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Paegun Sosol : The White Cloud Essays of Yi Kyubo

translated and annotated by Richard Rutt

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Paegun sosol* has several claims to attention. It is a collection of essays on poetry by the first Korean to write in that genre and to leave a quantity of poetry. Its content therefore merits investigation. Then comes the question of the origin of *Paegun sosol*, and whether it is really or entirely the work of Yi Kyubo. Finally, it turns out to be pleasant reading.

Yi Kyubo (1168-1241), a Koryo statesman and poet, is an important figure in the history of Korean literature, the earliest writer in Korea whose works survive completely and in notable quantity. He was a poet, writing—as was natural for his period—in literary Chinese. Like his contemporaries, he was drawn to the poets of Sung, who were the nearest Chinese to them in time and whose culture deeply affected the whole artistic culture of the Koryo dynasty. Although Yi Kyubo developed an affection for T’ao Ch’ien (who came to have a preponderant influence on Korean poetry) it was the Sung writers, Mei Yao-ch’en, Ou-yang Hsiu, Su Tung-p’o, and others, that attracted him most. During his last years of frailty and ill-health he felt a close affinity with the Tang poet Po Chu-i; but Po Chu-i of all T’ang poets most resembles the poets of Sung. The Sung poets provided the writers of mid-Koryo with their models. Su Tung-p’o above all was wildly popular, and was imitated with undiscriminating enthusiasm—a fact reflected in Yi Kyubo’s essays on plagiarism and originality.

The same Sung writers also invented *shih-hua* (in Korean, *sihwa*), ‘poetry anecdotes’ or brief essays about poems and poetic technique. Sihwa can also be considered as a special kind of sosol ‘little essays’. Yi Kyubo is the earliest Korean writer known to have written *sihwa*. *Paegun sosol* is a collection of them. *Paegun*, ‘white cloud’, was his favourite literary name, and is the one used in the village district of Kanghwa Island where his grave is still tended. (Modern Korean handbooks frequently refer to *Paegun sosol* as a collection of novels. This shows, alas, not only that the writers of the handbooks have never read the work, but also that they do not know that *sosol* has come to [page 2] mean ‘a novel’ only since the end of the nineteenth century.)

Very shortly before Yi Kyubo died, his son Yi Ham collected as many of his father’s writings as he could find and had them printed in the traditional form of collected works by a single author, a *chip*, under the title of *Tongguk Yi Sangguk chip*, ‘collected works of Prime Minister Yi of Korea’ (referred to in the notes below as TYSC). This *chip* and *Paegun sosol* are the only writings ascribed to Yi Kyubo that are known to have survived. The chip comprises fifty *kwon* in the woodblock edition and contains several thousand items of poetry and prose.

In comparison with the chip, *Paegun sosol* is a tiny document. It is known only from manuscripts, and was never printed until after the Korean war of 1950. It forms the first part of a four-volume collection of sihwa called *Sihwa ch’ongnimp* ‘dense forest of poetry anecdotes’, and cannot be shown ever to have existed apart from that collection. *Sihwa ch’ongnim* was compiled early in the seventeenth century by Hong Manjong, a scholar whose writings reflect the developed taste of his period for literary and textual criticism. The best-known manuscript, which appears to differ very little from the three or four other known copies, belongs to Seoul National University, where it forms part of the Karam Collection, amassed by the bibliophile and scholar, Yi Pyonggi (1891-1968). A mimeographed edition was issued in *Kungmun-hak ch’aryo* 5, Vol I, pp 4-13, Mullim-sa, Seoul 1961. Another edition of *Paegun sosol* only is in *Koryo myonghyon chip* 1 pp 573—80, Songgyun-gwan University, Seoul 1973. Ch’a Chuhwan includes the text of *Paegun sosol* with a Korean translation in *Han’guk kojon munhak taegye* 19: Sihwa wa mallok pp 3—35, Minjung Sogwan, Seoul 1966—but this edition omits sections II and VIII. There is another edition with a Korean translation by Chang Sonjong in *Han’gugui sasang tae chonjip* 5 pp 398-402 and 48-64, Tonghwa Ch’ulp’an Kongsa, Seoul 1972. Ch’oe Namson, in his revision of his edition of *Samguk yusa* (Sinjong Samguk yusa pp 69-72, Samjung-dang, Seoul 1946) prints the first five sections of Paegun sosol as additional related material.

Two modern essays discuss *Paegun sosol* in detail. So Susaeng contributed ‘Paegun sosol yon’gu’to *Kyongbuk Taehak nonmun chip* 8, pp 1-33, Kyongbuk University, Taegu 1964, and expanded it for reprinting in his *Koryo-jo han-mun-hak yon’gu* pp 140—97, Yongsol Ch’ulp’an-sa, Taegu 1971. Yi Yonguk published ‘Yi Kyubo wa Paegun sosol’ in *Haegun Sagwan Hakkyo yon’gu pogo* 1964 pp 99-112. Both So Susaeng and Yi Yonguk consider the question of whether Yi Kyubo himself compiled *Paegun sosol*. So Susaeng inclines to believe that he did, and that he did it in his last years. Yi Yonguk thinks it likely that Hong [page 3] Manjong made the compilation when he edited *Sihwa ch’ongnim*.

Both So Susaeng and Yi Yonguk list passages in *Paegun sosol* which are also found in *Tongguk Yi Sangguk chip*. So Susaeng found sixteen such passages, and Yi Yonguk twenty-one. In the notes to this translation I have identified the concurrence of twenty-six sections, leaving only six sections of *Paegun sosol* which have no traceable connection with the *chip*. Significantly, five of them are at the beginning and one at the very end. (The substantial passage in *Paegun sosol* 11 which does not occur in the chip is a special case, forming only part of a section).

The text is divided into various sections by modern editors and commentators. So Susaeng numbers twenty-eight, Ch’a Chuhwan twenty-nine, Chang Sonjong thirty. I join Yi Yonguk in following the divisions of the Mullim-sa edition of *Sihwa ch’ongnim*, which number thirty-two. These differences are not significant, for editorial division of the sections is bound to be arbitrary; the Mullim-sa arrangement is the most convenient.

The general plan of *Paegun sosol* is as follows:

1. Sections 1 to 7 are independent paragraphs in a loosely connected chronological account of early Korean poetry in Chinese. None of these sections is to be found in *Tongguk Yi Sangguk chip* save the account of Ch’oe Ch’i-won which forms section 4. Other sources, outside Yi Kyubo’s writings, can be found for most of the remaining sections.

2. Sections 8 to 24 deal with Yi Kyubo’s own experience and with poems written by himself and his friends. All occur in the *chip*, except for part of section 11. Sections 22 and 23 are parts of a single essay in the *chip*.

3. Sections 25 to 30 deal with general principles of poetry. All occur in the *chip*, where 25-28 are parts of the same essay, but their order is garbled in *Paegun sosol*.

4. Sections 31 and 32 form an appendix composed of a poem from Yi Kyubo’s last years, which occurs in the *chip*, and a pendant proverb which does not occur in the *chip* and is obviously suggested by the poem. So the whole collection is concerned with poetry, and most of it occurs in the *chip*, but not in precisely similar texts.

Some passages also occur in the great fourteenth-century anthology *Tongmunson*, but not all; so *Tongmunson* cannot be the sole source for *Paegun sosol*. The text in *Paegun sosol* omits many phrases and sentences found in the *chip*, while the few phrases found in *Paegun sosol* but not in the corresponding passages in the *chip* are explanatory notes (saving the long passage in section 11). The order of the sections in the two collections is different. The *chip* is broadly chronological in its arrangement, with an appendix (*hu- jip*) of pieces added later. The order of the pieces in *Paegun sosol* is random and [page 4] has no chronological basis. A few of the *Paegun sosol* sections consist of poems practically devoid of comment, thus barely meriting classification as essays, whether called *sosol* or *sihwa*. (This deficiency, however, is paralleled in other *sihwa* collections.) I have described these discrepancies more fully in the notes appended to the translation.

It is impossible to be sure who compiled *Paegun sosol* and when. If Yi Kyubo himself did it, it must be supposed that he combined a preliminary draft for a history of Korean poetry with a random collection of his essays made before his son Yi Ham began to work on the *chip*. It must further be supposed that Yi Ham either never saw this collection, or that he saw it and rejected parts of it—perhaps because he knew they were not original compositions. Remaining discrepancies between the texts of *Paegun sosol* and the *chip* would be explained as the results of the editorial discretion of Yi Ham in the *chip*, or a putative history of bad copying of *Paegun sosol*. In the context of East Asian literary history, none of these suppositions is more than a slender possibility. It appears highly unlikely that Yi Kyubo himself compiled *Paegun sosol*.

The text of the *chip* is so much better and fuller in most of the passages corresponding to *Paegun sosol* that it is more reasonable to give priority to the *chip*. A convincing reconstruction of the genesis of *Paegun sosol* is that at some time after Yi Kyubo’s death, when *Tongguk Yi Sangguk chip* had become a rare book and poetry criticism was a recognized literary genre, some scholar who had memorized parts of the *chip* wrote out what he could remember of the essays in poetry criticism included in it. This comprises sections 8 to 31. Defects of memory would account for the scrambling of the sections, inadvertent changes of characters, and the omission of short passages. Confused memories or deliberate editing would explain the insertion in section 11 of a story about Yi Kyubo that did not come from his own writings, and the completion of the poem by the monk Hyemun in section 17, which would have had to come from another source.

Rightly regarding Yi Kyubo as the first Korean to leave a considerable corpus of literature, and the first Korean writer of *sihwa*, the compiler of *Paegun sosol* then put him in perspective by prefacing the collection of his essays with a brief summary of earlier Korean poetry (sections 1-7) drawn from other sources, dovetailing Yi Kyubo’s account of Ch’oe Ch’iwon into this section. Finally the compiler, or a subsequent copyist, appended the rhymed proverb and its trite comment in section 32.

This might well have happened in the early seventeenth century, when the Korean intellectual climate was ripe for such activity. And nobody would be more likely to have done the work than Hong Manjong. The position of [page 5] *Paegun sosol* at the head of *Sihwa ch’ongnim* lends colour to this theory, which is strengthened by the fact that *Paegun sosol* has not been found outside *Sihwa ch’ongnim*. Nevertheless, definitive evidence is lacking.

It is disappointing to discover that everything of importance in *Paegun sosol* can also be found in *Tongguk Yi Sangguk chip*, usually in a better text. The parts that are not in the *chip* are all from other sources, not original to Yi Kyubo, except for two passages that have an air of folksy tradition (in sections 7 and 11). *Paegun sosol* tells us nothing about Yi Kyubo that we cannot learn better from the *chip*. But even negative conclusions are valuable, and studying the *sosol* is at least the beginning of acquaintance with the most intimately knowable personality of Koryo times—who happens to be amusing and attractive, as well as wise.

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THE WHITE CLOUD ESSAYS OF YI KYUBO

I

Literature had its beginnings in Korea when the Grand Preceptor of Shang, Ch’i Tzu,1 came here to rule the country, but that was so long ago that we know nothing of those early writers. In the Yosan-dang oegi,2 however, there is an account of Ulchi Mundok, containing a four-verse stanza of five syllables to the verse, that Ulchi Mundok sent to the Sui general, Yu Chung-wen:

Your strategy involves all heaven’s powers,

Your tactics exhaust this world’s resources;

The victory is yours and all nigh honour

I beg you be satisfied and now depart

The technique of the verses is archaic and strange, devoid of ornament and grace. No later forger would have attempted to produce it. Ulchi Mundok was in fact an eminent statesman of Koguryo.

II

The T’aep’yong si of Queen Chindok of Silla is included in the *T’ang-shih lei-chi*, and for strength and power is comparable to any of the works of early T’ang. In that period Korean culture was still immature, and no poem of the time is known apart from Ulchi Mundok’s quatrain―which makes the queen’s work all the more remarkable. The poem says:

When great T’ang began its glorious work

And the plans of the Eminent Emperor prospered,

Fighting stopped, men donned robes of peace,

Civil rule resumed the heritage of earlier kings.

Heaven was constrained to bestow precious rain,

Earth put in order and all things made bright;

Now imperial goodness shines like sun and moon,

The prosperity of Yao and Shun returns.

How brilliant his streaming banners, [page 7]

How thunderous his gongs and drums!

Outer barbarians who oppose his commands

Suffer Heaven’s displeasure and fall by the sword.

Gentle manners prevail in private and public,

Happy omens vie, both far and near.

The four seasons balance in perfect harmony,

The seven planets swing through their full courses;

The hills bring forth great ministers,

The emperor employs the loyal and good.

The Three Sovereigns and Five Rulers combine in one

To adorn the imperial house of T’ang.

The gloss says: In the first year of Yung-hui, Chindok destroyed the Paekche horde, wove some silk, wrote a poem of victory in five-character verses and presented both to the emperor. Yung-hui was a year-title of Kao Tsung.

III

Ch’oe Ch’iwon, 1 whose style was Koun, ‘lonely cloud,’ had ability such as was previously unheard of, with the result that he is held in great reverence by Korean scholars. A ballad of his, written for the mandolin, is included in Tang um yuhyang,2 but classified there as anonymous. Indeed the question of its authenticity remains unsettled. Some say that the verse

The moon sinks over Tung-t’ing, a lone cloud passes

proves Ch’oe’s authorship, but this verse alone is not conclusive.3

There is also his ultimatum to Huang Ch’ao,4 though it is not in the official histories. Huang read as far as: ‘Not only do all the citizens of the Empire determine to destroy you, the very devils under the earth have planned the same thing,’ and involuntarily came down from his seat and submitted. Ch’oe could not have achieved this had he not been able to evoke wailing demons and direful storms.

Yet his poems are not of the best—possibly because he went to China when T’ang was in decline. [page 8]

IV

The monograph on literature in the Tang shu1 mentions a book of Ch’oe Ch’iwon’s ‘four-six’ prose,2 and says that ten3 books of his Kyewon p’ilgyong, ‘Pen ploughings in cinnamon gardens’, have also been published.4 I have nothing but praise for the Chinese, who, because he was a foreigner, did not subject his work to criticism, but, since his collected compositions had been published, had him listed in an official history. Nevertheless, I do not understand why there is no separate biography of him among the literary biographies in the Tang shu. It can scarcely be because his life-story does not provide sufficient material He crossed the sea at the age of twelve and went to study in T’ang; he passed the highest state examination at the first attempt; later he served with Kao P’ien, and wrote an ultimatum that terrified Huang Ch’ao into submission; eventually he was appointed censor, and when he left to return to his fatherland, a graduate of his year named Ku-yun presented him with a ‘Song of a scholar immortal’, of which one distich5 went:

At twelve he entered a boat to come across the sea;

His writings touched the hearts of the Chinese nation.

He wrote of himself: ‘Dressed in plain silk I entered the flowery realm when my years equalled the peaks of Wu-hsia gorge; clad in brocades I returned to the eastern land when my age numbered the constellations of the Milky Way’ meaning that he went to T’ang at twelve and returned to Korea at twenty- eight.6 Such clear details could be used to write his biography better than the half-page accounts given in the Tang shu of Shen Ch’uan-ch’i, Liu Ping, T’sui Yuan-han and Li P’in.7

If Ch’oe was omitted because he was a foreigner, why was he mentioned in the monographs? And why are Yi Chonggi8 and Hukchisangji9 included among the biographies of non-Chinese generals? They were both Koreans, yet their doings are fully recorded. Why was Ch’oe Ch’iwon alone excluded from the literary biographies? My personal opinion is that the men of those times were jealous about writing skill. Ch’oe had arrived in the T’ang court as an unknown foreigner, then surpassed the great men of the day.10 Had his biography been written, they feared it might hurt them bitterly. So they omitted it. But I cannot be sure of this. [page 9]

V

Korea1 first had intercourse with China in the Hsia period, but nothing is now known of any records or writings from those times. The first writers appeared in the Sui and T’ang periods, when Ulchi Mundok sent his stanza to the Sui general, and the queen of Silla presented her ode to the Tang emperor. These poems were recorded, but they are isolated instances. Not until Ch’oe Ch’iwon graduated in T’ang was a Korean well-known in China. One of his couplets goes:

Running east from Kuen-lun, five green hills;

Flowing north from Hsing-su, one yellow river.

His contemporary, Ku-yun, said, ‘This distich is a whole geography,’ because the five Sacred Peaks of China all derive from Kuen-lun-shan, and the Huang- ho rises from Hsing-su-hai, the lake of Ngoring Nor.2

A couplet from Ch’oe’s ‘Poem on Tz’u-ho Monastery at Jun-chou’ goes:

Morning and evening, sorrow wells in the sound of the bugles; 3 How many live or have livea in the shadow of these green hills?

The haksa Pak Inborn wrote in his poem ‘Lung-so Monastery at Ching-chou’:4

Swinging lanterns light the steep path with firefly flickers,

The twisting steps are ringed with haloes playing on the rocks.

The ch ‘amjong Pak Innyang, in his poem ‘Kuei-shan Monastery in Szu-chou’, wrote :5

My boat skims the broad waters before the monastery gate, Where monks playing paduk beneath the bamboos idle the noontide away.

These three men first made Korean poetry known in China. Writers of such quality prove the splendour of our literary culture. [page 10]

VI

A well-known story has it that the haksa Chong Chisang went to stay in a mountain monastery in order to study, and one moonlit night as he sat alone in the temple hall he suddenly heard a verse being chanted :

Seeing a monk, I wonder where the temple is;

Sighting a crane, I regret there is no pine-tree.

Chong decided it must be an elfin voice. Later, when he sat for the state examination, the subject set for verse composition was ‘Summer clouds cluster round the peaks’, to be written to the rhyme of pong meaning ‘mountain peak’. He immediately recalled the couplet, built a poem round it, and handed in the following stanza:

The shining sun has reached mid-heaven,

But floating clouds loom in mountainous masses.

Seeing a monk, I wonder where the temple is;

Sighting a crane, I regret there is no pine-tree.

Lightning flashes like a woodcutter’s axe,

Thunder booms like a hidden temple bell.

Who says the mountains never move?

They fly away on the sunset breeze.

It is said that by the time the examiners had read as far as the second couplet they were praising his originality highly, and that in the end they gave Chong top marks. The couplet about seeing the monk and the crane is certainly good, but the rest is childish, and I cannot see why it should have been given first place.

VII

The *sijung* Kim Pusik and the *haksa* Chong Chisang were contemporaries and both had high reputations as poets. They were rivals of whom neither could surpass the other. The story goes that Chong Chisang wrote a couplet:

The sutras have ended in the temple. [page 11]

The sky is as clear as glass.

Pusik admired this and wanted to put it into a poem of his own, but Chisang refused to allow him.

Eventually Chisang was killed by Pusik, and became a ghost. Then one day Pusik was composing a spring poem in which he said:

The willows are green with thousands of catkins,

The peach-trees are pink with myriads of petals.

Suddenly Chisang’s ghost struck Pusik’s cheek, shouting, ‘ “Thousands of catkins, myriads of petals” indeed! Who counted them? Why don’t you write:

“Willow trees are green, catkin upon catkin,

Peach-trees pink, petal upon petal”?’

Pusik was infuriated.

Some time afterwards, when Pusik was staying in a monastery, he went to the latrine, where Chisang’s ghost came up behind him and grabbed his testicles, calling out, ‘Why is your face so red? Have you been drinking?’

Pusik replied deliberately in verse, ‘The scarlet maples across the valley are reflected in my cheeks.’

The ghost pinched his testicles harder and said, ‘Whatever are these made of?’

Pusik, without changing his expression, said, ‘Were your father’s made of iron?’

The ghost pinched him even harder, and he died there and then in the latrine.

VIII

Pogyang, otherwise known as O Sejae or O Tokchon,1 was a bold and powerful poet. His poems were widely esteemed and he was never defeated by a difficult rhyme. Once he climbed Puk-san2 and wanted to write a poem about Kug-am, ‘the halberd rocks’. The man who he asked to suggest a rhyme proposed horn, meaning ‘difficult’.3 Pogyang wrote:

The jagged rocks of the northern pass

Are called halberds by the local people. [page 12]

They rise higher than Ts’in4 on his crane,

Probe further that Hsien5 into heaven ;

Lightning gleams on their polished staves,

Frost is the salt that cleans their blades.

They might indeed make weapons

To destroy Ch’u and save small states.6

Some time later an envoy who was a good poet himself came from the northern court. He heard this poem several times and admired it greatly, but when he asked whether its author were still alive, what office he held, and whether he might see him, our Koreans gave no clear answers. When I heard about this I asked why no one had said that Pogyang was a chego haksa. It was a pity that his reputation was so little known.2

IX

There used to be seven scholars,1 well-known poets, who thought they were the greatest men of their day, and called themselves the Seven Sages, in imitation of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove in the Chin period They met frequently to drink wine and write poetry. They were so exclusive that they were the butt of much sarcasm.2

Soon after I had turned nineteen, O Sejae,although he was much older than me, made a friend of me, and used regularly to take me with him to the meetings of these seven. Once, when O was away in the eastern capital, I went to one of their gatherings alone. Yi Tamji looked at me and said, ‘Your friend has gone off to Kyongju and not returned. Why don’t you take his place?’

I retorted, ‘Are the Seven Sages some sort of official board where vacancies are bound to be filled? I have never heard that Chi K’ang and Juan Chi3 had to be replaced by successors.’

They all laughed heartily and told me to compose a poem on the two rhymes chun (spring) and in (man). I straightway extemporized:

What honour to attend this group among the bamboos!

How pleasant to pour spring wine from the crock!

But I cannot tell which of these seven sages

Is the man that makes holes in his plum-stones...4

They all frowned in annoyance. I got drunk in very arrogant fashion and left them. When I was young I used to behave like that. Everybody said I was mad. [page 13]

X

The year I passed the state examination, some of my contemporaries visited Tongje Monastery. Five or six of us deliberately dropped behind the rest of the party and rode slowly along in a group with saddles almost touching, capping verses as we went. One would give a rhyme and the rest of us would compose lu-shih. Since we were moving along the road at the time, nothing was written down, and because we considered the verses commonplace efforts we never bothered to write them down later on. Some time afterwards, however, I heard someone say that these poems had got as far as China, where the literati praised them highly. The man even repeated one couplet:

Blue hills at sunset in a lame donkey’s shadow;

Crimson trees of autumn in a lone wild goose’s call.

He liked those lines very much; but when I heard him I could not believe his story. Then another man recalled the next couplet:

Where does that single crane go through the sky so dark?

The traveller must go on, his road still stretches far.

But the first and last couplets of the whole poem could not be recalled. I am not clever, but I am not particularly stupid either I must simply have forgotten what had been composed on the spur of the moment and not seriously attended to.

Yesterday the Chinese Ou-yang Po-hu came to see me, and one of those present mentioned this poem. So I asked Ou-yang, ‘Your Excellency, is it true this poem has become known in China?’

‘Not only known,’ he replied at once, ‘Everybody puts it on scroll paintings and admires it.’

The guests were sceptical. Then he said, ‘If you do not believe me, I will bring a scroll painting with the whole poem on it and show it to you when I come back next year.’

Extraordinary! If this is all true, it is astonishing, and altogether too much for me. I have written a quatrain, using the rhymes of a poem I wrote some time ago, and have presented it to Ou-yang:

The shame of it! A commonplace poem [page 14]

Not worth re-reading, now written on a painting!

We know the generosity of China in judging outsiders,

But this time the connoisseurs have slipped badly.

XI

I first learned to read when I was seven years old. Since then I have never been without a book in hand. I devoured everything from Shih ching and Shang shu through all six Confucian classics, the writers of all the schools of philosophy, and the historians, to arcane and esoteric works, Buddhist and Taoist writings. Although I could not plumb all the depths of their meaning, nor extract their hidden sense, yet I collected splendid raw materials for my own compositions. From Fu Hsi, through Hsia, Shang and Chou, the two Han, Ch’in, Tsin, Sui, T’ang, and the Five Dynasties: all their records of the successes and failures of princes and ministers; quelling of rebellions in neighbouring states; achievements and failures, goodness and wickedness, loyal ministers and upright soldiers, wily scoundrels and bandit leaders―I could not take in everything, and inevitably some things had to be skipped, but by passing over the confusing passages and selecting important pieces as models for reading, memorizing and recitation, I prepared to make appropriate use of them later on.

Whenever I took writing materials and paper to compose poetry, even when I tried to fulfill as many as a hundred rhymes, the brush always galloped untramelled over the paper. Perhaps I did not unroll verses as lovely as silk embroideries, nor string them together like jade beads, but I never lost the poet’s manner. Despite this self-confidence, I was saddened by the thought that my writings would all eventually rot away like vegetation. I hoped for the day when I should wield a five-inch brush, enter the golden portal of examination success and be posted to the Jade Hall, where I should draft documents for the king, write rescripts and instructions, briefs and patents that would be published everywhere. Then my life’s desire would be fulfilled. I was not the sort of man to struggle at supporting his wife on a stipend of a few paltry hard-earned bags of rice.

I had great hopes, but alas, I neglected my talent. I was born unlucky. By the time I was twenty-eight I had still not even obtained a provincial posting. My loneliness and bitterness were such as to defy description, but they had turned my hair grey.

So if I came upon a beautiful landscape, I wrote a poem; if I came by wine, I drank it madly, and tried to escape from myself in a life of dissipation. [page 15]

In spring, when the breeze was soft, the sunshine warm, and all kinds of flowers vied with each other in luxuriant bloom, I could not resist the mood. One day I was enjoying both wine and flowers with my friend the lecturer Yun, and we wrote several dozen poems together. At last our inspiration flagged and we were drowsy from the wine, when he gave me another rhyme and asked me to write a poem. I promptly gave him:

I wish my ears were deaf, my mouth dumb.

Let my poems be my whole worldly knowledge.

Of any ten things hoped for, eight or nine fail;

I can talk with only two or three friends.

I aim to achieve as much as Kao Yao1 and K’uei,2

Determine to write as well as Pan Ku3 and Ssuma Ch’ien,4

But when I think over what I have done,

I am ashamed I cannot match past masters.

Yun said to me, ‘ “Eight or nine” is the wrong tone to parallel “two or three”. You usually write long poems of sonorous verses, hundreds of lines at a time without pause and at tempestuous speed, but with never a single character out of harmony. How have you managed to make a mistake of tone in this little piece?’

I replied, ‘I wrote in a dream, that’s why I made a mistake. Change “eight or nine” to “ten million”, and it will be all right. It’s dull, but unspiced meat and rough wine are better than vinegar that sets the teeth on edge. That’s how the great poets do it; didn’t you know?’

But before I had finished speaking, I stretched and woke up. I had been dreaming. I told Yun about the dream, and he said, ‘You are telling me you dreamt you explained what you wrote in your dream? That is what you might call “a dream within a dream”.’

We both shielded our mouths with our hands as we laughed, and for fun I composed another quatrain:

The land of sleep lies very near the land of drunkenness.

Here I am, just returned from both countries.

The three months of spring all pass as a dream,

From dreams I return, to be a man in a dream. [page 16]

XII

I am by nature fond of poetry, but although I enjoy it at all times, I am especially addicted to it when I am ill. I cannot understand why I should be twice as keen on verse then as I am at ordinary times, but whenever I am moved by a subject I compose compulsively, and cannot stop even if I try to, so I say that poetry is a sickness in itself. I have even written poems saying what I think about this disease of versifying―making myself worse, as it were. I cannot eat more than two or three spoonfuls of rice at a time. Otherwise I merely drink wine. This distresses me, but when I read the poems Po Chu-i wrote in his old age I find that many of them were written during illness, and he drank as I do. One of his poems says in essence:

When I quietly review my fate,

Most of life seems debited to verse.

Or why do I sing like a madman,

More when ill than when I am well?

In a poem to Liu Yu-hsi he wrote:

Muffled under hempen covers,

Befuddled with sickness, I make sleepy poems.

In a poem written after taking pearl-powder medicine:

The medicine digests the day’s three spoonfuls.

The other poems are similar. It comforts me to think that I am not the only one that suffers in this way, and that my predecessors did so too. It is all a matter of personality and destiny, and there is nothing to be done about it.

When Po Chu-i retired from office he took a hundred days sick leave, and from the time that I requested retirement until I actually retired I had 110 days of sick leave. Without my planning it we are alike in that point too. The matter in which we differed was Fan-su and Hsiao-man, the two concubines he discharged when he was sixty-eight, because he could no longer make use of them.

Indeed! I may fall a long way behind Po Chu-i in fame for both talent and virtue, but I am the same as him in most respects of sickness and old age. [page 17]

So I have written matching poems to his ‘Fifteen poems written in sickness’, enlarging on this intuition of mine. Here is my response poem to his entitled ‘Resigning’:

In old age I abandon care to walk in peace,

Letting Lo-t’ien be my teacher.

My talent will never match his fame,

but we are alike in writing poems when ill.

I think of the day he retired, years ago,

And find it resembles my request this year

(The last distich is missing.)

XIII

Paegun kosa, ‘White cloud hermit’, was the name he gave himself, suppressing his ordinary name, and using this instead. The reasons why he chose it, he wrote down in his Paegun kosa orok.1 When the house was so empty that there was nothing to prepare for a meal, he was as happy as ever. His spirit was free and unbridled; he found the universe cramping and the world confining. He would drink himself silly. Whenever he was invited out he set off at once, and later he would come back drunk. He was clearly a disciple of T’ao Ch’ien,2 for he passed his time playing the chin and drinking wine, and indeed so it was that he came to write this about himself. When he was drunk he wrote poems like this:

Heaven and earth are my quilt and pillow,

The rivers are my lake of wine.

I will drink on steadily a thousand days,

Then, drunk, I will be at peace.

And he added this epigram:

My desires are beyond creation,

Heaven and earth cannot hold them.

Together with form and substance

They go into the boundless void. [page 18]

XIV

In Hsi-ch’ing shih-hua1 there is a poem by Wang An-shih that contains the verses:

The garden grows gloomy in wind and rain at dusk,

Lingering chrysanthemum petals fall and gild the ground.

When Ou-yang Hsiu saw this he said, ‘Most flowers shed their petals as they die, but chrysanthemum petals wither on the stem. Why do you speak of them as falling?’2

Wang was incensed and replied, ‘You obviously do not know the lines of the Ch’u tz’u:

At evening I eat the fallen flowers of autumn chrysanthemums.

Your objection springs from ignorance.’

My opinion is that poetry should spring from experience, and since I have seen chrysanthemum petals torn off by a rainstorm, I believe that Wang, who had stated in his poem that ‘the garden grows gloomy in wind and rain at dusk,’should have told Ou-yang that he had written about what he had seen. Even though he was quoting the Ch’u tz’u, it would have been sufficient for him to have asked Ou-yang if he had not seen the same thing too. It was petty of him to impugn Ou-yang’s scholarship. Even if Ou-yang had not been a deeply learned man, the phrase in question was not a very obscure quotation from the Ch’u tzu, and he could have been expected to know it.3 I have no very high opinion of Wang’s manners.

XV

When I first read Mei Yao-ch’en’s1 poems I thought very little of them, and could not understand why he was so highly esteemed. On re-reading them, however, I found that, though pretty and frail, they have interior strength, and really are far above the common run, I would even say that until you have understood Mei Yao-ch’en, you have not understood what poetry is.

Earlier writers have pointed out Ssu Ling-yun’s2 verse: [page 19]

Spring grasses burgeon by the pool

as a model creation, but I cannot see what is so good about it. On the other hand, I think that Hsu Ning’s3 verse, in his waterfall poem:

A single line divides the green face of the mountain

is beautiful, though Su Tung-p’o4 thought the poem a poor one. All of which makes it clear that our appreciation of poetry is far from being like that of earlier generations.

And then, T,ao Ch’ien’s poetry is gentle and peaceful as solemn lute music in the quiet of an ancestral shrine, reverberating in the ear long after the playing stops. I have tried to imitate it, but could never come anywhere near it―indeed, the results were comic.

XVI

A senior monk of the Ch’an sect in Sung China, named Tsu-po, took advantage of Ou-yang Po-hu’s visit to Korea in order to send a poem to our Korean monk, Konggong. At the same time he sent five lacquer bowls and a staff of mottled bamboo. He also gave the name T’ogak1 —’rabbit’s horns’―to Konggong’s hermitage, wrote the name on a board and sent it with the other gifts. I admired the friendship between the two monks who lived so far apart, and since I had heard of Ou-yang’s reputation as a poet and wanted to see some of his work, I composed two poems.

Between here and China lies a great dividing ocean,

But these two hearts reflect each other mirror-clear across it.

Konggong makes a beehive hut;

Tsu-po sends from far its name of Rabbit Horn;

A staff, old, but its mottled bamboo still vivid;

And bowls, mysterious, rarer than blue lotus root.

Shall we one day see you holding your jangling staves,2

Together shaking the world with the roar of the Golden Lion?3

Coming over thousands of leagues of ocean,

With poetry fresh as a clear mountain stream,

What joy you bring,eddy of Old Drunkard’s torrent,4

Making us savor the fragrance of his name. [page 20]

Soaring up thousands of fathoms, heaven-piercing tree of jade,

You bring us nine roots of the mystic golden herb-of-life.

Long have I hoped for your presence, but never seen you yet.

When may I hope to hear you cough outside my door?

XVII

The dhyana-master Hyemun was a man of Kosong prefecture. He was over thirty when he was at last accepted as a monk, but after proceeding through the various grades of monkhood in order he finally became a head dhyana-master. He used to live at Unmun Monastery, and because he was a man of noble character, at one time many famous men of the period used to visit him. He enjoyed writing verses and did so in the style of a mountain recluse. He wrote one about Pohyon Monastery:1

Sanskrit prayers go up with the smoke of the censer;

Quietness brings forth the void, like the empty white room.2

The road outside the gate is long, where men go north and south;

The pines beside the rocks are ancient, where the moon shines now as of old;

Dawn air in the silent monastery is swollen by the wooden bell,

Autumn dew in the little yard weighs down the plantain’s heart.3

Here I loll in the senior monk’s chair:

An evening of spiritual talk is worth a thousand gold pieces.

The atmosphere of seclusion is realistic. The second distich became widely known, and Hyemun was called ‘the pine-tree moon monk’.

XVIII

I dreamt I was in the mountains, where I lost my way and came upon a strange and beautiful pavilion standing in a valley. I asked a bystander where I was, and he said it was the Pavilion of the Immortals. Suddenly six or seven beautiful women came out and invited me in. When I had entered and sat down, they asked me to compose a poem. So I chanted:

I neared the immortals’ bower, the jade door creaked,

And fairies like emerald moths came out to greet me. [page 21]

They were dissatisfied with this. I did not understand why, but I tried again:

With shining eyes and gleaming teeth, they greeted me with smiles.

Then first I knew that fairies share our mortal feelings.

This pleased them and they asked me to compose the second half of the quatrain, but I declined and asked them to finish it. One of them suggested:

It is not that mortal feelings can affect us:

But because we love you, we change our normal ways.

The rhyme, however, did not match the one I had used, so I said, ‘Can spirits make mistakes in rhyming?’

As I said it I laughed and clapped my hands—which woke me up. Then I completed the quatrain.

I had done only one couplet when I woke from my dream;

So a debt remains; I must go back again.

XIX

Old Tonyu, abbot of Sobaek Monastery, sent me two poems. His messenger stood at the gate, impatient to go, so I dashed off my replies:

Were it not for the dew of royal grace, you would have served at court,

But, pure-mist-like, your noble heart wills to live in seclusion.

Remember, if you are bidden speed to the Crimson Palace,

You may not stay long in the green hills you love.

The sage who leaves the world likes to hide his tracks,

While those eager for government promotion stretch their necks in

competition.

But if Sakyamuni comes again to earth

He will whisk away the taint of rats and foxes.

Do not be surprised to get a letter from the capital.

For a voice from the world dare not penetrate your misty clouds.

The moonlight of mountain monasteries is fit for quiet ascetics,

The dust of Songdo traffic suits those who mind money.

When I think of your life, ice enters my marrow, [page 22]

And I regret this career that has covered my head with snow.

Shall I someday hang up my hat and set off to some high place

Where my weakening bones can salvage what is left of old age?

I also wrote a poem thanking him for a gift of candles :

A tenth generation grandson of Korea’s Lonely Cloud

Writes verses with his ancestor’s graciousness and skill.

He sends me a poem with two golden candles—

The poem to cleanse my heart, the candles to banish gloom.

The abbot replied with a note:

‘Fearing your verses might get lost,

I have put them on a board and nailed

it to the wall, so that they will

last long.’

XX

I dreamt one night that I was given a little bottle-shaped water-dropper of green jade. It rang when it was tapped, the bottom was round, and the top pointed. It had two holes, so tiny that when you looked a second time they seemed to have disappeared. When I awoke, I thought how strange it was, and wrote a poem to explain it.

In a dream I received a jade bottle

Of gleaming green sheen that lighted the ground.

When I tapped, it gave a pure note;

It was elegant, glossy, and watertight.

It could be used to replenish an inkstone,

Enough for a thousand sheets of verse;

But spiritual things love to change,

And heaven’s workmanship enjoys jokes.

It suddenly closed its mouth

And refused to receive a drop―

Like a fairy rock that opened

And let out the emerald marrow within,

Then suddenly shut again tight [page 23]

And would not admit a man’s finger.

Hun-tun was given seven orifices,

And on the seventh day he died;

Fierce winds blow through cracks

And give rise to a thousand distresses;

Chu Ku1 worried about drilling holes in a gourd;

Pierced gems cover statesmen’s anxieties...

Everything is precious when whole,

But turns to mere rubbish when damaged.

For physical wholeness and spiritual wholeness,

Apply to the Lacquer Garden officer.2

XXI

A multi-petalled pomegranate, such as is rarely seen, bloomed in the garden at Ch’oe Ch’unghon’s house. He invited Yi Inno, Kim Kukki, Yi Tamji, Ham Sun and me, gave us a rhyme and bade us compose. This was my poem:

As soon as the wine flushes your pretty cheeks,

A scarlet army invades your whole face,

Beauty and fragrance join forces divinely,

And loveliness brings followers about you.

In sunshine your smouldering perfume draws butterflies,

At night your flaming colour startles the birds.

Alas for beauty born so late!

Who can fathom the creator’s purpose?

It was a reference to my own belated entry into public office.

XXII

Once in mid-autumn I took a boat at YongpTo1 and crossed the Naktong River to moor at Kyont’an.2 It was the middle of the night. The moonlight was brilliant, the swift current swirled against the rocks, the green hills were reflected in the water. The stream was wonderfully clear, so that when I bent over the gunwale I could count the darting fishes and crawling crabs. I rested against the side of the boat, sighing with contentment, feeling lightened and clarified in body, so other-worldly that I could imagine I was in the realm of [page 24] the immortals.3

Yongwon Monastery stands by the river there. A monk came out to greet me, and we talked together for a bit.4 I composed two poems.

The cool water soaks my short coat,

The clear strip of river is bluer than indigo.

The willows outdo the five at Tao Ch’ien’s gate,

The mountains the three at the Yu-chiang sea.5

Sky and water blend till I don’t know which way up I am;

Then the clouds lift and I can tell east from west again.

I tie the boat for a while near a flat hump of sand,

And a monk comes out of his little hermitage.

As dawn lit the sky I floated off from Yongp’o;

Now in gathering dusk I moor here at Kyont’an.

Dark clouds obscure the setting sun,

Wild rocks hinder the crazy waves.

The water grows cold in autumn,

The boat pavilion is chillier at night.

The landscape is a magnificent picture―

One might think it a painted screen.

These were verses written carelessly on the spur of the moment, and I doubt if they are up to standard.6

XXIII

Next morning I loosed the boat and let it drift, following the river down to the east.1 When evening came I moored in front of Wonhung Monastery, and spent the night in the boat. It was quiet and everyone else was asleep. The only noise to be heard was the plopping of fish in the water. I pillowed my head on my arm and dozed for a little, but the night was too cold for me to sleep long. I could hear some fishermen singing and the pipes of a group of merchants in the distance. The sky was cloudless, the water glassy, the sand and rocks gleamed white, the moonlight played with the shadows on the ripples that rocked the covered boat. Before us weird rocks loomed like crouching bears and tigers. I lazed there with my headband loosened, relishing the pleasures of the riverscape.2 How much better it was than spending every day in luxurious ease among painted women singing to flutes and strings. [page 25]

I wrote two poems:

Blue heaven rides the distant water;

That cloudy islet must be fairy land.

Rosy scales dive beneath the ripples,

White birds wing through the mist.

The stream changes its name as it goes,

The mountains vary as the boat turns.

I sent for wine from the village on the bank

And sipped a cup pensively.

I moor at night by a sandy bank near greenish rocks,

I sit and sing under the awning, stroking my wispy beard.

The glistening water gently rocks the boat,

Pale moonlight drips from the brim of my hat;

Rushing green torrents drown a lone rock for a moment;

When the white clouds part a low peak appears.

I cannot bear the screech of pipes;

I need jade-soft fingers strumming the lute.

(I had ordered a secretary to play on a pipe.)

XXIV

I received a royal edict putting me in charge of timber felling at Pyonsan. Because of this appointment I was nicknamed ‘the wood-chopper’. As I rode off to do the job I composed a humorous verse on the way:

What glory to command the coolie hosts!

What a shame to be the chief wood-chopper!

because the work was essentially a matter of portering and wood-cutting.

It was my first visit to Pyonsan. The piled-up peaks and crowding moun- tain-tops, rising, falling, twisting, and jumbled, come right down to the sea. There are mountainous islands out in the ocean, like Hedgehog Island, which can be reached at morning and evening. The seafolk say that with a fair wind one can sail to China and it is not far.

I went once to Chusa-p’o. The moon rose bright above the ridge and lit up the sandy beach. My mind seemed to be washed clean. I loosened the [page 26]

bridle and stopped spurring my horse while I gazed out at the sea for a long time, musing. The horseboy thought it very odd. I composed a poem.

Three times this spring have I passed this estuary,

But still I have not finished my service for the king.

Huge waves pound in from far, like snowy chargers;

Centuries-old woods surround me like coiled green dragons;

The sea wind soughs and whines with wild flute notes,

The rising moon over the beach greets the returning boats.

The lad that leads my horse thinks it odd

That coming to such places I always stop and stare.

I had not intended at first to make a poem. It came upon me without any effort at all.

XXV

As a result of prolonged consideration of the subject I have concluded that there are nine faults in poetry.

1. Quoting too many names of historical personages: the cartload of ghosts.

2. Stealing other writers’ ideas, which is bad even when done well: inept thieving for easy effect.

3. Unnecessary choice of difficult rhyme: the bow too stiff to bend.

4. Attempting a rhyme beyond one’s ability: drinking too much wine.

5. Liking obscure characters that puzzle the reader: digging ditches for the blind.

6.Straining to use intractable words: forcing men to follow.

7. Using too many colloquialisms: yokels’ parliament.

8. Liking to oppose Confucius and Mencius: lese-majeste.

9. Not pruning exuberant phrases: the field full of weeds.

When one can avoid all these faults, one may start speaking of poetry.

XXVI

The most important thing about a poem is its meaning, the creation of which is the most difficult part of composition. The arrangement of the words is a lesser matter. The principal part of meaning is wit, and the merit―the depth [page 27] or shallowness—of a poem depends on wit. This wit, or inspiration, comes from an innate gift and cannot be acquired by study. Poets of inferior inspiration may strive hard at their technique, but they will never achieve this first prerequisite of adequate meaning. They polish their verses and point their phrases to real elegance, but there is no substance or depth in them: although they give a good first impression, they will not bear prolonged rumination.

If one is writing a poem to rhymes chosen in advance and the rhymes hamper the sense, then they should be changed; though, of course, when writing a poem to correspond with the rhymes of a poem written by someone else, one is bound to adapt the meaning to the rhymes.1 Likewise, if one has great difficulty in finding a parallel verse, even after long mulling over it, it is best to cut one’s losses and give up the attempt.2

If the idea for a poem is badly conceived, the sense is likely to become involved. It will get twisted and go wrong, and finally will not convey what was at first intended. Only when the thought is free and natural3 will a perfect poem result.4

There are times when a fault in the first verse of a distich can be retrieved by means of the second verse. And it is also worth remembering that on occasion a single character will settle the quality of a whole verse.

XXVII

A style that is utterly plain and frugal is fit for a mountain peasant; a style that is all decoration and artifice belongs to the palace. Only when you can mingle the plain, the noble, the decorative and the ordinary will you produce an individual style that cannot be pigeon-holed.

XXVIII

When anyone points out the faults in your verse, you should be pleased. If what he says is right, follow his advice; otherwise stick to your position. There is no point in not admitting your faults, like some king who refuses to listen to the unpalatable criticisms made by his censors. When you have finished a poem, look it over again, not as though it were your own composition, but as though it had been written by someone else, or by somebody you have always envied and whose faults you would be delighted to pick out. Then if you can find nothing wrong, you can publish the poem.1 [page 28]

XXIX

One must read a great deal of a classic master’s verse before one can hope to emulate his qualities. Otherwise even mere imitation is difficult. The process is like burglary: a thief must first spy out a rich man’s house and acquaint himself thoroughly with all the walls and doors before he can enter the place and appropriate the rich man’s belongings without their owner knowing what has happened. If he simply goes round the house peering into boxes like someone searching for eggs in nesting-baskets, he is sure to be caught.1

When I was young I was a gadabout, far from industrious, and not at all devoted to my reading. I read the usual Chinese classics and histories extensively, but never really plumbed their meanings. Much less did I study the poets at all deeply. Not being immersed in the texts, how could I borrow their language or imitate their style? Thus I have been compelled to create a new style.

XXX

There is a poetry anecdote that mentions this distich in Li Shan-fu’s poem ‘On reading the Han shu’:

When Wang Mang came it was already half submerged;

When Ts’ao Ts’ao went it sank to the bottom.1

I think this well turned, but a certain Ko Yongsu carped about it and said, ‘It must be a poem about a shipwreck.’

I believe that in poetry any matter can be dealt with either literally or metaphorically. Li Shan-fu was comparing the Han dynasty to a boat, meta-phorically speaking of it half sinking and then sinking to the bottom. If he could have answered Ko Yongsu and said, ‘You call it a poem about shipwreck, and I was indeed comparing the Han dynasty to a ship. I am so glad you got the point!’ what could Ko have said in return?

The anecdote makes it clear that Ko Yongsu was an irresponsible and frivolous critic. His remarks may safely be ignored.2 [page 29]

XXXI

The old saying has it that eight or nine things out of ten go contrary to one’s wishes. So how much can a man hope to have to his liking during his life in this world ? I have written a poem of twelve verses on the subject.

The smallest things in life go wrong,

The slightest action runs into frustration.

When I was young and poor, my wife was unhappy;

When we grew richer the dancing-girls pursued me.

It usually rains if I have to go out,

But is fine when I can stay at home.

When I have no appetite, the food is tasty;

If my throat is too sore to drink, there is wine in plenty.

I sell some treasure cheap, then find the market price is high;

Just as I get better from long illness, a doctor shows up next door.

If all my petty affairs turn out like this,

What chance have I of riding the crane of Yang-chou?

So it is: everything goes awry. On a small scale this is true of personal joys and trials, on a large scale of national prosperity and crises: nothing goes according to plan. My doggerel describes trivialities, but the same point applies to major matters.

XXXII

A familiar quatrain about the four joys says:

When glad rain comes in time of drought,

When an old friend is met away from home.

In the bedroom on the wedding-night,

When one’s name is high on the pass-list.

But though it rains after drought, there will be another drought later on; though one meets an old friend away from home, one has to bid him farewell again; how can the bridegroom and bride be sure they will not be parted? How can one know that passing the state examination is not the beginning of [page 30] troubles? These things are more able to spoil our joy than to increase it. They ought to be considered as sorrows.

NOTES

I

1. Ch’i Tzu in Korean is Ki-ja, the viscount of Ch’i, supposed to have brought literary culture to Korea in 1122 BC.

2. This book is not otherwise known (though the same reference is given in Chibong yusol 13), but the story of Ulchi Mundok’s poem is in Samguk sagi 44 and Tongmun son 19. It relates to the defeat of the Sui army by Koguryo in AD 612. The description of the poem given here is technically precise, and avoids calling it chueh-chu.

II

Queen Chindok reigned 647-654. The story of the dispatch of a poem as a piece of diplomatic flattery to the newly enthroned T’ang emperor in 650 is recorded in Samguk sagi 5, with the text of the poem. The text is also in Chuan T’ang shin 11.10.3.

III

1. Ch’oe Chiwon lived AD 859-c 910

2. This collection has not survived.

3. The verse is otherwise unknown.

4. The whole text of the ultimatum is in Tongmun son49.

See also the following section.

IV

This passage is in TYSC 22.7a7-8a5.

1. i.e. Hsin T’ang shu

2. A form of elaborately balanced prose in phrases of four and six characters, in vogue in China from the fifth century until the reaction against it by Han Yu late in the eighth century. It continued in use, however, till Sung times, and was revived under the Ch’ing. Also referred to as ‘parallel prose’(p’ien-wen), it tended naturally towards the artificial and mannered.

3. TYSC says ‘twenty’, which is correct. Paegun sosol has doubtlessly been wrongly copied.

4. Here TYSC inserts: ‘and notes that he was a Korean who qualified in the state examination and was appointed to serve in Kao P’ien’s expedition to Huai-nan. After reading this...’

5. TYSC has (instead of ‘one distich’) ‘says in effect’: but the whole poem, including [page 31] this distich, is preserved at the end of Ch’oe Ch’iwon’s biography in Samguk sagi 46.

6. The passage ‘He wrote of himself to Korea at twenty-eight’, does not occur in the TYSC text. The quotation is written in ‘six-four’ prose.

7. Four T’ang poets. Apart from Shen Ch’uan-ch’i, they are minor figures.

8. Otherwise Yi Hoeok, a north Korean born in AD 760.

9. A Paekche general who, after the collapse of Paekche before the armies of Silla and T’ang in 660, gave his allegiance to China, where he had a distinguished career in the field.

10. Here TYSC inserts: ‘which would have aroused the jealousy of the Chinese’.

V

1. The word used is Sam-han, i.e. the three confederations of Han tribes, the earliest political organization of Korea known to traditional historiography.

2. This verse of Ch’oe Ch’iwon is not otherwise attested.

3. The whole poem is in Tongmun son 12.

4. Also in Tongmun son 12.

5. Likewise in Tongmun son 12. The same three passages are quoted at the beginning of Tongin sihwa, a later collection of Korean sihwa.

VI

This story may be compared with Yi Sugwang’s critique of the same poem in Chibong yusol 13.3a, where the same opinion is expressed, and doubt is cast on the authenticity of the poem.

VII

The contrast between the poetry of Kim Pusik (1075-1151) and that of Chong Chisang (died 1135) is a commonplace of traditional Korean criticism. (Tongin sihwa begins with the phrases of this section.) Kim Pusik, a staunch Confucian, but a military man of Songdo culture, wrote in the then popular style modelled on the work of Sung poets such as Ou-yang Hsin and Su Tung-p’o ; Chong Chisang, with Taoist leanings and sympathies for the Pyongyang area, wrote in the more elegant style of late T’ang. Because Kim Pusik was sent to crush a rebellion at Pyongyang, in the course of which he ordered Chong Chisang’s execution, the contrast has been enhanced by history. This sosol illustrates the sympathy later felt for Chong Chisang, and even the details in the emending of Kim Pusik’s distich illustrate the difference between the two styles.

A story of verse-stealing and murder in T’ang is told by Yi Sugwang in Chibong yusol 14 (Sihwa: 14.27a).

VIII

This passage is in TYSC 21.15a9-b7. O Tokchon befriended Yi Kyubo in spite of thirty years’ difference between their ages. He was never successful in obtaining a public appointment, so withdrew to Kyongju, where he died. Yi Kyubo addressed many poems to him, including a virtuoso piece of 300 distichs on the same rhyme. O Tokchon also figures in the next section.

1. The ho Pogyang and cha Sejae are not given in TYSC. [page 32]

2. The north mountain or ‘guardian mountain’ of Songdo, the Koryo capital. It is frequently mentioned in Yi Kyubo’s poems.

3. Or else it means simply that the man proposed a difficult rhyme. The rhymes used do not include the character hom, and though they rhyme with it approximately, they do not match it exactly in the traditional table of 106 rhymes.

4. Wang Tzu-chin or Wang Ch’iao. A sixth-century prince of Chin who became a Taoist adept and is said to have left the world riding to heaven on a white crane.

5. Wu Hsien: a diviner of legendary antiquity. Cf Shu ching, 5.16.7 and elsewhere.

6. TYSC ‘To defeat Ch’u and destroy all other countries’. A reference to the wars establishing the Han dynasty in China.

7. i.e. the Chin or Khitan emperor.

IX

TYSC 21.6a6-b6.

1. O Sejae, Im Ch’un, Cho T’ong, Hwangbo Hang, Ham Sun, Yi Tamji, and Yi Inno.

2. TYSC adds ‘and they became somewhat discouraged.’

3. Two of the Seven Sages of Chin.

4. Wang Jung, one of the Seven Sages of Chin, was so mean that when he ate plums from his favourite tree he always cracked the stones lest someone else should try to plant them.

X

TYSC hujip 4.21bl0-22b6 and 23a2-3. This passage has half a dozen casual differences of text from TYSC; with the additional significant difference that the last sentence as given here consists in TYSC of some 70 characters that express Yi Kyubo’s half-admitted hope that Ou- yang would bring the whole poem back from China in the following years. Yi Kyubo says that he presented Ou-yang with two poems to act as a reminder. The poem given in Paegun sosol is the first of a pair, with the final hemistich much altered. The two poems were written, as a tour-de-force, on rhymes which Yi Kyubo had already used twice in verses for Ou-yang Po-hou (TYSC hujip 3.3b9 and 4.15b6.)

The incident is referred to again by Yi Kyubo’s son Ham in his preface to TYSC hujip. If the order of the poems in the hujip is chronologically correct, Ou-yang’s visit must have been in the 3rd or 4th moon of 1238, about three years before Yi Kyubo’s death.

XI

This passage presents the most intriguing editorial problem in Paegun sosol. It begins with a description, in formal prose, of the writer’s early reading habits, taken from the middle of a letter addressed to the high minister of state Cho Yongin in 1197, bagging for help in gaining an official appointment. (TYSC 26.18a9—19a5 Sang Cho taeui so.) This ends in the translation at ‘turned my hair grey’. The story that follows is not in TYSC, except for the quotation at the end, which is TYSC 2.6al0, where the title reads ‘in response to Yun the lecturer, on a spring day when I fell asleep under the influence of wine’. The poem is praised by Ch’oe Cha Pohan chip (Chosen Kankokai edition p 105), written a generation after Yi Kyubo.

1. Kao Yao: the great minister of the legendary emperor Shun, mentioned in Shu ching. [page 33]

2. K’uei: another minister of Shun’s. He was put in charge of music.

3. Pan Ku: historiographer of the Han dynasty. Died AD 92.

4. Ssuma Ch’ien: author of Shih chi, died c 85 BC.

XII

TYSC hujip 2.4. Only three or four characters differ between the two texts. The prose is the preface to Yi Kyubo’s imitation of Po Chu-i’s ‘Fifteen poems written in illness’; the poem is the last of the fifteen. The final note, saying that the poem is incomplete, does not appear in TYSC, for the very good reason that the editor of Paegun sosol was mistaken in believing anything had been lost, Po Chu-i’s original poem had only six verses.

Po Chu-i (772-846) was a favourite of Yi Kyubo, who discerned a like spirit, and imitated the T’ang poet’s pen-names, as well as his verses. Hence the delight at the discovery of their similar experiences in illness.

XIII

TYSC 20.18. To all intents and purposes the two texts are the same, save for the insertion here of the poem written while Kyubo was drunk. (TYSC does, however, contain the preceding sentence about versifying when drunk. The poem is not in TYSC at all.) This was written about 1192, when Yi Kyubo was twenty-three.

1. TYSC 20.12

2. The great Chinese poet of rustic life (c365-427) who remained a paramount influence in Korean literature.

XIV

TYSC hujip 11.12. Two brief passages are omitted in Paegun sosol.

1. A Sung collection of poetry criticism by Ts’ai Hsiu.

2. TYSC inserts at the beginning of the next sentence: ‘Although this criticism was trifling...’

3. TYSC here inserts: ‘but in fact he was one of the great scholars of his day, and to suggest that he did not know this reference was most insulting.’

XV

TYSC 21.5.

1. Mei Yao-ch’en, Sung poet (1002-1060).

2. Ssu Ling-yun (385-433.)

3. A poet of mid-T’ang.

4. The great Sung poet (1036-1101).

XVI

TYSC hujip 3.7b, A sentence is omitted in Paegun sosol. It comes immediately before the poems and explains that the first is addressed to Tsu-po, the second to Ou-yang Po-hu. [page 34]

1. This translates the Sanskrit Sasa-visana or Sasa-srnga, and means that all phenomena are as unreal as rabbit’s horns.

2. The monk’s staff had jangling rings attached to its top.

3. A metaphor for expounding dharma.

4. ‘The old drunkard’, Tsui-weng, was a pen-name for Ou-yang Hsiu.

Both TYSC and Paegun sosol here insert a note to the effect that Po-hu was an eleventh generation descendant of Ou-yang Hsiu. (This is borne out by the occasional addition of 29 to the former’s name and 9 to the latter’s. They may have been collaterally related.)

XVII

TYSC 37.5 is basically the same text, but is considerably longer. It has a longer prose account of Hyemun, and concludes with a dirge of twenty four-character verses. The poem given here in Paegun sosol is quoted in TYSC by the second distich only, as it is also in Pohan chip. The following version of the TYSC text shows in brackets those parts which are not in Paegun sosol. It is clear that Yi Kyubo could not have written the TYSC text before 1235, when he was sixty-six years old.

(My friend in the faith, the Great) dhanya-master Hyemun, (whose name was Pinbin and surname in the world was Nam,) was a man of Koyang prefecture. He came to the capital and shaved his head in the Ch’an sect at Kaji-san and became a distinguished monk. He was over thirty when he was at last accepted as a monk, but after proceeding through the various grades of monkhood in order he finally became a head dhyana-master. (Then in 1232 he went away to live at Hwaak-sa. He had been living in the capital, teaching the law at Poje-sa, but that year, because of the Mongol inroads, the court moved and the monastery was commandeered by the invaders. He was perplexed as to where to go. Eventually, he went for three years to a monk who had been a novice with him and now) lived at Unmun Monastery. (In 1234 he fell ill and died.) He was a man of noble character. At one time many famous men of the period used to visit him. He enjoyed writing verses which he did in the style of a mountain recluse. He wrote one about Pohyon Monastery, of which this is an extract:

The road outside the gate is long,

where men go north and south;

The pines beside the rocks are ancient,

where the moon shines now as of old.

(Many people used to recite it) and Hyemun was called ‘the pine-tree moon monk’. (I knew him as a friend from the time I was a young man, and I was so affected by the news of his death that I wrote the following elegy:)

Pohyon Monastery is in North Pyongan on Myohyang-san near Yonghyon. The empty room where brightness is born is a symbol from Chuang-tzu 4 Jen chien shih. The dewdrop in the heart of the plantain or banana plant suggests the clogging power of transitory things.

XVIII

TYSC hujip 1.10. The text in TYSC begins with a date: The third moon of 1215’, (Yi Kyubo was then forty-six). At the end the poem is printed complete―i.e. with Yi Kyubo’s second attempt at the first distich repeated before his closing distich. Otherwise there are a few [page 35]

consistent changes in pronouns and two other minor changes in particles that do not affect the sense.

XIX

TYSC 17.2 The version in TYSC includes three notes between the distichs of the first poem, missing from Paegun sosol. Both texts have a note in the middle of the quatrain explaining that Tonyu was a tenth generation descendant (perhaps collateral) of Ch’oe Ch’inon, whose pen-name, Koun, meant ‘lonely cloud’. TYSC lacks the brief prose reply from Tonyu.

This section is unusual in that the title of the TYSC text, which is lacking in all other sections, is present in Paegun sosol in the guise of a preface.

XX

TYSC 5.15. There are several allusions to the Chuang-tzu here.

1. Chu Ku: had a perfect gourd, too hard to cut, but useless because no water could be put into it.

2. Lacquer Garden Officer: Chuang-tzu.

XXI

TYSC 9.4. The text differs significantly only in that TYSC begins with the date: ‘5th moon 1199’. Yi Kyubo was then thirty, Ch’oe Ch’unghon was virtually dictator of Korea, and a note in TYSC says he was later enfeoffed as Duke Chin’gang. This poem caught his notice and led to Yi Kyubo getting his first public appointment and leaving the capital for Chonju a month later.

XXII

TYSC 6.8. The TYSC text begins ‘7th day of the 8th moon. I left Yongdam Monastery at dawn. The next day I took a boat at Yongp’o...’

1. Yongyon near Mun’gyong.

2. Near Sonsan.

3. TYSC inserts ‘I had no fear of sinking. Then I let the boat go’.

4. In TYSC this sentence reads: The monk heard me, and came out to the river to greet me, cordially inviting me to go into the monastery, I declined and persuaded the monk to come aboard the boat, where we talked together for a bit’.

5. T’ao Ch’ien’s five willows are proverbial; Yu-chiang, spirit of the northern sea, is mentioned in Shan-hai-ching.

6. This comment is not in TYSC.

XXIII

TYSC 6.9. This follows on from the previous section, but an intervening river poem is lacking in Paegun sosol. There are some minor variations of characters.

1. TYSC inserts ‘The boat sped like a bird’.

2. Here TYSC inserts ‘Even in sickness it would be impossible not to enjoy it’. [page 36]

XXIV

An extract from ‘Diary of a journey in the south’ describing the itinerant part of Yi Kyubo’s job at Chonju. TYSC 23.9a5;9a7-9; (date omitted) 9a9-10; 9b1-3; 10a6-8 provide the mosaic of the prose section prefacing the poem. The poem itself is TYSC 10,2. The first two sentences are not in TYSC.

XXV

TYSC 22.19a8-19b7.

XXVI and XXVII

TYSC 22,18al-19a8. The beginning of an essay which is continued in XXV, and thereafter in XXVIII.

1. Here TYSC inserts: Then the sense has to take second place, because the placing of the rhymes is inflexible’.

2. Here TYSC inserts: ‘But the decision is hard to make: the whole poem may be turning out well, and one verse may hold up its completion; sometimes haste brings disaster.

3. Here TYSC inserts: ‘and clear in its details’.

4. Here TYSC inserts: ‘and there will be no further difficulty’.

XXVIII

TYSC 22.19b7-20a1.

1. TYSC adds: What I have said does not apply to poetry only. It applies approximately to prose as well Old style verse is elegant prose divided into phrases with rhymes to beautify it. Good meaning and gracious language naturally prevent it from being cramped. So verse and prose hold to the same standard.

XXIX

TYSC 26.4b8-5a5 (different text for the last phrase)

1. TYSC inserts: ‘and will not be able to take the goods.’

XXX

TYSC hujip 11.13

1. Wang Mang’s usurpation of the Han Empire in AD 8 and his death in AD 23 marked the end of the former Han; Ts’ao Ts’ao’s campaigns brought an end to Later Han in AD 220. Yi Shan-fu was a poet of late T’ang.

2. TYSC adds: I do not understand why the poetry anecdote does not state the fact explicitly. [page 37]

XXXI

TYSC hujip 2b3 has the poem, but not the introductory prose sentences.

XXXII

This section is not in TYSC. The phrase wisim, ‘frustration’ (in the TYSC title and Paegun sosol preface to the previous section) is echoed in the last sentence but one of this section, and doubtless prompted the addition of this section to Paegun sosol.

The poem, in very slightly different form, appears in *O Sukkwon P’aegwan chapki*, an early sixteenth-century collection of essays included in *Sihwa ch’ongnim* (Mullim-sa edition 2-156). It is there described as ‘a poem of early Ming’.