 너는 어이 눈 서리를 모르는다

구천에 뿌리 곧은 줄로 하여 아노라

나무도 아닌 것이 풀도 아닌 것이

곧기는 뉘 시기며 속은 어이 비었는다

서렇고 사시에 푸르니 그를 좋아 하노라

작은 것이 높이 떠서 만물을 다 비치니

밤중에 광명이 너만한 이 또 있느냐

보고도 말 아니하니 내 벗인가 하노라 (고산 윤선도)

7. 춘산에 눈 녹인 바람 건듯 불어 간 데 없다

적은 덧 빌어다가 불리고저 머리 위에

귀 밑에 해 묵은 서리를 녹여 볼가 하노라

8. 한 손에 막대 들고 또 한 손에 가시 쥐고

늙는 길 가서로 막고 오는 백발 막대로 치려더니

백발이 제 먼저 알고 지름길로 오도라 (우탁) [page 66]

9. 이화에 월백하고 은한이 삼경인 제

일지 춘심을 자규야 아랴마는

다정도 병인 양하여 잠 못 들어 하노라 (이조년)

10. 백설이 잦아진 골에 구름이 머흐레라

반가운 매화는 어느 곳에 피었는고

석양에 홀로 서 있어 갈 곳 몰라 하노라 (이색)

11. 이런들 어떠하며 저런들 어떠하리

만수산 드령칡이 얽어진들 그 어떠리

우리도 이 같이 얽어져 백년까지 누리리라 (이 방원 태종 대왕)

12. 이 몸이 죽고 죽어 일백번 고쳐 죽어

백골이 진토 되어 넋이라도 있고 없고

임 향한 일편단심이야 가실 줄이 있으랴 (포은 정몽주)

13. 오백년 도읍지를 필마로 돌아드니

산천은 의구하되 인걸은 간 데 없네

어즈버 태평연월이 꿈이런가 하노라 (길재)

14. 눈맞아 휘어진 대를 뉘라서 굽다 하던고

굽을 절이면 눈 속에 푸르르랴

아마도 세한고절은 너 뿐인가 하노라

15. 흥망이 유수하니 만월대도 추초로다

오백년 왕업이 목적에 붙였으니

석양에 지나는 손이 눈물겨워 하노라 (원천석) [page 67]

16. 대추 볼 붉은 골에 밤은 어이 듣드리며

벼 벤 그루에 게는 어이 내리는고

술 익자 체 장사 돌아가니 아니 먹고 어이리 (황희)

17. 장백산에 기를 꽃고 두만강에 말 씻기니

썩은 저 선비야 우리 아니 사나이냐

어떻다 능연각 화상을 우리 먼저 하리라

18. 삭풍은 나무 끝에 불고 명월은 눈 속에 찬데

만리 변성에 일장검 짚고 서서

긴 파람 큰한 소리에 거칠 것이 없어라 (김종서)

19. 수양산 바라보며 이제를 한하노라

주려 죽을진들 채미도 하는 것가

아무리 푸새의 것인들 긔 뉘 따에 났다니

20. 이 몸이 죽어 가서 무엇이 될고 하니

봉래산 제일봉에 낙락장송 되었다가

백설이 만건곤할 제 독야청청하리라 (성삼문)

21. 방 안에 혔는 촛불 눌과 이별하였관대

겉으로 누물 지고 속 타는 줄 모르는다

우리도 천리에 임 이별하고 속 타는 듯 하여라 (이개)

22. 까마귀 눈비 맞아 회는 듯 검노매라

야광 명월이 밤인들 어두우랴

임 향한 일편단심이야 고칠 줄이 있으랴 (박팽년)

23. 간 밤에 부던 바람 눈서 리 치단 말가

낙락장송이 다 기울어 지단 말가 [page 68]

하물며 못다 핀 꽃이야 일러 무삼 하리요 (유응부)

24. 초당에 일이 없어 거문고를 베고 누워

태평성대를 꿈에나 보려터니

문전에 수성 어적이 잠든 나를 깨워라 (유성원)

25. 간 밤에 우던 여울 슬피울어 지내거나

이제야 생각하니 임이 울어 보내도다

저 물이 거스리 흐르과저 나도 울어 예리라 (원호)

26. 천만리 머나먼 길에 고운 임 여이옵고

내 마음 둘데 없어 냇가에 앉아이다

저 물도 내 안 같아여 울어 밤길 예놋다 (왕방연)

27. 굽어는 천심 녹수 돌아보니 만첩청산

십장홍진이 얼마나 가렸는고

강호에 월백하거든 더욱 무심하여라 (이현보)

28. 산은 옛 산이로되 물은 옛 물이 아니로다

주야에 흘으니 옛 물이 있을 소냐

인걸도 물과 같아여 가고 아니 오노매라

29. 어져 내 일이야 그릴 줄은 모르더냐

있으라 하더면 가랴마는 제 구태여

보내고 그리는 정을 나도 몰라 하노라

30. 청산리 벽계쉬야 수이 감을 자랑 마라

일도창해하면 다시 오기 어려워라

명월이 만공산하니 쉬어 간들 어떠리 (황진이) [page 69]

31. 풍상이 섞어 친 날에 갓 피온 황국화를

금분에 가득 담아 옥당에 보내오니

도리야 꽃이온 양 마라 임의 뜻을 알괘라 (송순)

32. 두류산 양단수 예 듣고 이제 보니

도화 뜬 맑은 물에 산영 조차 잠겼어라

아이야 무릉이 어디오 나는 옌가 하노라 (조식)

33. 신라 팔백년의 높도록 무은 탑을

천근 든 쇠북 소리 치도록 울릴시고

들 건너 적막 산정에 모경 도울 뿐이라 (송강 정철)

34. 청량산 육륙봉을 아는 이 나와 백구

백구야 헌사하랴 못 믿을 순 도화로다

도화야 떠지 마라 어주자가 알가 하노라

35. 청산은 어찌하여 만고에 푸르르며

유수는 어찌하여 주야에 긋지 아니는고

우리도 그치지 마라 만고 상청하리라

36. 우부도 알며 하거니 긔 아니 쉬운가

성인도 못 다 하거니 긔 아니 어려운가

쉽거나 어렵거나 중에 늙는 줄을 몰라라 (퇴계 이황)

37. 태산이 높다 하되 하늘 아래 뫼이로다

오르고 또 오르면 못 오를 이 없건마는

사람이 제 아니 오르고 뫼를 높다 하더라 (양사언)

38. 일중 금 까마귀 가지 말고 내 말 들어

너는 반포조라 조중의 증삼이니 [page 70]

오늘은 나를 위하여 장재중천 하였고자

39. 만수산 만수동에 만수천이 있더이다

이 물에 술을 빚어 만수주라 하더이다

이 잔을 잡으오시면 만수무강 하시리라 (노진)

40. 바람은 절로 맑고 달은 절로 밝다

죽정송감에 일점진도 없으니

일장금 만축서 더욱 쇄려하다

41. 날이 저물거늘 나외야 할 일 없어

송관을 닫고 월하에 누웠으니

세상의 티끌 마음이 일호말도 없다 (권호문)

42. 말없는 청산이요 태 없는 유수로다

값 없는 청풍이요 임자 없는 명월이라

이 중에 병 없는 이 몸이 분별 없이 늙으리라 (성혼)

43. 한산섬 달 밝은 밤에 수루에 혼자 앉아

큰 칼 옆에 차고 깊은 시름 하는 차에

어디서 일성호가는 나의 애를 끊나니 (이순신)

44. 홍진의 꿈 깨연지 이십년이 어제로다

녹양 방초에 절로 놓인 말이 되어

시시히 고재를 들어 임자 그려 우노라 (장경세)

45. 철령 높은 재에 자고 가는 저 구름아

고신 원루를 비삼아 띠어다가

임 계신 구중궁궐에 뿌려 본들 어떠리 (이항복) [page 71]

46. 달이 두렷하여 벽공에 걸렸으니

만고풍상에 떨어짐 직하다마는

지금에 취객을 위하여 장조 금준 하도다 (이덕형)

47. 반중 조홍감이 고와도 보이나다

유자가 아니 라도 품음 직 하다만은

품어 가 반길이 없을새 글로 설워하노라

48. 부부 삼길 적에 하 중하게 삼겼으니

부창부수하여 일가천지 화하리라

날마다 거안제미를 맹광 같게 하여라

49. 천지간 만물 중에 사람이 취귀하니

취귀할 바는 오륜이 아니온가

사람이 오륜을 모르면 불원금수 하리라 (노계 박인로)

50. 청초 우거진 골에 자는다 누웠는다

홍안을 어디 두고 백골만 묻혔는다

잔 잡아 권할 이 없으니 그를 슬허하노라 (임제)

51. 추산이 석양을 띠고 강심에 잠겼는데

일간죽 비끼 들고 소정에 앉았으니

천공이 한가히 여겨 달을 조차 보내도다 (유자신)

52. 서까래 기나 짜르나 기둥이 기우나 트나

수간 모옥이 적은 줄 웃지 마라

어즈버 만산 나월이 다 내 것인가 하노라

53. 산촌에 눈이 오니 돌길이 묻혔에라

시비를 여지 마라 날 찾을 이 뉘 있으리 [page 72]

밤중만 일편명월이 긔 벗인가 하노라 (신흠)

54. 산촌에 밤이 드니 먼뎃 개 짖어 온다

시비를 열고 보니 하늘이 차고 달이로다

저 개야 공산 잠든 달을 짖어 무삼하리오 (천금)

55. 오동에 듣는 빗발 무심히 듣건만은

내 시름 하니 잎잎이 수성이로다

이후야 잎 넓은 나무를 심을 줄이 있으랴 (김상용)

56. 가노라 삼각산아 다시 보자 한강수야

고국 산천을 떠나고자 하랴만은

시절이 하 수상하니 올똥 말똥 하여라 (김상헌)

57. 헛글고 싯근 문서 다 주어 후리치고

필마 추퐁에 채를 쳐 돌아오니

아무리 매인 새 놓이다 이 대도록 시원하랴 (김광욱)

58. 풍설 섞어 친 날에 묻노라 북래사자야

소해 용안이 얼마나 치우신고

고국에 못 죽는 고신이 눈물 겨워 하노라 (이정환)

59. 청석령 지나거냐 초하구가 어디메오

호퐁도 참도 찰사 궂은 비는 무슨 일고

뉘라서 내 행색 그려내어 임 계신 데 드릴고 (효종 대왕)

60. 이 이별하던 날에 피눈물이 난지 만지

압록강 내린 물이 푸른 빛이 전혀 없다

배 위에 허여 센 사공이 처음 보롸 하더라 (홍서붕) [page 73]

61. 울며 잡은 소매 떨치고 가지 마소

초원 장제에 해 다 져 저물었다

객창에 잔등을 돋우고 앉아 새와 보면 알리라 (이명한)

62. 우는 것이 뻐구기냐 푸른 것이 버들 숲가

어촌 두세집이 모연에 잠겼어라

아이야 새 고기 오른다 헌 그물 내어라

63. 구름이 걷은 후에 햇빛이 두껍거다

천지 폐색하되 바다는 의구하다

가 없고 가 없는 물결이 깁 폈는 듯 하여라 (윤선도)

64. 임이 헤오시매 나는 전혀 믿었더니

날 사랑하던 정을 뉘 손대 옮기신고

처음에 뒤시던 것이면 이대도록 설우랴

65. 청산도 절로 절로 녹수도 절로 절로

산 절로 절로 수 절로절로 신수간에 나도 절로절로

이중에 절로 자란 몸이 늙기도 절로하리라 (우암 송시열)

66. 동창이 밝았느냐 노고지리 우지진다

소 칠 아이는 여태 아니 일었느냐

재 넘어 사래 긴 밭을 언제 갈려 하느니 (남구만)

67. 인심은 터이 되고 효제충신 기둥 되어

예의염치로 가지기 이었으니

천만년 풍우를 만난들 기울 줄이 있으랴 (주의식)

68. 오늘은 천렵하고 내일은 산행하세 [page 74]

꽃다림 모레 하고 강신을란 글피 하리

그글피 편사회 할제 각지호과 하시소 (김유기)

69. 옷 벗어 아이 주어 술집에 볼모하고

청천을 우러러 달더러 물은 말이

어즈버 천고 이백이 날과 어떠하더뇨

70. 백구야 말 물어보자 놀라지 마라 서라

명구승지를 어데 어데 보왔는다

날드려 자세히 일러든 너와 제 가 놀리라 (김천택)

71. 경회루 만주송이 눈앞에 버려 있고

인왕 안현은 취병이 되었는데

석양에 편편 백로는 오락가락 하노매 (김수장)

72. 벽상에 걸린 칼이 보미가 나단 만가

공 없이 늙어 가니 속절 없이 만지노라

어즈버 병자 국치를 씻어 볼가 하노라 (김진태)

73. 요화에 잠든 백구 선잠 깨어 나지 마라

나도 일 없어 강호객 되었노라

이후는 찾으리 없으니 너를 조차 놀리라 (김성기)

74. 국화는 무삼 일로 삼월동퐁 다 보내고

낙목한천에 네 혼자 피었나니

아마도 오상고절은 너 뿐인가 하노라 (이정보)

75. 도화는 무삼 일로 홍장을 지어 내서

동풍 세우에 눈물을 먹음으고

삼춘이 쉬운 양하여 그를 설어하노라 [page 75]

76. 어리고 성긴 가지 너를 믿지 않았더니

눈 기약 능히 지켜 두세 송이 피었구나

촉 잡고 가까이 사랑할 제 암향 조차 부동터라

77. 국화야 너는 어이 삼월 동풍 싫어한다

성긴 울 찬 비 뒤에 차라리 얼지언정

반드시 군화로 더불어 한 봄 말려 하노라 (안민영)

78. 남무아미타불 남무아미타불 한들 중마다 성불하며

공자 I 왈 맹자 I 왈 한들 사람마다 득도하랴

아무도 득도 성불은 도량난인가 하노라

79. 바람아 부들 마라 휘어진 정자나무 닢이 다 떨어진다

세월아 가지 마라 옥빈홍안이 공로로다

인생이 불득 항소년이니 그를 설어하노라

80. 만경 창파수에 다 못 씻을 천고수를

일호주 가져다가 오늘이야 씻있고야

태백이 이러하므로 장취불성하니라 (작자미상)

81. 비로봉 대자연을 사람아 묻지 마소

눈도 미치 못 보거니 입이 능히 말할손가

비로봉 알려 하읍거든 가 보소서 하노라 (이광수)

82. 청사에 길이 두고 빛내일 자랑일새

도둑메 몰고 쫓고 앞바단 피빛인데

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흐린 맘을 가다듬고 정성껏 읽어 보라

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**POSTSCRIPTA** (August 1958)

1. Contemporary sijo

In the last few months, two books have been published in Seoul which contain information about the present state of sijo writing.

First there is 名時調鑑賞 (*Some Notes on the Appreciation of Famous Sijo*) by Yi Pyŏng-gi (李秉岐) and Sin Sŏk-chŏng (辛夕汀). This very attractively produced book contains the texts of some 80 sijo, with a detailed commentary on each. The first half are all the work of contemporary poets.

Then there is 現代時調選叢 (*Anthology of Contemporary Sijo*) edited by Yi Pyŏng-gi (李秉岐) and Yi T’ae-guk (李泰極). This is the first volume of a 時調文學全集 (Complete Collection of Sijo) and contains upwards of 500 poems by twentieth century writers, thus providing excellent material for the study of modern sijo. A high proportion of the poems are in linked groups or cycles. Most of them keep closely to the standard form so far as the syllable count is concerned, but some of the writers tend to be cavalier in their treatment of its internal structure.

2. The origin of the name sijo

It has been suggested that the word *sijo* refers to the musical version of the poem and not to the literary form. Although the theory is not advanced by any writer I have come across, and it seems by no means proven, it is worth noticing.

According to this suggestion 時調 would mean a melody regulated by time. *Prima facie*, this might appear to be applicable to any, or at least most, music. On the other hand a similar objection can be made to the frequently expressed idea that the word means “seasonal song”, since practically everything in Oriental art of this period has a seasonal correspondence.

In support of this derivation are the fact that the earliest uses of the word are in a distinctly musical context  [page 84] (see above p. 34) and that, as explained below, the regulated time of the same basic melody is imposed on any of the lyrics, without reference to the relative lengths of the words

Furthermore the use of “sinjo” (新調, new song,), as a synonym for “sijo” in the Koryŏ dynasty reference (cf. p. 34) is intelligible if it refers to the time of the emergence of the new style of song.

3. Some further notes on the singing of sijo

Since singing is so integrally a part of the sijo tradition, it may be well to expand the remarks on the art given above (p. 11), even though there is no chance of doing full justice to the subject. A few of the poems have modern settings, but among the chap-books on any bookstall you can find little gaudily covered pocket-sized booklets which mingle transcriptions of the traditional sijo melodies with the more familiar folksongs, and there are many people in Korea who sing sijo professionally or for pleasure. Since their knowledge is derived almost entirely from an aural tradition, I have been able to find very little information on the subject in print, and the practitioners have rarely analysed their knowledge sufficiently to be able to give clear and concise descriptions. The additional and emended information given here is mostly derived from conversations with members of the Suwon Sijo Society and from the relevant chapter of Professor Yi Hye-gu’s recent book of studies on Korean Music (李惠求, 韓國音樂研究).

The melodies are divided according to length of the text into:

平時調 p’yŏngsijo, the standard or plain form;

엇 時調 ŏssijo, also written 旕時調, and sometimes called “half sasŏl”(半辭說);

辭說時調 sasŏl sijo, the most expanded form, also called 弄時調, nongsijo. (For the two latter cf above p. 11)

Within each of these groups the melody is virtually invariable, whatever the words may be. If the syllables are more than average they must be sung quickly, if fewer, they must be sung more slowly. As a result two people [page 85] singing different words simultaneously would be singing in unison so far as the notes were concerned. The two expanded forms use the same musical phrases as the standard form, but with repetitions and rearrangements. The first of the appended musical transcriptions gives the melody of the standard sijo (平時調) as sung in Seoul.

The falsetto, or “forced” sijo, called chirŭm sijo, is a variant of this melody. The first of the three verses is sung in a loud falsetto. The melody is a transposed variation on the standard melody, and is peculiarly haunting in the version sung by men, suggesting something of the heroic counter-tenor formerly in vogue in European opera. The second and third verses are the same as in the standard form.

The woman’s chirŭm is less dramatic and altogether more gentle and more ornate. Women singers can, however, sing the male chirŭm with beautiful effect.

This type of melody is by tradition associated with certain of the poems to which it is deemed appropriate. Examples are: “Stay o wind” (p. 79), “The North Wind” (p. 40), and “Plant the banner” (p. 40).

Because of the high first verse, this type of melody is also sometimes called 頭擧, tugŏ. Another kind, with the middle verse varied, is called 中擧, chunggo, or 중거리; it uses similar melodic elements to those of the chirum sijo.

Three scales are used: p’yŏngjo (平調), which roughly corresponds in effect to the western major; kyemyŏnjo (界面調), which is roughly like the minor ; and ujo (羽調), which is lower and has a masculine effect similar to that of a martial bass. (But it is not in fact a plain bass voice).

There are considerable regional variations in the performance of sijo. Four main styles seem to be distin¬guished: the Seoul style, kyŏngjo (京調), more commonly called kyŏngp’an (京판); the Kyŏngsang style, yŏngjo (嶺調) or yŏngp’an (嶺판), the name being derived from the expression Yŏngnam (嶺南), meaning “South of the Ch’upung Pass” (秋風嶺) (this pass marks the boundary of Kŏngsang Province as one passes into it from the capital); [page 86] and the Chŏlla style, wan jo (完調) or wanp’an (完판), from Wanju (完州)county in North Cholla. There is also a style peculiar to South Ch’ungch’ ŏng Province.

The singers of each regional style take a great pride in their own technique. The techniques mirror the traditional characteristics of the provinces. The Yŏngp’an of Kyŏngsang is vigorous and unrestrained, but the Kyŏngp’an of Seoul is smooth and comparatively gracious, even to the western ear. The executants of neither will allow much merit to the other.

It is hardly surprising to find that sijo singers maintain that there is a connection between music and morals. The mere practice of singing plain sijo is said to induce tranquillity of mind and to banish care. Certainly there is little chance for an agitated person to produce the sustained notes of some passages, lasting up to 15 or more seconds in one breath. (It is claimed that this feature suggested the name Eternal (or Long) Words in the title of Kim Ch’ ŏn-t’aek’s famous anthology. See above p. 32.)

It is proper for the seniors in a group gathered to enjoy sijo-singing to perform first. It is impolite to repeat a lyric already sung by someone else, but if one be driven to do so by ignorance of all else, the previous singer’s pardon should be sought in advance.

Tradition is in favour of the composition and singing of special sijo for congratulatory and commemorative occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and even memorials of the departed (cf No Chin’s song, above p. 13). In this case the text is written on a long scroll of paper and treated exactly as is the text of a speech for a similar purpose; after the poem has been sung, the paper is presented to the congratulated person.

Sijo can also be used to pledge cups of wine, and there is at least one which can be sung to announce that it is time for the guests to depart from a banquet. But in the latter case, the text begins with words which are thought to be too blatantly obvious to be sung without giving offence. Therefore the first two phrases are not sung. [page 87]

This is similar in effect to the unsung ending of all sijo (see above pp. 10 and 20). One reason for this latter custom is thought to be that the usual words of this last phrase were in grammatical forms that could not respectfully be used in the presence of the king or any other superior personage. But it should be noted that the abrupt ending often gives a dramatic emphasis to the poem.

4. A note on the transcriptions

These transcriptions will not enable anyone who has never been taught the art to sing sijo correctly. But they will give an inkling of the style of the music and the way it fits the words, and outline the charm of the “falsetto” melody. They may also help those who have the opportunity of hearing performances or recordings of the songs to appreciate the structure of the melody.

Some initial information was derived from Professor Yi Hye-gu’s book mentioned above, and from the transcription by Chang Sa-hun (張師勛) given there, but it has been simplified and modified according to performances which I have heard and made notes on. It represents the Seoul style of singing. But I have made no attempt to indicate the accompaniment on the double-ended drum (長短), which is practically indispensable in performance.

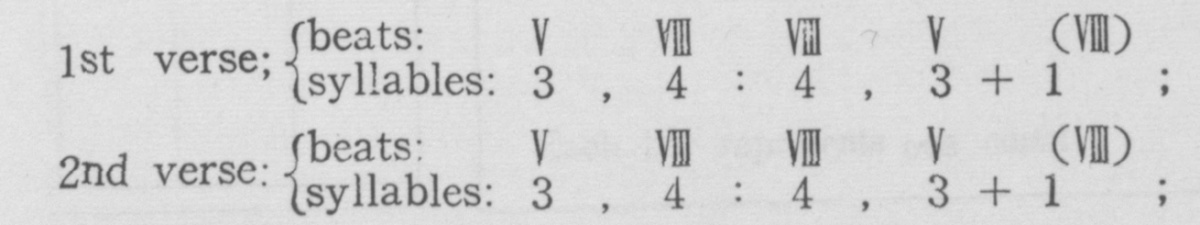
The musical structure falls into groups of slow beats as follows:

1st verse: 5 : 8 : 8 : 5:(8)

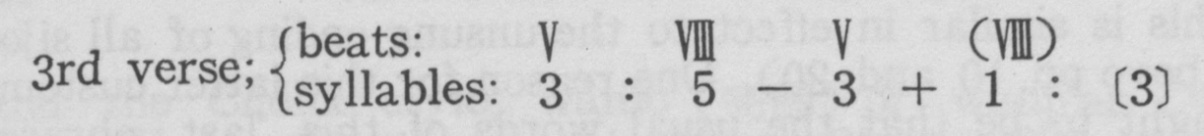
2nd verse: 5 : 8 : 8 : 5:(8)

3rd verse: 5 : 8 : 5 : (8)

If these are placed alongside the syllable units of the poem, with the number of beats in roman figures and the number of syllables according to the standard form (see above p. 9) in arabic figures, we have the following scheme:



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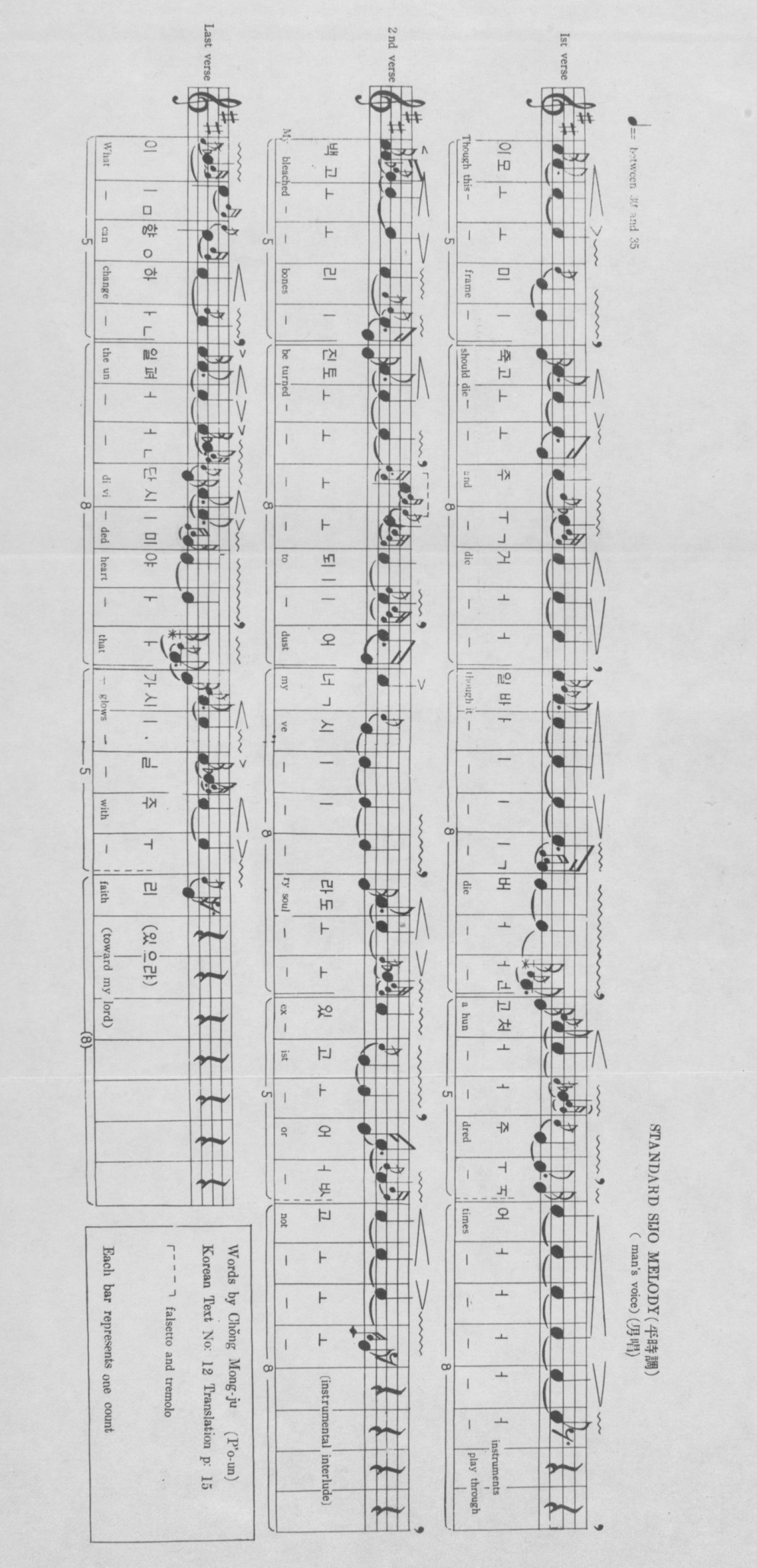


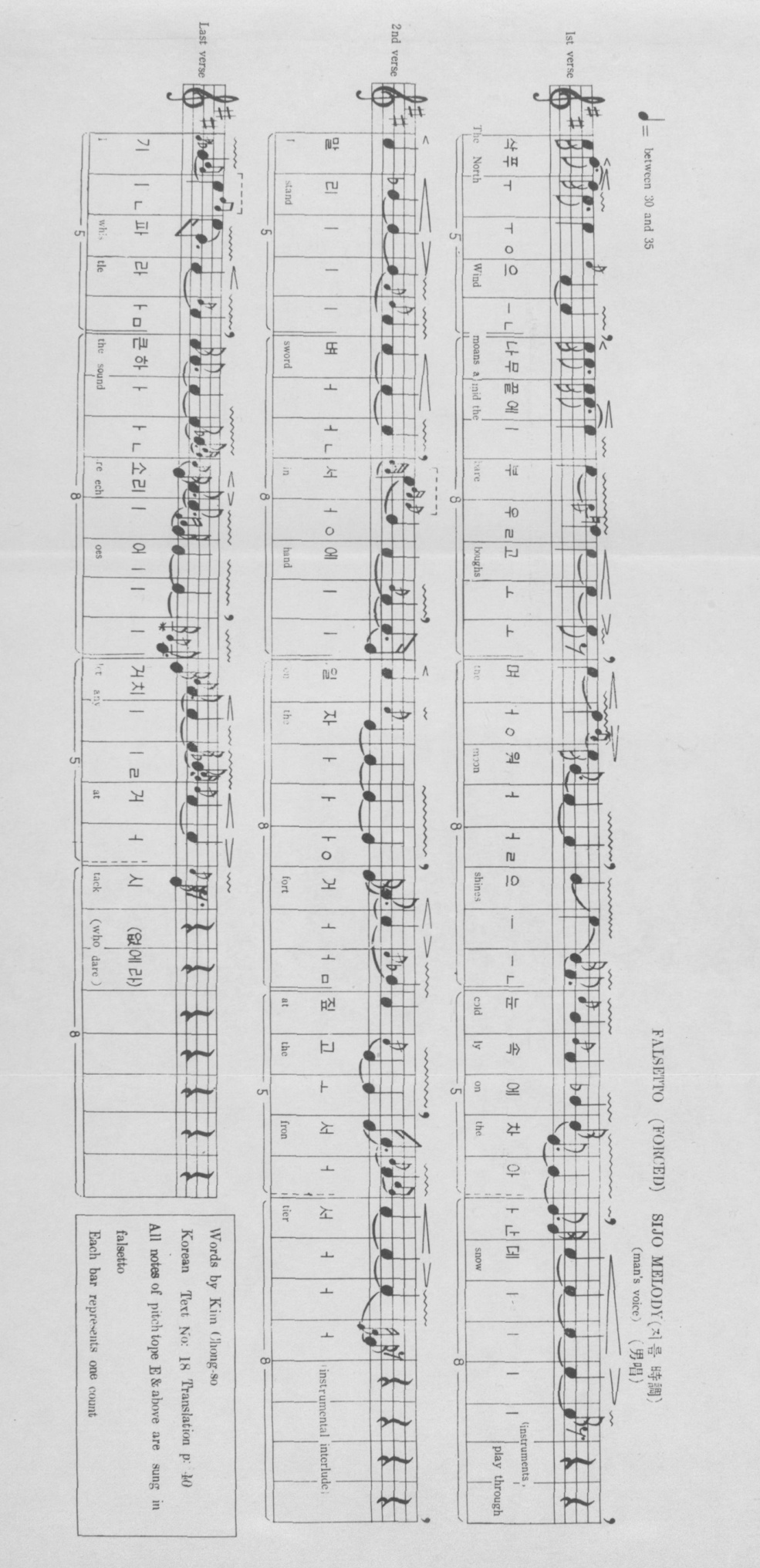
But since the number of syllables is actually variable (cf. above p. 8), whatever number of syllables may fall into any quarter verse of the poem, they must fill out, and not overspill, the appropriate number of musical beats. Diphthongs are split up into their component vowels if they are to be sung on a long note, and final nasal consonants may be vocalized.

Aside from the embellishing trills—including at least two different kinds of trilling techniques which are not accurately distinguishable in normal notation—there are really only four different pitches used in the standard melody. Of these, the highest and the lowest are used only at two points each, serving to keep the tune interesting, but also to underline the literary structure of the poem, especially in the last line, where the high note reinforces the effect of the twist (轉 see above p. 11) and the low note initials the closing phrase.

The English translation is not suitable for performance with the Korean music, but is added as a further help in showing the relation between the words and the melody.

Skill and beauty in sijo singing depend on tone production, crescendo, the execution of the trills, and above all, that indefinable quality often called interpretation, which is as elusive in this kind of music as it is in our own.





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ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, KOREA BRANCH

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL, April 1957—August 1958

The society is now well into its third year of revived activity, and is supporting a full and varied programme with a membership list that has trebled during the past twelve months. The payment of dues and the sale of the Transactions are maintaining the already sound financial condition of the branch.

The election of the council took place at the annual general meeting, which preceded the regular monthly meeting in the University Club rooms on 4 December 1957.

The monthly meetings, generally held on the first Wednesday evening of the month, have all been well attended. On several occasions the accommodation provided was not sufficient for the comfort of our guests.

In April 1957 the society heard a paper from Dr Richard Brown on Ceremonial Drinking in the Far East. Dr Brown had his very varied collection of oriental drinking vessels on display after the paper. In May, Dr Paul Crane gave a paper on Korean Postage Stamps and their history, which he illustrated with excellent coloured slides of his collection. In June Mr Hwang Su-yong read a paper on Korean Pagodas. All these meetings were held in the USIS Theatre at the American Embassy.

No meetings were held during the three summer months. The series re-opened in October with a paper on Korean Surnames by Mr Carl Miller, which was given at the Choson Hotel.

After this, meetings were held regularly in the University Club rooms at the Sogong Building. In November Mr Edward Wagner read a paper on Political Factionalism in the Yi Dynasty. In December, Father Richard Rutt gave a talk on Sijo poetry, which is printed in this volume. In January Mr Yi Kwang-in read a paper on Hop’ae (name tags used in census taking); and in February Dr Kim Ha-t’ae spoke on the Transmission of Neo-confucianism to Japan by Kang Hang, a prisoner of war in the Hideyoshi invasions. [page 90]

For the March meeting, members and guests were invited to the main studio of the Korean Broadcasting Station on Namsan, where Dr Yi Hye-gu gave an Outline of Korean Music, illustrated by many recordings. Afterwards the KBS collection of musical instruments was on view to those present.

The April meeting heard a paper from Dr Richard A Gard on Buddhism; the May meeting had a talk on Korean Medicine from Dr Paul Crane. These two meetings were held in the University Club, but the June meeting at which Father Rutt spoke on Rural Chinese Studies, was held in the Seoul Chamber of Commerce. After this the monthly lecture meetings were discontinued for the summer recess.

During the summer the society arranged and sponsored three field trips. In May a three day excursion visited Pulkuksa and Kyongju. In June a four day trip was made in South Cholla province, and in July another four day trip went to the Soraksan area on the East Coast. All these trips were arranged with the cooperation of the Ministry of Transportation and the response from members and friends was more than gratifying.

When Mr Scherbacher left Korea in June of this year, the council coopted his successor at the USIS, Mr Gregory Henderson (who is a member of long standing), to fill his post as librarian of the society. Mr Henderson is actively engaged in efforts to reconstitute the library.

We are glad that it is once again possible, after a lapse of some twenty years, to have the Transactions printed in Korea, and we hope in the near future to be able to reprint some of the back numbers, which are now practically unobtainable.

In view of the high degree of interest shown in the society’s activities, both inside and outside Korea, the council feels confident that the society can maintain the standard of its work, and even hopes, with the cooperation of its members, to expand and improve on what has been achieved in the past.

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