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**Samguk Sagi Volume 48\* Biographies Book 8**

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**HYANGDOK**

Hyangdok was a native of P’anjok-hyang Village in Silla’s Ungch’on-ju Province (Kongju). His father was called Son, and his given name was Pan’gil. His mother’s name has not come down to us. Hyangdok was gentle and meek by nature, and his department was praised in his native village.

Hyangdok also received the admiration of the people of his time for his filial service to his parents. In the fourteenth year of the Tian-bao reign of the Tang emperor Xuanzong (755)，there was an extremely poor harvest so the people went hungry. In addition to this, a terrible epidemic circulated, and as a result, Hyangdok’ s parents suffered from hunger and illness. His mother developed a carbuncle and drew close upon the verge of death, so Hyangdok exerted his strength and devotion in nursing her day and night without even taking the time to change his own clothing. However, he was not able to support his parents sufficiently，so he cut the flesh from his own thigh and gave it to them to eat. Then he sucked out his mother’s carbuncle with his mouth， thereby healing her illness and making her well again.

A village gentleman reported these events to the provincial officials, who in turn notified the king. The king issued an instruction rewarding Hyangdok with 300 ten-peck bags of tax grain，a mansion and several fields of pension land. He also commanded his officials to raise a stone monument in Hyangdok’s honor and to engrave these facts upon it Even to this day, people

\*Editor’s note: Samguk Sagi, written by Kim Bu-Shik，is a history of the Three Kingdoms period, published in 1145*.*

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call this place “Hyoga-ri”, or Filial Family Village.

SONGGAK

Songgak was a man of Silla’s Chong-ju Province (Chinju). His clan’s history has been lost to us. Songgak took no pleasure in his own title and post， so he gave himself the name Kosa and went to Illi-hyon County (Songju) to stay at Popchong Temple. He later returned to his home to support his aged mother. Due to decrepitude and sickness,his mother found it difficult to eat vegetables, so Songgak cut the flesh from his own leg for her to eat.

After his mother died，Songgak displayed devout sincerity in offering up food at her Buddhist funeral ceremony. News of these events reached the ears of the ministers Kakkan Kyongsin and I-ch’an Chuwon,who in turn related the news to the king. Based upon the precedent of Hyangdok of Ungch’on-ju Province,the king rewarded Songgak with 300 bags of tax grain from a nearby village .

A treatise: Song Qi wrote in the Tang Shu, “How superb the commentary of Han Yu! It was he who wrote,’It has been said that the preparing and administering of medicine to one’s sick parents is filial, but I have not yet heard of anyone injuring the flesh of his own body in performance of his filial duty. Indeed, if such acts would do no damage to one’s sense of morality, would not the Sages have already demonstrated them? If one should die as a result of such a misfortune, then one would bear the sins of wounding his body and of severing his family line. How then could citations be hung at his gate to commend him? Even so, although scholarship and decorum have not been adopted in the tenements of the poor，such places are overflowing with the sincerity of those disregarding their own bodies for the sake of their parents. And because the praise lauded upon such individuals has been considerable, their names have found their ways into the annals.’ “

For this reason, people such as Hyangdok have come to have their names recorded in the histories.

SILHYE

Silhye was the son of Taesa Sundok of Silla. He was upright by nature and did not yield in the least when faced with injustice.

Silhye became a Superior Chamberlain during the reign of King [page 73]

Chinp’yong (579-632). At this time the king’s favor had been won by the Subordinate Chamberlain, Chinje—a man of capricious and wicked nature. Though he was Silhye’s colleague, Chinje often disputed matters with him. Silhye was never wanting in straightforwardness and honesty, so Chinje bore a jealous resentment against him. On several occasions Chinje slandered Sil-hye before the king, saving, “Silhye lacks wisdom but excels in nerve. He is rash and impetuous, and even though the words he hears should be spoken by the Great King himself, if they did not accord with his own will, he would not lay aside his indignation. If he is not disciplined, he may yet throw the country into chaos. Why not expel him now? If later he repents his behavior, it will not be too. late to restore him to his position.” The king believed his words and thought them proper, so he immediately stripped Silhye of his position and banished him to Yongnim on the the fringes of the country.

Hereupon, someone said to Silhye,”You have served your country with loyalty since the time of our departed grandfathers, and your talent has become well known. But now you have suffered the slander of a fawning minister and have been exiled to the desolate remote regions beyond Chungnyong Pass. Do you not resent this? Why do you not defend yourself and set the matter straight?” To this Silhye replied, “In ancient times, Qu Yuan stood alone in his upright honesty, yet Chu rejected and expelled him. Li Si carried out his duties with fidelity, but Qin rewarded him with the death penalty. We are, therefore, not unfamiliar with cases of fawning ministers misguiding their lords and of loyal gentlemen being ousted from their positions. Considering these precedents from the old times, how can I grieve over this?”

In the end, Silhye left without saying a word in his own defense. He spent his time in exile writing long songs to express his feelings.

MULGYEJA

Mulgyeja was a man of humble ancestry who lived in the time of Naehae Nisagum of Silla (196-230). He had an uncommon disposition, and from childhood he had held fast to admirable principles.

At one time, the eight states of P’osang conspired together to launch a campaign against Ara-guk (Haman),so an envoy came from Ara-guk to Silla to request military reinforcement. Hereupon, Naehae Nisagum had his grandson Naeum lead the soldiers of the Six Districts of Silla and neighboring provinces forth to reinforce Araguk. In the end, Silla defeated the soldiers of the eight states, and in this battle Mulgyeja acquired considerable merit. How- [page 74] ever, Naeum detested Mulgyeja, so his merits went unrecorded. Someone said to Mulgyeja, “Your meritorious deeds were exceptional and yet they go unrecognized Do you not resent this? Why is it that you do not bring this to the attention of the king?” Mulgyeja replied, “What kind of resentment am I to harbor? To revere honor while seeking a name for oneself is not the way of the patriot. He should make the performance of his duty be his mind’s only concern and simply wait for later days.”

Later, when three years had passed, the people of the three states of Kolp’o，Ch’ilp’o and Kosap’o came to attack the fortress town of Kalhwa-song. The king led soldiers forth to rescue Kalhwa and completely defeated the soldiers of the three states. In this battle Mulgyeja struck down the enemy in dozens, yet when the time came to recognize merit, there were once again no rewards for him. He returned home and said to his wife, “I have heard that the duty of a loyal subject is to lay down his life when he encounters peril and to sacrifice his body in times of national difficulty. The battles of P’osang and Kalhwa were both perilous and difficult; however, I was able neither to lay down my life nor to sacrifice my body. With what kind of dignity can I now walk the streets? How can I now look people in the face?” At last, he untied his hair and, carrying a komun ‘go, wandered off to Sach’e Mountain never to return.

PAEKKYOL SONSAENG

It is not known from whence he came, but he lived below Nangsan (Kyongju) and he was exceedingly poor. The clothes he wore were patched in a hundred places, and he was so bedraggled that he looked like a quail hung upside-down. The people of this time called him Paekkyol Sonsaeng，or Master One Hundred Knots, of the Eastern Village. Paekkyol came to admire the Chinese musician, Rong Qiqi, so he taught himself to play the komun’go. Any time he felt joy, anger, sorrow or pleasure, or anytime something made him discontented, he would console himself by playing the komun’go.

One year as the New Year approached, Paekkyol’s neighbors began pounding rice in their mills. His wife heard the sounds of the rice mills and said, “Everyone else is busy pounding their rice. We alone have none to pound. How shall we make it through this year to greet the next?” Paekkyol turned his eyes to the heavens and lamented, Life and death are preordained, and wealth and position depend on the heavens.... You cannot avoid that which will come and you cannot pursue that which has passed. How can you [page 75] grieve over this? To console your sadness, I will play the sounds of the rice mill. This song has been passed down to us through the ages and is called the “Tae-ak”, or The Song of the Pestle.

KOMGUN

Komgun was the son of Taesa Kumun of Silla, and he served as a secretary at the Saryang Palace.

In the eighth month of the forty-fourth year of Kon-bok (627)，there was a heavy frost and all the crops suffered damage. In Spring and Summer of the following year there was severe famine, and the people were reduced to such miserable straits that they were forced to sell their own children in order to eat. At this time, a group of palace secretaries schemed together and secretly stole grain from the storehouse reserves and divided it amongst themselves. Only Komgun refused to accept any of this grain, so the suspicious secretaries said to him，”Everyone has taken a share except for you. What is the reason for this?” and they asked him once again to accept a share of the stolen grain. Komgun merely smiled and said, “As a follower of the hwarang, Kullang, I am practicing the Way of the Wind and the Moon. If a deed is improper, I would not act upon it, even if by doing so I should profit by one thousand pieces of gold” and he firmly refused to accept the grain.

Komgun then parted the secretaries’ company and proceeded to the home of Kullang, the son of I-ch’an Taeil. The secretaries plotted covertly and said, “If we do not kill Komgun, he will undoubtedly reveal the matter of our thievery,” and they presently summoned Komgun to meet them.

Komgun knew that the palace secretaries were plotting to murder him, so he told Kullang, “You and I shall not meet after this day,” and though Kullang pressed him for an explanation, Komgun would not reply. However, after Kullang had solicited an explanation three times, Komgun gave him a brief account of his predicament. Kullang asked him, “Why have you not brought this matter to the attention of the officials?” and Komgun replied, “I feared for my life, and I furthermore could not bear to bring about the punishment of so many people,” Kullang asked him, “If so, then why do you not flee and escape them?” to which Komgun replied, “Their hearts are twisted whereas mine is straight. To flee from them is not the course a gentleman would take.” So saying, he left forthwith to meet the palace secretaries.

The secretaries had prepared a banquet in Komgun’s honor. Their ostensi--ble intent was to apologize to Komgun; however, their real intent was to poi-[page 76] son him. Komgun knew that his food had been poisoned, but he ate it without hesitation and immediately fell dead. A gentleman has since said，”Komgun need not have died, but he chose death to preserve his sense of righteousness. One may well say that, by comparison, Mount Tai is a trivial thing!”

KIM SAENG AND YO KUG’IL

Kim Saeng’s parents were of humble origins, so we do not know his family lineage, but he was born in the second year of the Jing-yun reign of the Tang Emperor Ruizong (711). From his early childhood he was skilled at calligraphy, and though he never mastered any other skills, he did not rest his calligraphy brush until he was past the age of 80. His seal characters, as well as his cursive and semicursive styles, were marvelously executed. Even today his works surface from time to time, and scholars uphold them as precious treasures.

During the Chong-ning reign of the Song Emperor Huizong (1102- 1106)，the Koryo Academician, Honggwan, went to Song in the company of envoys and lodged in the guest accommodations at the capital Bianjing (Kaifeng). At this time, the Song Academicians, Yang Qiu and Li Ge, went to the guest lodgings under imperial orders to paint a hanging scroll there. When Honggwan met these men, he showed them a volume of Kim Saeng’s cursive and semicursive calligraphy. The men were surprised and said, “How is it that we have today chanced to behold the brushwork of Wang Youjun?” and Honggwan replied,”This is not the work of Wang Youjun. This is the hand of Kim Saeng of Silla.” The two men laughed at this and said.”How could there exist in this world such excellent brushwork as this, except for that drawn by the hand of Wang Youjun?” and despite Honggwan’s insistence to the contrary, the two men would not believe him.

There was also a calligrapher named Yo Kug’il who held the combined ranks of Chief Minister and Attendant Academician. His brush strokes were forcefully executed, and he adapted the technique of Ouyang Shuai. Although he did not attain to the status of Kim Saeng, the refinement of his work was praised nevertheless.

SOLGO

Solgo was a man of Silla. His origins were humble and indistinct, so his family lineage was not set down in the records. [page 77]

Since his early youth，Solgo displayed great skill at painting. He once painted a picture of an old pine tree on a wall at Hwangnyong Temple. He made the trunk of the tree chapped so that it appeared rough and textured, and he made the branches and leaves realistically twisted and winding. From time to time ravens, kites, swallows and sparrows would see this painting and come flying, only to fall to the ground when they tried to light upon it.

As time passed, however, the painted colors faded, so a monk from the temple restored them, but hereafter the birds no longer tried to land on the tree.

The Kwanum Posal (Avalokiteshvara) of Punhwang Temple in Kyongju and the image of Yuma (Vimalakirti) of Tansok-sa Temple in Chinju were both works of art executed by Solgo’s hand. These paintings have come down to us through the ages and are considered to be divine portraits.

CHIUN, THE FILIAL DAUGHTER

Chiun was the daughter of Yon’gwan of Han’gi-bu (Kyongju), and she had a remarkably filial character. She lost her father at an early age so she cared for her mother by herself. Even at the age of 32 she still had not taken a husband,but she remained by her mother,s side day and night. As they were destitute, she was not able to support her mother adequately. She sometimes worked for others or went door to door to beg rice which she would then bring home for her mother to eat. But as the days went by, she found that she could not overcome their poverty, so she went to the house of a wealthy man and sold herself into bondage in exchange for ten and more bags of rice. Hereafter, she worked at this house all day long, returning home only at sundown with food which she had prepared for her mother.

After three or four days had passed in this manner, Chiun’s mother said, “The rice of former days, though coarse, tasted very good. But the rice of today, though of fine quality, does not taste as good I feel as though my heart had been pierced with a knife. Why is this?” Chiun told her mother the truth of the matter, and her mother exclaimed, “You became the slave of another for my sake? You would have been better off if I had died early!” and she began to wail loudly. Her daughter began to cry as well, and the passers-by outside heard their sobs and felt a profound pity for them.

A man named Hyojong-nang had been out roaming and happened to witness this. He returned to his home and asked his parents for 100 bags of grain and some clothing which he then gave to Chiun and her mother. He also repaid Chiun’s master in grain and thereby bought back her freedom. Some [page 78] 1,000 of Hyojong’s hwarang followers heard of this, so each of them sent a bag of grain to Chiun and her mother. Even Queen Chinsong heard of these events and bestowed upon them 500 bags of grain and a house. She also exempted both of them from taxes and labor requirements. Since Chiun and her mother now had so much food, they grew concerned about thieves, so the queen commanded the local officials to dispatch soldiers to maintain a guard on them. The village itself was honored with a plaque bearing the name ‘‘Hyoyang-bang”,or Filial Support Village. The tale of these noble deeds was committed to writing and sent to Tang.

Hyojong was the son of Prime Minister Sobal-han In’gyong, and in his youth he was called Hwadal. The queen once said that although Hyojong was young at the time, he nevertheless showed himself to be mature well past his years. She therefore gave Hyojong the daughter of her own elder brother, King Hon’ gang, to take as a wife.

SOL-SSI

Sol-ssi (Miss Sol) was a daughter of the house of Yulli Village. Her fam-ily was poor and friendless, but her features were beautifully formed and her principles and conduct were well refined. Of those men who beheld her, there were none who did not admire her beauty and none who dared to violate her.

In the time of King Chinp’yong (579-632)，Sol-ssi’s aged father was called upon to serve in the defense of Chong-gok Valley (on the Koguryo border). Sol-ssi could not endure the thought of her aged, infirm and weak father being sent off alone far from home，and she hated that，as a woman，she could not accompany him. She was left with no recourse but to bury herself in her own grief.

There was at this time a poor and humble young man of Saryang-bu named Kasil, who had always cherished noble aspirations. He was delighted with the beautiful Sol-ssi, but he had never found the courage to speak to her When he heard of Sol-ssi’s old father being sent off for military duty, howev-er, he finally went to her and said, “Though I am a coward, I consider myself to be determined and ambitious. Unworthy as I am, I would like to take your father’s duty upon myself.” Sol-ssi was overjoyed upon hearing this so she rushed off to inform her father of the news. Her father presently ushered Kasil into his room and said, “I have heard that you, sir, intend to perform the duties of this old man in his stead. I cannot overcome my own joy and grati-tude . I wonder how I shall ever repay your kindness. Perhaps, sir, if you do [page 79] not think her too foolish and rude,you might wish to take my young daughter as your wife.” Kasil bowed twice before him and said,”I had not dared to wish for this, but this is truly what I would desire.”

Kasil withdrew and went to ask Sol-ssi to name a wedding date. Hereupon Sol-ssi said, “Marriage is a very important event in one’s life and should not be rushed. Once I have given my heart to someone, I shall not give up my devotion even though he should die. Therefore，when you have returned home after performing your military duties, then we may select a date to complete the wedding ceremony,” and so saying，she pulled out her mirror and broke it in half. She kept one half for herself and gave the other to Kasil, saying, “These pieces represent our faith and trust. They shall one day be joined together again.” Kasil then brought forth his horse and said,”This is the finest horse in the land, and I shall certainly have use for him in days to come. But while I am gone he will have no master to serve, so I would like for you to take him into your care and to make use of him.” Then they said their farewells and parted.

But as it happened, the army had cause to retain troops at the defensive sites rather than allowing them to return after performing their shifts; therefore, Kasil was unable to return home for six years. Sol-ssi’s father told her,”Kasil promised to return to marry you after three years. That day has already passed and still he has not returned home. You must find someone else to marry.” But Sol-ssi replied,”I became Kasil’s betrothed in order to bring you peace. And because Kasil trusted in our promise of marriage, he has for a long time served as a soldier, suffering the hardships of hunger and cold, to say nothing of being pressed close to the enemy border without a weapon in hand. Like one standing close to a tiger’s mouth, he must constantly worry about being chewed up. If we forsake his trust and break our word, how can we consider ourselves humane? I dare not do as you suggest. Let us not speak of this again.”

Her father was getting extremely old, however, and he was concerned because his daughter was now in the prime of her life and still had not found a husband. He therefore resolved to have her married even if it meant resorting to coercion, so he secretly made arrangements with a village man and had the wedding date set. But when he summoned the man, Sol-ssi adamantly refused to marry him and tried instead to run away. However, when she reached the horse stables and caught sight of the horse which Kasil had given her, she stopped and gave a great sigh of grief while bitter tears rolled down her cheeks. At this time, Kasil returned home at last, but he had become thin as a [page 80] skeleton and his clothes were tattered. The people of Sol-ssi’s house did not even recognize him and they took him to be someone else. Kasil walked forward and produced his half of the broken mirror and tossed it upon the floor. Sol-ssi picked it up and uttered a cry of joy. Her father and her family were all pleased as well Sol-ssi and Kasil selected a date to complete their wedding ceremony and were married at last. They lived out their lives in each other’s company and grew old together.

TOMI

Tomi was a man of Paekche. Though he came from a common and humble family, he had a sharp sense of moral righteousness. His wife was not only beautiful and elegant, but faithful as well. The couple elicited the praise of the people of their time.

At one time, King Kaeru heard of the beauty of Tomi’s wife，so he sum--moned Tomi before him and said, “In general, wives consider their foremost virtue to be their faithfulness, yet I maintain that there is no woman who cannot be swayed if tempted by clever words in a dark place when no one is near.” To this Tomi replied,”One cannot measure the emotions of another; however, in the case of your subject’s wife,she would remain faithful to me even if threatened with death.”

The king decided to put this to the test, so he had Tomi detained on some business matters and then had one of his personal attendants fetch his clothes and horse. When night fell his attendants went to Tomi’s home in advance to announce, the king’s arrival. When the king arrived, he confronted Tomi’s wife and told her,”I have long heard of your exquisite beauty, so by winning a wager with Tomi I have acquired you for myself. Tomorrow you are to be installed as a lady of the court, and hereafter you will be my property.” He then began to act lasciviously, so she said，”The king would never tell a lie, so how could I dare not to submit. If the king will go into the bedroom first, I will change my clothes and follow you in.” But after the king had gone into the bedroom, she dressed up a female house servant and sent her into the room to serve the king as his mistress.

Afterward, the king saw the servant and knew that he had been deceived. He became enraged and later had Tomi falsely charged with a crime. As punishment, he had Tomi’s eyes gouged out and had him led into a small boat which was then cast adrift upon the river. The king then had Tomi’s wife brought before him. But when he tried to force her, she told him，”Now I have [page 81] lost my husband and I am all alone. Since I cannot support myself, and since I have become the king’s attendant, how could I dare to defy the king’s command? However, since I am menstruating now and my body is unclean, I ask the king to wait for another day and to return when I am clean.” The king believed her and granted her request.

Hereafter, Tomi’s wife fled the capital and came to the mouth of a river. She could not cross over, however, so she turned her eyes to the heavens and wailed sorrowfully. Suddenly, a solitary boat appeared followed by a wave. She jumped into the boat and rode the wave to Ch’onsong Island where she found her husband who had not yet died. For a time the couple survived by digging out grass roots to eat, but they eventually left the island together in the boat and sailed as far as the base of San Mountain in Koguryo, where the Koguryo people took pity on them and gave them food and clothing. Tomi and his wife lived out the remainder of their lives in poverty, wandering far from home.

