

ISSN online: 2720-6327

Volume 8/2022

# International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences



Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures  
Adam Mickiewicz University  
Poznań, Poland

in co-edition with  
Inha University, Incheon, South Korea  
and  
Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea

**FACULTY OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES  
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY, POZNAŃ, POLAND**

<https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/kr>  
koreanhumanities@gmail.com

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Editor-in-chief:** Kyong-geun Oh

**Co-editors:** Kang Sok Cho, Emilia Wojtasik-Dziekan, Kyung Sup Woo

**Secretary:** Emilia Wojtasik-Dziekan

**External Member of the Editorial Board:**

Jong-seong Park (Korea National Open University, South Korea)

**Section editors:**

**Linguistics:** Emilia Wojtasik-Dziekan

**Literature:** Jong-seong Park, Kyong-geun Oh, Kang Sok Cho

**Social sciences:** Kyung Sup Woo

**Linguistic editor:** Kyong-geun Oh for Korean

**Technical editor:** Emilia Wojtasik-Dziekan

**Editorial Office**

International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures  
Adam Mickiewicz University  
al. Niepodległości 4, room 319B  
61-874 Poznań, Poland  
koreanhumanities@gmail.com

The electronic version serves referential purposes /  
Wersja elektroniczna jest wersją referencyjną czasopisma

The journal has been indexed on ERIH PLUS since 2018

Copyright by Faculty of Modern Languages and Literatures,  
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Published in Poland

in co-edition with

Inha University, Incheon, South Korea

and

Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea

ISSN online (e-ISSN): 2720-6327

<https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/kr/issue/archive>

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Inha University, Incheon, South Korea

Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea

## *Table of Contents*

### **ARTICLES**

- Mansu KIM: *Global contents but nationalistic themes: Bong Joon-ho's "Snowpiercer"* 7
- Nahyun KIM: *Between 'minjung' and 'literature': Korean labor poetry and reportage literature in the 1980s* 25
- Gia KIM: *Living in the modern society of colonial Joseon as a patient: a study on Yi Sang's literature focusing on diseases and physical sicknesses* 43
- Cleo GOH: *A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel and various editions of "Hamel's Journal"* 71
- Boram HAN: *Finding female identity in the Neo-Confucian country of Joseon: analysis of female-related crimes in "Sabeobpumbo" (司法稟報)* 97
- Aleksandra MÜLLER: *From King Hyegong to Suh Dongjin: the evolution of LGBT and homosexual rights in the Korean community, according to historiographical texts* 117

### **LIST OF REVIEWERS** 143

## *Spis Treści*

### **ARTYKUŁY**

Mansu KIM: <i>Nacjonalistyczne podejście do globalnej problematyki ukazane w filmie „Snowpiercer: Arka Przyszłości” w reżyserii Bong Joon-ho</i>	<b>7</b>
Nahyun KIM: <i>Między ‘narodem’ a ‘literaturą’: koreańska poezja robotnicza i literatura reportażu w latach 80. wieku XX</i>	<b>25</b>
Gia KIM: <i>Życie pacjenta w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie Joseon okresu kolonialnego: studium nad chorobami i fizycznymi dolegliwościami w twórczości Yi Sanga</i>	<b>43</b>
Cleo GOH: <i>Nowa odsłona biografii Hendricka Hamela oraz poszczególnych wydań „Dziennika Hamela”</i>	<b>71</b>
Boram HAN: <i>W poszukiwaniu kobiecej tożsamości w neokonfucjańskim Joseon: analiza przestępstw dotyczących kobiet w „Sabeobpumbo”</i>	<b>97</b>
Aleksandra MÜLLER: <i>Od króla Hyegonga do Suh Dongjina: ewolucja osób LGBT i ich praw w społeczności koreańskiej na podstawie tekstów historiograficznych</i>	<b>117</b>
<b>LISTA RECENZENTÓW</b>	<b>143</b>

## 목차

### 학술지 논문

- Kim Mansu: 글로벌 주제에 대한 민족주의적 접근: 봉준호의 “설국열차” 7
- Kim Nahyun: ‘민중’과 ‘문학’ 사이: 1980년대 노동시와 르포르타주 문학 25
- Kim Gia: 병자로서 조선의 근대사회를 살아가기 – 이상(李箱)의 문학 속 질병과 아픈 신체를 중심으로 43
- Goh Cleo: 헨드릭 하멜 생애와 『하멜표류기』 판본에 대한 재검토 71
- Boram HAN: 성리학 국가 조선에서 여성의 정체성 찾아가기 – 『사범품보』에 나타난 여성 범죄 사건의 분석 – 97
- Aleksandra MÜLLER: 해공왕에서부터 서동진까지: 역사적 기록들을 바탕으로 살펴본 한국사회에서의 LGBT 성소수자들의 권리 발전 동향 117
- 심사위원들 143



*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*  
vol. 8/2022  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.01>

## **Global contents but nationalistic themes: Bong Joon-ho's "Snowpiercer"**

**Mansu KIM, Professor**

Inha University,  
College of Humanities,  
100 Inharo, Nam-gu, Incheon, 22212,  
South Korea  
[mskim20@inha.ac.kr](mailto:mskim20@inha.ac.kr)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0595-7752>

**Abstract:** Bong Joon-ho's film, *Snowpiercer* (2013) is based on a French graphic novel which deals with the people who got on a train that ran continuously around the world in the coming ice ages. At first, the passengers of the train were restricted to the upper classes, but some lower class people happened to get on the train abruptly. It seems to be inevitable to start to struggle between the two classes. In this regards, the theme of this film is focused on the environmental disaster and social stratification. The ruling classes on this train emphasize the order and control. They justify their domination and oppression over the lower classes, assuming that the cause of the disaster lies in the discrepancy which comes from the uncontrolled populations and productions. They use 'the Spell of Plato' to prove their logic. According to their logic, the hierarchy must be divided into two (the ruler and the oppressed) or three (guardians, warriors and workers). Every

citizen must be satisfied with his social position. Their logics are further reinforced by the gradual ‘piecemeal social engineering’ proposed by Karl Popper. They also emphasize the justification of strong control supported by the Malthusian ‘principle of population’, where the population grows exponentially, but production increases arithmetically. This theory is repeated itself at the commercial movie like *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017). These movies became the dominant trends which could be named ‘(Post) Apocalyptic Film’. It seems that Bong Joon-ho is willing to follow the trends and conventions of the genre movie as known as Apocalyptic Film. However, by casting Korean actors as third groups of the movie intentionally, he makes it possible to imagine a new world that is different from this frustrating dichotomy (higher’s domination/lower’s oppression). Namgung Minsu and Yona who are acted by two Korean actors are represented as very active and interesting characters who are anticipated to solve the main social problems in the movie; environmental disasters and class conflicts. They show us the possibilities of the new world which can be imagined after the frozen and totally destroyed world is ended. Korean spectators can feel proud of the fact that the heroic and fantastic character of this movie is restricted to two Korean actors. Bong seemed to aim the target of spectators only to Korean. Anyway, he could make a little bit different movie from the conventions of blockbuster a.k.a. disaster movie or apocalyptic movie.

**Key words:** binary opposition; post-apocalyptic film; ‘Spell of Plato’; hierarchy; film conventions.

### 글로벌 주제에 대한 민족주의적 접근: 봉준호의 “설국열차”

**초록:** 봉준호 감독의 영화 “설국열차” (2013)는 지구에 불어닥친 혹한을 피해 달리는 열차에 탑승한 사람들의 이야기를 담은 프랑스 그래픽 노블을 원작으로 하고 있다. 원래 이 기차의 승객은 상류계급이었는데, 막무가내로 하층계급이 기차에 탑승함에 따라 두 계급 사이에 충돌이 벌어진다. 이런 점에서 보면 이 영화의 주제는 환경재앙, 계급갈등의 문제에 있다. 이 기차의 지배계급은 질서와 통제를 강조한다. 재앙의 출발 또한 조절되지 못한 인구수와 생산량에 있다는 전제하에, 하층계급에 대한 지배와 억압을 정당화한다. 이들은 자신의 논리를 입증하기 위해 ‘플라톤의 마술’을 사용한다. 즉 계급은 지배자, 군인, 평민으로 나뉘며 각자는 자신의 위치에 만족하는 것이 ‘정의’라는 주장을 내세운다. 이들의 주장은 칼 포퍼에 의해 제시된 ‘점진적 사회공학’에 의해 더욱 강화된다. 이들은 또한 인구는 기하급수적으로 증가하지만 생산량은 산술급수적으로 증가한다는 맬서스의 인구론을 바탕으로 깔고 강력한 통제를 강조하는데, 이러한 세계관은 영화 “어벤저스”



와 “킹스맨” 등에 효과적으로 활용됨으로써 최근 ‘아포칼립스 영화’의 장르적 관습으로 자리잡은 듯하다. 봉준호 감독도 이러한 아포칼립스 영화의 장르적 규칙을 따른다. 그러나 그는 한국인 배우를 의도적으로 제3의 인물로 설정함으로써, 이러한 답답한 이분법과는 다른 새로운 세계를 상상하도록 만든다. 한국인 배우들이 연기한 남궁민수와 요나는 환경재앙의 해결책을 통제와 억압에 두고자 하는 극중인물들과는 다르게 열차 바깥의 세계를 상상할 수 있게 하는 계기를 제공함으로써 재난 영화의 관습적 인물 배열과는 다른 세계관을 보여준다. 이 영화는 한국인 배우를 통한 한국인의 잠재적 가능성을 재현함으로써 한국인 관객에게 특별히 어필할 수 있었다. 어쨌든 재난 영화의 보편적 문법을 따르면서도 민족주의적인 성격을 부여함으로써, 환경재앙과 계급갈등이라는 현대적 과제를 다루되 한국인의 소망과 취향을 고려하여 좀더 한국인에게 친숙한 영화를 만들 수 있었던 것으로 보인다.

**키워드:** 이항대립; 포스트아포칼립스 영화; 플라톤의 마술; 위계질서; 영화 관습.

### **Nacjonalistyczne podejście do globalnej problematyki ukazane w filmie „Snowpiercer: Arka Przyszłości” w reżyserii Bong Joon-ho**

**Abstrakt:** Film *Snowpiercer: Arka przyszłości* (2013) w reżyserii Bong Joon-ho oparty jest na francuskiej powieści graficznej, ukazującej ludzkość znajdującą się w krążącym po skutym lodem świecie pociągu. Początkowo pasażerami byli jedynie przedstawiciele klas wyższych, jednak nieoczekiwanie okazało się, że do środka pociągu dostały się także osoby z klas niższych. Kwestią czasu zatem stało się starcie tychże klas. W tym ujęciu film skupia się na katastrofie klimatycznej oraz rozwarstwieniu społecznym. Klasy rządzące w pociągu kładą nacisk na porządek i kontrolę. Uzasadniają swoje rządy oraz ucisk klas niższych tym, że katastrofa miała swoje źródło w rozdzwisku między niekontrolowanym wzrostem liczebności populacji oraz uprzemysłowieniem. Udowadniają swoją logikę odwołując się do ‘czaru (zaklęcia) Platona’. Zgodnie z nim, hierarchia musi być podzielona na dwie (rządzący i rządzeni) bądź trzy (strażnicy, wojownicy i robotnicy) części. Każdy obywatel musi zadowolić się swoją pozycją społeczną. Ich logika ulega następnie wzmocnieniu Popperowską ‘stopniową cząstkową inżynierią społeczną’. Podkreślają również uzasadnienie silnej kontroli wspieranej maltuzjańską ‘statyczną teorią zasobów’, w której liczba ludności przyrasta geometrycznie a produkcja żywności arytmetycznie. Teoria ta powtarza się w takich filmach komercyjnych jak *Avengers: Wojna bez granic* (2018) czy *Kingsman: Złoty krag* (2017). Tytuły te stały się dominujące w obszarze filmów nazywanych ‘(post)apokaliptycznymi’.

Wydaje się zatem, że Bong Joon-ho chce podążać za trendami i konwencjami filmu gatunkowego uznawanego za apokaliptyczny. Jednakże celowo obsadzając koreańskich aktorów w grupie trzeciej umożliwia wyobrażenie nowego świata, innego od tego pełnego frustrującej dychotomii (dominacja wyższego/ucisk niższego). Namgung Minsu i Yona, grani przez koreańskich aktorów, są ukazani jako bardzo aktywni i ciekawi bohaterowie, mający rozwiązać główne problemy społeczne w filmie, katastrofy klimatyczne i konflikty klasowe. Ukazują możliwości, jakie przynieść może ze sobą nowa rzeczywistość po tym, jak obecny zamrożony i zniszczony świat upadnie. Koreańscy widzowie mogą zatem czuć się dumni z tego, że bohaterski i fantastyczny wymiar filmu jest podkreślony dzięki grze tych dwojga aktorów. Wydaje się zatem, że reżyser, wykorzystujący z jednej strony uniwersalny schemat filmów katastroficznych i nadający mu nacjonalistyczny charakter, a jednocześnie podejmujący wyzwanie współczesnych tematów katastrofy klimatycznej i konfliktów klasowych, tym właśnie filmem zdołał trafić w gusta Koreańczyków.

**Słowa kluczowe:** opozycja binarna; film postapokaliptyczny; ‘czar (zaklęcie) Platona’; hierarchia; konwencje filmowe.

## 1. Preface

### 1.1. About the movie *Snowpiercer*

*Snowpiercer* (설국열차, 2013) is a 2013 English-language science fiction action film based on the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* by Jacques Lob, Benjamin Legrand and Jean-Marc Rochette. This film is directed by Bong Joon-ho (봉준호), and written by Bong and Kelly Masterson. The film marks Bong’s English-language debut; approximately 80% of the film was shot in English<sup>1</sup>.

The movie is based on an original story which deals with the people who got on a train that ran continuously around the world in the coming ice ages. In 2014, an attempt to counteract global warming through climate engineering backfires catastrophically, causing another ice age and extinguishing all life. The only survivors are on the *Snowpiercer*, a massive train traveling on a circum-navigational

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowpiercer> (Accessed March 1, 2020).

track created by the transportation magnate and inventor, Wilford. At first, the passengers of the train were designed to be restricted to the upper classes, but some lower class people happened to get on the train abruptly. It seems to be inevitable to start to struggle between the two classes. In this regards, the theme of this film is focused on the environmental disaster and social stratification.

## 1.2. About the director, Bong Joon-ho

Let's start with the filmography of Bong Joon-ho. His films have dealt with the influences of the United States in a series of diverse ways. In his first popular film, *Memories of Murder* (살인의 추억; 2003), the United States plays a pivotal role in identifying or misidentifying serial murders. In his second film *The Host* (괴물; 2006), the monster was suspected to be created by the influences of poisons poured at the US Military Base at Yongsan Military Camp (용산군사기지) (Taylor 2016: 44). In his latest film *Okja* (옥자; 2017), CEO of Miranda, global food company at New York wants to capture a pig and send it to the laboratory in order to make a Super Pig. A Korean girl love that pigs so intensely that she decided to depart to save her pet pig, Okja. When we mention the characteristic aspects of *Okja*, we must remind the fact that US entertainment company Netflix supported him to make that movie. Also, American actors, American budget and English language are used at that movie. Anyway, his films are involved with the United States.

Nowadays we heard the big news that Bong's new film *Parasite* (기생충; 2019) received Palme d'or Award at Canne International Film Festival and Oscar Awards at four important sections. He became one of the most brilliant film directors in the world.

## 1.3. Between Global and Korean

In the winter of 2005, Bong was known to find Jean-Marc Rochette's French graphic novel series *Le Transperceneige* at a graphic novel

shop near Hongik University Street (홍대거리) and finished reading the entire series while standing in front of the bookshelf where he found it. He was fascinated by ideas of people struggling on the train for survival, and how every section is classified in social stratification. Bong showed the series to his friends, fellow director Park Chan-wook (박찬욱) and producer Lee Tae-hun (이태훈), who loved it as well. In the following year, Park's production company Moho Film acquired the copyrights to the original story of *Snowpiercer* for Bong. Next time, Kelly Masterson was hired to rewrite the script. Bong and Masterson had originally envisioned a romantic story for the protagonist; however they jettisoned that idea in subsequent drafts of the screenplay. On 2012, Chris Evans began negotiations to star in the film adaptation, and was later confirmed as the film's male lead. After the contract, Tilda Swinton and Jamie Bell were confirmed to be in talks to join the project. Principal photography had officially begun in Prague, Czech Republic, with a budget near to \$42 million, which was the largest film budget of all time for any film with Korean investors. The preparatory production began in Tyrol, Austria during mid-March for one day to shoot some snowy scenery on the Hintertux Glacier<sup>2</sup>.

The movie has been produced by the collaboration of many people whose nationalities are very diverse: Korea, US, French, Czech Republic. Although it has been made by the collaborations of various nation's people, the basic tone and theme seem to be restricted only to Korean people and Korean culture. Although the main issues and many elements of this movies are global and universal, but the main streams seem to be controlled by nationalistic feelings aroused by Korean director and Korean actors.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowpiercer> (Accessed March 1, 2020).

Tab. 1. Basic data on *Snowpiercer*

Item	Name	Nationality
original story	Jean-Marc Rochette's French graphic novel	French
directed by	Joon-ho Bong	Korean
written by	Joon-ho Bong/Kelly Materson	Korea/US
filmed at	Prague/Korea	Korea/Czech
language	English (80%), Korean (20%)	English/Korea
budget		Korea
actors	Chris Evans, Tilda Swinton, Gangho Song, and others	US/EU/Korea

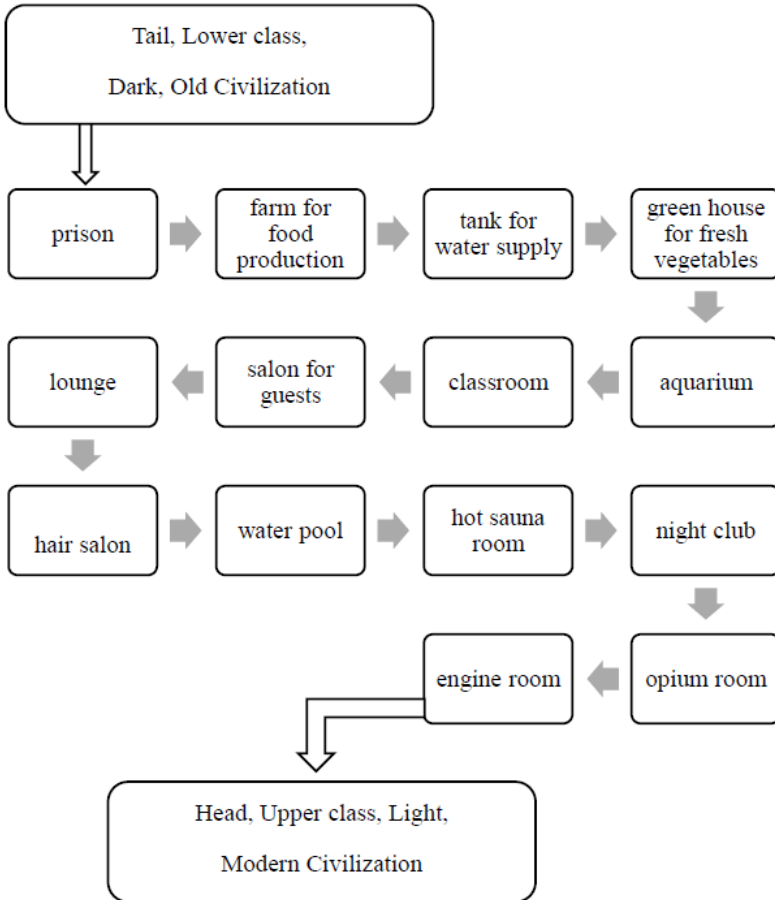
## 2. Binary Opposition of this movie

According to the category shown by the website Naver Movie, this movie is classified as 'SF-Action-Thriller'. We can watch the disaster which would be forecasted in the future, so it can be called SF Movie. We can meet the battle between two groups, so it can be Action Movie. We want to know the riddle of the struggle, so it can be Thriller Movie. Some articles treat this movie in these perspectives, to mention e.g. Taylor 2016; Canavan 2014 or Schmidt 2014.

### 2.1. Theme 1: Action Movie

Under watch by Wilford's guards, the poor people are brought only gelatinous 'protein blocks' to eat. The leader of the poor people, Curtis Everett plans to lead the tail passengers in a revolt that will take them all the way up to the engine, a perpetual motion machine. They started to attack toward the top. The train then heads into a long tunnel, plunging the car into darkness. They are quickly able to fashion some torches, which levels the playing field. In the ensuing bloody combat, Curtis can capture Mason Minister. It is the first victory.

In fact, the structure of this story is similar to that of Adventure Video Game which could be operated at PC or mobile phone. Each cabin of that train is similar to the stages of Adventure Game. Probably, the long chained linear train of the movie seem to be designed to be similar to the developing sequences of the human civilization.



Graph 1. The scheme of the quest inside the train and its reflection on the civilization development.

Each poor people must march towards the rich people. Each ancient people must move to the enlightened society. The lower class people at the tail cabin must struggle to get their freedom and human rights. It is represented like a video game.

## 2.2. Theme 2: Claustrophobia of Prison Movie

The situation of film *Snowpiercer* is restricted to the enclosed space. All the characters of this film are closed to the speedy and horrible nonstop-train. The overwhelming atmosphere is concerned with claustrophobia. Everyone who suffers from claustrophobia feels very uncomfortable or anxious when they are in small or enclosed places. The claustrophobia which can be experienced at the box stage became the main theme of the modern drama (Hayman 1995: 164). The people of the movie is similar to the actors of Box Stage in the modern drama.

That situation is presumed to be come from that of Nazi's Concentration Camp depicted at Günter Eich's radio-drama, *The Dream (Die Träume; 1947)*. The grandfather, father, son and grandson have been living together in completely enclosed trains for decades. In previous day, they were assumed to be abducted by the unknown soldiers (maybe they were Nazist). Grandfather always talks about 'yellow flowers' dandelions, but his grandson and his wife do not believe in the existence of dandelions. Because they have never seen a dandelion on the train, the family do not believe in the existence of dandelions except grandfather. All the Family get angry at the mention of their grandfather for they don't believe that the yellow flower would exist in the world:

Grandson's wife: My boy, there is not yellow flower in the world.

Child: But my grand grandfather and grand grandmother always talk about that flower.

Grandson's wife: Come on, That was just a fairy tale.

Child: What does it mean?

Grandson's wife: It's not real story.

Grandfather: You must not tell a lie to your lovely baby. I just say something true.

Grandson: All right. If your words are true, why not show that flower to us? please show it to me.

Grandfather: As you know, how can I show it?

Grandson: If you cannot show it immediately, it should be a lie. There can be no yellow flowers. (Kim Kwang-gyu 김광규 1983: 102–118).

In other words, that situation reminds us the ‘allegory of Plato’s Cave (Imprisonment in the cave)’. According to Plato and Socrates, there can be an imaginative cave where people have been imprisoned from birth. These prisoners are chained so that their bodies are fixed, forcing them to gaze at the wall in front of them and not look around at the cave. Behind the prisoners there is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a long walkway. The prisoners cannot see any of what is happening behind them, they are only able to see the ‘shadows’ cast upon the cave wall in front of them. Socrates suggests that the shadows are reality for the prisoners because they have never seen anything else; they do not realize that what they see are shadows of objects in front of a fire, much less that these objects are inspired by real things outside the cave which they do not see. Also, few humans will ever escape the cave. This is not some easy task, and only a true philosopher, with decades of preparation, would be able to leave the cave, up the steep incline. Most humans will live at the bottom of the cave, and a small few will be the major artists that project the shadows with the use of human made light (Russell 1995: 196).

Plato continues, saying that the freed prisoner would think that the world outside the cave was superior to the world he experienced in the cave and attempt to share this with the prisoners remaining in the cave attempting to bring them onto the journey he had just endured; “he would bless himself for the change, and pity [the other prisoners]” and would want to bring his fellow cave dwellers out of the cave and into the sunlight. The returning prisoner, whose eyes have become accustomed to the sunlight, would be blind when he re-enters the cave, just as he was when he was first exposed to the sun. The prisoners, according to Plato, would infer from the returning man’s blindness that the journey out of the cave had harmed him and that they should not undertake a similar journey. Plato concludes that the prisoners, if they were able, would therefore reach out and kill anyone who attempted to drag them out of the cave.

According to that allegory, the people located at the tail cabin is the same to the prisoners at Plato’s Cave. The tail cabin is dark and the top cabin is light. The people at lower class is dark and foolish, the



ones at upper class is light and wise. They must obey to the command of the top cabin.

### 2.3. Theme 3: Social Stratification

The riots were able to capture Mason Minister. She was the mouthpiece of dominating upper class. She always shouted: ‘you are just the tail. You must obey the command of the top. Or you will be perished’.

After the capture, they forced her to put her shoes on the head. This scene seems to be the critical parody against Plato’s *Politics*.

‘Now see whether you agree with me’, says Socrates.

‘Do you think it would do much harm to the city if a carpenter started making shoes and a shoemaker carpentering.’

‘Not very much.’

‘But should one who is by nature a worker, or a member of money-earning class... manage to get into warrior class; or should a warrior get into the guardian’s class without being worthy of it; then this kind of change and of underhand plotting would mean the downfall of the city.’

‘Most definitely it would.’

‘We have three classes in our city, and I take it that any such plotting or changing from one class to another is a great crime against the city, and may rightly be denounced as the utmost wickedness?’

‘Assuredly.’

‘But you will certainly declare that utmost wickedness towards one’s own city is injustice?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then this is justice. And conversely, we shall say that when each class in the city attends to its own business, the money-earning class as well as auxiliaries and the guardians, then will be justice. (Plato in Popper 2013)

At the previous sentences, Popper accuses Plato of betraying Socrates in *The Republic*, wherein Plato portrays Socrates sympathizing with totalitarianism. Anyway, Plato’s hatred of democracy led him, says Popper, “to defend lying, political miracles, tabooistic superstition, the suppression of truth, and ultimately, brutal violence”. Popper feels that Plato’s historicist ideas are driven by a fear of the change that liberal democracies bring about. Plato

according to Popper was sympathetic to the oligarchs of his own day and contemptuous of the common man. Popper also suspects that Plato was the victim of his own vanity, and had wished to become the supreme Philosopher King of his vision.

Plato (according to Popper, it's not Socrates probably) made a strict hierarchy from top to bottom like the following tableau.

Tab. 2. The juxtaposition of Plato's hierarchy and the hierarchy in *Snowpiercer*.

Plato's <i>The Republic</i>	Movie <i>Snowpiercer</i>	
guardian	Gilford	head cabin
warrior	Mason Minister/soldiers	
worker	Curtis, Edgar, Namgung Minsu	tail cabin

It is a very stubborn dichotomy between the head and shoes. The worker must be satisfied with his social position in the same reason that the shoes must be put not on the head but on the feet. The class differentiation represented in the words of Spell of Plato is strengthened in the last dispute between Gilford and Curtis. It seems to be the conservative attitude of this movie.

## 2.4. Theme 4: Disaster or Apocalyptic Movie

In the movie, to run a sacred engine eternally is the duty of the leader (guardian) of the top cabin. The leader Gilford insists that to keep balance between production and consumption is the only way for survival in the fatal apocalyptic environment.

His economical policy comes from Malthusian 'principle of population'. He also emphasize the justification of strong control supported by the Malthusian 'principle of population', where the population grows exponentially, but production increases arithmetically. This theory is repeated itself at the commercial movie like *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017).

These movies became the dominant trends which could be named '(Post) Apocalyptic Film'. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction is a sub-genre of science fiction, in which the Earth's

technological civilization has collapsed. The apocalypse event may be climatic, such as runaway climate change; natural, such as an impact event; man-made, such as nuclear holocaust or resource depletion. The story may involve attempts to prevent an apocalypse event, deal with the impact and consequences of the event itself, or it may be post-apocalyptic, set after the event. Post-apocalyptic stories often take place in a non-technological future world or a world where only scattered elements of society and technology remain.

To sum it up, the themes of this movie come from the combination of disaster and class conflict. The principle of ‘the survival of the fittest’ is very dangerous thought especially when it would be adapted at human society. We can call it totalitarianism. The guardian at the top engine has the doxa that human must keep the basic rule that some people should sacrifice their lives for the happiness of all mankind.

### **3. Binary Oppositions without Exit**

#### **3.1. Third Vision over hopeless dichotomy**

The future vision presented at *Snowpiercer* does not stay at the narrow binary oppositions. Namgung Minsu and Yona offered us a new vision which could be named as the third possibility. They overcame the dichotomy between the head cabin and tail cabin, the upper and lower layers. Two Koreans actors acted very bravely and creatively than others. So spectators come to believe that only Korean people could reach their destination of the ultimate paradise they can imagine. The third vision is more important than hopeless and stubborn dichotomy. To acknowledge it, we must mention ‘the Rule of the Three’ (cf. Kim Mansu 2015).

In the beginning, in almost any story, there is an all-important ‘one’: the central figure of the story, the hero or heroine with whom we identify. Then, there arises a sense of division, of a splitting into two a.k.a. dichotomy. Basic story such as myth and folklore lies in the clear and distinct logic of dichotomy. But we must realize that the trichotomy (rule of three) is richer than the binary oppositions for it contains various rich elements that could not be explained by

dichotomy. According to Bruno Bettelheim, English folk tale *Three Little Pigs* is more attractive than Aesop's fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper* because it contains three characters. A comparison of *Three Little Pigs* with *The Ant and the Grasshopper* accentuates the difference. In both stories the child identifies with the animals: but after having identified with grasshopper, there is no hope left for the child, according to the fable. But identification with the little pigs of the fairy tale teaches that there are development-possibilities of progress from the pleasure principle to the reality principle (Bettelheim 2010: 43). Of course, Aesop's fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper* is based on a firm dichotomy of 'labor and play' and has a strong moral intensiveness. However, this allegory cannot give children a real sense of emotion. The fable teaches a terrible instruction that enjoying life in the midsummer is a kind of crime or bad behavior. Also it teaches that rich people must not help poor people because the charity to the poor make the poor more dependant. But in the tale of *Three Little Pigs*, the weakest and youngest pig has a warm heart enough to help his two elder brothers. *Three Little Pigs* is based on three logics. The logic is richer than the dichotomy of strict instruction.

### **3.2. New Vision represented by Korean Actors**

In the movie, Namgung Minsu (남궁민수) and Yona (요나) play a funny role like Joker at card game. The proportion of these two figures was somewhat secondary until the middle of this story. Unlocking the securities set up at the train was their job. Though they were doing it quite well, they were not important character but comic. Suddenly the story started to change after they broke the windows of the train and tried to escape out of the train. At the moment of the escape from the enclosed train, the theme and the vision of this film had been changed into unanticipated closure.

As you know, most important stories were constituted with the binary opposition between head (upper class) and tail (lower class). Most important role were given to famous Hollywood star such as Chris Evans, Tilda Swinton and Jamie Bell. But the key character to escape the enclosed train were given to two Korean actors, Song

Kang-ho (송강호) and Go Ah Sung (고아성). Of course, they are known to very influential actors in Korean movies. It seems to be important that Bong tried to emphasize their role in this movie only because they are Korean. We cannot deny the fact Korean movie has been produced and consumed only in Korea in the long time. We must criticize Bong's intention to appeal only Korean movie goers.

This setting contributes to create a kind of hybrid and transnational characters in the film. When all the people stays in the closed circuit of dichotomy, only the Korean people can dream of the third realm and imagine the new possibility. It makes the Korean audience set as the main consumer segment of the film.

The film presents a message of salvation through the way Yona and Timmy are depicted as masters of the new world. Of course, the audience of this film cannot come out of the train with Yona. It was because the movie ended before they could escape from the enclosed trains. However, their play remains as a third visual impulse, as strongly as the class confrontation pair that kept this film conflict constant.

#### 4. Conclusions

The film has earned US\$ 86.7 million worldwide. The film grossed US\$ 59,8 million in South Korea and its largest international market was China, with \$11 million. It succeeded not at the global market but at the domestic<sup>3</sup>.

In Korea, over twenty movies could achieve the blockbuster title which means 10 million spectators come to see the movie. Ten million people means the amount of 20% of all Korean population. It is an amazing scale that 20% of all people saw the movie at the same time. *Snowpiercer* is not 10 million blockbuster. But it was the tenth highest-grossing domestic film in South Korea with 9.35 million admissions at that time.

It succeeded not at the global market but at the domestic. Socialist realism wanted to show their attitude via this slogan, "socialistic in content, nationalistic in form". To parody the slogan of

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowpiercer> (Accessed March 1, 2020).

socialist realism, Bong's film seems to be restricted to be a nationalistic film even though it intended to be global products.

We can conclude this movie like the following sentences: It seems that Bong Joon-ho is willing to follow the trends and conventions of the genre movie as known as Apocalyptic Film. However, by casting Korean actors as third groups of the movie intentionally, he makes it possible to imagine a new world that is different from this frustrating dichotomy (higher's domination/lower's oppression). Namgung Minsu and Yona who are acted by two Korean actors are represented as very active and interesting characters who are anticipated to solve the main social problems in the movie; environmental disasters and class conflicts. They show us the possibilities of the new world which can be imagined after the frozen and totally destroyed world is ended. Korean spectators can feel proud of the fact that the heroic and fantastic character of this movie is restricted to two Korean actors. Bong seemed to aim the target of spectators only to Korean. Anyway, he could make a little bit different movie from the conventions of blockbuster a.k.a. disaster movie or apocalyptic movie.

## References

- Bong, Joon-ho (dir.). 2013. *Snowpiercer* (movie). CJ E&M 영화사업부문 (CJ ENM Yeonghwa saeobbumun; CJ ENM Entertainment Division).
- Kim, Kwang-gyu (김광규). 1983. *귄터 아이히 연구 (Guinteo Aihi Yeongu; Studies on Günter Eich)*. 서울: 문학과지성사 (Seoul: Munhag-gwa Jiseongsu/Moonji Publishing).
- Kim, Mansu. 2015. 'The Rule of Three' in the Growth Stories – Gangbaik Lee's Drama "Like Looking At The Flower In The Midwinter". *International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 1: 11–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/kr.2015.01.01>
- Platon. 1999. *플라톤의 국가론 (Peullaton-ui gugkaron; Republic by Plato)*. Transl. by Choi Hyeon (최현 역). 서울: 집문당 (Seoul: Jimmondang).

- Popper, Karl Raimund. 1997. *열린 사회와 그 적들 (Yeollin sahoe-wa geu jeogdeul; The Open Society and Its Enemies)*, vol. 1. Transl. by Lee Han-gu (이한구 역). 서울: 민음사 (Seoul: Mineumsa).
- Hayman, Ronald. 1995. *How to Read a Play (희극을 어떻게 읽을 것인가, Heuigok-eul eotteokke ilgeul geosinga)*. Transl. by Kim Mansu (김만수 역). 서울: 현대미학사 (Seoul: Hyeondae Mihaksa).
- Taylor, Brandon. 2016. The Ideological Train to Globalization: Bong Joon-ho's *The Host* and *Snowpiercer*. *CineAction*, vol. 98 (1): 44–48. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6TG8F>
- Canavan, Gerry. 2014. “If the Engine Ever Stops, We’d All Die”: *Snowpiercer* and Necrofuturism. *Paradoxa*, 26: 41–66.
- Schmidt, Christopher. 2014. Why are Dystopian Films on the Rise Again?. *JSTOR Daily*, Nov. 19, 2014. <https://daily.jstor.org/why-are-dystopian-films-on-the-rise-again/>. Accessed March 1, 2020.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. 2010. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Booker, Christopher. 2010. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. London: Continuum.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1995. *서양 철학사 (Seoyang cheolhaksa; A History of Western Philosophy)*. Transl. by Han Cheol-ha (한철하 역). 서울: 대한교과서 (Seoul: Daehan Gyogwaseo).
- Snowpiercer*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowpiercer>. Accessed March 1, 2020.





*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*  
vol. 8/2022  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.02>

## **Between ‘minjung’ and ‘literature’: Korean labor poetry and reportage literature in the 1980s**

**Nahyun KIM, PhD**

Institute of Korean Studies, Yonsei University,  
Republic of Korea  
50 Yonsei-ro Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, 03722  
[nabiena@gmail.com](mailto:nabiena@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1103-4746>

**Abstract:** This paper reviews three books which symbolically represent a new direction in ‘minjung literature’ in the 1980s. Labor poet Park No-hae (박노해)’s collection of poems, *Dawn of Labor* (노동의 새벽), was popular when it was published because it was literature in the form of poetry written by a real member of the minjung who kept his identity as a worker secret by becoming a faceless poet. Song Hyo-soon (송효순)’s memoir, *Road to Seoul* (서울로 가는 길) records the miserable reality of factories as the subaltern writing. Park Tae-soon (박태순)’s *The Land and the Minjung* (국토와 민중) was reportage (reporting) literature that records his travels around the country. He shows that the history of ‘minjung’ physically exists within the country and testifies that the land was owned by the ‘minjung’. These three books reflect how ‘minjung literature’ in the 1980s testified to the ‘minjung’. Concern about how to describe and represent the ‘minjung’ shows thoughts

about both the 'minjung' and literature. The 'minjung' testimonies written in a variety of literary styles cause readers to ask themselves what literature is. 'Minjung' poetry and reportage in the 1980s can help answer this question.

**Keywords:** minjung; minjung literature; labor literature; minjung poetry; labor memoir; reportage literature; travel writing; Park No-hae; Song Hyo-soon; Park Tae-soon.

### ‘민중’과 ‘문학’ 사이: 1980년대 노동시와 르포르타주 문학

**초록:** 이 글은 1980년대 민중문학의 새로운 방향을 상징적으로 보여준 세 권의 책을 검토하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 노동시인 박노해의 시집 『노동의 새벽』은 민중의 당사자로부터 발신된 문학이라는 점에서 각광받았고, 박노해는 얼굴 없는 시인으로 활동함으로써 자신의 노동자성을 지켰다. 송효순의 수기 『서울로 가는 길』은 서울로 상경한 공장 여성 노동자의 비참한 현실을 기록한 책으로, 우리는 이 텍스트를 통해 서발턴 글쓰기와 대면하게 된다. 박태순의 『국토와 민중』은 르포르타주 문학으로서 국토 기행을 기록한 기행문집이다. 국토라는 공간 안에 민중의 역사가 삽입되어 있음을 보여주는 그의 국토 재현은 그 자체로 민중 재현이며 하나의 증언이 된다. 이상의 세 텍스트는 민중적인 것을 증언하는 것이 민중문학의 새로운 길이라고 믿었던 당대 담론을 잘 보여준다. 민중을 어떻게 묘사하고 대리할 것인가에 대한 고민은 ‘민중’에 대한 사유인 동시에 ‘문학’에 대한 사유였다. 우리는 기성의 문학 형식 안팎을 넘나들며 수행된 민중적 증언 글쓰기를 통해 ‘문학이란 무엇인가’를 되물어보게 된다. 바로 이 점에 1980년대 민중 시와 르포르타주 문학의 현재적 의의가 있다.

**핵심어:** 민중; 민중문학; 노동문학; 민중시; 노동수기; 르포르타주 문학; 기행문; 박노해; 송효순; 박태순.

### Między ‘narodem’ a ‘literaturą’: koreańska poezja robotnicza i literatura reportażu w latach 80. wieku XX

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł zwraca uwagę na trzy książki, które symbolicznie rysują nowy kierunek w ‘literaturze narodowej’ w latach 80. wieku XX. Tomik poezji robotniczej Park No-hae zatytułowany *Świt pracy* zyskał popularność już z chwilą ukazania się – była to poezja napisana przez rzeczywistego przedstawiciela narodu, który ukrył swoją robotniczą tożsamość za maską bezimiennego poety. Lakonicznie zapisane wspomnienia Song Hyo-soon, zatytułowane *Droga do Seulu*, odnotowują nędzne realia pracy w fabrykach. *Kraj i naród* Park Tae-soona to przykład literatury reporterskiej, która opisuje jego podróże po kraju. Pokazuje on, że historia ‘narodu’ istnieje w kraju namacalnie i zaświadcza o tym, że kraj należy

do 'narodu'. Te trzy dzieła przybliżają sposób, w jaki 'literatura narodowa' lat 80. wieku XX świadczyła o 'narodzie'. Troska o to, jak opisać i odzwierciedlić 'naród' ukazuje myśli zarówno o 'narodzie', jak i o 'literaturze'. Świadczenia 'narodu' ujęte w różnych stylach literackich sprawiają, że czytelnicy zadają sobie pytanie o to, czym jest 'literatura'. Poezja 'narodowa' i reportaż lat 80. minionego wieku mogą udzielić na te pytania odpowiedzi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** naród; literatura narodowa; literatura robotnicza; poezja narodowa; wspomnienia robotników; literatura reportażu; zapiski podróżnicze; Park No-hae; Song Hyo-soon; Park Tae-soon.

## 1. Preface

'Minjung (민중, the people) literature' left a clear mark on South Korean literature more broadly in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is not easy to define. 'Minjung literature' encompasses literature read and written by and representative of the 'minjung', represented by 'minjung', and written by 'minjung'. It was a literature that explored what was popular and anti-popular. Therefore, 'minjung literature' asked serious questions about what it is or should be. It is difficult to define what the 'minjung' is. Who is or was the 'minjung'? Does the concept of the 'minjung' change over time? Is it a valid concept today? The 'minjung' were the interpellated subjects in between the political subject of the 'people' which was born out of the ideology of the people's sovereignty, and the class subject of the 'proletariat' which could be liberated from alienation only by ending the rule of capital. Today, the 'minjung' seems to repeatedly appear and disappear in the concept of the 'population' an identity that encompasses everyone within the boundaries of a territory regardless of the will of the subjects within it. The minjung are constituted to modify or abolish the present ruling power. So, they have no choice but to rise and fall on the surface of the population according to the form of the state while basing their existence in a community to come or one that has passed.

The best way to define the 'minjung' might be to define their most obvious characteristics first. One of the 'minjung's most obvious attributes is their plurality. The 'minjung' can never be just one

person. Even if most of the minjung are only potential members, the word *minjung* has the concept of a large number of people in it. The second letter of 'minjung', *jung* (衆) is a Chinese letter that means 'a crowd'. However, the concepts of modern literature and the plurality of the 'minjung' sometimes collide. For example, when writing 'minjung poetry', how should first-person modern lyric poetry deal with the 'minjung's plurality? Is the plurality delegated to the singular subject? Can 'minjung' literature keep its name even after its plurality disappears? Or is the singular subject erased by 'minjung's plurality? How is 'I' present in 'we'? Can 'I' ever represent 'we'?

These questions show the predicament that 'minjung' literature faced throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, this conflict between the concepts of 'minjung' and literature was also driving force behind the writing of 'minjung' literature. Kim Ji-ha (김지하)'s critique *Satire or Suicide* (풍자냐 자살이냐) argued that the poet should remain as an individual but commit to the 'minjung'. He said that poet should reach "self affirmation as the minjung"<sup>1</sup>(Kim Ji-ha 김지하 2002: 43). Also, he said that authors can only produce minjung literature that expresses the 'minjung's sorrow when they refuse to remain as a singular 'I' enters into the minjung and conform themselves as a part of it. This logic was repeated in Cho Tae-il (조태일) and Shin Gyeong-rim (신경림) and became the main premise of 'minjung' literary theory. Cho insisted that poets should write poems by means of 'popular language' to create vital beauty (Cho Tae-il 조태일 1972: 59). And Shin Gyeong-rim (신경림 1973: 10) requested 'literature rooted in the minjung's real life emotions' and emphasized that 'literature must be return to the minjung' (Shin 1973: 26). The ontological commitment to and self-affirmation of authors as a part of the 'minjung' led to discussions on how writers identify with the minjung. The consensus of these discussions was that intellectuals needed to be awakened. For example, Go Eun (고은 1983: 252) said that 'the awakening of intellectuals' brings the minjung's conscioueness.

On the other hand, there was an article that did not view the 'minjung' as a specific population group and so changed the direction of this discussion. Kim Joo-yeon (김주연)'s *The Minjung and the*

---

<sup>1</sup> "민중으로서의 자기 확신" (김지하 2002: 43). All translations from Korean are by Author.

*Masses* (민중과 대중) takes issue with the obsession to substantiate the popular and defines ‘the masses’ as referring to the substantial majority of people and ‘minjung’ as referring to specific values (Kim Joo-yeon 김주연 1979: 37). It was rooted in the masses and saw things, such as intellectuals experience mental agony, as reflecting minjung values. This article also stated that ontological agony is a core quality of the minjung. Seong Min-yeop (성민엽)’s *The Logic of Minjung Literature* (민중문학의 논리) expressed this as a kind of ‘existential transition’ (Seong Min-yeop 성민엽 1984: 59). Thus, literature that simply reflected the reality of the ‘minjung’ was not enough to qualify as ‘minjung literature’. In ‘minjung’ literary discourse in the 1970s, the singular ‘I’ became a part of the ‘minjung’ concept.

Since the 1980s, the Korean literary world has undergone some notable changes. Several major magazines that played an important role in the literary discourse in the 1970s, such as *Literature and Intelligence* (문학과 지성), *Creation and Criticism* (창작과 비평), *Tree with Deep Roots* (뿌리 깊은 나무), and *The Sound of Seeds* (씨알의 소리) were forced to close by the military government. Starting with the publication of *Practical Literature* in 1980, the era of small group literature and irregular magazines (mook) began.

Consequently, the literary movement diversified both regionally and over, and led ‘minjung literature’ in a more practical direction for the next 10 years. As a result of these changes, ‘minjung literature’ began to pay attention to testimony. For example, the magazine *Practical Literature* (실천문학) got its name because it aims for literature that practices history beyond literature that participates in history. In its first issue of 1980, the editors (편집부 1980: 374) declared “We are a community of testimony”<sup>2</sup>. The practice they sought was eventually achieved through testimony. This clear shift to focus on testimony solved the numerical difference between the plural ‘minjung’ and the singular writer and presented a new answer to the question of what the ‘minjung’ is.

The trend in the 1970s of realizing ‘minjung literature’ by the transfer of the author’s existence was expanded in the 1980s to creating practical ‘minjung literature’ through testimony. This change came from the realization that representation of ‘minjung literature’

<sup>2</sup> “우리는 증언 공동체다” (편집부 1980: 374).

until then was insufficient. There was the 'minjung' who exceeded the 'minjung' composed of texts.

In this paper, I review three testimony-style books that represent the new practices of 'minjung literature' in the 1980s. The first is Park No-hae (박노해)'s collection of poems, *Dawn of Labor* (노동의 새벽, 1984). Park was both a poet and a worker, so this book was thought to clearly embody the concerned party of 'minjung literature'. The second is Song Hyo-soon (송효순)'s memoir *Road to Seoul* (서울로 가는 길, 1982), which vividly shows the reality of female workers at the time. The last is Park Tae-soon (박태순)'s *The Land and the Minjung* (국토와 민중, 1983), which is a collection of travel writings that is classified as reportage(reporting) literature. This paper shows how each book reflects the new direction of 'minjung literature' in the 1980s and discusses the current definition of the 'minjung'.

## 2. Literature of a Worker-poet: *Dawn of Labor*

In 1977, workers' memoirs published in the monthly *Dialogue* (대화) became popular as workers' writings began to become popular forms of literature more generally. Yu Dong-woo (유동우)'s *The Cry of a Stone* (어느 돌멩이의 외침) and Seok Jeong-nam (석정남)'s *I Want to Live as a Human Being* (인간답게 살고 싶다) are representative of these memoirs. As interest in workers' diaries and memoirs, which were subalterns' writings, increased, labor literature gradually became its own genre and people began discussing the subject of 'minjung literature'. Many authors wrote at the intersection of labor literature and 'minjung literature', combining the expertise and sophistication of intellectuals and the practicality and simplicity of workers. The emergence of labor writers made people accept the 'minjung' of 'minjung literature' not as the contents of representation, but as a mark indicating the subject of representation, and thus attributed the core of 'minjung literature' to the concerned parties. In adversarial legal systems parties directly argue their case without being represented by an expert. Since the late 1970s, the emergence of labor writers has evoked an adversarial system within 'minjung literature'. Unlike intellectuals who had to become part of the 'minjung' produce

‘minjung literature’, workers were already part of it so the ‘minjung’ literature they produced was thought to be more authentic.

In this context, Park No-hae (박노해), a worker poet who debuted in 1983 with *Dream of Sida* (시다의 꿈) shocked the poetry world. The emergence of workers’ writings, which were a perfected form of poetry, shocked the literary field. For a while, he was called ‘the faceless poet’ because he showed that he was not as an ordinary poet but rather a worker-poet by not appearing at awards ceremonies or conducting solo interviews. In other words, he did not act as a poet and maintained his role as worker, choosing the worker’s face over the poet’s face. His short profile, “[B]orn in Jeonnam in 1956, moved to Seoul at the age of 15, and now a craftsman”<sup>3</sup>(Park No-hae 박노해 1984: 1), did not say much more than his name No-hae (노해), which means ‘labor liberation’ (노동 해방).

Worker poets who did not clearly reveal their identities continued to emerge. For example, the description of the 19 workers poets whose poems were included in the *Anthology of Labor Poems* (노동시선집) also lived as so-called faceless poets. Among them, five were unnamed and most of those who were named had the note with “biography unknown”(Chae 1985: 10) under their names. Some poets had job descriptions such as ‘bus attendant’ ‘craftman’ and ‘construction worker’ along with the year they were born. This information did not do much to reveal the poets’ individual characteristics but rather emphasized their anonymity as part of the ‘minjung’. The appearance of faceless worker poets was unfamiliar and new at the time.

However, the anonymity of labor poems reflected the existence and identities of workers as part of ‘minjung literature’. One of the key attributes of the proletariat is that its members have no individual identities. Labor literature denounces the loss of workers’ individuality and their exploitation as replaceable inputs to production. However, when workers become poets to denounce their situation, their identity as a member of the proletariat and not as an individual is suspended. Therefore, most labor poems had a name column only for the purpose of erasing individuality. The anonymity of worker poets remind readers of their status as workers and give them certain faces as poets.

---

<sup>3</sup> “1956년 전남 출생. 15 세에 상경하여 현재 기능공” (박노해 1984: 1).

Park's *Dawn of Labor* (노동의 새벽), published in 1984, vividly describes workers' reality. The military regime immediately banned the book from being sold, but this did not stop its popularity because of readers' desire for truth and realism. *Finding Fingerprints* (지문을 부른다) is a poem that strongly conveys how workers' individual identities are erased. The narrator says, "at least once to confirm that we are the same citizen / to renew our resident registration" they went to the public office, but "oh / disappeared, clearly / disappeared / mashed fingerprints / no proof that you and I are different / no fingerprints came out"<sup>4</sup> (Park No-hae 박노해 1984: 45–46). The act of finding the fingerprint, the poem its title, was a call for workers to recover their individual identities.

The poem *The Hand Grave* (손무덤) has the same theme. This poem reveals the terrible reality of a worker whose hand was cut off by a press:

"His hand in my arms / is cold and green / We wash it in soju / We bury it under the sunny factory wall / On the blood and sweat of the workers / The yellow hands of exploitation enjoying the prosperous nation / White hands playing and eating without labor / I bury / Crush them with a press / I bury (ask) and bury (ask) again"<sup>5</sup> (Park No-hae 박노해 1984: 88).

The cold served hand that was held by the surviving workers is a kind of black hole in their lives that will never be filled, so the poem's narrator has to ask and bury again and again while holding this served hand without being treated fairly. The poem's author was Park No-hae, a faceless worker. It is desperate testimony of the 'minjung' whose individual identities have been erased.

---

<sup>4</sup> "한번쯤은 똑같은 국민임을 확인하며/ 주민등록갱신을 하(지만) ... / 아/ 없어, 선명하게 없어/ 노동 속에 문드러져/ 너와 나 사람마다 다르다는/ 지문이나 오지를 알아" (박노해 1984: 45–46).

<sup>5</sup> "내 품 속의 정형 손은/ 싸늘히 식어 푸르텡텡하고/ 우리는 손을 소주에 씻어 들고/ 양지바른 공장 담벼락 밑에 묻는다/ 노동자의 피땀 위에서/ 변영의 조국을 향락하는 누런 착취의 손들을/ 일 안하고 놀고먹는 하얀 손들을/ 묻는다/ 프레스로 짹짹 깃잘라/ 원한의 눈물로 묻는다/ 일하는 손들이/ 기쁨의 손짓으로 살아날 때까지/ 묻고 또 묻는다" (박노해 1984: 88).



### 3. A Female Worker's Memoir: *Road to Seoul*

Another type of testimony is reportage writing that delivers only objective facts without any fiction or sentimentality. The goal of 'minjung literature' to represent the reality of the 'minjung' was dramatically achieved in memoirs and reportage. Thus, in the 1980s, reportage writing became an increasingly large part of minjung literature. Irregular magazines that specialized in reportage, such as *Era of Reportage* (크뽀시대; 1983) and *Reportage Literature* (크뽀문학; 1984), were published, expanding the variety of 'minjung literature'. The desire for testimony led to this new genre of writing that went beyond more traditional forms of literature, such as poetry and novels.

Workers' memoirs were for and by the 'minjung' and were accepted as unaffected truth. 'Minjung literature', which must necessarily reflect on popular values, is explosively powerful in the forms of diaries and memoirs, which are self-reflecting. In the 1980s, female workers' writing began to achieve recognition. Song Hyo-soon (송효순)'s *Road to Seoul* (서울로 가는 길; 1982), Seok Jeong-nam (석정남)'s *Factory Light* (공장의 불빛; 1984), and Jang Nam-soo (장남수)'s *The Stolen Workplace* (빼앗긴 일터; 1984) are representative examples of this newly popular women's writing. In these works, the authors look back on and affirm their history and show how they understood their social context as workers and members of the 'minjung'. These works show that they understood that they were the victims of a social contradiction that could not be explained by individual misfortune and had a sense of solidarity based on popular awareness. The most important part of this literature was that it showed the authors' identities as both women and workers, making them doubly disadvantaged.

Song Hyo-soon (송효순)'s memoir *Road to Seoul* (서울로 가는 길; 1982) shows the prototype of a country girl becoming a factory worker in the city. This is what most workers have experienced in Korea at that time. Song grew up in a poor family that lived in the countryside and whose interests were sacrificed so that her older and younger brothers could continue attending school. After graduating from elementary school, she went to Seoul and did various jobs before getting a job at a factory. Tragically, even though she was

not legally old enough for such work, she had to earn money, so she used her nephew's name and submitted fake documents to get the job.

"I hesitated to borrow and use the name of my nephew. Because my brother's family didn't treat me well. I thought it would be better to borrow the name of someone I don't know. In addition, I was afraid that I would secretly get a job using someone else's name and be found out. My sister said that many girls get jobs like this. It is miserable to have to work in a factory at such a young age. Others are studying at this age. My brother sent me back a letter telling me to accept all of this situation as fate and live on. It's a miserable fate. I really hated my strict brother. I hate my fate of having to borrow the brother's daughter's name"<sup>6</sup> (Song Hyo-soon 송효순 1982: 32-33).

This quote clearly shows the feelings of contempt and despair she felt at having to choose the path of a worker at such a young age. Her father and brother told her to accept her fate as a worker while her older sister, a woman, comforted her and helped her accept the reality that she had no choice but to borrow someone else's name to get a job. Her older sister, who became a worker before her, may have walked a similar path.

Song describes how she worked hard to support her family back home. She sent money to them to pay for her younger brother's school fees. At the time, many urban workers missed their hometowns and the harsher their jobs, the stronger their nostalgia for them. Some women sang this song while working overtime through the night in a factory where the heaters did not work in the winter:

"The light of the factory, which used to shine beautifully, have nowhere to go, only dimly lit work lights. I can't go back to my dear

---

<sup>6</sup> "다른 사람도 아닌 큰오빠 딸이라는 것이 마음에 걸렸다. 내게 잘해주지도 않는 사람들인데 차라리 남의 식구 이름을 빌리는 것이 낫다는 생각이 들었다. 게다가 남의 이름으로 몰래 들어가야 한다니 그러다 들키기라고 하면 어쩔담. 웬지 무섭기도 하였다. 언니는 남의 이름으로 공장에 들어가는 아이들이 많으니 팬찮다고 달랬다. 왜 가난하게 태어나 너무나 어려 공장에서든 받아주지 않는 나이에 공장에 들어가야만 되는가. 남들은 공부를 하는 나이인데. 전에 내가 아버지에게 편지를 하였을 때 오빠는 모든 것을 숙명으로 받아들이고 살아가라고 답장이 왔다. 숙명치고는 너무 더럽다. 가장 무섭고 가장 싫어하는 큰오빠의 딸 이름으로 공장에 들억야 하다니" (송효순 1982: 32-33).

hometown. On a clod, weary night, here is another home”<sup>7</sup> (Song Hyo-soon 1982: 140).

Song came into contact with the labor movement through ‘Industrial Mission’<sup>8</sup> and became aware of the absurd reality of female workers. However, she was punished by her company after meeting with the actor from Industrial Mission. Even though she did nothing wrong, she was required to write a letter of resignation. When she repeatedly refused to write the resignation, she was eventually required to write the resignation because of her disobedience. She protested at the company’s unfairness, was forced to work in a far-off province, and later was fired. This process shows the harsh reality that female workers faced.

*Road to Seoul (서울로 가는 길)* exposes various structural burdens imposed on female workers. First was the burden of having to support the men in her family as a daughter and sister. Second was the fact that, as a woman, she was subordinate to male workers and company executives. Third was the humiliation she felt because of the gaze around her. People did not respect them, calling them ‘Gongsuni (공순이)’, which means female workers of factory. ‘Gongsuni’ seemed to be the lowest class of the social hierarchy. Her company offered a class called How to be a Good Wife?” in which the instructor said:

“Please don’t wear jeans. Jeans make you look rude and uneducated. If you go to a famous department store, it only costs 50,000 to 60,000 won for a set of clothes. Buy it and wear it”<sup>9</sup> (Song Hyo-soon 송효순 1982: 117).

---

<sup>7</sup> “예쁘게 빛나던 불빛 공장의 불빛, 올 테 갈 테도 없는 회부연 작업등만. 이대론 못 돌아가지. 그리운 고향 마을. 춥고 지친 밤, 여기는 또 다른 고향” (송효순 1982: 140).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Industrial Mission (산업선교)’ was a labor movement organization that had a great influence on various labor issues and labor movements that occurred in Korea in the 1960s and 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> “여러분들, 제발 청바지 입지 마세요. 청바지를 입으면 공순이 티 나고 교양이 없어 보이니까요. 유명백화점에 가면 옷 한 벌에 5, 6 만 원밖에 안 해요. 한 벌씩 사 입으세요” (송효순 1982: 117).

The monthly salary of the women in that class was 50,000 won. In this liberal arts class taught by a woman, female workers became uncountable subalterns.

Workers' memoirs are meaningful in that they are the writings of subalterns who were represented only by intellectuals' language before. This new form of writing expanded the scope of minjung literature by directly offering the testimony of the minjung. Critic Kim Jong-cheol 김중철 (1980: 92) said that the appearance of labor memoirs, which have "value as vivid testimonies"<sup>10</sup>, should be accepted as a literary challenge before asking whether or not they are literature. This testimony challenged literary conventions. It was produced by the vividly living 'minjung', so it was acceptable even though it was not sophisticated literature.

#### 4. Non-literature of 'Minjung' Intellectuals: *The Land and the Minjung*

While memoirs were becoming popular, various non-literary forms of writings were as well. Park Tae-soon (박태순)'s travel writing published serially in the 1970s and 1980s. Park started writing in 1960 and became a novelist who showed a keen understanding of people from the lower classes who lived on the outskirts of cities, which he wrote about in his early novels *On the Hill of a Dear Land* (청든 땅 언덕 위에) and *Collapsed Theater* (무너진 극장). Then, in 1971, he published two noteworthy reportage, *Warning of the Burning Body* (소신의 경고) about the death of Jeon Tae-il (전태일) and *Five Days and Four Nights in the Gwangju Complex* (광주단지에서의 4박5일). The Gwangju Grand Complex Incident in 1971 seems to have caused Park to take a new look at the territory of South Korea. It reflected the spatial divisions that occurred during South Korea's modernization in which people were deported from the shantytowns on the cities to the unmodernized outskirts. After the 1971 event, he began working on travelogues in earnest. His first travelogue, *An Author's Travel* (작가가기행; 1975), was a collection of travel writings

---

<sup>10</sup> “생생한 증언으로서의 가치” (김중철 1980: 92).

that he had published serially in monthly magazines since 1971. He wrote his second travelogues, *The Land and Minjung* (*국토와 민중*, 1983) between 1982 and 1983.

The theme of national territorial representation has an important meaning. In Korea, two national territorial representations have long been prevalent. Sometimes people naturally imagine the entire Korean Peninsula from Mt. Baekdu to Mt. Halla as a single territory, but sometimes they think of territory under the reality of a divided Korea. This idea is reflected in Korean law about its national territory. The Constitution of the Republic of Korea Article 3 defines the territory of South Korea as “the Korean Peninsula and its annexed islands”<sup>11</sup>, but in reality, the South Korean government does not actually govern half of this area. Thus, the nation of South Korea views its territory as unfinished.

In this context, in the 1970s, two separate efforts were being made to recover the national territory. These two were based on opposing imaginations. One was the Park Chung-hee (박정희) administration’s national land development project. Based on the 1963 National Territory Construction Comprehensive Planning Act (*국토건설종합계획법*), national land development plans began to be made in the 1970s; the Gyeongbu, Honam, and Yeongdong Expressways were built; and rural environmental improvement and large-scale land reclamation projects were conducted. The other effort was the minjung literature about Korean land. A representative example of this literature is Cho Tae-il (조태일)’s series of poems titled *Homeland* (*국토*). Park Tae-soon (박태순)’s travelogues in the 1970s and 1980s were also part of this trend. The national land development project based on economic logic focused on fostering several representative cities and connecting them efficiently to enable rapid movement of the national territory. The catchphrase ‘one-day living area of the whole country (전국 1일 생활권)’ was emphasized. In contrast, Park Tae-soon (박태순)’s work went in the opposite direction.

*The Land and the Minjung* (*국토와 민중*, 1983) contains 15 travelogues about the Demarcation Line area, the coal mines of

---

<sup>11</sup> “대한민국의 영토는 한반도와 그 부속도서로 한다.” (대한민국헌법 제 3 조, 법제처 국가법령정보센터 <https://www.law.go.kr/법령/대한민국헌법>). Accessed 10 January, 2023.

Gangwon-do, the Namhan River basin, Jirisan, the Nakdong River, and Jeju. It includes areas where people have lived for a long time, that were excluded from government-led development efforts, and that served as the background of minjung literature. It covered a wide range of places in the country, their histories, and cultural artifacts related to the minjung. Park's travels are slow, and his travelogues praise rough roads and detours, saying that we had to deal with the road historically, not efficiently. In short, while Park Chung-hee's government transformed the nation by shortening travel times by building highways, Park Tae-soon expanded people's understanding of the national territory by writing about the 'minjung's lives. He criticized three types of maps. The first is tourist maps that are created by people in an area who reduce it to an object to be seen. The second is development maps that erase the lives of people living in the areas they cover and emphasize national development. The third is historical maps that try to preserve the past so that they fossilize the land. Following these critiques, he presented a new type of minjung map.

However, he did not absolutely aestheticise and mystify the land of 'minjung'. He was wary of simplifying or sanctifying the national territory itself and maintained that it only reflected the diversity of the 'minjung's homes. He wrote in a testifying manner. This book provided an alternative representation of the national territory by naming localities that are not captured or are intentionally eliminated by modernization. He shows how the 'minjung and' their history is a part of the land so the land is a part of their testimony.

Park Tae-soon (박태순)'s writings and the journal *Practical Literature* (실천문학), which he founded in 1980, reflect his view of literature. He said:

“Now, it is meaningless to write novels or poetry and argue about literary or artistic value. Also, literature must become the literature as a movement, that is, literature as a practice of history, not as a part of its participation in history.”<sup>12</sup> (Park Tae-soon 박태순 1980: 6).

---

<sup>12</sup> “이제는 소설 쓰고 시 쓰고 문학성이 어떻게 예술성이 어떻게 하면서 따지는 것은 도저히 의미가 없다. 문학도 어떤 운동으로서의 문학, 즉 문학이 역사에 어떤 참여를 하는 게 아니라 역사를 실천하는 것으로서의 문학이 아니면 안 된다” (박태순 1980: 6).

This idea was embodied in testimony and reportage. In addition to the state violence of the Yusin regime that was implemented in the 1970s, the reality of the ‘minjung’ symbolized by the deaths of Jeon Tae-il (전태일) and Kim Gyeong-sook (김경숙) and the events in Gwangju in May 1980 neutralized Korean literature. Literary conventions, such as the division between poetry and novels, the procedures for recognizing authors, and publishing practices, were all questioned, returning the field to a kind of blank slate on which new conventions were written. Testimony literature was required in this context. Thus, Park Tae-soon’s travel writings, which was reportage written in prose rather than poetry or a novel, was the writing of a reportage, not a literary author.

## **5. Conclusion**

Poems about labor that were written by the minjung, the memoir of a worker as a subaltern, and travelogues that describe the unprocessed spaces of the minjung are all forms of testimony in ‘minjung literature’ in the 1980s. The shift of emphasis from describing the minjung to testifying to the ‘minjung’ is connected to the two meanings of ‘representation’ one by one. ‘Representation’ is a detailed description of an object such that it re-presents that object, but it can also mean ‘standing for’ someone else. These two definitions are discontinuous but also inseparable, like two sides of a coin. Therefore, no matter how realistic ‘minjung literature’ is, it is still speaking about a situation and is not that situation itself.

Therefore, it is not clear that the singular author can represent the plurality of the ‘minjung’. The key question about representation including self representation, is whether such representation is ‘real’. The vividness of the object can be a problem. ‘Minjung literature’ in the 1970s and 1980s represented the ‘minjung’. Concerns about how to do so were concerns about the ‘minjung’ and literature at the same time. Poems of labor poets bursting out across the official debut system, memoirs of workers writing unaffected self-histories, and prose existed partially within established literary genres while also moving outside of them. However, all of these works were the writings of people trying to represent reality while challenging literary conventions. The desire to represent reality peaked in ‘minjung

literature' in the 1980s. In this way, workers' poetry and reportage literature in the 1980s is significant.

## Bibliography

- Chae, Gwang-seok (채광석) ed. (편). 1985. *노동시선집 (Nodong siseonjib; Anthology of labor poetry)*. 서울: 실천문학사. (Seoul: Silcheon Munkaksa).
- Cho, Tae-il (조태일). 1972. 민중언어의 발견 (Minjung eoneo-ui balgyeon; The discovery of the 'minjung' language). *창작과 비평 (Changjag-gwa bipyeong; Creation and Criticism)*, 7: 81–94.
- Constitution of Republic of Korea (대한민국헌법, Daehan Mingug Heonbeob)*, Korean Law Information Center (법제처 국가법령정보센터; Beobjecheo gugkka beobryeong jeongbo senteo). <https://www.law.go.kr/법령/대한민국헌법>. Accessed 10 January, 2023.
- Go, Eun (고은). 1983. 민중과 지식인 (Minjung-gwa jisigin). In: *인텔리겐차와 지식인 (Intelligenchya-wa Jisigin; The Intelligentia and the Intellectuals)*, ed. Aleksander 겐라 (Aleksander Gella), 251–263. Transl. by 김영범, 지승중 (Kim Yeong-beom and Ji Seung-jong). 서울: 학민사 (Seoul: Hakminsas).
- Kim, Ji-ha (김지하). 2002. 풍자나 자살이냐 (Pungjanya jasarinya). In: *김지하 전집 3 (Kim Jiha Jeonjib 3; Poetry of Kim Ji-ha, vol. 3)*, 27–45. 서울: 실천문학사 (Seoul: Silcheon Munkaksa).
- Kim, Jong-cheol (김종철). 1980. 산업화와 문학 (Saneophwa-wa munhak). *창작과 비평 (Changjag-gwa bipyeong; Creation and Criticism)*, 55: 74–96.
- Kim, Joo-yeon (김주연). 1984. 민중과 대중 (Minjung-gwa daejung). In: *한국민중론 (Hanguk minjungnon)*, ed. 한국신학연구소 (The Institute of Theology; Hanguk sinhak yeonguso), 29–39. 서울: 韓國神學研究所 (Seoul: Hanguk sinhak yeonguso).
- Park, No-hae (박노해). 1984. *노동의 새벽 (Nodong-ui saebyeog; Dawn of Labour)*. 서울: 풀빛 (Seoul: Pulbit).



- Park, Tae-soon (박태순). 1980. 민중시대와 실천문학 (Minjung sidae-wa silcheon munhak). *실천문학 (Silcheon munhak; Practical Literature)*, 1: 5–11.
- Park, Tae-soon (박태순). 1983. *국토와 민중 (Gukto-wa minjung; The land and the minjung)*. 서울: 한길사 (Seoul: Hangilsa).
- Seong, Min-yeop (성민엽). 1984. 민중문학의 논리 (Minjung munhag-ui noll). In: *민중문학론 (Minjung munhaknon; The theory of the minjung literature)*, ed. Seong, Min-yeop (성민엽), 145–177. 서울: 문학과지성사 (Seoul: Munhag-gwa jiseongsa).
- Shin, Gyeoing-rim (신경림). 1973. 문학과 민중 (Munhak-gwa minjung; Literature and minjung). *창작과 비평 (Changjag-gwa bipyeong; Creation and Criticism)*, 8: 5–26.
- Song, Hyo-soon (송효순). 1982. *서울로 가는 길 (Seoul-lo kaneun gil; Road to Seoul)*. 서울: 형성사 (Seoul: Hyeongseongsa).



*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*  
vol. 8/2022  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.03>

## **Living in the modern society of colonial Joseon as a patient: a study on Yi Sang's literature focusing on diseases and physical sicknesses**

**Gia KIM, PhD student**

Yonsei University,  
#617 Oesol-gwan, Yonsei-ro 50, Seodaemun-gu,  
Seoul, South Korea  
[giakim0305@gmail.com](mailto:giakim0305@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3833-3436>

**Abstract:** This study aims to discuss the body experiencing modern society and modernity realized through the body by analyzing the disease and physical sicknessness depicted in Yi Sang's literature. Until now, Yi Sang's literary research has focused on the subject's death impulse (Thanatos) and the image of death in his works, so this study aims to present a new perspective on Yi Sang's literature. Specifically, this paper explores works that illustrate diseases such as syphilis and tuberculosis and examines the author's subjective consciousness. In short, this paper discusses Yi Sang's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros), by analyzing narratives that mention prostitution and syphilis among Yi Sang's works. Meanwhile, this article reveals the author's guilt about his inability to function properly due to syphilis. Furthermore, this paper manifests how Yi Sang presents his sick body that experiences the modern society of colonial Joseon by describing how he

implements the body with tuberculosis. Therefore, in each analysis process, this study reads Yi Sang's specific texts by referencing his various works to understand his esoteric world and literary image. Moreover, this paper reveals that the author reflects on his critical reasons for such a modern society and violent hygiene discourse in his independent literary world and identity as a patient.

**Keywords:** Yi Sang (이상 李箱); diseases; body; colonial Joseon; modern society; syphilis; tuberculosis.

### 병자로서 조선의 근대사회를 살아가기 – 이상(李箱)의 문학 속 질병과 아픈 신체를 중심으로

**초록:** 본 연구의 목적은 이상(李箱)의 문학에서 묘사되는 질병과 병든 신체를 분석함으로써 근대를 경험하는 신체와 그 신체를 통해 구현되는 근대성에 대해 논의하는 것이다. 지금까지 이상(李箱)의 문학 연구는 주체의 죽음 충동 (Thanatos)과 작품 속 죽음의 이미지에 치중되어 있어 그와 반대되는 성 충동에 대한 분석은 상대적으로 등한시되어 있는데, 이에 본 연구는 이상(李箱) 문학을 이해하는 새로운 관점을 제시하고자 한다. 구체적으로 본고는 이상(李箱)의 문학에서 묘사되는 질병을 각각 매독과 결핵으로 분류하고 이러한 질병에 내포된 작가의 주체의식을 탐구한다. 그리고 본고는 이상(李箱)의 작품 중에서 매춘 행위와 매독과 결합된 사례를 분석함으로써 성적 충동 (Eros)으로 나타나는 주체의 생에 대한 애착에 대해 논의한다. 동시에 매독으로 인해 제대로 기능하지 못하는 신체에서 비롯된 불능과 불모성의 이미지를 분석함으로써 그러한 이미지에 기저하고 있는 작가의 죄의식에 대해 탐구한다. 또한 본고는 이상(李箱)이 결핵에 걸린 신체를 구현하는 방식을 기술함으로써 근대를 경험하는 신체와 그 신체에 대한 작가의 주체의식에 대해 탐색하는데, 이상(李箱)의 난해한 작품세계와 문학적 이미지를 이해하기 위해 각각의 분석과정에서 이상(李箱)의 다양한 작품들을 참조해 그의 텍스트들을 상호텍스트적으로 독해한다. 나아가 본고는 병자로서의 정체성을 고수하며 스스로 소외된 타자이기를 고집한 이상의 작가적 정체성과 독자적인 문학 세계에는 근대 조선 사회와 폭력적인 위생 담론에 대한 그의 비판적인 사유가 반영된 결과임을 밝힌다.

**핵심어:** 이상 (李箱); 질병; 신체; 식민지 조선; 근대 사회; 매독; 결핵

### **Życie pacjenta w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie Joseon okresu kolonialnego: studium nad chorobami i fizycznymi dolegliwościami w twórczości Yi Sanga**

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie odmalowanego w twórczości Yi Sanga obrazu chorób i fizycznych dolegliwości, których

ludzkie ciała doświadczały w warunkach nowoczesnego społeczeństwa koreańskiego i w ówczesnych realiach. Do tej pory badania literackie nad dziełami Yi Sanga koncentrowały się na impulsie śmierci podmiotu (Tanatos) i obrazie śmierci w jego utworach. Niniejsze badanie zakłada jednak nowe spojrzenie na literaturę Yi Sanga. Niniejszy tekst analizuje dzieła, które ukazują choroby takie jak kiła i gruźlica oraz bada subiektywną świadomość autora. Tekst zatem omawia przywiązanie Yi Sanga do życia, które jawi się jako impuls seksualny (Eros), analizując wśród prac pisarza te narracje, które mówią o prostytutce i syfilisie. Artykuł ten ma również ujawnić poczucie winy Yi Sanga w związku z jego spowodowaną kiłą niemożnością prawidłowego funkcjonowania w społeczeństwie. Tekst także pokazuje, jak Yi Sang przedstawiał swoje chore ciało, które doświadczało realiów ówczesnego społeczeństwa Joseon okresu kolonialnego, opisując, w jaki sposób traktowane jest ciało chorego na gruźlicę. Dlatego na każdym etapie analizy niniejsze badanie odczytuje tylko określone teksty Yi Sanga, aby ułatwić zrozumienie jego ezoterycznego świata i literackiego obrazu poprzez odwoływanie się do jego wybranych dzieł. Artykuł zakłada również, że Yi Sang jako pacjent ujawniał w swojej niezależnej twórczości literackiej i brutalnym dyskursie na temat higieny swój krytycyzm wobec ówczesnego nowoczesnego społeczeństwa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Yi Sang (이상 李箱); choroby; ciało; kolonialne Joseon; nowoczesne społeczeństwo; syfilis, gruźlica.

## **1. Introduction: The Modern Society of Colonial Joseon and the Body**

The purpose of this study is to discuss the body experiencing modern society and modernity realized through the body by analyzing the disease and physical sickness depicted in Yi Sang's literature. Until now, Yi Sang's literary research has focused on the subject's death impulse (Thanatos) and the image of death in the work, so this study aims to present a new perspective on understanding Yi Sang's literature. Specifically, this paper explores works that illustrate diseases – such as syphilis and tuberculosis – and examines the author's subjective consciousness. In short, this paper discusses Yi Sang's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros), by analyzing narratives that mention prostitution and syphilis among Yi Sang's works. Meanwhile, this article reveals the author's guilt about his inability to

function properly due to syphilis. Furthermore, this paper investigates how Yi Sang presents his sick body that experiences modern society of colonial Joseon by describing how he implements the body with tuberculosis. Therefore, in each analysis process, this study reads Yi Sang's specific texts by referring to his various works to understand his esoteric world and literary imagery. Moreover, this work demonstrates that the author, in his separate literary universe and identity as an invalid, focuses on his critical reasoning in the society of early 1930s Joseon.

Before starting our discussion, it is necessary to introduce the artist. Yi Sang (이상, 1910–1937) is a representative writer of Korea who was active in the Japanese colonial era, starting with his serial novel “12 월 12 일” (sib-i wol sib-i-il; 12th December) in *Joseon*, a magazine published by the Japanese Government-General of Korea. He was an architect and a painter in addition to being a poet, novelist, and essayist who authored hundreds of works across six years. Additionally, as the first and greatest modernist writer, his massive impact on Korean modern literature studies is so significant that various research projects on Yi Sang's work are still underway. Since Yi Sang, who died at the age of 26, suffered from tuberculosis during his lifetime, many studies on the theme of diseases have been conducted. According to Kim Yun-sik's 김윤식 claim (1988: 68) that “Yi Sang's literature began after Yi Sang's first hemoptysis”<sup>1</sup>, and “the essence of Yi Sang's literature is based on his suicidal impulse and death drive related to hemoptysis”<sup>2</sup>, it is highly possible that Yi Sang's literature commenced from his unhappy personal life. However, the concept of diseases repeatedly presented in his literature does not just mean fear or struggle with diseases but implies much more. In other words, Yi Sang's identity was a patient who lived in the modern society of Joseon and expressed his suffering from diseases and public distress of society. Therefore, this paper explores the meaning of sickness and physical sicknesses in Yi Sang's literature.

In Joseon, the concept of individual ownership of the body arose in modern times. Western culture has strongly influenced Joseon since 1876, breaking down the traditional feudal social order and starting reforms into a modern society. People have since devided the

---

<sup>1</sup> “첫 번째 각혈에서 이상(李箱) 문학이 비롯되었다” (김윤식 1988: 68).

<sup>2</sup> “이상(李箱) 문학의 본질을 이루는 것은 각혈과 관련된 자살과 죽음의 등가사상” (김윤식 1988: 68).

notion of the body into *body* and *consciousness*. Unlike traditional culture that did not separate body and soul, the body that appeared in Joseon's modern novels existed as a concept of separation between body and nature due to the influx of Western culture. In other words, the perception of the body has begun to change in modern times. When the body was an ancestral heritage, it was a domain of respect that should not be damaged. However, as people started recognizing the body as an individual's private possession, the body acquired autonomy. Therefore, the change from a body that reproduces *social norms* to a body that embodies individuals' *private desires* meant the dissolution of the body's public discourse and the expansion of personal discourse. In short, in modern Joseon society, the body became a concept that emphasized the idea of *individual* and *individuality*.

As such, the body is not just a matter of appearance. Perception of a body can be a specific methodology that can grasp changes in thoughts before and after modern times. In other words, the shift in perception of the body shows the difference in social customs and culture at that time. Therefore, in novels written in modern times, the subject's body is not just a matter of appearance but a specific criterion for grasping the author's sense and identity.

Besides, modernity is embodied as a body in Yi Sang's literature. As an individual experiencing modern times, his body reveals the phenomena and nature of modern times, awareness and practice, consciousness and unconsciousness, process and reality. In short, bodily perception in Yi Sang's literature is an indicator that shows not only the consciousness of the characters but also the consciousness of the artist who invented and manipulated them, as well as the changes in the body concept at that time. Accordingly, this paper investigates the writer's self-directed method in his literature through his sick body and such a differentiated body as one experiencing modern times.

## **2. *Hwaryubyeong* 화류병 (花柳病), Libido, and Impotence**

In 1916, as one of the colonial control policies for Joseon, the Japanese introduced a prostitution control policy 공창제 (*gongchangje* 公娼制) that practically licensed prostitution. It gave the appearance of a policy

emphasizing a clean body and a hygienic life, but it was actually a product of the Japanese government intended to transform the colonial people into giving complete obedience to the Japanese authority. As a result, *gisaengs* 기생 (female musicians) became prostitutes and the number of syphilis patients increased rapidly in Joseon amid rampant prostitution (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 292). In this type of social environment where syphilis discourse was active, the subject of prostitution and *hwaryubyeong* 화류병 (花柳病) appeared in Joseon's modern novels that were published in the 1920s. Here, *hwaryubyeong* is a generic term for sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea, which are described as diseases of geisha in Japan's prostitution industry. In fact, magazines and newspapers published in Joseon during the Japanese colonial period mentioned 19 and 138 cases of *hwaryubyeong*, respectively (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 293). Accordingly, *hwaryubyeong*, infection through sexual intercourse, often symbolized a reckless sexual life and promiscuous people. Thus, *hwaryubyeong* implies promiscuous people such as prostitutes and their clients. Meanwhile, *hwaryubyeong* represented a physical and moral disorder in Joseon; it was also recognized as a disease *munmyeongbyeong* (문명병 文明病) of spoiled children of wealthy families or highly educated women (An Young-hee 안영희 2020: 106).

As a modern Korean novelist, Yi Sang wrote many works on the theme of romance with *gisaeng*, including *이런 시* (*Iron Si; A Certain Poetry*) and *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*). In addition, works such as *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), *지주회시* (*Jijuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*), *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), *종생기* (*Jongsaenggi; A Lifelong Memories*), and *추등잡필* (*Chudeung jappil; The Autumn Compilation*) describe prostitution by referring to *gisaeng* or can houses. Some of those works prominently depicted the grotesque nature of this prostitution and *hwaryubyeong*. However, at the same time, Yi Sang (2010 [1936g]: 235) referred to syphilis as “a disease that is not honorable but not so shameful when you think about it”<sup>3</sup> in his essay *추등잡필* (*Chudeung jappil; The Autumn Compilation*). In addition, this quote shares his romantic ideas about syphilis like another proverb<sup>4</sup> from the Japanese Edo period. Therefore, this paper reviews

---

<sup>3</sup> “그다지 명예롭지 못한 그러나 생각해 보면 또 그렇게까지 불명예라고까지 할 것도 없는 질환” (이상 2010 [1936g]: 235).

<sup>4</sup> “自惚れと瘡氣の無い者はない No man is free from conceit and syphilis”.



Yi Sang's works where prostitution and disease are mentioned and reveals that the pathological condition of a body suffering venereal disease presupposes tragic eroticism.

First, I will analyze Yi Sang's poem, *가외가전* (*Gawaegajeon; A Story on the Street and off the Street*). The poem was written in Japanese and published in March 1936. However, as you can see from the footnote below, Yi Sang completely ignored the grammatical system when he wrote it. The writer listed words and phrases without any rhyme, so three scholars have translated and revised it in Korean over 50 years due to its complexity. Below is an excerpt of the poem and its English translation<sup>5</sup>.

“My body wears out from the sound of entertainment. Everyone says I am a young man as weak as an old man. However, it is easy for me to wash my body in a lump and bounce over a mountain of eggs. But, instead, I'm content with my life looking down at another vast continent from higher place. My friends are rejoicing and having a roll in the hay. Under the moonlight, the body shakes like a celestial globe. However, their shadows are hypocritical. All the tiny shades sit down by chance. The cherry blossoms wither. The seeds are eradicated. My peeping fizzles out. Why isn't there a clap that should be? Maybe I just have betrayed my father. (...) My pointed body part rubs the center of a young prostitute's body as if diagnosing it. The alley gradually decays. I can see there is a luxurious-looking door in the alley with a mouth. A mouth with golden teeth. And a lung disease with a dirty tongue is inside. Oh-oh-oh. What goes in once does not come out again. And it all becomes the same. On top of that, the pair of shoes stumbles. Certain bacteria cause one's lower abdomen to suffer—a muddy disease.

(...)

The scandal of money. A foot-like hand shamelessly grabs the sick old woman's hand.

There is a rumor that a tyrant has snuck into the house. Girls are willing to be his pet every time after time. Where can I hide so that I can't see that their shoes collide with each other? At the peak of the time, everyone laughs and talks at the same time. The gunfire rings from far away, and the purple spot appears dimly.

All of these are stuffy garbage generated in that large room. A choked crow as big as a pigeon flies into the room where lightning was pounding. Then, intense things are exterminated as if they were sprayed with medicine. The room becomes clean as if it would explode at any moment. However, the things here are just a pile of rubbish in our times.

---

<sup>5</sup> Since there is no English translation, I translated all the novels and poems of Yi Sang by myself mentioned in this paper. And for the reader's understanding, the author's poem was modified to fit in the right grammatical system.

(...)

The blood is on the cigarette, and a big fire broke out that night. Fallen angels breed. They cover the sky and cross temperate climate regions. These things are getting warmer all at once. A large room festers inside, making itching. The garbage sticks to the room continuously.”<sup>6</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1936a]: 111–113).

Kwon Young-min 권영민 (2013: 123–124) interprets the disease in the poem as tuberculosis or measles, saying that the poem

---

<sup>6</sup> “暄噪(喧噪)때문에 마멸(磨滅)되는몸이다. 모두가소년(少年)이라고들그러는데 노야(老翁)인기색(氣色)이 많다. 혹형(酷刑)에 씻기워서 산반(算盤)알처럼 자격(資格)너머로 튀어오르기 쉽다. 그러니까 육교(陸橋)위에서 또 하나의 편안한 대륙(大陸)을 내려다보고 근근(僅僅)히 산다. 동갑네가 시시거리며 떼를 지어 답교(踏橋)한다. 그렇지 않아도 육교(陸橋)는 또 월광(月光)으로 충분(充分)히 천칭(天秤)처럼 제 무게에 끄덕인다. 타인(他人)의 그림자는 위선 넓다. 미미(微微)한 그림자들이 얼떨김에 모조리 앓아 버린다. 앵도(櫻桃)가 진다. 종자(種子)도 연멸(煙滅)한다. 정탐(偵探)도 흐지부지—있어야 움을 박수(拍手)가 어찌서 없느냐. 아아 아버지를 반역(反逆)한가 싶다.

(...)

쏟으려는 노릇—날카로운 신단(身端)이 싱싱한 육교(陸橋)그 중심(甚)한 구석을 진단(診斷)하듯 어루만지기만 한다. 나날이 썩으면서 가리키는 지향(指向)으로 기적(奇蹟)히 골목이 뚫렸다. 썩는 것들이 낙차(落差)나며 골목으로 몰린다. 골목 안에는 치사(侈奢)스러워 보이는 문(門)이 있다. 문(門)안에는 금(金)니가 있다. 금(金)니 안에는 추잡한 허가 달린 폐환(肺患)이 있다. 오—오—. 들어가면서 나오지 못하는 타입 깊이가 장부(臟腑)를 답는다. 그 위로 짝바편 구두가 비칠 거린다. 어느 균(菌)이 어느 아랫배를 앓게 하는 것이다. 질다.

(...)

화폐(貨幣)의 스캔달—발처럼 생긴 손이 염치 없이 노파(老婆)의 통고(痛苦)하는 손을 잡는다. 눈에 띄우지 않는 폭군(暴君)이 잠입(潛入)하였다는 소문(所聞)이 있다. 아기들이 번번이 애충이 되고 되고 한다. 어디로 피(避)해야 저어른 구두와 어른 구두가 맞부딪는 꼴을 알 볼 수 있으랴. 한창급(急)한 시각(時刻)이면 가가호호(家家戶戶)들이 한테 어우러져서 멀리 포성(砲聲)과 시반(屍斑)이 제법 은은하다. 여기 있는 것들 모두가 그 방대(龍大)한 방(房)을 쓸어 생긴 답답한 쓰레기다. 낙뢰(落雷)심한 그 방대(龍大)한 방(房)안에는 어디로 선가질 식(窒息)한 비둘기만 한 까마귀 한 마리가 날아 들어왔다. 그러니까 강(剛)하던 것들이 역마(疫馬)잡듯 픽픽 쓰러지면 서방(房)은 금시 폭발(爆發)할 만큼 정결(精潔)하다. 반대(反對)로 여기 있는 것들은 통요사(通要事)의 쓰레기다.

(...)

궤련(卷煙)에 피가 묻고 그날 밤에 유곽(遊廓)도 탔다. 번식(繁殖)하고 거짓 천사(天使)들이 하늘을 가리고 온대(溫帶)로 건넌다. 그러나 여기 있는 것들은 따뜻해지면서 한꺼번에 들떠든다. 방대(龍大)한 방(房)은 속으로 굵아서 벽지(壁紙)가 가렵다. 쓰레기가 막 붙는다.” (이상 2010 [1936a]: 111–113).

expresses the diseased human organs one after another based on his body. This interpretation considers the historical fact that Yi Sang suffered from tuberculosis during his lifetime and the phrase “a mouth with golden teeth and a lung disease with a dirty tongue is inside”. However, given that metaphors for prostitution in the house of ill reputation can be found in the poem, it is more likely that “a mouth” refers to a vaginal orifice and “the bacteria” refers to syphilis rather than tuberculosis.

To analyze the poem, first, the body, which wears out from the sound of entertainment, indicates a body exhausted by frequent prostitution. Therefore, despite his young age, the speaker is as weak as an old man. Consequently, while his friends are laughing and enjoying sexual pleasure, he is content to stand on both legs and look down at the vast continent (a metaphor for nudity). However, his friends are unhappy with him. Eventually, the writer starts having sexual intercourse due to the serious air around him. He begins to invade the prostitute’s vagina with his genitalia. However, the vagina, metaphorically the alley, is a street where rotten things thrive on a daily basis. Additionally, the door is a hotbed of venereal disease (bacteria) that hurts his lower abdomen. In short, the poem illustrates how sex with prostitutes can transmit venereal disease. Furthermore, the writer presents the grotesque and negative imagery of his self-deprecation and hatred for the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases through prostitution using words such as “a purple spot”, “blood”, “garbage”, “rubbish”, “breeding”, “festering”, and “itching”. However, though he complains about the tragedy, Yi Sang does not distinguish himself from such an unfaithful place. Instead, he laments and sympathizes with the situation of young gisaengs who exchange sex for money. Along with them, the writer is willing to associate with them as a bunch of garbage that represents a social misfit and cancer in society.

At the same time, such prostitution involves more than just the infection of sexually transmitted diseases. Prostitution always comes with a pang of guilt. In verses such as “the cherry blossoms wither”, “the seeds are also eradicated”, and “maybe I just have betrayed my father”, the readers can find that prostitution is an act of pursuing pleasure and refusing to produce an heir. In other words, syphilis implies the concept of impotence in Yi Sang’s literature, related to the inability to produce children. Therefore, it is not the guilty conscience of the ego seeking sexual pleasure that is to blame but rather the impotence resulting from the inability to produce future generations.

For instance, Yi Sang's poem *문벌* (*Munbeol*; *Lineage*) also describes his guilt and sense of debt because he cannot bear a child due to his illness. Therefore, this inability to produce an heir leads to an impotence theme in the texts of Yi Sang. The motif is presented not only in Yi Sang's literature but also in the novel *발가락이 닮았다* (*Balgarak-i dalmadda*; *His Toe Is Similar to Mine*) (Kim Dong-in 김동인 1932). Furthermore, in modern Korean novels, one's fear of syphilis, which can infect one's spouse and even children yet to be born, goes on to a fear of pregnancy, evoking an image of barrenness. For instance, the wife in Shim Hoon's novel *직녀성* (*Jiknyeoseong*; *Vega*) refuses to sleep with her husband to avoid infection after noticing that he has syphilis (Shim Hoon 심훈 1934). From this point of view, the wife's prostitution in Yi Sang's novel *Wings* can be interpreted as an economic activity to make a living and a refusal to have a sexual relationship with her husband because she is worried about contracting his syphilis.

However, in Yi Sang's work, syphilis interestingly becomes one's excuse to reject others. In other words, it is he who refuses to have sex. The following is an excerpt from the full text of Yi Sang's poem, *신경질적으로 비만한 삼각형* (*Singyeong jiljeog-euro bimanhan sangakhyeong*; *A Sharp-tempered Fat Triangle*). The poem was written in Japanese and later translated into Korean.

“—△ is my AMOURUSE.

Dear ∇, how many times have you won wrestling?  
Dear ∇, I only can see your backside buried in my coat.  
Dear ∇, I am an instrument broken by the sigh.  
Any solitude for me may come, I won't have X.  
Only by doing so would my life be as rich as primary colors.  
But I am a caravan.  
I am a caravan.”<sup>7</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1931a]: 30).

---

<sup>7</sup> “—△은 나의 AMOUREUSE 이다.

▽이여씨름에서이겨본경험은몇번이나되느냐.  
▽이여보아하니외투속에파묻힌등덜미밖에없고나.  
▽이여나는그호흡에부서진악기로다  
나에게여하한고독은찾아올지라도나는XX하지아니할것이다.  
오직그러함으로씨름만나의생에는원색과같이풍부하도다.  
그런데나는캐러번이라고.  
그런데나는캐러번이라고.” (이상 2010 [1931a]: 30).

The poem begins with the phrase “△ is my lover (AMOURUSE).” Therefore, △ represents a symbol of one’s lover, and ∇ means the opposite of △. When you look at the relationship between these two, you can realize that ∇ represents something the speaker doesn’t love. He makes fun of ∇ for losing in wrestling. Furthermore, he connects ∇’s experience and his own situation in the verse “I am an instrument broken by the sigh.” Thus, through these verses and a metaphor of ∇ as a snake in another poem ∇의 유혈 (∇-ui yu-hee; ∇’s Play), it is possible to infer that ∇ refers to the genitalia. Furthermore, it is obvious that wrestling in this poem means sexual intercourse, so ∇ may represent an improperly functioning penis. Therefore, △ indicates a properly functioning penis that can sexually satisfy a woman, while ∇ indicates sexual impotence whereby an erection is not forthcoming due to a nervous breakdown. Accordingly, the verse “your backside buried in my coat” refers to the genitalia just buried in clothing because it is not ready to have sex. Furthermore, “sigh” can be considered a metaphor for the speaker’s disappointment with his physical condition. Furthermore, the verse “I’m an instrument broken by the sigh” can be interpreted as a metaphor for loss of sexual function because his ∇ cannot make a woman cry with pleasure through sexual intercourse.

However, the speaker vows that he won’t have X. Here, it is easy to infer that X refers to sexual intercourse. What’s interesting is the speaker’s attitude that rationalizes the current situation, where his sexual ability is insufficient and sexual relationships are impossible, as a choice of one’s own will rather than rejection by others. Moreover, the speaker refers to himself as a caravan, which is his identity and does not fit the situation of not having sex, as the speaker’s attitude evokes a somewhat skeptical atmosphere. Thus, what does “caravan” mean? A caravan is a group of people with camels or horses traveling together on a long journey through the desert. However, a single definition only cannot help us read the symbolism of the caravan riding camels. Therefore, deducing the specific concept of the caravan in the poem requires looking up another text from Yi Sang’s literature. Thus, I cite a part of his novel *저도 의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; The Dark Chamber on the Map*), in which Yi Sang describes a “camel”:

“He likes camels that look like trunks. A camel gobbles up white papers. It swallows bills. Whatever you write down, whatever you order, the camel quickly chews the piece as if it were standing in front of a mailbox. However, he doesn’t want camels to have such obscene letters.

The camel doesn't know that having such letters would eventually make its body thin, so he wanted to write a letter with a pencil telling it to spit out the letters quickly, but the camel doesn't know anything about the pain."<sup>8</sup> (Yi Sang 이 상 2013 [1932]: 26).

The above quote describes the camel as an animal that eats white paper, bills, and obscene letters. Lee Kyoung Hoon 이경훈 (2014: 322) explains that the obscene letter presented in Yi Sang's text means a condom. As a result of this researcher's explanation and the fact that the camel's humps resemble a woman's breasts and it receives money, it is possible to conclude that the camel represents a prostitute. Thus, a caravan with many camels represents a man with lots of sexual desire. Accordingly, the poem's title, *The Sharp-temper Fat Triangle*, can be interpreted as a penis (▽) that does not function due to syphilis even though he has a strong libido-Eros (an instinct for self-preservation). In this way, romance in Yi Sang's literature is based on a pathological body and tragedy.

On the other hand, in Yi Sang's work, impotence leads to the blocking of senses. Referring to the description of the room presented in the novel *Wings*, the speaker's room has no windows, unlike his wife's room. In addition, in the story, he has to go through his wife's room to get to his own, which means that when he comes out of his own room, his wife's room appears. In other words, since there is no means of interaction with the outside world in his room, he can only see the outside through his wife. This is because only the wife earns money and her room has doors and windows connected to the outside world. Furthermore, these doors and windows can be said to be related to the wife's economic skills because it generally requires money to afford windows in a room. However, he has lost his ability to spend money because he doesn't earn it. He even hates giving his attention to the outside world out of laziness. In this way, he isolates and confines himself from society in a windowless room, actively refusing to contact others and disconnecting himself. The following is the text cited in the novel *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*).

---

<sup>8</sup> “그는 트렁크와 같은 낙타를 좋아하였다. 백지를 먹는다. 지폐를 먹는다. 무엇이라고 적어서 무엇을 주문하는지 어떤 여자에게의 답장이 여자의 손이 포스트 앞에서 한 듯이 봉투째 먹힌다. 낙타는 그런 음란한 편지를 먹지 말았으면. 머으면 괴로움이 몸의 살을 마르게 하리라는 것을 낙타는 모르니 하는 수 없다는 것을 생각한 그는 연필로 백지에 그것을 열른 배알아 놓으라는 편지를 써서 먹이고 싶었으나 낙타는 괴로움을 모른다.” (이 상 2013 [1932]: 26).

“I threw out the mirror, got close to my wife’s dressing table, and looked at various beauty products lined up side by side. They are more attractive than anything else in the world. I picked one of them, pulled the plug out, put it on my nose, and smelled it. As I inhale those exotic, sensual scents, my eyes get closed. It is the smell of my wife. I close the bottle and think. Which part of her smelled like this? I’m not sure. Why? Because my wife’s smell would be the sum of these scents in these various bottles. (...) But I don’t actively think about it, even when I think about it in my bed. I didn’t have to. (...) I like to be lazy like the lazy animal rather than working as a decent social worker or hearing news from my wife. If it’s possible, I want to take off this meaningless human face”<sup>9</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 80–82).

According to the above quote, he perceives his wife by smell, not sight. This expresses the speaker’s self-deception; by smelling his wife’s scent, he identifies her with himself and tries to possess her. In this process, he removes his visual sense by closing his eyes. However, he fails to acquire her overall image. This is because while sight means observations and judgments that grasp reality, smell is a sense of imagination that does not require actual reality. Therefore, in this novel, impaired vision indicates a weakening of his ability to grasp reality, which leads to impaired cognitive functions and a loss of control over the situation. In other words, one’s perception that can only be sensed by smell represents fragmented individuals who exist only partially in modern Joseon society.

Furthermore, in the literature of Yi Sang, prostitution and syphilis do not only mean entertainment, infection, or sexual impotence. They also refer to the feeling of impotence that accompanies unemployment. As modern times began, the economic unit of Joseon changed from large households to nuclear families. Therefore, the

<sup>9</sup> “나는 거울을 내던지고 안해의 화장대 앞으로 가까이 가서 나란히 늘어 놓인 고 가지각색의 화장품 병들을 들여다본다. 고것들은 세상의 무엇보다도 매력적이다. 나는 그 중의 하나만을 골라서 가만히 마개를 빼고 병 구멍을 내 코에 갖이다 대이고 숨죽이듯이 가벼운 호흡을 하여 본다. 이국적인 센슈얼한 향기가 페로 스며들면 나는 저절로 스프르 감기는 내 눈을 느낀다. 확실히 안해의 체취의 파편이다. 나는 도로 병마개를 막고 생각해 본다. 안해의 어느 부분에서 요 냄새가 났던가를……. 그러나 그것은 분명치 않다. 왜? 안해의 체취는 요기 늘어 섰는 가지각색의 향기의 합계일 것이니까. (...) 나는 그러나 그런 이불 속의 사색 생활에서도 적극적인 것을 궁리하는 법이 없다. 내게는 그럴 필요가 대체 없었다. (...) 내가 제법 한 사람의 사회인의 자격으로 일을 해보는 것도, 아내에게 사설 듣는 것보다도 나는 가장 게으른 동물처럼 게으른 것이 좋았다. 될 수만 있으면 이 무의미한 인간의 탈을 벗어버리고도 싶었다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 80–82).

family could only be maintained when the couple was engaged in economic activities. However, in Yi Sang's novels such as *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*), *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), and *지주회사* (*Jihuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*), only wives make a living through prostitution instead of husbands who are unable to engage in economic activities. As an example, the novel *Wings* (Yi Sang 이상 1936) presents a situation in which the traditional gender roles have been reversed. The man in the novel tries to confirm his position as a spouse by repeatedly referring to the woman as his wife. However, the wife, who sells sex for money, hands him the money she received from her customers instead of affection, sex, or children. Through her behavior, we can realize that she is free from wifely duties or demands through economic activity. Meanwhile, the husband does not spend the money he receives from his wife. This can be interpreted as pursuing his minimum rights as a husband, meaning a rejection of or resistance against transferring one's rights to others. However, he keeps reaffirming his lack of economic capacity or masculinity as he eventually fails to make and spend money. In this way, the concept of impotence and incapacity can be connected to the psychological images of deficiency and pessimism in Yi Sang's novel affects the composition and development of the narrative. Syphilis is not just a cause and symbol of physical pain but also the reason he cannot have mutual communication and express his sympathy with others. Moreover, through the body infected by syphilis, Yi Sang shows that the body is not only the means of satisfaction and pleasure but also the source of pain and distress.

### **3. Tuberculosis, Consumption, and the Modern Society of Joseon**

In Joseon, people started recognizing tuberculosis as a dangerous disease in the 1910s, and the number of tuberculosis patients rapidly increased as modernization progressed. Due to this influence, tuberculosis was illustrated as a representative infectious disease in modern literature in the early 1900s. At the same time, tuberculosis was related to hygiene and fatigue in Joseon's urbanization process. Therefore, for many writers, tuberculosis became a new metaphor and



symbol, indicating Koreans' poor nutritional status and weak immune system at the time (Pyo Jung-Ok 표정옥 2015: 340). In addition, the rapid increase in tuberculosis in the 1930s led many to predict depressing results rather than positive signs of healing. Thus, the symptoms of mental illness and nervous breakdowns in novels published in the 1930s could be another indicator of tuberculosis or related diseases (Pyo Jung-Ok 표정옥 2015: 340).

As a tuberculosis patient, Yi Sang frequently included epic characters suffering from tuberculosis and tuberculosis-related subjects in his works. The following is a partial quote from the text directly describing the symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis in *봉별기* (*Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong*), *공포의 기록* (*Gongpo-ui girok; The Record of Fear*), and *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*):

“Back then, it was March. I was twenty-three years old, coughing blood.”<sup>10</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936d]: 184).

“I know I haven't had a life for some time. The only 'life-like thing' that visits me in fragments is a monster called 'pain'. No matter how often I look for it, no one will understand me. (...) After the second sign of hemoptysis, I think I got to notice how long my life span is left.”<sup>11</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2004 [1937]: 317).

“My complexion dried up as I turned pale. As I can see, day by day, my energy has decreased. Bones popped up over the skin due to a lack of nutrition. I couldn't stand the pain here and there without lying around dozens of times overnight.”<sup>12</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 83–84).

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by tuberculosis bacteria that mainly infects the lungs, but it can also affect other organs. However, infection with tuberculosis bacteria does not immediately

<sup>10</sup> “스물세 살이오—3월이오—각혈(咯血)이다.” (이상 2013 [1936d]: 184).

<sup>11</sup> “생활, 내가 이미 오래전부터 생활을 갖지 못한 것을 나는 잘 안다. 단편적으로 나를 찾아오는 '생활 비슷한 것'도 오직 '고통'이란 요괴뿐이다. 아무리 찾아도 이것을 알아줄 사람은 한 사람도 없다. (...) 제 2 차의 각혈이 있는 후 나는 으스스푸레하게나마 내 수명에 대한 개념을 파악하였다고 스스로 믿고 있다.” (이상 2004 [1937]: 317).

<sup>12</sup> “나는 안색이 여지없이 창백해 가면서 말라 들어갔다. 나날이 눈에 보이듯이 기운이 줄어들었다. 영양 부족으로 하여 몸뚱이 곳곳이 뼈가 불쑥불쑥 내어밀었다. 하룻밤 사이에도 수십 차를 돌쳐놓지 않고는 여기저기가 배겨서 나는 배겨낼 수가 없었다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 83–84).

develop into the disease. Instead, tuberculosis occurs when the carrier's immunity weakens due to extreme fatigue, stress, and nutritional imbalances once the virus is lurking in the carrier's body. Therefore, unless it worsens, it is similar to a cold. However, if the disease becomes active tuberculosis, the patient goes through its characteristic symptoms such as hemoptysis, shortness of breath, fever, helplessness, fatigue, weight loss, and severe coughing (Kim Sung-Kyu 김성규 1997: 711; The Korea National Tuberculosis Association 대한결핵협회 2013: 42). Accordingly, Yi Sang repeatedly described these major symptoms of tuberculosis in various works. The following are excerpts from *날개* (*Nalgae; Wings*), *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), and *지주회시* (*Jijuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig*).

"I overly spent every day lazy for no reason, and everything was just fine."<sup>13</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936b]: 79).

"When he begins to lie down at four o'clock, he will rest until five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. He is a funny guy—Yi Sang."<sup>14</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 21).

"Let's see how lazy a person can be. (...) Even if it's noisy, you must pretend you don't know it and be lazy. I'll live my life being lazy, and I'll die."<sup>15</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1936f]: 56–57).

As mentioned above, Yi Sang's work has a generally lethargic and melancholy tone. Readers who first encounter his works may consider the writer (or the main character, represented by Yi) as a man enervated by slothful habits. However, continuous sleeping without going outside can be a symptom of depression, which is common among tuberculosis patients. One study found significant depression-related factors—such as gender, age, living standards, mental support, and lung function—in a group of people with active TB. Females, young age, low living standards, lack of mental support, and poor lung function are also found to be influential factors in patients' depression

---

<sup>13</sup> “그냥 그날그날을 그저 까닭 없이 편둥편둥 게을르고만 있으면 만사는 그만이었던 것이다.” (이상 2013 [1936b]: 79).

<sup>14</sup> “네 시에 누우면 다섯, 여섯, 일곱, 여덟, 아홉 그리고 아홉 시에서 열 시까지 리상—나는 리상이라는 한 우스운 사람을 안다.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 21).

<sup>15</sup> “그저 한없이 게으른 것—사람 노릇을 하는 체 대체 어디 얼마나 기껏 게으를 수 있나 좀 해보자. (...) 시끄러워도 그저 모른 체하고 게으르기만 하면 된다. 살고 게으르고 죽고—” (이상 2013 [1936f]: 56–57).

(Seo Hae-sook et al. 서해속 외 2012: 160). Therefore, except for gender, it is safe to assume that Yi Sang had a high depressive factor.

Yi Sang got tuberculosis at the age of 21, when the disease was considered incurable. At that time, the perception and medical treatments for tuberculosis were much worse than they are now. Hence, the writer would have suffered from enormous fear of death. For him, a tuberculosis diagnosis was tantamount to a death sentence. Thus, he compared his life with a sick body to *hard labor* (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 22). *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*), in particular, Yi Sang's representative novel disclosed his resentment and fear of active tuberculosis. Below is a partial quote from the corresponding text.

“If he dies in his grave to die once more, he must die once more, so if he dies again, he must die continuously, so even if it is the same if he dies once or twice, he intends to die many times, so he has died countless of times, but it never ends. Lord, did you abandon him? Oh lord, why would you let him die again after his death?”<sup>16</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 28).

In the quote above, the speaker repeatedly mentions “death” as often as ten times in a sentence. For him, death is not a one-shot punishment but a punishment that will never end. As a result, the speaker repeatedly experiences death in his mental world. He just can't help thinking about death, even assuming he's already dead and trapped in his grave. He despairs that no matter how hard he dies, the death will not eventually end. Thus, suicide is a meaningless act; it would only speed up his countless deaths. As such, the disease not only made the writer feel lethargic but also instilled fear enough to cause a nervous breakdown. The following is a description of the behavior of the speaker and K in the novel.

“Her eyes were so red that he sat watching the woman's eyes completely change, and her heart became fierce like a lion, but he didn't change his facial expression; it means that he didn't care if she bit her

---

<sup>16</sup> “그는 무덤 속에서 다시 한 번 죽어버리려고 죽으면 그래도 또 한 번은 더 죽어야 하게 되고 하여서 또 죽으면 또 죽어야 되고 또 죽어도 또 죽어야 되고 하여서 그는 힘들여 한번 몹시 죽어보아도 마찬가지로지만 그래도 그는 여러 번 여러 번 죽어보았으나 결국 마찬가지로에서 끝나는 끝나지 않는 것이었다. 하느님은 그를 내어버려두십니까. 그래 하느님은 죽고 나서 또 죽게 내어버려두십니까.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 28).

lips with her teeth and make it bleed, or moans at him like a thin, long sound from the phonograph. The woman cries. (...) She raises her tearful face, approaches him, pulls up her sleeves, and says, "Look, isn't my arms too skinny?" (...) However, he doesn't know how skinny her arms are. So then, the woman cries bitterly."<sup>17</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2013 [1932]: 31-32).

As you can see, the woman is at the end of her rope and expresses her pain to K. The woman yells, curses, and cries over her sadness, resentment, and fear. She unleashes all kinds of negative emotions on K. However, K responds indifferently to such reactions. He does not truly sympathize with her. Rather than empathizing, he keeps his distance and breaks off emotional relationships with her.

Who are these people? The woman can be said to be a psychological projector that exists in the consciousness and unconsciousness of Yi Sang. First, the woman caught in the fear of death because her body is getting thinner represents the writer's instinct and desire for life. Moreover, she doesn't just lie down and sob when she's sick. Instead, she actively speaks out about her situation. The woman shows that Yi Sang's desire to live was intense. However, there was no cure for tuberculosis in Joseon at that time. There was a lack of awareness of tuberculosis and no medical knowledge of the causes of or treatments for the disease. Thus, he was in a problematic situation where he couldn't do anything because he didn't know how to fix it. He considered it reality and his fate. He had no choice but to accept the impending death despite not wanting it. The writer criticizes the helpless society through K's unwitting reaction to the woman. K discourages the woman's will to live through indifference, distinct from rational judgment. He disregards the woman's intention to live and tells her to give up without putting forward any convincing reasons. K does not understand women's desire and soon blocks women's hysteria and

---

<sup>17</sup> “눈가없이 대단히 벌게지면 여자의 눈은 대단히 성질이 달라지면 마음은 사자와 같이 사나워져 가는 것을 그가 가만히 지키고 앉아 있노라면 여자는 그에게 별짓을 다 하여도 그는 변하려는 얼굴의 표정의 먹살을 짝 붙들고 다시는 놓지 않으니까 여자는 성이 나서 이빨로 입술을 짝 깨물어서 피를 내고 축음기와 같은 국어로 그에게 향하여 가느다랗고 길게 막 퍼부어도 그에게는 아무렇지도 않다. 여자는 운다. ... 여자는 곧 눈물이 글썽글썽한 얼굴을 들어 그에게로 주면서 팔뚝을 훌훌 걷으면서 자 보십시오 이렇게 마르지 않았습니까 하고. ... 그에게는 얼마큼에서 얼마큼이나 말랐는지 도무지 알 수가 없어서 분한 듯이 여자는 막 운다.” (이상 2013 [1932]: 31-32).

cuts them off. In this respect, K represents Joseon society, indifferent to alienated and sick patients.

As such, the novel *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*) illustrates the artist's mentality and depicts the modern society of Joseon that ignores the underprivileged. Moreover, the sick body is compared to a weary body, as TB is related to consumptive images. Thus, in Yi Sang's narrative, tuberculosis is a nomenclature that negatively symbolizes the violence of modern Joseon society under the Japanese Empire, as its old term (consumption) symbolizes such negative symptoms. Thus, the body coughing up blood from pulmonary tuberculosis conveys an image of solitude and distress.

In short, the writer does not consider TB a personal tragedy for himself. In his writings, Yi Sang also criticizes the government for labeling tuberculosis a social disease. His criticism can be found in the transformation of a woman appearing in *지도의 암실* (*Jido-ui Amsil; A Dark Chamber on the Map*) in his poem *흥행물천사* (*Heunghaengmul cheonsa, The Angel of Entertainment*). The text below is an excerpt from that poem:

“The orthopedic surgeon plucked the woman's eyes and turned them into an old clown's. A woman with clown's eyes smiles when she does not and laughs even when she cries. (...) The doctor takes the whip to the angel with a whip that looks like an angel's snake. The angel laughs in pain. She becomes mushy like a rubber balloon. The angel drops her shoes and runs away. She throws more than ten nets at a time. (...) The angel chews the full moon into pieces and gives a feast. People fat as pigs swallow up those pieces and spread the smell of chocolate.”<sup>18</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1931b]: 41–43).

Here, the surgeon representing the power of the government takes away the creativity that enables her to look at things, including reality. Thus, the woman who had complained about Joseon society's deficiencies in the dark chamber becomes an angel of entertainment; she now belongs to the realm of death. Moreover, as a victim of a

---

<sup>18</sup>“정형외과는여자의눈을찢어버리고형사形使없이늘어빠진극예상의눈으로만 들고만것이다. 여자는실컷울어도또한웃지아니하여도웃는것이다. (...) 천사의뱀과 같은회초리로천사를때린다. 천사는웃는다, 천사는고무풍선과같이부풀어진다. (...) 천사는신발을떨어뜨리고도망한다. 천사는한꺼번에 10 개이 상의뿔을 내던진다. (...) 여자는만월을잘게잘게씹어서향연을베낀다. 사람들은그것을먹고 돼지같이비만하는초콜렛냄새를방산하는것이다.” (이상 2010 [1931b]: 41–43).

grievous injustice, she condemns Joseon's violence and social irregularities and takes grotesque vengeance on society. In particular, the angel chewing the full moon into pieces with her mouth full of blood (chocolate) and feeding the bunch of people conveys the image of an infectious disease. In short, the poem expresses the writer's loathing of modern Joseon society, which dismisses patients as abnormal.

Nevertheless, why did Yi Sang criticize modern Joseon society so much? First, to understand Yi Sang's position when dealing with Joseon society, it is necessary to look at the sanitary city project in colonial Joseon at that time. In 1911, all hygiene-related tasks became the jurisdiction of the Japanese police and the Japanese Empire issued the Infectious Disease Prevention Order upon Joseon in 1915 (Jung Keunsik 정근식 2011: 233–241). Furthermore, the implementation of 조선시가지계획령 Joseon Planning Ordinance for Urban Areas in 1934 led to systematic developments considering hygiene and urban planning (Kim Heungsoon 김흥순 2007: 156). In particular, in the 1930s, when Yi Sang was actively writing, the Japanese Empire pushed for the removal of slums in Seoul and the expulsion of urban vagrants as one of Joseon's urban development plans (Kim Baek-Yung 김백영 2005: 87–88).

However, this emphasis on cleanliness and a hygienic environment became a legal regulation for colonial order stability rather than spreading knowledge of modern medicine (Kim Eun-jeong 김은정 2012: 292–293). Furthermore, pro-Japanese intellectuals advocated hygiene education and mental education in Joseon as part of the enlightenment movement. A case in point is 이광수 (Lee Kwang-soo), who advocated 민족개조사상 the national reformism in his poem 너는 청춘(青春)이다 (*Neo-nun chungchun-ida; You Are Young*). In the poem, Lee identifies himself as a writer and doctor, criticizing “the complaints that cannot be digested and the sentimentalism of tuberculosis of a nervous wreck” (Lee Kwang-soo 이광수 1921: 97). Through this assertion, he emphasized hygienic individuals who are disease-free and mentally healthy.

While Lee Kwang-soo's ego creates and spreads self-consciousness by discriminating himself from others, Yi Sang's ego does not distinguish him from others. Yi Sang defines himself as “an indigent patient” and “a beggar”, and embraces others far from the knowledge system (Lee Kyoung Hoon 이경훈 2014: 316–323). In short, the artist includes him in the domain of the underprivileged. As such, Yi Sang spreads sentimentalism, implying sickness through his

literature. Additionally, with the eyes of a clown (nervous wreck), he resists the hygiene discourse advocated by Lee Kwang-soo and criticizes the Japanese colonial power. For instance, the writer's resistance to repressive and violent sanitary discourse is directly suggested through the description in *조춘점묘* (*Jochun-jeonmyyo*; *An Announcement in the Early Spring*):

“However, if it is possible to have a hygienic world without beggars, sick people, or criminals, when everything disturbing to our eyes is completely gone, the earth would be a dull world, boredom itself. Therefore, philanthropists will have no way of satisfying their vanity. All doctors, lawyers, and courts will be wasted. Every day is just the same in a row, and this kind of world would be a waste. If one person accidentally gets a boil in this mild spring weather, he will immediately kill himself to be clean in front of all the people in the world. Without realizing it, the sense of morality of such a world will demand him to do so.”<sup>19</sup> (Yi Sang 이상 2010 [1936e]: 199–200).

While Lee Kwang-soo insisted on eradicating social ills and pointing to tuberculosis patients as the cause of social problems, Yi Sang's statement satirizes that society itself is responsible for the evils of colonial Joseon society, not the sick. Thus, Yi Sang adheres to his identity as a patient to accuse the Japanese Empire of its tyranny and absurdity by illustrating his ill body. Furthermore, the suffering body here refers to the modern society of colonial Joseon under Japanese imperialism. In other words, the ill body symbolizes the modern society of Joseon, which was impoverished by the violent oppression of the Japanese colonial rule, not just the individual's sick body.

---

<sup>19</sup> “그러나 또 생각해 보면 걸인도 없고 병자도 없고 범죠힌도 없고 하여간 오늘 우리 눈에 거슬리는 온갖 것이 다 깨끗이 없어져 버린 타지마당 같은 말쑥한 세상은 만일 그런 것이 지상에 실현할 수 있다면 지상은 그야말로 심심하기 짝이 없는 권태 그것과 같은 세상일 것이다. 그러니까 자선가의 허영심도 채울 길이 없을 것이고 의사도 변호사도 아니 재판소도 온갖 것이 다 소용이 없어질 것이고 따라서 그날이 그날 같고 이럴 것이니 이래서야 참 정말 속수무책으로 바야흐로 할 일이 없어질 것이다. 이런 춘풍태탕한 세월 속에서 어찌다가 우연히 부스럼이라도 좀 나는 사람이 하나 있다면 참과 이것을 이기지 못하여 천하만민 앞에서 아주 깨끗하게 일신을 자결할 것이고 또 그런 세상의 도덕이 그러기를 무언중에 요구해 놓아둘 것이다.” (이상 2010 [1936e]: 199–200).

#### **4. Conclusion: Living in the Modern Society of Joseon as a Patient**

To understand Yi Sang's literature, it is clearly necessary to explore the motifs of the disease underlying his literary world. Nevertheless, we should analyze not only the disease itself but also the body suffering from it. Thus, I suggest that Yi Sang's literature is based on a sick body experiencing modern times. In other words, in Yi Sang's literature, the concept of modernity is perceived through the body. Furthermore, he has experienced a body suffering from diseases that rampantly spread in the early 1900s and reveals the phenomena and nature, perceptions and practices, both conscious and unconscious, process, and reality of modern society. Specifically, Yi Sang shows his identity as a patient and a sex buyer, and he experiences and criticizes the large body of modern society, that is, the society represented as one giant organism. To discuss such topics, this paper debates the body discourse that resisted the sanitary discourse during the Japanese colonial period by analyzing the disease and sick body depicted in Yi Sang's literature.

First, this paper explores the author's consciousness and unconsciousness implied by syphilis in his literature. This paper specifically discusses his libido and attachment to his life by analyzing the case of combining prostitution and syphilis in his works. Thus, this topic differentiates itself from existing studies by focusing on the artist's death impulse and the image of death in his literature. Therefore, this study presents a new perspective on understanding Yi Sang's literature that has been relatively overlooked by revealing the writer's attachment to life, which appears as a sexual impulse (Eros). Moreover, the study reveals the author's guilt about his inability to function properly due to syphilis, which turned out to be a pang of guilt for failing to fulfill his duty to produce future generations and earn money. Furthermore, this paper identifies the author's autistic characteristics by capturing the disconnection from others described in his works. As a result of the analysis, the study finds that syphilis is not just a cause and symbol of physical pain but also the reason for the inability in actual communication and exchange with others.

In the second topic, I examined the concept of the body in modern times by describing how the writer implements the body with tuberculosis. In many modern pieces of literature, syphilis and tuberculosis are considered social diseases suffered by modern society.



However, no one actively adheres to their identity as a sick or infectious individual like Yi Sang. In response, this paper discusses the body discourse of Yi Sang, who resisted the hygiene discourse of the society of that time by sticking to his identity as a patient and insisting on considering himself among a neglected class of people.

For the discussion above, this paper reads the texts by referring to various works by Yi Sang. To understand his esoteric world of literature and literary images, an intertextual approach is essential. Through such analysis, it is possible to capture the psychological projections and poetic images that constitute the writer's literary world.

In conclusion, the body presented in Yi Sang's literature was a site of illness and a representation of a sick society. Through his literature, the author deplores the evils of the hygiene discourse advocated by colonial Joseon society under the Japanese Empire; that is, Joseon was the perfect breeding ground for the virus and the Japanese Empire to occupy. For Yi Sang, modern Joseon society was a place that neither understood neglected people nor sympathized with them. Thus, he established an independent literary world that reflects his critical reasoning for modern Joseon society.

## Bibliography

- An, Young-hee (안영희). 2020. 화류병과 문명병으로 표상된 일본과 조선의 근대 – 한일근대소설의 매독담론 (Hwaryubyeong-gwa munmyeongbyeng-euro pyosang-dwen Ilbon-gwa Joseon-ui geundae – Hanil geundae soseul-ui maedok damron; The Modern Era of Japan and Chosun Represented in the Venereal and Civilizational Diseases: Discourse about Syphilis in Korean and Japanese Modern Novels). *일본연구 (Ilbon-yeongu; Journal of Japanese Studies)*, no. 86: 105–130.
- Jung, Keunsik (정근식). 2011. 식민지 위생경찰의 형성과 변화, 그리고 유산 – 식민지 통치성의 시각에서 (Sikminji wisaeng gyeongchal-ui hyeongseong-gwa byeonhwa, geurigo yusan: Sikminji tongchiseong-ui sigak-eseo; Formation, Change, and Legacy of the Colonial Sanitary Police in Modern Korea). *사회와 역사 (Sahwae-wa yeoksa; Society and History)*, no. 90: 221–270.

- Kim, Baek-Yung (김백영). 2005. 식민지 도시계획을 둘러싼 식민 권력의 균열과 갈등 (Sikminji dosi gaehoek-eul dulleossan sikmin gweonllyeok-ui gyunyeol-gwa galdeung; The Repute and Conflicts in the Colonial Urban Power Bloc Concerning Colonial Urban Planning). *사회와 역사 (Sahwae-wa yeoksa; Society and History)*, no. 67: 84–128.
- Kim, Eun-jeong (김은정). 2012. 일제강점기 위생담론과 화류병: 화류병 치료제 광고를 중심으로 (Ilje gangjeomgi wisaeng damron-gwa hwaryubyeong: Hwaryubyeong chiryoje gwanggo-reul jungsim-euro; The Sanitation Discourse and the Hwaryubyeong (disease) during Japanese colonial rule: focused on advertisements of sanitation and sexually transmitted disease (hwaryubyeong)). *민족문학사연구 (Minjok Munhaksa Yeongu; Journal of Korean Literary History)*, no. 49: 291–316.
- Kim, Heungsoon (김흥순). 2007. 일제강점기 도시계획에서 나타난 근대성 – 조선시가지계획령(朝鮮市街地計劃令)을 중심으로 (Iljae gangjeomgi dosi gyehoek-eseo natanan geundaeseong: Joseon sigaji gyehoekryeong-eul jungsim-euro; Modernity Revealed in Urban Planning in the Era of Japanese Colonist Rule – A Review on Chosun Planning Ordinance for Urban Areas). *서울도시연구 (Seoul dosi yeongu; Seoul Studies)*, vol. 8, no. 4: 155–173. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23129/seouls.8.4.200712.155>
- Kim, Sung-Kyu (김성규). 1977. 폐결핵의 증상 및 임상증례를 통한 감별진단 (Pye gyeolhaek-ui jeungsang mit imsang-jeungrye-reul tonghan gambyeol jindan; Clinical Manifestations and Differential Diagnosis of Pulmonary Tuberculosis). *결핵 및 호흡기 질환 (Gyeolhaek mit hohupgi jilhwan; Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases)*, vol. 44, no. 4: 711–715. <https://doi.org/10.4046/trd.1997.44.4.711>
- Kim, Yun-sik (김윤식). 1988. *이상 연구 (Yi Sang yeongu; The Study on Yi Sang)*. 경기도 파주: 문학사상 (Gyeonggi-do Paju: Munhak sasang).
- Kwon Young-min (ed; 권영민 엮음). 2013. *이상 전집 1 (사) (Yi Sang Jeonjip 1 (Si); The Collected Poems of Yi Sang, Vol. 1)*, 123–126. 경기도 파주: 태학사 (Paju: Thaeaksa Publisher).
- Lee, Kwang-soo (이광수). 1921. 너는 청춘이다 (Neo-nun chungchun-ida; You are Youth). *창조 (Changjo)*, vol. 8: 97.

- Lee, Kyoung Hoon (이경훈). 2014. 소설가 이상 씨 (MONSIEUR LICHAN)의 글쓰기 - 「지도의 암실」을 중심으로 - (Soseolga Isang Ssi Monsieur LICHAN-ui geulsseugi - Jido-ui Amsil-eul jungsim-euro; The Writing of Novelist MONSIEUR LICHAN), *사이 문* SAI, no. 17: 303-331. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30760/inakos.2014..17.009>
- Pyo, Jung-Ok (표정옥). 2015. 은유와 상징의 결핵 담론에서 근대 문학의 과학 담론으로의 변환에 대한 기호학적 연구 (Eunyu-wa sangjing-ui gyeolhaek damron-eseo geundae munhag-ui gwahak damron-euro-ui byeonhwa-e daehan gihohagjeog yeongu; A Semiotic Study about the changing Meaning from the Kyulhak as a Metaphor and symbol to the scientific discourse of Modern Literature). *기호학 연구 (Kihohak yeongu; Semiotic Inquiry)*, no. 44: 337-366.
- Seo, Hae-sook, Kim, Jong Kyung, Hong, Jae-rack, Seo, Jeong Eun, Jo, Yeng-soo, Kwon, Oh-woo, Kim, Buyeon. (서해숙, 김종경, 홍재락, 서정은, 조영수, 권오우, 김부연). 2012. 결핵양상에 따른 우울증 연구 (Gyeolhaek yangsang-e ddareun uuljeung yeongu; A Study on the Depression of Tuberculosis Symtoms). *대한결핵 및 호흡기학회 추계학술발표초록집 (Daehan gyeolhaek mit hoheubgi hakhoe chugyehaksul palpyo chorokjib; The Conference of the Korean Academy of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases)*, no. 114: 160. [https://preview.kstudy.com/W\\_files/ftp43/0y909827\\_pv.pdf](https://preview.kstudy.com/W_files/ftp43/0y909827_pv.pdf)
- The Korea National Tuberculosis Association (Daehan Gyeolhaek Hyeobhui; 대한결핵협회). 2013. 결핵 바로 알기(2) - 결핵의 발병과 증상 (Gyeolhaek paro algi (2) - gyeolhaek-ui palbyeong-gwa jeunsang; Accurate Information on Tuberculosis (2): The Incipient Stage and Symptoms of Tuberculosis). *보건세계 (Bogeon Segye; Health Care)*, no. 648: 42-43.
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1931a]. 신경질적으로 비만한 삼각형 (Singyeong jiljeog-euro bimanhan sanggakhyeong; A Sharp-tempered Fat Triangle). In: *이상 전집 2 - 시, 수필, 서간 (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2)*, ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 30. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1931b]. 흥행물천사 (Heung-hang-mul-cheonsa; The Angel of Entertainment). In: *이상 전집 2 - 시,*

수필, 서간(Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 41–43. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).

- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1931c]. ▽의유희 (▽-ui yuhee; ▽'s Play). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간* (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 18–19. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2013 [1932]. 지도의 암실 (Jido-ui Amsil; The Dark Chamber on the Map). In: *이상 전집 2* (Yi Sang Jeonjib 2; The Collected Works of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kwon Young-min (권영민 엮음), 21–33. 경기도 파주: 태학사 (Gyeonggi-do Paju: Taehaksa Publisher).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1936a]. 가외가전 (Gawaegajeon; The Story of the Distance from Outside the Street). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간* (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 111–113. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2013 [1936b]. 날개 (Nalgae; Wings). In: *이상 전집 2* (Yi Sang Jeonjib 2; The Collected Works of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kwon Young-min (권영민 엮음), 76–100. 경기도 파주: 태학사 (Gyeonggi-do Paju: Taehaksa Publisher).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1936c]. 문벌 (Munbeol; Lineage). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간* (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 121. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2013 [1936d]. 봉별기 (Bongbyulgi; The Record from Meeting and Breaking up with Geumhong). In: *이상 전집 2*, (Yi Sang Jeonjib 2; The Collected Works of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kwon Young-min (권영민 엮음), 184–191. 경기도 파주: 태학사 (Gyeonggi-do Paju: Taehaksa Publisher).
- Yi Sang (이상). 2010 [1936e]. 조춘점묘 (Jochun-jeommyo; An Announcement in the Early Spring). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간* (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2), ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 193–212. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).

- Yi, Sang (이상). 2013 [1936f]. 지주회시(Jijuhwaesi; A Story of a Spider and a Pig). In: 이상전집 2 (*Yi Sang Jeonjib 2; The Collected Works of Yi Sang, Vol. 2*), ed. Kwon Young-min (권영민 엮음), 56–75. 경기도 파주: 태학사 (Gyeonggi-do Paju: Taehaksa Publisher).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2010 [1936g]. 추등잡필 (Chudeung jappil, The Autumn Compilation). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간 (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2)*, ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 227–240. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi, Sang (이상). 2004 [1937]. 공포의 기록 (Gongpo-ui girok; The Record of Fear). In: *이상 전집 1 – 소설 (Yi Sang Jeonjip 1: Soseol; The Collected Novels of Yi Sang, Vol. 1)*, ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 317–331. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).
- Yi Sang (이상). 2010 [1961]. 어리석은 석반 (Eo-ri-sugeun seokban; A Pointless Supper). In: *이상 전집 2 – 시, 수필, 서간 (Yi Sang Jeonjip 2: Si, supil, seogan; The Collected Poems, Essays, and Letters of Yi Sang, Vol. 2)*, ed. Kim, Jong-Nyon (김종년 엮음), 306–318. 서울: 가람기획 (Seoul: Garam Kihoek; Garam Publishing).



*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*  
vol. 8/2022  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.04>

## **A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel and various editions of “Hamel’s Journal”**

**Cleo GOH, M.A. student**

Department of History  
Inha University, 100 Inharo, Nam-gu,  
Incheon, 22212,  
Republic of Korea  
[cleogo.yx@gmail.com](mailto:cleogo.yx@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3851-5192>

**Abstract:** It is undisputed that Hamel is known in Korea’s history as a historical character who first introduced Joseon to the West in the 17th century. Prior to the release of *Hamel’s Journal*, the West had never heard of a country named Joseon. Furthermore, *Hamel’s Journal* also was significant as one of the only sources of information the West had of Joseon up till the 19th century. However, there are still misunderstandings surrounding the historical significance of Hamel in Korea’s history, and additionally, the impact of *Hamel’s Journal* in the West is not as well-studied despite having played such an important role. Therefore, this paper aims to first look into the historical significance of Hamel within Korea’s history and resolve the misunderstandings surrounding it. Also, the impact of *Hamel’s Journal* in the West will be discussed and what its role was in shaping the West’s perspective of Joseon from the 17th century.

## *Cleo Goh: A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel...*

**Keywords:** Hendrick Hamel; *Hamel's Journal*; Dutch East India Company (VOC); Joseon; Korea; Saagman; Hoetink; perspective discourse.

### 헨드릭 하멜 생애와 『하멜표류기』 판본에 대한 재검토

**초록:** 헨드릭 하멜은 한국에서 조선을 서양에 처음 소개한 17 세기의 역사적 인물로 알려져 있다. 『하멜표류기』가 출판되기 전까지 서양은 조선이라는 나라에 대해 들어본 적이 없었다. 또한 『하멜표류기』는 19 세기까지 서양이 조선에 대해 갖고 있던 유일한 정보원 중 하나로서 중요한 의미가 있었다. 그러나 한국사에서 하멜의 역사적 의미를 둘러싼 오해가 여전히 존재하고 있으며, 또한 조선을 서양에 소개하는 데 그렇게 중요한 역할을 했음에도 불구하고 서양에서의 『하멜표류기』의 영향은 제대로 연구되지 않고 있다. 따라서 본 논문은 우선 한국 역사 내에서 하멜의 역사적 의의를 살펴보고 이를 둘러싼 오해를 해소하는 데 목적이 있다. 그리고 서양에서 『하멜표류기』의 영향과 17 세기부터 서양의 조선 인식을 형성하는데 있어서 『하멜표류기』의 역할이 무엇이었는데에 대해서도 분석할 것이다.

**핵심어:** 헨드릭 하멜; 하멜표류기; 네덜란드 동인도회사; 조선; 한국; 사그만; 후틴크; 표류민 송환 체제.

### **Nowa odsłona biografii Hendricka Hamela oraz poszczególnych wydań „Dziennika Hamela”**

**Abstrakt:** Nie ulega wątpliwości, że Hamel zapisał się na kartach koreańskiej historii jako osoba, która po raz pierwszy odkryła państwo Joseon siedemnastowiecznemu Zachodowi. Państwa zachodnie nie słyszały wcześniej o takim kraju – sytuacja ta zmieniła się wraz z momentem ukazania się *Dziennika Hamela*. Zapiski te były zatem aż do wieku XIX znaczącym źródłem informacji o Joseon. Jednakże pomimo ważnej roli *Dziennika* wciąż nie doczekał się on na Zachodzie dogłębnej analizy, występują także nadal pewne nieporozumienia dotyczące jego historycznego znaczenia. Niniejszy artykuł ukazuje zatem nie tylko rolę, jaką Hamel odegrał w koreańskiej historii, ale i stara się wyjaśnić związane z nim nieporozumienia. Przeanalizowany zostanie także wpływ *Dziennika Hamela* na Zachód, jak również i to, jaką rolę odegrał w kształtowaniu zachodniej percepcji Joseon od siedemnastego wieku.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Hendrick Hamel; *Dziennik Hamela*; Holenderska Kompania Wschodnioindyjska (VOC); Joseon; Korea; Saagman; Hoetink; dyskurs perspektywiczny.



## 1. Introduction

Hendrick Hamel is known as a historical character in Korea's 17th century history who first introduced Joseon to the West through the narrative he wrote. Hamel and his crew worked for the Dutch East India Company (hereafter known as VOC) and due to a shipwreck, their ship crashed on Jeju Island in 1653 while enroute from Taiwan to Japan. Prior to that, Hamel worked as a bookkeeper for the VOC and sailed from Europe to Africa and Asia along the VOC trading routes. After crashing on Jeju Island, Hamel spent 13 years in various regions of Joseon and in 1668, various accounts detailing Hamel's experience in Joseon were published. It is most commonly known as *Hamel's Journal* currently and has been translated into various languages throughout the years. *Hamel's Journal* is significant as it is the first document published that contains information about Joseon to be released in the Western world, and therefore represents an important milestone in Korea's history with respect to the West's awareness of Joseon and Korea.

Currently, Hamel is mentioned in Korean history textbooks as a character who first introduced Korea to the West. If mentioned to the general public, most would know that there is an exhibit of a model of Hamel's ship, *De Sperwer*, in Jeju Island. Some might have even heard of a museum that is dedicated to Hamel in Yeosu, the last place that Hamel had lived in before escaping Joseon. However, in comparison to Hamel's apparent historical importance as being the first person who had introduced Joseon to the majority of the West, his impact is not as well-researched as it should be. Therefore, this paper aims to take a relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel, the impact of his narrative in the West and how it has shaped the West's perception of Korea.

With regards to the direction of research in Korea up till now, it has mostly been focused on Hamel's time spent detained in Joseon for 13 years and the analysis of related materials. The basis of such research is closely related to the academic inclination in Korea since the early 1900s, where the main focus of much research often attempted at making meaningful connections between Korea and the West. This is also largely in conjunction with the country's modernization efforts and still persists up till now. There has also been increasing opinions that Hamel had possibly contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. However, such claims need to be addressed as it has the potential

to completely alter Hamel's historical significance in Korea. Hence, the validity of such claims will also be covered in this paper as well.

Within Korea, Hamel was only brought into the spotlight in the early 1900s. Prior to that, it appears that there were no Korean translations of Hamel's narrative and therefore, research on Hamel could not be carried out. The first known Korean translation of Hamel's narrative was published by 최남선 (Choi Nam Seon), who chanced upon the article in a Japanese magazine titled *Pacific Ocean*. He translated the Japanese article into Korean and then published it in a Korean magazine titled *청춘* (*Cheongchun; Youth*) in 1918 (Choi Nam Seon 최남선 1918). However, it should be noted that this article had been translated from Japanese – not directly from the original work's language – and thus, the accuracy of it may be compromised to a certain extent.

Following that, the first full translation of *Hamel's Journal* officially published in a book was by 이병도 (Lee Byung Do) in 1934. It is considered to be a well-researched translation that is highly regarded in the academic field (Lee, Byung Do 이병도 1934). In fact, the image of Hamel created at that time has been reflected in the Korean academia and textbooks till the late 1900s. That is, implying that the Western culture had already been introduced by Hamel into Joseon from as early as the 17th century and along with it, knowledge of weapons as well.

It was only until the 1990s that research regarding Hamel began to break away from the initial perspective and branch into other aspects. Through research on Hamel, other aspects such as 17th century East Asian relations (Kwon, In-hyuk 권인혁 1999: 9–22; Han, Myung-ki 한명기 2003: 8–25), trading system and culture (Ji Myung-suk 지명숙 2003: 53–95), laws regarding repatriation of drifters (Shin, Dong-gyu 신동규 2007) etc. could also be studied. Hence, the historical significance of Hamel should not be limited to his purported contributions to the Joseon military and instead, be approached from other perspectives.

As such, this paper aims to first address the issues regarding the possibility of Hamel having contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. Firstly, Hamel's childhood and the experience he obtained while working under the VOC, their trading routes and the products they come in contact with will also be analysed. Through such an analysis, whether Hamel actually had the skills and knowledge required to contribute to the development of weapons can be inferred and it will also resolve the related misunderstandings. The overall East Asian situation during Hamel's time spent in Joseon and what he did while being dispatched to various regions will also be covered as well.

Next, to approach the historical significance of Hamel from another perspective, this paper aims to cover the impact of Hamel's narrative in shaping the West's perspective of Joseon. In fact, *Hamel's Journal* was known as the only source of direct information that the West had of Joseon for over two centuries. Hence, it can be said that it was instrumental in the formation of the West's initial impression of Joseon.

In order to examine the impact of Hamel's work, the first step would be to understand the authoring process and Hamel's intentions for writing his narrative. As Hamel's narrative was the West's only direct source of information on Joseon for over two centuries, it inevitably became the source that many researchers relied on regarding Joseon and was treated as a comprehensive guide to understanding Joseon instead. However, Hamel's intention has to be taken into account, which aspects of Joseon he focused on, and what he possibly omitted.

The three initial editions of *Hamel's Journal* that was published in 1668 upon Hamel's crew's return to the Netherlands will also be analysed. At that point of time, it is known that Hamel was still in Japan and only returned to the Netherlands after his narrative had been published. Therefore, it can be said that Hamel's writings were not published with his consent. Additionally, the content of all three editions differ from each other and therefore, the general public's first impression of Joseon would vary accordingly as well. Hereby, issues with the content and inaccuracies that persisted due to it since the publishers had to cater to the general public's preferences will be highlighted.

Lastly, the translations of *Hamel's Journal* from the 18th to 20th century will be examined as well, with a focus on a few notable English translations. References made to it by writers and researchers with regards to research about Joseon will also be taken into account. Together with the above analysis of Hamel's intention, we will take a deeper look into how Hamel's description of Joseon was perceived by other researchers and the context in which it was used.

With the analysis of all the above points, this paper aims to take a relook into the historical significance and importance of Hamel in Korea's history, and also to reanalyse the impact his writing had in shaping the West's perspective of Korea since the 17th century.

## **2. Hamel's Life and Shipwreck in Joseon**

Since the 1930s, Hamel has been depicted as a character who had contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon and also spread the Western culture to the people of Joseon from as early as the 17th century. Therefore, he is also painted as one of those who could have brought about the modernisation of Korea earlier. While it is possible that Hamel might have had knowledge pertaining to weapons that were typically more common in the West, there remains a need to clarify if Hamel actually had skills and knowledge in the development of weapons to the extent of leaving a lasting societal impact in 17th century Joseon. This could lead to defining changes regarding Hamel's historical significance and therefore, this research will begin with an analysis of Hamel's childhood, as well as information related to his background and experience.

Thereafter, it was known that Hamel joined the VOC at a relatively young age of twenty. Hence, this research will also cover Hamel's work experience throughout the duration of his employment with the VOC and the possible trading routes and products exchanged during the 17th century. By analysing the above factors, it will provide a better understanding of Hamel's background and experience, and thereby providing a firm basis in order to draw a conclusion regarding the possibility of Hamel's involvement in the development of weapons.

Hamel's time in Joseon and what his actual role was is also important in this analysis. Additionally, the overall situation of Joseon and its relations with other East Asian countries have to be taken into account as well.

Upon his escape to Japan in 1666, it was also known that Hamel wrote his narrative about Joseon while in Japan and it was published shortly after in 1668, in the Netherlands. His description went on to become the first document that introduced Joseon to the Western world, and also remained largely relevant for the next two centuries. It could also be considered the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon up till the late 19th century.

Before taking a deeper look into the impact of Hamel's narrative in the West and its role in shaping the West's perspective of Joseon, this portion of the paper will first analyse Hamel's authorship process and his initial intentions of writing such a description. This will provide a better

understanding as to whether Hamel's writings were later used within his original intended boundaries or used for other contexts throughout the time from its first published edition up till the late 19th century.

## 2.1. Childhood and Employment with the VOC

Since the 1930s, Hamel has been depicted as a character who had contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. In order to determine if Hamel had the skills and knowledge to contribute towards the development of weapons, archives on his childhood and background will be analysed chronologically. Whether Hamel had any exposure to weapons or formal military education can be analysed by looking into the environment that he grew up in. To further complement this portion of the research, the overall societal and economic circumstance of 17th century Netherlands will also be briefly covered.

Hendrick Hamel was born in Gorinchem in 1630, which is also otherwise known as the Golden Age of the Netherlands. The Dutch economy developed rapidly from the late 16th century, especially in regions situated by the trading ports. According to Dutch researcher Valentine Wikaart, Hamel had lived near the port areas during his childhood and therefore, it is more probable that he had been exposed to the likes of merchants, traders and sailors (Wikaart 2021, "Hendrick Dirckszn Hamel"). The following is an excerpt from the Gorinchem archives that contains information about Hamel's father's occupation and possible influence on Hamel.

"Dirck Frederiks Hamel, ..... fortification builder, contractor, workmaster of fortifications and fortification master, lived in Gorinchem and was born there around 1594. Died between Saturday, 23 March and Wednesday 9 October 1641 in Kortendijk. Dirck was almost 47 years old." (Regionaal Archief Gorinchem, RA 434 f 76)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Valentine Wikaart (2021): "Dirck Frederiks Hamel, (...) fortificatiebouwer, aannemer, werkmeester der fortificaties en fortificatiemeester, wonende te Gorinchem en aldaar, is geboren rond 1594, wonende Kortendijk aldaar, is overleden tussen zaterdag 23 maart en woensdag 9 oktober 1641 aldaar. Dirck werd hoogstens 47 jaar".

*Cleo Goh: A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel...*

Through the records, it is known that Hamel's father was a contractor that was involved in building city fortresses and often travelled around the country for work. He also passed away when Hamel was eleven years old. Hence, it did not seem likely that Hamel's father had considerable influence on him during his formative years. Furthermore, Hamel had also joined the VOC at a relatively young age of twenty years old (Ledyard 1971) and hence, the possibility of Hamel having been skilled in weaponry and yet going on to join the VOC as a sailor does not seem plausible.

With regards to the 17th century Dutch society and its possible influence on Hamel's background, the background that led to it being considered the Golden Age of the Netherlands will be looked into first. According to a description regarding Dutch society in the 17th century, a new society that had high levels of urbanisation had arisen, specifically in the areas that were involved in maritime trade and in Holland.

The Dutch Republic had thrived in the areas of trade, science and art during the 17th century and was known as a maritime and economic power as well. It was only at the end of the 17th century that certain conflicts led to the decline of the Dutch economy and simultaneously, the end of the Golden Age as well (Price 1999: 3–21).

Therefore, considering the structure of 17th century Dutch society and the social and economic situation then, it is not likely that the average citizen will have any need for knowledge regarding weapon development. While it is true that European regions were often at war over territorial conflicts, 17th century Netherlands was more focused on expanding its maritime trade. Hamel also lived near the ports where traders and merchants were more commonplace, as opposed to people who lived near the borders where territorial conflicts took place. Furthermore, being trained to develop weapons is considered a very specific occupation and would require years of education and training as well. Reiterating the fact that Hamel joined the VOC when he was only twenty years old, it can be concluded that the possibility of Hamel being an expert in developing weapons is very miniscule.

As mentioned above, it is known that Hamel joined the VOC in 1650 when he was twenty years old and therefore, generally wouldn't be considered to be someone with a wealth of experience. Next, Hamel's experience and trading items he often came in contact with while employed with the VOC will be looked into.

There is currently still a significant amount of accounting records of the VOC from the 17th to the 18th century that can be accessed and in

this report, it will be analysed to gain more insight into the occupation and skills required of the sailors then. According to the archives, Hamel joined the VOC with the role of ‘Bosschieter’. The role is explained as that of someone who is a competent sailor that was also tasked with firing cannons. From the time Hamel joined the VOC until 1653 – a short two-year period – Hamel was promoted to assistant and later served as a bookkeeper<sup>2</sup>. Hence, it is worth noting that while Hamel had started off with the role of ‘Bosschieter’ and had learned how to fire cannons, it seems to be a standard role for all newcomers and it is mainly related to defense aspects of the job (Nationaal Archief, “1.04.02”). As the VOC ships carried significant amounts of valuable items to be traded and sold, it would seem that defense mechanisms were necessary to protect themselves from possible encounters with pirates or other forms of danger.

Furthermore, knowing how to fire cannons does not necessarily equate to having the skills and knowledge on how to develop cannons or any type of weapons. Taking into account that Hamel’s shipwreck in Joseon happened a mere two years after he joined the VOC, it is unlikely that he became an expert in the development of weapons during that short period of time while still performing his duties as a bookkeeper and their trading activities.

To have a more comprehensive understanding of Hamel’s experience during his employment with the VOC, this paper will also be taking into account the possible trading routes taken by the VOC in the 17th century and the products that they traded.

When the VOC was established in 1602, its initial purpose was to engage in the East Asian spice trade industry. Since then, the VOC quickly established a strong presence in the international trading community and transported a variety of goods, in addition to spices, between Europe and Asia for nearly 200 years. Hence, when Hamel joined the VOC in 1650, it was already an established business that traded a significant number of products.

The VOC fleet generally sailed from the Netherlands, through the Cape of Good Hope and towards Batavia. However, some ships also docked in Galle, Sri Lanka to obtain cinnamon (Jacobs 2000: 39). According to the records of where Hamel’s ship had sailed to and the different ports they docked at (Nationaal Archief, “1.04.02”), it would seem that Hamel had not yet made a return to the Netherlands before he

---

<sup>2</sup> Through the VOC’s records, it seems that Hamel had been promoted rather quickly and did not spend much time in the newcomer position.

drifted to Joseon. Comparing this with a typical voyage and route of a VOC ship (Brujin 1980: 251–265) also confirms the fact that Hamel wouldn't have been able to make a return trip to the Netherlands in such a short time. In other words, he did not experience a complete voyage during his time working with the VOC.

According to the VOC trading records, firstly it is known that they generally carry a significant amount of silver on their fleets for trading purposes. Items that they trade include spices such as nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon and pepper. Fabric from India was also an important item along the trade routes as it was necessary in exchange for the spices. Other valuable items that the VOC traded included Chinese porcelain and tea; copper bars; silk and silk threads; luxurious products such as rubies and pearls; coffee and tea; and even exotic plants, fruits and animals. Additional items that they traded along the way included commodities that they brought along to the various Dutch settlements in Africa as those items could not be obtained locally. They included limestone, marble and European oak, and also food items such as salted butter and cheese. In general, most fleets would return to the Netherlands with the above-mentioned items by fall and then the goods will be auctioned for profit (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1987: 12–20).

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the VOC trading routes mostly dealt with spices and various other commodities, and they did not do trading of weapons in general. Thus, it was not likely that the sailors aboard the VOC fleets needed any further education in terms of their understanding of weapons development aside from the basic knowledge mentioned above.

Hence, after taking into consideration all the above factors, including Hamel's childhood, the age he joined the VOC and the short period of time he was employed, as well as the products traded by the VOC, it is unlikely that Hamel would have been familiar with military systems or the development of weapons. It is therefore hard to justify the opinion that Hamel might have been able to contribute significantly to the development of weaponry during his time in Joseon.



## 2.2. Escape to Japan and Authorship of *Hamel's Journal*

During Hamel's time in Joseon, he was sent to various regions such as 서울 (Seoul), 강진 (Gangjin), 순천 (Suncheon) and 여수 (Yeosu). The longest time he remained in a region was in Gangjin, where he spent over 7 years. Due to a precedent with another Dutch sailor named Jan Janse de Weltevree who had drifted to Joseon in 1627, 26 years before Hamel did, Hamel and crew were also assigned to a military training institute called the 훈련도감 (訓練都監; *Hullyeon dogam*) and officially designated as military personnel. It is also the reason why Hamel had often been associated with having contributed to the development of weapons, because there were official records of the aforementioned Weltevree assisting in the development of cannons.

However, through various records by the officials in the regions, it is known that Hamel and crew did not have roles that required them to be actively participating in the military. In fact, they could be more accurately described as performing miscellaneous jobs such as cleaning, removing weeds and so on (Jeju National Museum 2003: 208–210). Furthermore, the issue was exacerbated by poor harvests and a nationwide famine that affected not only Joseon, but the surrounding East Asian countries as well. The famine was also described as one of the worst Joseon had ever encountered up till then. It was also due to the severity of the prolonged famine that Hamel and crew were split up and sent to different regions to lessen the burden of each region. Hence, considering the situation of Joseon, historical data on Hamel's activities, and also the lack of any mention about weapons development in *Hamel's Journal*, it further confirms that there is only a very low possibility that Hamel had made any significant contributions to the military of Joseon.

Then in 1666, Hamel escaped to Japan with a few remaining members of his crew. It is known that Hamel had written his narrative on Joseon while he was in Japan and it is also this very particular narrative that went on to become the first document that introduced Joseon to the Western world. Prior to that, aside from select industries such as the Portuguese who started sailing and trading in Asia before the VOC, the majority of the general public in the West had never heard of a country named Joseon. Therefore, to take a relook into the impact and importance of Hamel's narrative in Korea's history, the authorship process of Hamel's narrative will be covered as follows.

*Cleo Goh: A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel...*

Firstly, it is important to differentiate if Hamel's narrative was meant to be written as a travelogue that contained stories about his time spent in Joseon, or if it was meant for other purposes. After the Portuguese started trading routes between Europe and Asia in the 16th century and the establishment of the VOC in the 17th century, stories that consisted of unfortunate events such as shipwrecks and experiences in foreign, exotic lands were considerably popular. Furthermore, with the spread of the Gutenberg printing technology in Europe that allowed for an easier way to distribute information and books since the 16th century, it became more commonplace for stories to be created and published to the general public too.

However, one of the reasons that Hamel wrote a chronological record about his time spent in Joseon is known to be for the purpose of claiming compensation from the VOC for his wages. Since he had been on a voyage that was within the boundaries of the VOC's stipulated work when the ship crashed on Jeju Island, it seemed plausible that Hamel would want to obtain compensation for the time that he had been detained in Joseon:

"Hamel, the supercargo of the ship, wrote a book on his return, recounting his adventures in a simple and straightforward style." (Griffis 1882: 176).

Additionally, according to the above excerpt from William Elliot Griffis's book about Korea – more will be mentioned in the later portion of this paper – Hamel's writing was being described as "simple and straightforward" by Griffis as well. Taking into consideration the purpose of Hamel's description of Joseon, which is a formal report to his employees and not a travel journal of his adventures, it would be befitting to adopt a simple and formal method of writing.

Furthermore, it was also later revealed that Hamel's narrative about Joseon—a detailed description about Joseon that included specific information pertaining to subjects such as Joseon's trading relations with its neighbouring areas, its geographical characteristics and so on—closely followed a format that was provided by the VOC to its employees.

In fact, the format contained the following general headings: geographical characteristics, state organisation, commerce, agricultural products, the position of the VOC specified region, etc. Looking at Hamel's description of Joseon, it does indeed follow the format very closely and therefore, was in fact meant to be a report to be submitted to the VOC. This format is provided by the VOC to all its employees in the

event that they come in contact with a region that does not have trading relationships with the VOC, and by taking down the necessary information according to the format provided, the VOC would be able to take the information and assess if it was worthwhile to establish trading relations with the said region (Walraven 2007: 19–32). Thus, it is sufficient to conclude an important fact that Hamel's narrative about Joseon was not meant to be a travelogue describing his adventures or about his unfortunate shipwreck that led him to be stuck in a foreign, exotic land for 13 years, it was in fact, an official report that was meant to be submitted to his employers for them to assess the trading merits of Joseon. With this in mind, it is crucial to note that the initial editions of *Hamel's Journal* were published without Hamel's knowledge, and since it was an official work report, it is also inevitable that it wouldn't be an interesting and comprehensive recount of his experience, but instead, would be tailored to suit the needs of the VOC.

It is also due to such reasons that Hamel's narrative, although more widely known as "Hamel's Journal", is also referred to as "Hamel's Report". As established above, the original intention of Hamel was not to write a diary or "journal" about his time in Joseon. But it was for all intents and purposes, an official report to be submitted to the company that he was working for. Hence, it might be more accurate to refer to Hamel's original submission to the VOC as "Hamel's Report", while the versions published later that were based on the contents written in Hamel's report, can be referred to as "Hamel's Journal".

With regards to whether Hamel's report had fulfilled its original purpose, there are records that the VOC's board of directors, which consists of a panel of 17 members, known as HEEREN XVII, had in fact received Hamel's report and deemed Joseon to be worthy of establishing trade relations with.

According to a record detailing the Heeren XVII's plans regarding Joseon, they had decided that it was a lucrative venture to establish trading relations with Joseon for items such as sandalwood, pepper and cloves. They had even named the fleet *Corea* that was set to depart in the spring of 1669. The crewmen that had escaped Joseon along with Hamel and returned to the Netherlands, also offered to take the voyage as they had experience living in Joseon and would be suitable for the mission. The records also indicated the wages allocated to the sailors that would be on the voyage to Joseon, otherwise known as Corea (Nationaal Archief, "Record No. 4934"). Hence, it can be said that Hamel's report had in fact, fulfilled its original purpose of being a report

that detailed the trading aspects of Joseon and the VOC had taken the information positively as well.

An important note hereby, would be the fact that the VOC did not manage to establish trading relations with Joseon in the 17th century. However, this was not due to any form of outright rejection from Joseon, as often misunderstood by many. In fact, while the VOC had contacted their counterparts in Batavia (modern day Jakarta) about their plans to establish trading relations with Joseon, they were discouraged to do so due to their knowledge of the East Asian trading culture. More often than not, Joseon has been labelled as ‘closed off’ and ‘conservative’ up till the 19th century, and this incident regarding the failure to establish trading relations between Joseon and the VOC contributed towards such views as well.

Such misunderstandings mainly stem from the vast differences in the trading system and culture of Europe and East Asia in the 17th century. However, as the topic is a vast and complicated issue in and of itself, it will not be covered in this research paper. It is sufficient to note that with regards to this particular issue, trading happened vibrantly in the 17th century within the East Asian countries and Joseon did not outrightly reject the VOC in terms of establishing trading relations because the VOC never managed to attempt it at all.

### **3. Various Editions and Characteristics of *Hamel’s Journal***

The next half of the paper will delve deeper into the crux of this research, which is the impact of Hamel’s narrative in the West and its significance in relation to Joseon. While it is undeniable that Hamel’s description of Joseon had raised the West’s awareness of what was once considered an unknown country, how Hamel’s work was perceived in the West still remains a topic that needs to be looked further into.

As mentioned above, it would seem that Hamel’s work was not meant to be published to the general public, but instead, was an official report meant to assess the trading merits of Joseon. Be that as it may, it was ultimately still published by three different publishers in 1668 and quickly became popular among the readers of the general public. However, since Hamel’s report was documented according to a format

given by the VOC for work and trading purposes, it is unlikely that it would have been able to garner interest among the general public. Thus, it was inevitable that the publishers would have altered the content to cater to the interests of the target audience.

Hence, the initial three Dutch publications will be examined and issues regarding the altered, exaggerated or false content and illustrations that were included in the publications will be highlighted as well. This is especially important as it completely changes our understanding of how the West would have perceived Joseon initially in the 17th century, and therefore the significance of Hamel's narrative historically will be different as well.

Following the Dutch publications, translations into various languages such as French, German and English were made intermittently throughout the 1700s to the 1900s. In this research, various English translations and how they have been referenced by researchers and scholars who studied Joseon will be the main focus.

Some issues such as inaccuracies due to the texts being translated across a number of languages, and also the limitations of the information with regards to the culture and traditions of Joseon will be looked into as well. As Hamel's narrative remained the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon for over 200 years, it is likely that the West had to consider it as a comprehensive description of Joseon. Due to that, it has inadvertently led to certain misrepresentations of Joseon and Korea, and this paper aims to address such issues as well.

### **3.1. Three Different Dutch Publications from the 1600s**

When Hamel's description was published in 1668 in the Netherlands, it was known that he was not physically back in the Netherlands yet. He had stayed back in Japan to claim compensation for his wages and only returned to the Netherlands after his story was already published. Since it was meant to be submitted to the VOC, it can be considered to have been leaked to the public.

There were three publishers that released Hamel's story in 1668: Van Velsen, Stichter and Saagman.

The first publisher, Van Velsen, was the first to know about Hamel's story and published two editions immediately after. His edition

*Cleo Goh: A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel...*

did not contain any illustrations, and also did not include the excerpt at the back about the specific descriptions of Joseon. It only included Hamel's diary log of events that happened during the time he was detained in Joseon. Therefore, it can be said to be a hasty piece of work.

The second publisher, Stichter, was a famous publisher of almanacs in Rotterdam, Netherlands. He also published Hamel's story in 1668, shortly after Van Velsen. His edition included seven illustrations and also the specific descriptions of Joseon. Up till now, a woodblock of his illustration is being preserved in the Netherlands.

The third publisher, Saagman, is where issues regarding the credibility and reliability of Hamel's story stemmed from. The following translations from traditional Dutch to modern language was done with the help of Dutch researcher and former curator of the museum dedicated to Hamel in the Netherlands, Valentine Wikaart.

Firstly, Saagman's edition of Hamel's story was intended to cater to the average, less-wealthy audience, which also made up for a larger market. During the late 17th century, stories related to events such as shipwrecks, battles, captivity, exotic foreign places and so on, were immensely popular. Additionally, illustrations also increased the appeal of books significantly.

However, as Saagman's intention was to produce stories for a wider but less wealthy audience, he had to reduce the production costs as well. Hence, Saagman obtained old copper plates of various illustrations and inserted them into the stories to enhance their marketability. But these illustrations were not accurate descriptions of the content at all.

According to an excerpt from Saagman's publishings, it can be translated as follows:

"If you would like to read something new and strange, then you can, at home and at ease. Experience what happened to these people: their ship, shipwrecked; their men, imprisoned, in a rough and non-christian country, which has been described; as well as the daily life of its inhabitants, and the trade that they practice" (Saagman 1668)<sup>3</sup>.

Hence, it can be seen from the excerpt that the nature of Saagman's publishings tended to favour strange happenings that were

---

<sup>3</sup> Translated by Valentine Wikaart. "Ghy die begeerigh zijt yets Nieuws en vreemts te lefen, Kond' hier op u gemack, en in u Huys wel wefen, En fien wat perijckelen dees Maets zijn over g'komen, Haer Schip dat blijft door Storm, gevangen zijnf' genomen, In een woefit Heydens Landt; in 't kort men u Befchrijft Den handel van het Volck, d' Negotie die men drijft."

previously unheard of, specifically shipwrecks that took place in exotic countries. Since Hamel's story fitted the bill, it wouldn't be unusual for Saagman to have included it.

Furthermore, illustrations in Saagman's edition of Hamel's narrative often do not accurately depict Joseon's culture, dressing and customs. Instead, it merely illustrates a scene that would have been considered foreign and exotic by the average reader in the West. The illustrations also fail to accurately portray Joseon's environment and people.

Additionally, Saagman even included pictures of animals that could not be found in Joseon in the 17th century. Animals like crocodiles, camels and elephants are not native to Joseon or Korea, even up till today. Exaggerated stories such as how Hamel had described the people of Joseon capturing a crocodile because it had eaten three young children were also included. However, there are no native crocodiles in Korea and such stories were also not found in other editions of Hamel's description of Joseon. It is highly possible that Saagman added this content to increase the popularity of the stories and his publishings.

While it is unfortunate that Saagman's edition had caused Hamel's description of Joseon to be deemed incredible due to the inaccurate descriptions and false content, it is also to be noted that Saagman's stories were never meant to be biographies or historical records. In current terms, it would simply be classified under 'historical fiction', where stories inspired by actual events are reinterpreted with a creative take on it. With that being said, Saagman's edition shouldn't be taken into consideration when evaluating the accuracy of Hamel's description of Joseon. However, it can be said to have contributed to have increased the West's interest in Joseon.

The West would therefore have a varied first impression of Joseon according to which edition they had access to first. Additionally, even if they had first come to know about Joseon through Hamel's original description, it wasn't a comprehensive description of Joseon but instead, it was a narrative that was majorly focused on aspects such as the trading relations, manufactured products and geographical characteristics. It still wouldn't have been an accurate representation of the culture, traditions and life of people in Joseon.

In other words, *Hamel's Journal* is strictly speaking, a formal report meant to be submitted to the VOC for them to assess the pros and cons of trading with Joseon. It is not a manual for trading with Joseon,

nor is it a comprehensive informational guide to understanding the customs and culture of Joseon.

### **3.2. English Translations and Misrepresentations from the 1700s to the 1900s**

Even though European countries were known to share similar values in terms of trading and have similarities in their culture and tradition due to proximity, language barriers still existed as they do not all speak the same language. Hence, in order to evaluate the impact of Hamel's story in the other Western countries, the frequency and accuracy of translated editions have to be taken into account as well.

As mentioned above, this paper will be focusing on the various English translations and writings of researchers that referenced Hamel's description of Joseon in English. The first known English translation of Hamel's story was published in 1704 by John Churchill. He had published Hamel's story together with a series of other similar happenings in a collection titled *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (Churchill 1704).

"Hendrik Hamel's account of his unexpected and involuntary visit to Korea from 1653 to 1666 has long been known as the earliest report in a western language on the land, people and customs of Korea, yet for over 300 years the only version available in English has been the very flawed Churchill translation of an embroidered French version of the text. Gary Ledyard in his work *The Dutch Come to Korea*, shows up the errors in the Churchill translation (...)" (Buys 1994: ix).

However, as seen in the excerpt above, John Churchill's edition of Hamel's narrative was not directly translated from Dutch to English, but instead, taken from what seems to be a loosely translated French edition of Hamel's story. Hence, it was pointed out by Jean Paul Buys (1994: ix) of the Royal Asiatic Society that John Churchill's edition contained mistakes and did not contain the entirety of the contents as well.

This is important as in 1884, a well-known researcher and author named William Elliot Griffis had published a series of books on East Asian countries and his books on Corea, or Joseon, made reference to Hamel's description of Joseon. As mentioned above, Hamel's description of Joseon was only meant to be a report on the trading merits of the



country, but in this case, it was taken to be a comprehensive information guide to Joseon:

“Three Dutch editions of Hamel’s Narrative of an Unlucky Voyage and Shipwreck on the Coast of Korea are known, of which translations appeared in French, English and German. Of the two in English dress, we have selected that found in Churchill’s Collection of Voyages, London 1732.” (Griffis 1884: 37).

Additionally, as seen in the excerpt from Griffis’ book, he also stated that he had specifically referred to Churchill’s English translation, that is an incomplete version that was said to contain mistranslations as well, for his research. While it is inevitable as there were no other sources of information on Joseon at that time, it is to be noted that Griffis had referenced a source that only contained information limited to certain aspects of Joseon, and additionally, it was a source that was from two centuries ago. A lot would have changed in Joseon within the two centuries, but Griffis and other researchers in the West did not have access to such information.

It was not until later on in the early 20th century that another Dutch scholar named Hoetink published another transcription of *Hamel’s Journal* that is recognised by scholars to be accurate and is currently still highly regarded in the academic field (Hoetink 1920). Hoetink’s edition is considered to be a well-researched work that incorporated many original records from the VOC’s archives and Hamel’s notes, and also appropriately translated traditional Dutch to modern Dutch. Since then, many translations into other languages, such as English and Korean versions that are relevant to this research, have referred to Hoetink’s edition. In fact, it would seem that up till 1994, before Jean Paul Buys released an English translation of Hamel’s narrative by referencing Hoetink’s transcriptions, the most widely referred-to English translation was John Churchill’s version that was published in 1704. Other publishings of Hamel’s narrative up till the 19th century were reprints of Churchill’s edition as well (Royal Asiatic Society 1918).

Pertaining to the aforementioned Saagman edition of Hamel’s narrative that caused it to be unreliable as a credible historical source, it was only also only until Hoetink published the transcriptions of Hamel’s original notes that his reputation was cleared. However, there are some researchers and scholars that still do not regard Hamel’s narrative to be a credible source of information up till this day. Therefore, it would seem

*Cleo Goh: A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel...*

that this issue is worth looking into again to determine the impact and significance of Hamel's work historically.

With regards to the issues brought about by the English translations and references made, they can be largely summarised as follows: Hamel's description of Joseon was more often than not used to label Joseon as (a) a country that did not accept Christianity and therefore, considered to be uncivilised, and (b) a country that refused to establish trading relations with the West and therefore, considered to be conservative and closed-off.

"Until the introduction of Christianity into the peninsula, the hermit nation was uninfluenced by any ideas which the best modern life claims as its own. As with the whole world, so with its tiny fraction Corea, the door of ancient history shut, and the gate of modern history opened, when the religion of Jesus moved the hearts and minds of men." (Griffis 1882: 176).

First of all, as mentioned above, Griffis' observation and research on Joseon regarding its perspectives towards Christianity was based on Hamel's narrative—which was already two centuries old at the time of Griffis' writing. Additionally, the ideology that countries that did not accept Christianity were uncivilised comes from a Western-centric point of view. It does not take other factors into account, such as the original culture and history of the subject of research. In fact, Hamel's narrative about Joseon was largely used in such a context in the West and also in other books released by Griffis as well. While such academic trends could be attributed to the inaccessibility of information on Asia prior to the 19th century, the situation now is very different. Therefore, there is a need to reexamine history from other perspectives and take into account the culture and original systems of the research subject. In other words, if Joseon is the subject of research, factors such as the trading system already present within East Asia, its relations with other countries in the region and ideologies that influence their actions should be considered as well.

Next, it has also been explained above that Joseon had not rejected the establishment of trading relations with the VOC directly, but that the attempt was not made at all. Therefore, it seems to be that Hamel's description of Joseon was used out of context in relation to Joseon. While that was inevitable as it was the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon from the 17th to early 20th century, it is sufficient to call for a relook into Hamel's narrative and his actual impact in the West.

## 4. Conclusion

Thus, referring back to the main focus of this paper, various factors that would provide a better understanding of Hamel's narrative in order to reevaluate the historical significance and importance of Hamel and his description of Joseon in Korea and the West have been analysed. The sequence of events that led to the West having certain perceptions about Hamel and Joseon in general, as well as certain misunderstandings that still persist to-date were also covered.

Firstly, an important factor that has often been overlooked would be Hamel's intention with regards to his authorship of *Hamel's Journal*. It was never intended to be a comprehensive travel guide, nor a collection of stories to recount his experience in an exotic, foreign country. It was only meant to be a formal report meant to be submitted to the VOC for them to decide if they want to establish trading relations with Joseon. Therefore, Hamel's narrative had been largely focused on the trading aspects, manufactured products and geographical characteristics of Joseon. Despite that, it has been regarded as a largely comprehensive description of Joseon and therefore, resulted in certain misunderstandings with regards to the traditions and culture of Joseon. Furthermore, the failure to establish trading relations between the VOC and Joseon, despite the VOC's positive evaluation of Joseon, also added on to further misunderstandings regarding the trading culture of Joseon and of East Asian in general.

Secondly, since Hamel's report was not written with the general public's interests in mind, publishers had taken the liberty to exaggerate the content and that has also led to Hamel's narrative being doubted for its credibility. In fact, there are even opinions that Hamel had never actually been to Joseon. However, as mentioned above, there has been a lot of research done in Korea on the 13 years Hamel spent detained in Joseon and according to a significant amount of Korean historical records, the events mentioned in *Hamel's Journal* match those of the records and hence, it is undeniable that Hamel and his crew had been in Joseon during the same period specified in Hamel's Journal.

However, the exaggerated and false content, especially that of Saagman's edition, did result in the West having an inaccurate perception of Joseon. Furthermore, Saagman's edition was meant to be more affordable and therefore, catered to a wider audience. It would also imply

that a large proportion of the Western general public might have had an inaccurate perception of Joseon in the 17th century. Since there are researchers that still do not regard Hamel's narrative as a credible source of information up till now, it would imply that Saagman's edition of Hamel's story was also considerably impactful in the Western society.

Lastly, how Hamel's description of Joseon was referenced by researchers up till the late 19th century was also examined. Even though Hamel's narrative was already two centuries old at that point of time, it still proved to be relevant and remained an important source of information about Joseon in the West. However, it also became a major source that was used to label Joseon as uncivilised due to its purported religious inclinations, and conservative due to the trading culture. In fact, such misunderstandings have persisted till today and while there have been attempts to differentiate the different trading systems and cultures of East Asia and the West, it is a vast and complicated topic that needs to be researched further and therefore, remains as a limitation of this paper.

In conclusion, despite the issues with its credibility and the content being limited to being as assessment of the trading merits of Joseon, it is undeniable that Hamel's narrative had been a piece of work that put a spotlight on Joseon and increased the Western world's awareness of the country, and it had also been relatively successful in maintaining the world's interest in Joseon for over two centuries. That, in and of itself, is a feat that remains hard to achieve by many other similar works. Therefore, with regards to the historical impact and significance of Hamel's narrative, it can be concluded that it is an important piece of work with a considerably long-lasting impact in both Korea and in the West for it has changed the trajectory of events leading to the West having increased awareness of what was otherwise, an unknown country in the regions of East Asia, Joseon. However, as mentioned above, Hamel's historical significance is in fact much wider and is not limited to interpretations of his narrative in Western literature. Other aspects such as the trading system of East Asia, diplomatic relations of Joseon with other countries etc. can also be studied through Hamel's narrative as well.

## Bibliography

- Brujin, Jaap R. 1980. Between Batavia and the Cape: Shipping Patterns of the Dutch East India Company. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 11(2): 251–265.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400004458>
- Buys, Jean Paul. 1994. *Hamel's Journal and a description of the Kingdom of Korea, 1653 – 1666*. Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch.
- Choi, Nam Seon (최남선). 1918. *청춘 (Cheongchun; Youth)*. 서울: 신문관 (新文館) (Seoul: Sinmungwan).
- Churchill, John. 1704. *An account of the shipwreck of a Dutch vessel on the coast of the Isle of Quelpaert, together with The Description of the Kingdom of Corea. A Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Transl. out of French by John Churchill. London: Awnsham and John Churchill.
- Griffis, William Elliot. 1882. *Corea: The Hermit Nation*. London: W.H. Allen & Co.
- Griffis, William Elliot. 1884. *Corea, Without and Within*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication.
- Han, Myung-ki (한명기). 2003. 하멜 漂流 무렵의 조선과 東아시아: 당시의 朝淸, 朝日關係를 중심으로 (Hamel Pyoryu muryeob-ui Joseon-gwa Dong-Asia: Tangsi-ui jocheong, Ju-Il gwangye-reul jungsim-euro; Joseon and East Asia during the time of Hamel's Drift: with the focus on Joseon dynasty and Joseon relations of the time). *명지대학교 국제한국연구소 학술대회 (Myeongji Daekakkyo Gugje Hangug Yeonguso Hagsul Daehui; Conference Proceedings from International Institute of Korean Studies at Myongji University)*, 9: 8–25.
- Hartkamp-Jonxis, Ebeltje. 1987. *Sits: Oost-West Relaties in Textiel*. Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers.
- Hoetink, Bernardus. 1920. *Verhaal van het Vergaan van het jacht de Sperwer en van het wedervaren der schipbreukelinen op het eiland Quelpaert en het vasteland van Korea (1653 – 1666), met eene beschrijving van dat rijk*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Jacobs, Elisabeth Maria. 2000. *Koopman in Azië: De handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers.

- Jeju National Museum. 2003. *항해와 표류의 역사 (Hanghae-wa pyoryu-ui yeoksa; Voyages and Shipwrecks on the Korean Coast: A History)*. 서울 : 솔출판사 (Seoul: Sol Choolpansa).
- Ji, Myung-suk (지명숙). 2003. 하멜 일행의 한국 체류, 적응 및 이해 (Hamel ilhaeng-ui Hanguk cheryu, jeogeung mit ihae; The Sojourn of Hamel and His Crewmen in Chosen: Their Adaptation to and Understanding of Chosen). *동방학지 (Dongbanghagji)*, 122: 53–95.
- Kwon, In-hyuk (권인혁). 1999. 17 세기 조선의 對外認識과 하멜 漂着. (17-segi Joseon-ui daeoe insig-gwa Hamel pyochag; 17th Century Joseon's Perception of Foreign Entities and Hamel's Drift). *濟州島史研究 (Jejudo-sa yeongu; Research on Jeju Island's History)*, 8: 9–22.
- Ledyard, Gari. 1971. *The Dutch Come to Korea*. Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch.
- Lee, Byung Do (이병도). 1934. *蘭船濟州島難破記 (Nanseon Jeju-do Nanpagi; Shipwreck Records of a Dutch Ship on Jeju Island)*. 서울: 진단 학보 (Seoul: Jindan Hakbo).
- Price, J. Leslie. 1999. The First Modern Society? The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century. *Journal of Low Countries Studies*, 23: 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.1999.11784099>
- Royal Asiatic Society. 1918. *An Account of the shipwreck of a Dutch vessel on the coast of the isle of Quelpaert, together with the description of the Kingdom of Corea*. (Reprint of John Churchill's Edition of 'Hamel's Journal'). Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch.
- Shin, Dong-gyu (신동규). 2007. 근세 동아시아 속의 日·朝·蘭 國際關係史 (Geunse Dong-Asia sog-ui Il-Jo-Nan gugje gwangye-sa; Relations between Japan, Joseon, Netherlands in Modern East Asia). 경기: 경인문화사 (Gyeonggi: Gyeongin Munhwasa).
- Walraven, Boudewijn. 2007. Reluctant Travellers: Shifting Interpretations of the Observations of Hendrik Hamel and his Companions. *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, 7(1): 19–32. <http://doi.org/10.21866/esjeas.2007.7.1.002>
- Wikaart, Valentine. 2021. Hendrick Dirckszn Hamel. *Wiedenis*. December 2021. <https://www.wiedenis.nl/hendrick-hamel-en-het-vergaan-van-de-sperwer/hendrick-dircksz-hamel/> (Accessed July 22, 2022).

조선왕조실록 (*Joseon Wangjo Sillok; Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*). <https://sillok.history.go.kr> (Accessed August 10, 2022).

National Archives of the Netherlands. <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/en> (Accessed August 3, 2022).

Regionaal Archief Gorinchem.  
<https://www.regionaalarchiefgorinchem.nl/> (Accessed August 5, 2022).





*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*  
vol. 8/2022  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.05>

## **Finding female identity in the Neo-Confucian country of Joseon: analysis of female-related crimes in “Sabeobpumbo” (司法稟報)**

**Boram HAN, PhD**

The Department of History and Culture  
Daejeon University, South Korea  
96-3, Daehak-ro, Dong-gu, Daejeon, South Korea 34520  
[hanboram0924@gmail.com](mailto:hanboram0924@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0598-9527>

**Abstract:** This research analyzes female-related cases in *Sabeobpumbo* (사법품보, 司法稟報) to examine Joseon women’s identity and perceptions of their role in the patriarchal society. Since women’s chastity was directly related to their social value, it was sometimes traded for their lives. Women were often unfairly reprehended when involved in domestic conflicts because of their lower status and they have been understood as individuals who faithfully followed the agnatic principle. However, there were exceptions, and *Sabeobpumbo* contained extraordinary accounts of various Joseon women in which they were described as independent and displayed active defiance in response to their highly conservative society while hoping to break free from the rigid social structure. In some cases, Joseon women decisively left their husbands for various reasons, mostly involving financial instability

or neglecting duties. Furthermore, some women went to incredible lengths to preserve their husband's and his family's dignity. Interestingly enough, these women were not only absolved from their actions but even met with silent approval from the public. These examples provide an intriguing perspective that directly clashes with the accepted norms during the Joseon Dynasty and calls for further research on the complexities of female identity as a Joseon woman.

**Keywords:** *Sabeobpumbo*; Joseon; Korean women; women's identity; female-related crimes.

성리학 국가 조선에서 여성의 정체성 찾아가기  
- 『사법품보』에 나타난 여성 범죄 사건의 분석 -

**초록:** 본 논문은 19 세기 말 자료인 사법품보에 등장하는 여성 관련 사건들을 분석하여 조선이 구축했던 가부장제 사회의 현실에서 여성이 가지고 있었던 정체성과 자기 역할에 대한 인식을 살펴본 작업이다. 흔히 조선의 여성은 중벌 질서가 지배하는 성리학 국가가 여성에게 의도한 것, 즉 정절 규범의 수용과 남편 가족의 위계 아래 종속됨을 충실히 따른 것으로 이해되어 왔다. 여성의 정절과 관련된 명예는 곧 여성의 사회적 가치와 직결되었기 때문에, 정절은 여성의 목숨과 맞바꾸어지기도 했다. 또한, 시집 공동체 내에서 약자의 위치에 서있었기 때문에 남편 혹은 시집 구성원들과 갈등에서 희생자가 되는 일도 흔했다. 하지만 조선의 여성이 이와 같이 국가와 사회로부터 부여받은 여성의 위치를 수동적으로 받아들인 것은 아니었다. 사법품보에 나타나는 그녀들의 모습은 국가의 의도에서 벗어나 주체적이고 능동적인 자세로 자신을 둘러싼 환경에 대응하는 것이었다. 그녀들은 인간으로서 생존을 위해 자신의 생존에 도움이 되지 않는 남편은 과감하게 바꾸기도 했다. 그리고 남편을 죽인 원수를 직접 살해하는 등 자신이 소속된 가족을 위해 자신이 주체가 되어 문제 해결에 나서기도 했다. 그런데 여성이 주체가 되어 문제를 해결한 가족 공동체는 시가 공동체에 한정되지 않았다. 친부모를 죽게 만든 전남편을 직접 살해함으로써 친정 부모에 대한 효를 입증한 사건도 존재한다. 즉, 사회가 여성에게 요구한 것은 부계 중심 사회에서 여성으로서 정절과 종속이었지만, 여성은 단지 여성이 아닌 하나의 인간으로서, 사회가 인간에게 요구하는 효를 입증함으로써, 남성과 동일한 기준으로 공동체 내 자신의 역할을 수행하고 있었던 것이다. 그리고 국가는 이와 같은 여성의 경계 넘기를 제어할 논리를 가지고 있지 않았다.

**핵심어:** 사법품보; 조선; 조선 여성; 정체성; 여성 관련 범죄.

**W poszukiwaniu kobiecej tożsamości w neokonfucjańskim Joseon:  
analiza przestępstw dotyczących kobiet w „Sabeobpumbo”**

**Abstrakt:** Niniejsze badanie opisanych w *Sabeobpumbo* (사법품보; 司法稟報) przypadków przestępstw dotyczących kobiet ma na celu analizę przykładów mówiących o kobiecej tożsamości z czasów Joseon, jak i percepcji roli kobiet w patriarchalnym społeczeństwie. Cnotliwość kobiet odgrywała olbrzymią rolę w ich życiu gdyż korelowała z ich społeczną ‘wartością’. Kobiety z racji swego niskiego statusu często były niesprawiedliwie piętnowane za udział w konfliktach domowych. Przyjmowano także, że mają się one wiernie stosować do zasad starszeństwa i podległości. Zdarzały się jednakże wyjątki. *Sabeobpumbo* zawiera szczególnego rodzaju świadectwa dotyczące koreańskich kobiet, w których opisane są one jako jednostki niezależne i buntujące się przeciwko konserwatywnemu społeczeństwu, działające z nadzieją na przełamanie ograniczeń sztywnych ram społecznych. W pewnych przypadkach kobiety z Joseon świadomie i z różnych przyczyn opuszczały swoich mężów, choć w znacznej mierze było to spowodowane brakiem stabilności finansowej lub zaniedbywaniem przez nich męskich obowiązków. Zaskakująco niektóre z nich dołożyły jednocześnie wszelkich starań, by nie tylko zachować, ale i by zadbać o honor męża i jego rodziny. Co ciekawe, kobiety te nie tylko zostały uniewinnione z zarzucanych im czynów, ale nawet spotkały się z cichą aprobatą opinii publicznej. Te przykłady prezentują zaskakującą perspektywę, która bezpośrednio kłóci się z przyjętymi w czasach dynastii Joseon normami i daje podstawę do dalszych badań nad złożonością koreańskiej tożsamości kobiecej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Sabeobpumbo*; Joseon; Koreanki; tożsamość kobiet; przestępstwa dotyczące kobiet.

## 1. Introduction

As a Neo-Confucian state, Joseon sought to establish a social order based on the agnatic principle (종법, 宗法) from the beginning of its foundation. The agnatic principle was to give authority to the firstborn son so that all successions could be carried down to the paternal side. Therefore, male-centered patriarchy was established in the late Joseon Dynasty, and accordingly, the hierarchical order of men and women was reinforced. In this social structure, women were assigned the task of playing the role of daughter-in-law and wife as subordinates to the

husband's family. *일부종사* (*Ilbujongsa*, 一夫從事), maintaining fidelity to their husbands, had become a social virtue that women must defend. It naturally led women to have passive social status who were not able to decide anything according to their will (정지영 Jung, Ji Young 2002: 21).

To date, a general view of Joseon women described them as subordinates who were forced into obedience and obligation in a male-centered Neo-Confucian society. Joseon women were portrayed as strictly controlled individuals in a society dominated by Confucian ideology and were given roles such as generous wives, obedient daughters-in-law, and modest widows (Deuchler 2013: 379–380). Some studies, however, suggest that Joseon women tried to protect their status in a given situation. For example, Joseon women tried to gain social recognition by exercising their right to adopt children, using their rights as a daughter-in-law guaranteed to them, or by choosing the path of a virtuous woman who follows her husband to the grave (이순구 Lee, Sun-gu 2005: 136–137).

However, there is a big obstacle to precisely examining how Joseon women established their status and identity under the Neo-Confucian social order, which is a lack of data produced by women themselves that provides their perspectives and stances. This is because women in the Joseon Dynasty were not able to express their opinions officially. Even if data produced by women remain, there are only a handful of high-class women's writings available currently. In order to overcome these limitations and lack of data, this study examines the situation and choices of women in the late 19th century of the Joseon Dynasty, using “사법품보” *Sabeobpumbo*. *Sabeobpumbo* is judicial records from the late Joseon Dynasty to the Korean Empire (1894–1907) with details of various civil and criminal cases, testimonies from people involved, and sentences from the state. It is currently in the possession of the Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies. A total of 180 books remain, including 128 books of “사법품보 (갑)” *Sabeobpumbo (Gap)* and 52 books of “사법품보 (을)” *Sabeobpumbo (Eul)*. Female-related cases comprise a significant proportion of the records as well as various examples that vividly show the situation in which women were in a patriarchal community (한보람 Han, Boram 2022).

Therefore, this research aims to explore the reality of women in the late Joseon Dynasty, when the agnatic principle was considered to have been settled as the governing order of society, and how women

were responding to such reality by analyzing the female-related cases in *Sabeobpumbo*. In specific, the study pays attention to the state's intention that was to be implemented to women in the process of establishing a patriarchal society and examines if it was successful. This will take us a step closer to what identity women of the time formed on their own. All English translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

## 2. The State's Intention: Acceptance and Subordination

### 2.1. Acceptance of norms of fidelity

From the 16th century, the state began to impose strong regulations on women's *Ilbujongsa* and fidelity. In the reign of 중종 (中宗) *Jungjong*, the adultery of a noblewoman was capitally administered by hanging her. Since then, in the 18th century, the scope of punishment has expanded to include the adultery of common women as well. In addition, remarriage is considered to fall within the scope of adultery so that remarried women were punished as servants of government offices (장병인 Chang, Byung-inn 2003).

Furthermore, the code of the Joseon Dynasty, *대명률* (*Daemyeongryul*, 大明律), stipulates that “if a woman is found to be committing adultery, it is acceptable for the woman's husband to kill the wife and the other man immediately”<sup>1</sup>. The law allows private revenge for the woman's husband if a woman's fidelity is damaged. In Joseon society, keeping fidelity to their husbands has become an unavoidable norm. Women had to face a situation where they could lose their lives when they failed to maintain their fidelity, and their tarnished reputation would also heavily affect their families as well. On the other hand, if a woman remained faithful to her husband and was recognized as a virtuous woman, it was considered a great honor for the entire clan. That was why the mere rumor of a woman's obscene behavior could potentially lead her to be completely ostracized from the community and permanently ruin the family's social status (김선경 Kim,

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Great Ming Code*. Criminal code (『大明律』 刑律, 殺死姦夫條.) [https://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlawb\\_160\\_0190\\_0010\\_0040](https://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlawb_160_0190_0010_0040). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

SunKyoung 2000: 69-71). It was impossible for a woman living in Joseon society to deviate from these national and social norms.

Therefore, a considerable number of tragic stories about women's fidelity appear in female-related cases in *Sabeobpumbo*. Women chose death just by rumors of a relationship with men. In the case of an incident in 1896 in Uiju-gun, Pyeongan-do (의주군, 평안도), 김인택 Kim In-taek's farm servant, 김귀만 Kim Gwi-man, tried to block In-taek's 15-year-old niece's chance of marriage by spreading a rumor that she was dating him. In response, Kim In-taek immediately drove his farm servant out of his house, but Gwi-man responded by returning to the family residence and refused to leave. The 15-year-old girl, who could not endure the humiliation surrounding her, committed suicide after nine days of self-imposed starvation<sup>2</sup>.

In such an environment where mere rumors about women could lead them to commit suicide, it was natural to see several cases of women's suicide due to rape crimes, which could *damage* their fidelity. For example, the case that occurred in 1896 in Gyeolsung-gun of Chungcheong-do (결성군, 충청도) made 심(沈)씨 처녀 maid Shim hang herself after 유진석 Yoo Jin-seok threatened and tried to rape her and she resisted<sup>3</sup>. Even though it was the attempted rape, maid Shim proved her innocence by death. Given this situation, the suicide of a rape victim woman in 1895 in Yeongil-gun, Gyeongsang-do (영일군, 경상도), seems very natural; it was an incident in which 김(金)씨 여인 a woman with the last name Kim committed suicide by drowning with her young son after being raped. She tried to publicize her resentment by extinguishing not only herself but also her son, who was the successor of her husband's family<sup>4</sup>.

For women, defamation of their fidelity was directly related to women's social values. A woman who was considered to have lost her

---

<sup>2</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 19, Bogoseo 3. (『司法稟報(甲)』 19 책, 報告書 제 3 호(平安北道裁判所判事署理定州郡守 洪淳旭→法部大臣韓圭高, 建陽 2 年 2 月 23 日). ‘義州郡金仁宅姪女獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>3</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 15, Bogoseo. (『司法稟報(甲)』 15 책, 報告書(忠清南道觀察使李乾夏→法部大臣韓圭高, 建陽元年 11 月 11 日). ‘結城郡沈女兒獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 9, Bogoseo 3. (『司法稟報(甲)』 9 책, 報告書 제 3 호(東萊府觀察使池錫永→法部大臣韓圭高, 建陽元年 6 月 18 日). ‘陸已西子婦金召史獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

value in society responded to her family and society by giving up her life. The ruling of the *Justice Department* 법부 (*Beobbu*, 法部) on these cases illustrates how their choices were socially accepted; the state referred to them as chaste women and positively evaluated them as dead to keep their righteous fidelity soundly. Those women were praised as a being that did not deviate from the fence of the fidelity value set by the state.

In Joseon society, the fidelity of women was an honor that the state and the family community should protect, and in such a social view, women died in vain to protect their fidelity or because they could not protect it. The state and society viewed the death of a woman as a sad but noble act to prove her chastity. Women's suicide also shows that women themselves were actively accepting it as a value to protect their chastity in such a society. The norms of chastity set by the state and society were acting as a powerful means of controlling women until the end of the Joseon Dynasty. Understandably, women were in a position where they had no choice but to accept it.

## 2.2. Subordination under the hierarchy of the family

In Joseon society where the patriarchal system was established, women belonged to their husbands' family through marriage after leaving their own family. In addition, the social moral norm to which women had to adhere was *Ilbujongsa* so that women's remarriage was regulated, and thus, the reality faced by Joseon women was to faithfully play the given role as a member of the husband's family community, the husband's wife, and daughter-in-law. The previous research notes that although Joseon women lost their rights as daughters, they actively secured their status by finding the rights guaranteed as daughters-in-law (이순구 Lee, Sun-gu 2005). Nonetheless, it remained unchanged that women still had to struggle alone in the husband's family community due to the patriarchal social structure of Joseon. If a woman were to be separated from her husband's family, she would be threatened with social honor as well as survival itself. Therefore, women had no choice but to stay in the position of the weak in society and family communities in Joseon's given social environment.

It is easy to find cases in *Sabeobpumbo* that imply the status of women as the weak in the family community; these cases show that if a woman experienced conflict with her husband and his family members, she did not have many options to choose. If the husband no longer wanted to live with his wife due to the marital conflict, the wife was forced to commit suicide. In a real case in Daegu-gun, Gyeongsang-do (대구군, 경상도), 이(李)씨 부인 *a wife with the last name Lee*, who was kicked out by her husband Kim Yang-ro, returned to her parents' home and hanged herself. The reason why she was kicked out was that she did not obey her mother-in-law<sup>5</sup>. In another case, 유(柳)씨 부인 *a wife named Yoo* committed suicide by taking poison after hearing her husband 심상득 Shim Sang-deuk's intention to divorce<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, both husbands were acquitted because the article of a criminal code in *Daemyeongryul*, "If a husband beats and scolds his wife and then she commits suicide, the husband is absolved from any crimes", was applied<sup>7</sup>.

Interestingly enough, there was a separate case that was similar to 김양로 Kim Yang-ro's that occurred in a similar time period and in the same province. This case reported a husband who committed suicide due to a marital conflict in Daegu-gun, Gyeongsang-do (대구군, 경상도). 공정오 Gong Jeong-oh, 이(李)씨 Lee's husband, committed suicide by taking poison because his wife Lee went to a neighboring village at night without preparing his meals. Regarding this case, the provincial governor judged that even if taking poison was 공정오 Gong Jeong-oh's own will, it was not different from a plotted murder. While the governor inquired about what laws to apply, he gave 50 lashes to

---

<sup>5</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 6, Jilpumseo 6. (『司法稟報(甲)』 6 책, 質稟書 제 1 호(大丘府觀察使 李重夏→法部大臣 張博, 建陽元年 1 月 14 日). ‘大丘郡致死女人李召史獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>6</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 8, Bogoseo 24. (『司法稟報(甲)』 8 책, 報告書 제 24 호(仁川裁判所判事臨時代辦行裁判所檢事 任午準→法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 6 月 27 日). ‘仁川港致死女人柳召史獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>7</sup> *The Great Ming Code*. Criminal code (『大明律』 刑律, 人命, 夫毆死有罪妻妾條). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).



the wife and imprisoned her<sup>8</sup>. Even though the wife did not directly persecute her husband, she was singled out as the cause of her husband's suicide just because there was discord, and she had already been given severe lashing even before the official sentence was made. *Daemyeongryul* was a law that discriminated between the same criminal acts of husbands and wives according to hierarchical order, by giving them different punishments and sentences. Wives were even punished for disobeying and betraying their husbands; that is, *Daemyeongryul* was enacted to establish a family order based on husband-centered marital relations (박경 Park, Kyoung 2009: 41–42). Under this legal system, therefore, the position of women, including the relationship with their husband and husband's family, was inevitably reduced.

In such social and legal environment, incidents in which a husband used violence against his wife and led her to death could often occur. In Cheongdo-gun, Gyeongsang-do (청도군, 경상도), 김원석 Kim Won-seok beat his wife 서(徐)씨 Seo to miscarry, and then she died<sup>9</sup>. In Geumgu-gun, Jeolla-do (금구군, 전라도), 김진여 Kim Jin-yeo strangled his wife 김(金)씨 Kim to death after having an argument with her under the influence of alcohol<sup>10</sup>. Women were often killed due to their husband's violence.

Not only the husband, but also his family were at the top of the hierarchy that women had to endure. There were many reported cases where a daughter-in-law was beaten to death by her husband's family member. Additionally, it was common to find documents that report many cases of suicide of a daughter-in-law due to severe physical and psychological abuse.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 16, Jilpumseo 11. (『司法稟報(甲)』 16 책, 質稟書 제 11 호(慶尙北道觀察使 嚴世永→法部大臣, 建陽元年 11 月 24 日). ‘大丘郡致死男人孔正五獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>9</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 14, Jilpumseo 5. (『司法稟報(甲)』 14 책, 質稟書 제 5 호(前大丘府觀察使署理大丘郡守 李範善→法部大臣, 建陽元年 9 月 30 日). ‘清道郡致死女人徐召史獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>10</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 21, Jilpumseo 20. (『司法稟報(甲)』 21 책, 質稟書 제 20 호(全羅北道觀察使 尹昌燮→法部大臣臨時署理議政府贊政 趙秉稷, 建陽 2 年 5 月 5 日). ‘金溝郡致死女人金召史獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

In Jinsan-gun, Chungcheong-do (진산군, 충청도), when mother-in-law 강(李)씨 Kang scolded her daughter-in-law 이(李)씨 Lee, she committed suicide by drowning<sup>11</sup>. Just a few days after this incident, another mother-in-law 조(趙)씨 Cho physically assaulted her daughter-in-law 강(姜)씨 Kang, which led her to death, in a similar area, Deoksan-gun, Chungcheong-do (덕산군, 충청도)<sup>12</sup>. Not only mothers-in-law, but conflicts with other family members also led women to death; for example, a woman hanged herself after being abused by her husband's sister-in-law<sup>13</sup>, and another drowned herself after having a conflict with dongseo (a wife of brother-in-law)<sup>14</sup>.

Joseon women entered the family community of her husband's clan and were subordinated to them as the lower rank of the community hierarchy. In the patriarchal social order that the state wanted to establish, women had no choice but to accept a subordinate position. They were in the position of the weak, and thus, they frequently became a victim of several incidents that demonstrated such position.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 11, Bogoseo 8. (『司法稟報(甲)』 11 책, 報告書 제 8 호(忠淸南道觀察使 李乾夏→法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 8 月 22 日) ‘珍山郡致死女人李召史獄事’.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>12</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 13, Bogoseo 25. (『司法稟報(甲)』 13 책, 報告書 제 25 호(忠淸南道觀察使 李乾夏→法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 9 月 5 日) ‘德山郡致死女人姜召史獄事’.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>13</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 6, Bogoseo 1. (『司法稟報(甲)』 6 책, 報告書 제 1 호(南原府觀察使署理參書官 申佐熙→法部大臣 李範晉, 建陽元年 3 月 29 日) ‘寶城郡致死女人姜召史獄事’.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 23, Bogoseo 47. (『司法稟報(甲)』 23 책, 報告書 제 47 호(忠淸北道觀察使 朴齊億→議政府贊政法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽 2 年 7 月 3 日) ‘鎭川郡致死女人徐召史獄事’.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

### 3. Joseon Women's Perspectives: Choice for Survival and Becoming the Main Agent of Society

#### 3.1. Changing the husband for survival

In the Neo-Confucianist ideological society that emphasized *Ilbujongsa*, women's remarriage was a deterrent from the state. Remarriage was taboo even for a widow whose husband died. According to research on widow remarriage, it already became a trend for noble women to live as a widow for the rest of their lives in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, and the proportion of common women living as widows for life had also gradually increased in the late Joseon Dynasty, indicating that the negative social notion of widows' remarriage began to pervade even among the ruled class (정지영 Jung, Ji Young 2000). Due to these social norms, it was generally recognized until recently that remarriage of women in the Joseon Dynasty was almost impossible. In reality, various cases mentioned in *Sabeobpumbo* seemed to deviate away from this societal norm. It was actually not uncommon for women to change husbands to survive, and the social perception seemed to be very flexible depending on the situation.

We can see that it was realistically possible for a woman to choose divorce through various incidents that occurred when a woman abandoned her husband. It is noteworthy that the reason why a woman leaves her husband is mostly due to poverty; that is, if a man could not guarantee his wife's survival, the wife left him in a decisive manner. For example, in Gowon-gun, Hamgyeong-do (고원군, 함경도), 한종길 Han Jong-gil's wife 김(金)씨 Kim complained about poor living conditions and financial woes, so she decided to leave home and return to her original family. The husband went to her family's house to argue with her parents, but Kim's father, 김덕연 Kim Deok-eon, rather scolded his son-in-law, saying that his daughter was already seeing another man. The disappointed husband returned home drunk and died shortly after<sup>15</sup>. What stands out in this incident is that there were situations in which a woman with discontent, in terms of

<sup>15</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 18, Jilpumseo 2. (『司法稟報(甲)』 18 책, 質稟書 卷 2 호(咸鏡南道裁判所判事 徐正淳→議政府贊政法部大臣 趙秉式, 建陽 2年 1月 30 日) ‘高原郡致死男人韓宗吉獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

maintaining a living, left her husband and had a relationship with another man afterwards.

Such a case is also seen in the incident of 보부상 *bobusang* (peddler) 이용운 Lee Yong-woon that occurred in Onyang-gun, Chungcheong-do (온양군, 충청도). Lee Yong-woon visited the house of the noble 심선전 Shim Seon-jeon with a group of *bobusang* and behaved violently after learning that his wife, who left the house a few years ago, lived there. This case, like the above one, shows that the wife left her husband due to discontent, but what attracts attention in this case is the state's ruling; it notes that "What did a husband do to make his wife betray her husband and followed someone else?"<sup>16</sup>. It criticized the husband by saying that "the husband had to reflect on himself if the wife did not want to live with him even after he found her, but he created a disturbance without reflecting on himself"<sup>17</sup>. It refers to the husband's responsibility for his wife's leaving him. This shows that the state could not prohibit a woman from leaving her husband when he could not guarantee her survival. Despite the statement that *following a man is a woman's proper duty*, the country could not compel women to keep their 'duty' beyond 'survival' at a time when real problems arise.

Women's willingness to choose a husband was not only shown in commoners. Noble women were also found to choose another husband to survive after their husband's death. It is interesting that aristocratic women showed an evolved form of the will of choice rather than simply choosing to survive. In Hansan-gun, Chungcheong-do (한산군, 충청도), so-called widow 보쌈 *bossam* occurred, in which a commoner 이봉일 Lee Bong-il kidnapped 양반 과부 박(朴)씨 Park, a noble widow. However, in this case, when 김학관 Kim Hak-gwan, a rich man in the same village, suggested that she be a concubine, the widow Park asked the neighbor 조(曹)씨 여인 woman Cho to introduce her to at least a poor widower because she did not want to be a concubine of the rich. With Cho's matchmaking, the commoner Lee Bong-il picked up widow Park and lived together, and the widow's

---

<sup>16</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 16, Bogoseo 17. (『司法稟報(甲)』 16책, 報告書 제107호(忠淸南道觀察使 李乾夏→議政府贊政法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 12月 13日) ‘溫陽郡李貴同被打事件’) 取妻如何하야 背夫從他하니. [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>17</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 16, Bogoseo 17. (『司法稟報(甲)』 16책, 報告書 제107호(忠淸南道觀察使 李乾夏→議政府贊政法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 12月 13日) ‘溫陽郡李貴同被打事件’) 雖覓無味라 不思自返하고 犯分作孽하며. [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

former mother-in-law reported that her daughter-in-law had been kidnapped<sup>18</sup>. In this case, the widow Park needed a new husband to survive, but she rejected the status of a “첩 (concubine)” and chose the status of a “부인 (wife)” where only the minimum survival was guaranteed. It is important that basically women had a choice of changing husbands, even if there were differences according to social stratum.

It is also noteworthy that the choice of a woman to change her husband was often met with silent approval from her original family. In case of 한종길 Han Jong-gil's wife Kim's father, who was mentioned above, had no objection that his daughter, who was dissatisfied with her husband because of poverty, left him and came to her parents' house without keeping loyalty to her husband. Rather, it is interesting and uncommon to see that Kim blamed his son-in-law for not playing the role of the husband properly and did not try to hide about his daughter's wish to meet with another man.

The same instance, actively taking the daughter's side who tried to leave her husband, was shown in other cases as well. In Sunan-gun, Pyeongan-do (순안군, 평안도), 한국현 Han Kook-hyun died shortly from severe injuries after a fight with his daughter's former in-laws; Mr. Han attempted to reclaim his daughter's property from her ex-husband's family when she remarried afterwards<sup>19</sup>. Even though his daughter remarried, he still claimed the right to his daughter's property at her ex-husband's house. Given the extreme response of her ex-husband's relatives and that the same case rarely appears in *Sabeobpumbo*, it does not seem to be common for a woman who remarried after a bereavement to claim property rights. However, it is noteworthy that a remarried woman's parents were not appeared to be ashamed of their daughter's remarriage and even confidently claimed their rights.

As such, national discipline that prevented women from changing the relationship they have with their husband did not exert a

<sup>18</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 16, Bogoseo 127. (『司法稟報(甲)』 16 책, 報告書 제 127 호(忠淸南道觀察使署理公州郡守 徐玉淳→議政府贊政法部大臣 趙秉式, 建陽元年 12 月 27 日) ‘韓山郡朴寡劫奪事件’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>19</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 6, Jilpumseo 1. (『司法稟報(甲)』 6 책, 質稟書 제 1 호(平壤府觀察使 鄭敬源→法部大臣 張博, 建陽元年 2 月 4 日) ‘順安郡致死男人韓國玄獄事’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

strong power in a situation where they cannot guarantee women's survival in the reality. Women made choices for themselves, not bound by national discipline, for their own survival and dignity. These choices were shunned by neither their own families nor society.

### 3.2. Being a problem solver for the family

The family was the foundation of the country during the Joseon Dynasty. The state pursued the ideal of establishing a patriarchal family order; under such a social stance, women belong to the husband's family and were given the role of wife and daughter-in-law. The female-related cases in *Sabeobpumbo* reflect that women were playing an active role as members of the family community to which they belonged. They actively filed a complaint to the state or directly avenged the perpetrator as members of the marital community for the damage suffered by their husbands. For instance, when 허(許)씨 부인 the wife Heo's husband 유희일 Yoo Hoe-il was shot by his neighbor 이만룡 Lee Man-ryong in Mokcheon-gun, Chungcheong-do (목천군, 충청도), the wife Heo accused Lee Man-ryong of killing her husband due to the pressure the husband gave to Lee to pay the debt that Lee failed to repay within the time limit. The provincial governor interrogated Lee Man-ryong, but Lee instead laid the blame on Yoo Hoe-il saying that he committed the crime because he viewed Yoo as a thief. However, the wife Heo broke down and sobbed on the ground, constantly complaining of an injustice; after further investigation, the governor concluded that Heo's claim was true<sup>20</sup>. In this incident, Heo actively appealed to the state for the injustice in her husband's case. Even though the perpetrator joined the hunter's army and threatened the victim with the power of the group, Heo did not succumb to his threat and actively solved problems on behalf of her family.

Such active roles of women are frequently shown in *Sabeobpumbo*. They sometimes went beyond merely appealing to the state for their husband's problems and took action more actively. In

---

<sup>20</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 13, Bogoseo 19. (『司法稟報(甲)』 13 책, 報告書 제 19 호(忠淸南道觀察使 李乾夏 鄭敬源→法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽元年 9 月 1 日) ‘木川郡致死男人柳會一獄事’).

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

Naju-gun, Jeolla-do (나주군, 전라도), a cigarette seller 최덕원 Choi Deok-won was beaten to death by a young man, 이연수 Lee Yeon-soo, after having a quarrel with him. During Choi's autopsy, his wife 서(徐)씨 Seo was so enraged and decided to confront Lee in person; she suddenly rushed to Lee Yeon-soo and stabbed him to death. She personally decided to avenge her husband, rather than waiting for the state to decide a punishment. However, the views stated by the governor on this case are noticeable; he highly appreciated the wife Seo that "this ordinary woman's energy was firm and strong"<sup>21</sup>, and said that it was "natural in the name of loyalty" that she took revenge on Lee for her husband. In addition, he ruled that Seo should not be executed for murder because vengeance on the husband's foe should be treated the same as avenging the parents<sup>22</sup>. Seo proved her value as a member of society by actively realizing the social value in a patriarchal society that women's duty to their husbands is the same as that to their parents. Seo was not the only woman who proved this. A considerable number of cases of women who directly took revenge on behalf of their husbands are shown in *Sabeobpumbo*, and the state evaluated that "their dignified and courageous spirit is sufficiently virtuous because they saw their husband die before their time so that they killed the foe with a knife in their hand, and immediately informed the governor"<sup>23</sup>. A woman's revenge for her husband was recognized and highly valued in the Neo-Confucianist ideological society. Under the patriarchal social structure, women actively absorbed the values of society and proved their values

<sup>21</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 20, Bogoseo 3. (『司法稟報(甲)』 20 책, 報告書 제 3 호(全羅南道觀察使 尹雄烈→法部大臣, 建陽 2 年 3 月 18 日) '羅州郡致死男人崔德元獄事') '匹婦之義氣가 凜烈이요'. [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>22</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 20, Bogoseo 3. (『司法稟報(甲)』 20 책, 報告書 제3호(全羅南道觀察使 尹雄烈→法部大臣, 建陽 2年 3月 18日) '羅州郡致死男人崔德元獄事') '義則當然'. [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

<sup>23</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 19, Bogoseo 8. 見夫匪命에 手刀讐人하고 旋即告官하얏시니 凜烈之風은 足爲可尙이나.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023). (『司法稟報(甲)』 19 책, 報告書 제 8 호(平安北道觀察使署理定州郡守 洪淳旭→議政府贊政法部大臣 韓圭高, 建陽 2 年 3 月 12 日) '義州郡致死男人金太平獄事').

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00). (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

with their own actions beyond passively enduring the roles given to them.

Women not passively performing the role given by society are also shown in the cases in which they proved their filial piety toward their parents. Joseon's patrilineality set limits for women to play the role of a member of their husband's family. However, it is very interesting to see that Joseon women were not bound by the limits set by society, but had an identity as a member of their original family and carried out the social value of filial duty. In this regard, the case of 송씨 여인 woman Song in Jeonju-gun, Jeolla-do (전주군, 전라도), is notable; Song's husband, 김덕삼 Kim Deok-sam, confined Song's aged mother and vented his anger on her for nine days and eventually caused her life to end after his wife left him and remarried. Song avenged her mother's death with her sister by beating Kim Deok-sam to death with a wooden pestle<sup>24</sup>. She stepped up as the main agent of revenge for her mother. Song's case is also noteworthy in that she chose to remarry after leaving her husband with whom she was not satisfied. However, what stands out in addition to this is that she did not perform the filial duty to her husband's family as a daughter-in-law, but performed the duty directly to her own mother as the main agent of her own family community. In particular, she decisively relativized her ex-husband as a different individual when trouble occurred between him and her own mother, as the main agent of her original family. She took revenge on her ex-husband, who killed her mother, by taking an oath of "not being able to live under the same sky with him due to the proper human path".

In Song's behavior, it is impossible to find any loyalty to her husband that Neo-Confucianism society tried to realize as appropriate behavior for women; rather, she was completely out of the social context of emphasizing *Ilbujongsa*. However, her intention was not to break away from the society she lived in but to realize the values pursued by society as a member of society by presenting filial piety to her parents, the best value recognized in her society. In addition, Song's realization of these values was something that could not be ignored by the state. The provincial governor who was in charge of the judgment

---

<sup>24</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 26, Jilpumseo 31. (『司法稟報(甲)』 26 책, 質稟書 제 31 호(全羅北道觀察使尹昌燮→法部大臣韓圭高, 光武元年 9 月 29 日). ‘全州郡致死女人 趙 召 史 致 死 男 人 金 德 三 獄 事 ’). [https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00).(Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).



highly appreciated Song's actions by saying, "Since she killed the foe with joy by picking up the pestle and hitting the foe to death, this is not something a woman can easily do"<sup>25</sup>. In this evaluation, it is not even a problem that Song betrayed her husband and remarried; rather, only Song's realization of the best social values despite her gender was the center of attention, the filial duty to the parents.

Joseon emphasized the value of '인간이라면 부모에게 효도해야 한다; *human beings should be filial to their parents*' as a social norm, but women were expected to have loyalty to their husbands because the state emphasized that women should treat their husbands and parents the same. Therefore, what the state expected of women would be being loyal to their husband, which could be useful for maintaining a patriarchal family order. The state must not have included the category of social norms for women to promote filial piety toward their own parents while relativizing their husband. However, the women of Joseon actively interpreted and applied social norms, beyond the limits set by society, as '인간 (living beings)', not as '여성 (women)'. They actively tried to maintain their dignity as '인간 (human beings)' keeping the shared values for '남성 (males)', going beyond the limitations of socially created '여성 (female figures)'. The state did not have any logic to restrict such women's crossing of boundaries.

#### 4. Conclusion

Joseon nationally pursued a patriarchal family order. The late Joseon Dynasty was a period when the patriarchal order, which had been in progress since the early period, was evaluated to have been socially established over a long period of time. In this context, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, near the end of the Joseon era, can be seen as the final stage to examine how the order created by the state had been absorbed into society. Therefore, this study examined the identity of women and their perceptions of the given roles in the reality of Joseon's patriarchal

<sup>25</sup> *Sabeobpumbo*, Gab 26, Jilpumseo 31. (『司法稟報(甲)』 26책, 質稟書 제31호(全羅北道觀察使尹昌燮→法部大臣韓圭高, 光武元年 9月 29日). '全州郡致死女人趙召史致死男人金德三獄事') 擧杵直打하야 甘心殺讐하니 實非女子之所可容也라.

[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00) (Accessed 3 Feb. 2023).

society through female-related cases in *Sabeobpumbo*, the data from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Often, women in Joseon were thought to be passive beings who had an identity as a member of the husband's family and who accepted the mere role of a wife and daughter-in-law. Of course, since they were socially required to have this identity, it was not difficult to find women who accepted the norms of fidelity set by the state in the social framework and were subordinated to the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the husband's family community.

However, Joseon women did not only passively remain to accept and stick to the roles given by the state and society, that is, *Ilbujongsa* or the role of daughter-in-law and wife as members of the husband's family community, not their original parents. Women independently and actively took action with their own intentions, going beyond the state's intention. They decisively changed their husband who was not helpful to their survival for their own survival as a human being, and also clinched the norms that could bring social recognition, which was only applied to males originally, by proving their filial piety for their own parents, not for their husband's parents. In other words, despite the limitations that women could never be free from the restrictions presented by the state and society, they tried to perform and prove their role in the community on the same basis as men.

## Bibliography

Chang, Byung-inn (장병인). 2003. 조선 중·후기 간통에 대한 규제의 강화 (Joseon jung·hugi gantong-e daehan gyuje-ui ganghwa; A reinforcement of adultery regulations in the Middle·Late Choson period). *한국사연구* (*Hanguksa yeongu; The Journal of Korean History*), no. 121: 83–116.

*Daemyeongryul Hyeongryul 대명률 형률 大明律 刑律 (The Great Ming Code. Criminal Code).*

[https://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=GO#/dir/node?dataId=ITKC\\_GP\\_1461A&solrQ=query% E2% 80% A0% EB% 8C% 80% EB% AA% 85% EB% A5% A0\\$ solr sortField% E2% 80% A0\\$ solr sortOrder% E2% 80% A0\\$ solr secId% E2% 80% A0GO\\_SJ\\$ solr toalCount% E2% 80% A01\\$ solr curPos% E2% 80% A00\\$ solr](https://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=GO#/dir/node?dataId=ITKC_GP_1461A&solrQ=query% E2% 80% A0% EB% 8C% 80% EB% AA% 85% EB% A5% A0$ solr sortField% E2% 80% A0$ solr sortOrder% E2% 80% A0$ solr secId% E2% 80% A0GO_SJ$ solr toalCount% E2% 80% A01$ solr curPos% E2% 80% A00$ solr)

- [r\\_solrId%E2%80%A0SJ ITKC GP 1461A](#) (Accessed 23 Feb. 2023)
- Deuchler, Marina. 2013. *한국의 유교화 과정 (Hangug-ui yugyohwa gwajeong)*. Trans. by Lee Hun-sang (이훈상). 서울: 너머북스 (Seoul: Neomeobukseu).
- Han, Boram (한보람). 2022. 갑오개혁 직후 (1894-1897) 여성 관련 범죄의 사회적 의미 - 사법품보 (司法稟報) 문서 분석을 중심으로 - (Gabo gaehyeok jikhu (1894-1897) yeoseong gwallyeon beomjoe-ui sahoejeok uimi - 'Sabeoppumbo' (司法稟報) munseo bunseog-eul jungsim-euro - ; Analysis on Social Implication of Female Crimes after the Gabo Reform - based on the Review of 'Sabuppumbo (司法稟報)'). *역사와 실학 (Yeoksa-wa silhak; The Yeoksa and Silhak)*, no. 77: 203-237.
- Jung, Ji Young (정지영). 2000. 조선후기 과부의 수절과 재혼: 경상도 단성현 호적대장에서 찾은 과부들의 삶 (Joseon hugi gwabu-ui sujeol-gwa jaehon: Gyeongsang-do Danseonghyeon hojuk daejang-eseo chajeun gwabudeur-ui salm; A Widow's chaste widowhood and Re-Marriage in the late Joseon Dynasty). *고문서연구 (Gomunseo yeongu; The Journal of Korean Historical Manuscripts)*, no. 18: 1-30.
- Jung, Ji Young (정지영). 2002. 조선후기 호주승계방식의 변화와 종법질서의 확산: 17·8세기 『단성호적』에 나타난 과부와 그 아들의 지위를 중심으로 (Joseon hugi hoju seunggye bangsig-ui byeonhwa-wa jongbeop jilseo-ui hwaksan: 17-18 segi 'Dansong hojeok'-e natanan gwabu-wa geu adeul-ui jiwireul jungsim-euro; Patriarchal Order and the Rule of the Succession to the Householder in Late Chosun Korea: Widow and Son in 'Dansung Hojuk'). *한국여성학 (Hangug yeoseonghak; Journal of Korean Women's Studies)*, no. 18(2): 5-35.
- Kim, SunKyoung (김선경). 2000. 조선 후기 여성의 성, 감시와 처벌 (Joseon hugi yeoseong-ui seong, gamsi-wa cheobeol; The Gender of Women in Late Joseon: Surveillance and Punishment). *역사 연구 (Yeoksa yeongu; The Journal of History)*, no. 8: 57-100.
- Lee, Sun-gu (이순구). 2005. 조선시대 가족제도의 변화와 여성 (Joseon sidae gajok jedo-ui byeonhwa-wa yeoseong; Changes of the family systems and the women of the Chosun dynasty). *한국고전여성문학연구 (Hanguk gojeon yeoseong munhag*

*yeongu; Korean Classical Woman Literature Studies*), no. 10: 119–142.

- Park, Kyoung (박경). 2009. 살육(殺獄) 판결을 통해 본 조선후기 지배층의 부처(夫妻)관계상 - 『추관지(秋官志)』 분석을 중심으로 - (Sarok pangyeor-eul tonghae bon Joseon hugi jibaecheung-ui bucheo gwangyesang - ‘Jugwangji’ bunseog-eul jungsim-euro -; The Ideal images of the spousal relationship in the latter half of Joseon dynasty - Examined through judgments on murder cases in ‘Chugwan-ji (秋官志)’). *여성과 역사(Yeoseong-gwa yeoksa; Women and History)*, no. 10:35–70. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.22511/women..10.200906.35>

- Sabeobpumbo*, (Gab). 사법품보 (갑) 司法稟報(甲)  
[https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book\\_cd=GK17278\\_00](https://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/book/view.do?book_cd=GK17278_00)  
(Accessed 3 February, 2023).

*International Journal of Korean Humanities and Social Sciences*

vol. 8/2022

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/kr.2022.08.06>

**From King Hyegong to Suh Dongjin:  
the evolution of LGBT and homosexual rights  
in the Korean community, according  
to historiographical texts**

**Aleksandra MÜLLER, M.A.,**

[aleksandra.mu98@gmail.com](mailto:aleksandra.mu98@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1900-3680>

**Abstract:** Even though homosexuality and other sexual minorities have never been considered illegal by the Korean government, people identifying as non-heteronormative were and are still vastly ostracised. Furthermore, the LGBT community was and is still facing social stigmatism. What cultural conditions influenced the way non-heteronormative minorities are perceived by most South Korean society? How has the LGBT minority developed over the centuries? When did the attitudes of South Koreans change for the better? The following article covers the answers to the above-stated questions based on a particular query of texts related to the topic based on historiographic records. In the first section, the influence of the Confucian ideas of Three Fundamental Bonds and Five Constant Virtues (三綱五倫, 삼강오륜 [*samgangoryun*]) on the image of ‘correct relationship’ and the Taoist division of gender roles based on energy adversity (yin (陰, 음 [*eum*]) and yang (陽, 양 [*yang*])) will be explained. This will serve as a basis for understanding cultural opposition to

same-sex relationships. The following subchapter consists of a chronological overview of the most important historical records regarding same-sex relationships. The third subchapter presents the sexual minority groups formed in the 1990s, such as *Chodong Society* (초동회 [chodonghoe]), *Between Friends* (친구사이 [chingu sai]) and *Maeum 001* (마음 001 [maeum gongongil]), which had the most significant impact on the development of the contemporary LGBT movement in South Korea. The last section presents current changes and problems that the South Korean LGBT society faces.

**Keywords:** Korean society; sexual minorities; LGBTQ; historical analysis of attitudinal changes; queer identification.

### 혜공왕에서부터 서동진까지: 역사적 기록들을 바탕으로 살펴본 한국사회에서의 LGBT 성소수자들의 권리 발전 동향

**초록:** 동성애와 기타 다른 성소수자들이 한국정부에 의해 불법으로 간주된 적은 없지만, 그들은 예전에도 그랬고 지금도 여전히 사회에서 배척되고 있다. 특히 LGBT 공동체는 현재도 사회적 오명에 직면해 있다. 어떤 문화적 요소들이 한국사회 대다수 사람들이 갖고 있는 성소수자들에 대한 인식에 영향을 미쳤는가? LGBT 성소수자 그룹은 수세기에 걸쳐 어떻게 발전해 왔는가? 그들에 대한 한국인들의 태도와 인식은 언제 보다 나아질 것인가? 본 논문은 역사적 기록들을 바탕으로 하여 위에 언급한 질문들에 대한 답을 찾고자 한다. 제 1 장에서는 유교의 기본 이념인 ‘삼강오륜’이 ‘올바른 인간관계’에 미치는 영향 그리고 도교의 ‘음양’이론에 따른 성역할의 구분에 대해 논한다. 이것은 동성애 혹은 다른 성수자들에 대한 문화적 반감을 이해하는 데 초석이 된다. 제 2 장에서는 동성애와 관련된 역사적 기록들에서 대표적인 것들을 연대순으로 살펴본다. 제 3 장은 한국에서 ‘성소수자운동’의 발전에 큰 동력이 된 1990 년대에 구성된 성소수자 단체들인 ‘초동회’, ‘친구사이’ 그리고 ‘마음 001’의 활동들을 소개한다. 마지막 장에서는 현재 한국사회에서 LGBT 성소수자 단체들의 변화양상과 그들이 직면하고 있는 문제들에 대해 논한다.

**핵심어:** 한국사회; 성소수자; LGBT; 태보 변화의 역사적 분석; 역사적 분석; 퀴어동일함.

### Od króla Hyegonga do Suh Dongjina: ewolucja osób LGBT i ich praw w społeczności koreańskiej na podstawie tekstów historiograficznych

**Abstrakt:** Pomimo faktu, że homoseksualizm i inne mniejszości seksualne nigdy nie zostały uznane przez koreański rząd za nielegalne, osoby identyfikujące się jako nieheteronormatywne były i nadal są poddawane ogromnemu ostracyzmowi. Co więcej, społeczność LGBT była i nadal jest

narażona na stygmatyzm społeczny. Jakie uwarunkowania kulturowe wpłynęły na sposób postrzegania mniejszości nieheteronormatywnych przez większość społeczeństwa Korei Południowej? Jak mniejszość LGBT rozwijała się na przestrzeni wieków? Kiedy nastawienie Koreańczyków z Południa zmieniło się na lepsze? Poniższy artykuł zawiera odpowiedzi na powyższe pytania, oparte na wnikliwej kwerendzie tekstów związanych z tematem, opartych na źródłach historiograficznych. W pierwszej części omówiono wpływ konfucjańskich idei Trzech Podstawowych Węzi i Pięciu Niezmiennych Cnót (三綱五倫, 삼강오륜 [*samgang oryun*]) na obraz ‘właściwego związku’ i taoistyczny podział ról płciowych oparty na przeciwnościach energetycznych (yin (陰, 음 [*eum*]) i yang (陽, 양 [*yang*])) zostaną wyjaśnione. Posłuży to jako podstawa do zrozumienia kulturowego sprzeciwu wobec związków osób tej samej płci. Poniższy podrozdział zawiera chronologiczny przegląd najważniejszych zapisów historycznych dotyczących związków osób tej samej płci. W trzecim podrozdziale przedstawiono utworzone w latach 90 grupy mniejszości seksualnych, takie jak *Chodong Society* (초동회 [*chodonghoe*]), *Between Friends* (친구사이 [*chingusai*]) i *Maeum 001* (마음 001 [*maeum gongongil*]), które wywarły największy wpływ o rozwoju współczesnego ruchu LGBT w Korei Południowej. W ostatniej części przedstawiono aktualne zmiany i problemy, z jakimi boryka się południowokoreańskie społeczeństwo LGBT.

**Słowa kluczowe:** społeczeństwo koreańskie; mniejszości seksualne; LGBTQ; analiza historyczna; queer.

## 1. Etymological and cultural background to LGBT matters in South Korea

### 1.1. Etymological introduction to the topic

According to Rutt (1961: 57–58), homosexual practices were regarded with disgust during the Joseon era. However, the number of terms used to describe gay and lesbian people and their relationships could indicate that they had an appreciable place in the culture.

One of the most popular terms that were used for homosexual practices was *the dragon and the sun* (龙阳之宠, 용양지충 [*yongyang chichong*]). The dragon and the sun are classified as signs that carry *yang* (陽, 양) energy. The principles of *yin* and *yang* will be explained in more detail in the following subchapter. However, it is crucial to

emphasize that the term implies the coming together of the two male symbols and was thus often used to describe homosexual relations between men in the ruling class of the Goryeo dynasty.

화랑년 [*hwaryangnom*] means a slut or prostitute (Rutt 1961: 8). Modern *hwarang* or ‘players’ are also perceived as a homosexually oriented group (Arnold 2016: 36). As Arnold (2016: 36) puts it, „they all glance by homosexual practice, almost as though they were circling the issue without ever naming it explicitly”.

There are also terms derived from theatre culture. The first is the word *Midong-aji* (美童아지 (미동아지)) derived from the *Kkoktu Kaksi* (꼭두각시) ‘puppet theatre’. In the play, an older yangban falls in love with a boy he names *Midongaji*. Over time, the word became synonymous with handsome boys who had sex with other boys. There was also a shorter version of the word – *Midong* (美童, 미동) – meaning attractive boy, often in women’s clothing and makeup, and who was a passive sexual partner (Rutt 1961: 61). What’s more, „It is used thus in Korean translations of the bible to translate the Hebrew *qadesh* or male prostitute” (Rutt 1961: 61).

Another term stemming from theatre culture is *namsadang* (남사당). Traveling troupes recruited anyone willing to join them into what Murray (2000: 169) describes as „appearingly a homosexual community”. These communities consisted of performers who divided into groups of *sutdongmo* (숫동모, which Murray translates into ‘butch’) and *yongdongmo* (영동모, which he translates into ‘queens’). These translations seem similar to the modern slang used in LGBTQ communities when describing masculine (butch) or feminine (queen) presenting gays or lesbians.

Furthermore, Rutt also introduces the words *tojangi* (툫장이), *biyeok* (비역) as well as *namsaek* (남색). The first two supposedly have more of a literal meaning, where the first is used to describe a catamite, while the second is used to refer to same-sex intercourse or sodomy (Rutt 1961: 57-58). The third one is synonymous with the second, yet it is used in a more modern way and usually appears in a figurative sense.

In contemporary Korean, the most neutral way to describe same-sex love is *dong song ae* (동성애, 同性愛). This can be translated into ‘same-sex love’ (Naaranoja 2016: 15). Chen (2020: 124) further emphasizes the importance of this word – or instead naming relationships in this way – as it has been used more and more since the 1930s. Terms derived from the English language, such as *gay* (게이



[*gei*]), *lesbian* (레즈비안 [*lejeubian*]), and *queer* (퀴어 [*kwieo*]) are also widely used. According to Hilton (2008: 12 in Naaranoja 2016: 15), the latter is commonly used in public events such as the Seoul Queer Culture Festival (서울퀴어문화축제 [*seoul kwieo manhwa chukjae*]) or cinematography, like in Korean Queer Film Festival (한국퀴어영화축제 [*hanguk kwieo yeonghwa chukjae*]). Another commonly used term would be *seongsosuja* (성소수자 [*seongsosuja*]), which translates into ‘sexual minority’. However, there is also the term *iban* (이반 [*iban*]), which gay and lesbian activists commonly use. The term can be translated into ‘second-class’, which stands in opposition to ‘first-class’ (*ilban* (일반 [*ilban*]), which can be considered normal or general (Suh 2001: 69–70).

To avoid misunderstandings, I would like to explain the use of some of the terms that appear most often in the article. When I use the acronym LGBT, I mean people who include the extension of the abbreviation (Parent, DeBlaere, Moradi 2013), i.e., lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and trans people. I use ‘homosexual’ as a synonym for both ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ – naturally, the distinction will be apparent from the context. I applied a similar synonym to the term *homosexual relationship*.

## 1.2. Confucian and Taoist ideology as cultural background

Speaking of LGBT, it is impossible not to mention the community’s cultural background, which significantly affects the perception of sexualities other than hetero. In the case of Korea, the perception was most influenced by the philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism originating in China. It should be remembered, however, that I will only discuss part of both philosophies because more than just one subchapter could be written about them in volume. I will focus on the essential elements that, according to the researchers, will help to understand why LGBT issues were addressed in the way they did.

I will first discuss the influence of Taoism, focusing on homosexual relationships. While Taoism does not explicitly condemn same-sex relationships in any of its scriptures, its teachings indirectly convey that relationships should flourish between men and women.

This is due to the idea of combining two cosmological energies, thus creating harmony. Of course, we are talking about *yin* (陰, 음 [eum]) and *yang* (陽, 양 [yang]).

The concept of *yin* and *yang* focuses on the complementary idea of opposite forces. *Yin* is commonly identified with passiveness and submissiveness, while *yang* is recognized with activeness and dominance. The *yin* and *yang* within Tao create a complementary relationship (Chang 1986 in LeBlanc 2015: 153) in which the two complementary elements become one. This signifies the interconnection and interdependence of natural forces, in which one cannot exist without the other. Thus, the ‘natural’ relationship for humans, both sexually and in marriage, would be that of a man and a woman. Through a connection like this, they will be able to „embrace and share (...) life through their utilization of their dominant *yang* and *yin*, respectively” (LeBlanc 2015: 153). This would also help „achieve a healthy, dynamic balance between these two energies” (Francoeur 1992: 3).

After the fall of the Goryeo dynasty in 1392 (Rurarz 2009: 407–408), the Joseon dynasty adopted Confucianism as a governing ideology to confirm their dynasty as totally different from Goryeo (Rurarz 2009: 311). Even though Confucianism had negative attitudes about same-sex relationships, there were still male-to-male relationships among Buddhists and the rural ruling class. Lesbian relationships, however, were not treated with the same acceptance revealed in the palace chronicles of the Joseon dynasty (Yi 2004: 947).

As one of the leading influences that came to Korea from China, Confucianism stands at the very base of Korean society. Being the dominant belief system in the country, it has impacted the worldview of Koreans significantly and for centuries. Even now, Korean Confucianism appears in ethics textbooks. As Chung (2015: 73) says, „many of the core Confucian values (e.g., filial piety, respect, righteousness, propriety, etc.) are taught there. There is considerable attention to the inseparability of morality, society, politics, and the harmony of self, family, and community”.

The Three Fundamental Bonds and the Five Constant Virtues (三綱五倫, 삼강오륜 [samgang oryun]) (Thacker 2013: 660) are two of the essential concepts that shine a light on the premonitions of non-heteronormativity. According to Kim and Hahn (2006: 60), they have constituted heterosexuality as „a key social and ethical norm in Korea”. The Five Constant Virtues (五倫, 오륜 [oryun]) consist of:

- a) 仁 [ren] (인 [in]) *benevolence*
- b) 義 [yi] (의 [yi]) *righteousness*
- c) 禮 [li] (예 [ye]) *propriety*
- d) 智 [zhi] (지 [ji]) *wisdom*
- e) 信 [xin] (신 [sin]) *trustworthiness* (Knapp 2009: 2254).

Among these, the most crucial Virtue to grasp would have to be the concept of propriety (禮 [li] (예 [ye])). Obedience to authority, conformity to social order, and fulfilling one's responsibilities lay at the root of the concept. One of those responsibilities is filial piety, which is included in the Three Fundamental Bonds (三綱, 삼강 [samgang]), which will be further discussed below. According to Hahn and Kim (2006: 60), the duty of filial piety was

„considered as a means of earning continuity in the family lineage and the ancestral cult. (...) The heterosexually oriented family system is thus an ethical virtue as well as a basic element of social norms in Korean Confucian society”.

Furthermore, the attachment to Confucian tradition causes Korean society to be more punitive towards unconventional behavior (Adamczyk, Cheng 2014: 3).

The Three Fundamental Bonds (三綱, 삼강 [samgang]) are a set of three relationships in which the cosmological principles of the Taoistic idea of *yin* (陰, 음 [eum]) and *yang* (陽, 양 [yang]) are naturally being expressed. The concept of those opposite forces is most evident in one of the Three Fundamental Bonds (三綱, 삼강 [samgang]), namely the bond between the husband and the wife, as explained above. The relationship between the husband and the wife leads to the most natural exchange of energies, which brings balance and harmony.

According to Lim and Johnson (2001: 547) suggest that homosexuality was never ‘officially’ disparaged for religious or ethical reasons, but due to the Confucian society model, which accentuates the importance of duties and obligations, it simply disturbs the moral order. It can also be seen as rejecting traditional gender roles (Lim, Johnson 2001: 547). Helkama (2009: 50 in Naaranoja, 2016: 13) furthermore suggests that in societies that hold tradition and conformity values close to their heart, morality becomes a „social responsibility” rather than a personal choice. Interpreted in this way, homosexual relationships

become a threat not only to the value system but the ancestral cult as well.

## 2. Records of same-sex relationships during the Goryeo and Joseon dynasty

Though researchers have said that Korea, unlike other East Asian countries, does not have a long history of homosexual cultural activities (Martin, Berry 2003: 91), some records suggest otherwise.

One of the first records of same-sex attraction in early Korean culture is the story of monk Myojeong (妙正, (묘정 [*myojeong*])), which has been prevalent in Korean folklore tales. Myojeong was a young Buddhist monk who lived during King Wonseong's (원성왕 [*weonseong-wang*]) reign. His beauty bewitched not only the nobility of Silla but also an Emperor from the Tang Dynasty<sup>1</sup>.

One of the most researched topics that connect with the topic of homosexual relationships in ancient Korean culture would have to be the Flowering Knights (화랑 [*hwarang*]), a so-called “homoerotic military elite” (Murray 2002: 168–171) of the Silla Dynasty (B.C 57 – A.D. 935). The *Hwarang* were a group of chosen sons of the Silla nobility that was to protect the kingdom. According to records from 1215 written down by Buddhist monk Kakhun (Lee, 2013), the first and foremost criterion to become a *Hwarang* was appearance – “It was handsome youths who powdered their faces, wore ornamented dresses, and were respected as *hwarang*”. The warriors existed in social groups and were known to meet and study all aspects of fine arts. The expression of same-sex longing is most prominent in vernacular poems such as *Song of Yearning for the Flower Boy Taemara* (慕竹旨郎歌, 모죽지랑가 [*mojukjirangga*]), *Song in Praise of the Flower Boy Kilbo* (讚耆婆郎歌, 찬기과랑가 [*changiparangga*]) and *Choyong's Song* (處容歌, 처용가 [*choyongga*]) (Kim, Hahn 2006: 61), which can be seen below:

---

<sup>1</sup> „그 뒤에 사신을 따라 당나라로 갔을 때 황제로부터 신하에 이르기까지 모두 묘정을 존경하고 좋아하였다” (Oh Hyeonggeun 오형근 1996).

*Song of Yearning for the Flower Boy Taemara* (慕竹旨郎歌, 모죽지랑가 [mojukjjirangga])

The whole world weeps, sadly.  
For departing Spring.  
Wrinkles lance  
Your once handsome face.  
For the space of a glance  
May we meet again?  
Fair lord, what hope for my burning heart?  
How can I sleep in my alley hovel? (Rutt, 1961: 49)

*Song in Praise of the Flower Boy Kilbo* (讚耆婆郎歌, 찬기과랑가 [changiparangga])

Moon  
Appearing fitfully  
Trailing the white clouds,  
Whither do you go?  
The face of the Flower Boy Kilbo  
It was reflected in the pale green water.  
Here among the pebbles of the stream  
I seek the bounds of the heart he bore.  
Ah, ah! Flower Boy hero,  
Noble pine that fears no frost! (Rutt, 1961: 51)

*Chōyong's Song* (處容歌, 처용가 [choyongga])

Playing in the moonlight of the capital  
Till the morning comes,  
I return home  
To see four legs in my bed.  
Two belong to me.  
Whose are the other two?  
But what was my own  
Has been taken from me. What now? (Rutt 1961: 52).

Hahn and Kim give further examples, such as *Song of the Comet*, *Tusia Hymn*, and *Song for a Dead Sister*<sup>2</sup>, that prove the homosexual eroticism of the *Hwarang* (2006: 64–65).

The earliest records of homosexuality that appear in royal Korean historical accounts are chronicled in the *Samguk*

---

<sup>2</sup> „(...) and Song for a Dead Sister, which was written for honour of a dead soul who died in battle”. Here, the ‘sister’ referred to is in fact a hwarang boy who adopted a passive role in homosexual acts” (Hahn, Kim 2006: 64–65).

*Yusa* (三國遺事). They tell the story of King Hyegong of Silla (혜공왕 [Hyegong-wang]). His father, King Gyeongdeok (경덕왕 [Gyeongdeok-wang]), was in dire need of a male successor, as his offspring was solely female. According to *Samguk Yusa*, the King begged and prayed to God to allow his wife to bear male offspring. Yet God insisted that King Gyeongdeok's destiny was to have daughters solely. God warned the King about the dangers of granting his wish, saying it would leave the country in disarray. However, King Gyeongdeok persisted. Eventually, God gave in, letting King Gyeongdeok's wife bear a son, yet according to *Samguk Yusa*, he purposefully put a female spirit into him (Yi 2004: 947). Though no official records specifically stating his sexuality exist, King Hyegong had often been described as a man by appearance and a woman by nature. The 13th-century chronicles of Il Yeon found in the *Samguk Yusa* may suggest that King Hyegong had homosexual or bisexual tendencies. Furthermore, fifteen years after his ascension to the throne, King Hyegong was killed by royal subordinates as „they were no longer able to tolerate his femininity” (Das Wilhelm 2004: 211). Some contemporary historians even contemplate that King Hyegong might have been a trans woman (Youn 1996: 3).

This, however, was not the only record of same-sex relationships among the ruling class, in Seong's historical analysis of *Hallimbyulgok* (翰林別曲 (한림별곡 [hallimbyeolgok])) (Yi 2004: 947), it is said that King Chungseon of Goryeo (高麗忠宣, 고려 충선 [Goryeo Chungseon]) had a long-time relationship with a male lover named Weonchung (Sohng, Icard 1996 in Hilton 2008: 4 in Naaranoja 2016: 11).

Similarly, King Gongmin of Goryeo (高麗恭愍, 고려 공민 [Goryeo Gongmin]) had not one but at least five young male attendants serving as sexual partners, whose names were recorded<sup>3</sup>. This kind of attendant even had their term – *chajaehwi* (子弟衛, 차재회) – which „suggests that the practice of taking passive male partners was hardly limited to King Gongmin alone” (Hahn 2006: 61 in Arnold 2016: 29).

Compared to records of gay homosexual relationships, forms of lesbian relationships are particularly scarce. According to Woo (2017: 5), this could be caused by factors such as the patriarchal system of Korean society, Confucian culture, and sexism. Naaranoja (2016: 17)

---

<sup>3</sup> Their names were: Hong Yun (洪倫), Han An (韓安), Kwön Chin (權璿), Hong Kwan (洪寬) and No Sön (盧瑄) (Rutt 1961: 57).

further argues that lesbianism has always been viewed in a more negative light than male homosexuality. In connection to Confucian tradition, women uninterested in fulfilling the female duty of being a mother fail to uphold their societal responsibility.

The earliest records of lesbianism occur in the palace chronicles of the Joseon dynasty. Lesbianism was not a rare occurrence in royal facilities. Similarly to the *chajaewi*, lesbianism had its term. *Taesik* (태식), which meant sharing energy (Han 2004: 145), was prevalent in the royal palace to the extent that special penalties for women found guilty of lesbianism had to face were conceived. According to Han (2004: 145), the number of strokes with a cudgel was increased from 70 to 100 by Sejong the Great (세종대왕 [*Sejong daewang*]) himself.

The most extreme incident relating to lesbianism was that of Crown Princess Sun (순빈 봉씨 [*Sunbin bongssi*]) and her handmaiden So-Ssang (소쌍 [*Sossang*]). Crown Princess Sun, King Munjong of Joseon's (朝鮮文宗, 조선 문종 [*Joseon Munjong*]) second wife and Sejong the Great's daughter-in-law, was rumored to have had the same-sex intercourse with her handmaiden. What was almost just as unspeakable was the class difference between the two women. After all, Crown Princess Sun was part of royalty, and Sossang was a mere enslaved person. However, the rumor was proven true during a testimonial, which had been chronicled in the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty (朝鮮王朝實錄, 조선왕조실록 [*Joseon wangjo sillok*]). According to it, Crown Princess Sun

„[she] demanded that I lay with her, but I refused. She then forcibly tore about half my clothing off and pulled me behind the folding screen; she took off the rest of my clothes and forced me down. Then, just like a man, she trifled with me” (*Sejong Sillok* 75, 7b–9b in Arnold, 2016: 32).

However, Sossang was not the only enslaved woman with whom the Crown Princess had been intimate. The Crown Princess was deposed in 1436, years before King Munjong's ascension to the throne, and banished from Joseon in 1454. Despite the previously quoted records, the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty state that the dismissal of the Crown Princess was caused by her sending palace supplies to her hometown and inviting visitors without King Munjong's knowledge (Das Wilhelm 2004: 211). Sossang and the other handmaiden had been executed (Han 2004: 145).

In addition, there are also academic records of lesbian relationships. One of them is the 2008 musical *Gongchilpal Saesamnyuk* (공칠팔 새삼륙), inspired by a real story from 1931. Hong Okim and Kim Yongju, two 20-year-olds, fall in love with each other. Their feelings for each other were dismissed by both families, which led the two women to flee and eventually commit suicide together. Such suicide pacts (also known as ‘same-sex love double suicides’, 동성애 정사 [*dongseongae jeongsa*]) among lesbians were not a rare occurrence. According to Chen (2020: 132), the media would often report on the phenomenon, and the term mentioned earlier would circulate and soon become known in the 1920s society.

Another academic record of such relationships is Park Taewon’s (朴泰遠, 박태원) *Portrait of a Beauty* (美女圖, 미녀도 [*minyodo*]), which was serialized in the *Morning Light* (朝光, 조광 [*jogwang*]) in 1939. The novel describes the ambivalent customs that were cultivated in schools for girls. On the one hand, it was customary for girls’ schools in the years of the Japanese occupation (1920) to bring up a good wife and mother. On the other hand, it tells the custom of same-sex love between girl students, which took place in the inner quarters of girls’ schools (Ha 2020: 146).

Ten years later, Hwang Sindeok (황신덕) published the article “Stories of Same-Sex Love of Female Celebrities” (여류명사의 동성연애기 [*yeoryumyeongsa-ui dongseonyeonaegi*]) in the newspaper *Another World* (별건곤 [*byeolgeongon*]), which somewhat confirmed the events occurring in schools. However, the author stated that same-sex relations were a ‘trend’ among school-aged girls, with most marrying and having children after leaving school (Ha 2020: 147). The love that blossomed between girls was „condoned as a transient emotion that would easily and rapidly dissipate” (Ha 2020: 147).

What is also worth noting is the fact that homosexuality was well-known in rural society as well. According to Rutt (1961: 58), it was a common occurrence among *chibang yangban* (地方兩班, 지방양반), yet those involved „practices of the lower classes” (Rutt 1961: 58), among those – paederasty. Such instances were also included in literary works. One of them is the collection of anecdotes *Myongyeop Chihae* (冥葉志譜, 명엽지해) that were written by Hong Manjong (洪萬宗, 홍만중), who has lived during the reign of Sukchong (1675 – 1721). Another example would be Yuk Yong-jeong’s (1842-1917) *Lee Seong-seon* (이성선) — this novel depicts the infatuation between a widower and a neighbor’s young man (Kim 2014).



### 3. Same-sex love in times of war, military dictatorship, and the beginning of democracy

When the subject of homosexual relationships and love was first addressed during colonial times, they were “pathologized” (Chen 2020: 124). In her essay, Jeong Seoktae states that the only normalized form of lust and love is between heterosexuals – homosexuals should be treated. Similarly, Kim Yunkyeong said that same-sex desire was a perversion that led to sexual disease and death (Chen 2020: 124). This view of homosexuality as a disease that can be cured will be ingrained in Korean society for many years.

Modern attitudes towards homosexuality in Korea were created by combining Confucian traditions and the fear of the foreign and unknown (Naaranoja 2016: 14). As mentioned in the first subchapter, heterosexual relationships and heterosexuality was seen as fulfilling one's obligation to society. On the other hand, homosexual relationships opposed what was already known to Koreans. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Kim Oki and Kim Yongju, cited in the previous section. Let me quote the words of Ha (2020: 150):

„Through same-sex relationships, young women could maintain ties to modern cultures and lifestyles that they had been exposed to within the institutional space of girls' schools. (...) Meanwhile, journalistic descriptions of their suicide betray a keen interest in certain details of their death scene: the image of a fast-approaching train and their Western-style skirts billowing behind them as they jumped. This shows that the same way the two women staged their deaths was a statement of their strong self-identification with modernity”.

However, as can be seen from articles such as Hong Sandeok's “Stories of Same-Sex Love of Female Celebrities” cited above or Kim Yojo's (김요조) “Same-Sex Love” (동성애 [*dongsongae*]) published in 1939, there were instances of negative views towards same-sex relations. This view deepened with the beginning of the Korean War (1950–1953), where the primary role of women was to „produce a new generation of fighters for the nation”<sup>4</sup> (Ha 2020: 149). This means that love between two men or two women was utterly useless to the country,

---

<sup>4</sup> „여성의 군대, 군대의 여성” (Kim 1937: 57 in Ha 2020: 151).

which main aim was to rebuild itself and strengthen its military power because it did not result in reproduction (Chen 2020: 124).

The aversion towards people with non-heteronormative sexualities was further deepened during the rule of postcolonial governments, which stigmatized all non-normative individuals who could not adapt to social norms as pro-Japanese collaborators (Todd 2020: 10). Again, individuality was urged aside to rebuild strong Korean nation with ideas such as Park Chung Hee's 'Confucian Parental Governance'. In this, Western ideologies, such as freedom of speech and individual rights, were disregarded, and society was pushed to fulfill the hierarchal metaphor of familial relationships (Cho 2020: 268). Furthermore, according to Cho (2020: 268), „official information about non-normative sexualities such as homosexuality was restricted during the developmental period of South Korean history”, which would explain the lack of information about the situation of homosexuals during that time. A big part of the history of homosexuality is still being excavated (Todd 2020: 10).

The beginning of the modern era of the LGBT community in South Korea can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, during which gay subculture began to emerge around the areas of Tapgol Park (탑골 공원 [*Tapgol gongweon*]) and Jongno (종로 [*Jongno*]) (Yi 2004: 947). Given the conditions mentioned above imposed by governments, acceptance of same-sex relationships and homosexuals was low. According to the *World Values Survey* of 1982 (Inglehart et al. 2014), in which almost 76% of the interviewees agreed that homosexuality was not justifiable under no circumstance. However, Cho (2020: 270) suggests that so-called 'outlets' for homoerotic experimentation did exist in the form of military institutions and contacts with foreigners such as American soldiers or gay Japanese men and women, who had a different understanding of homosexuality as most Western societies have undergone the 'sexual revolution' during the 1960s, according to which erotic life should be considered part of one's daily life and not repressed, especially not by sexual morality nor religion. This change began in Korea almost thirty years later, in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. What further deepened the perception of homosexuals being dirty and immoral was the spread of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s (Cho 2020: 269).

It wasn't until the democratization of South Korea back in 1987 and the start of its globalization, which started in 1993, that the perception of homosexuality began to change (Cho 2020: 274).

Homosexual people slowly stopped being perceived as perverse and maladjusted to society but began accepting them as community members. It should be emphasized, however, that it was a very long process that continues to this day.

The mid-1990s were also when the first gay and lesbian organizations began to emerge, mirroring the development in Taiwan (Cho 2020: 274). This happened thanks to the rapid growth and increasing access to the Internet (Kim, Shin Young 2010: 18). One of the first groups that began emerging were: *Sappho*, *Chodong Society* (초동회 [Chodong-hoe]), *Between Friends* (친구사이 [chingu sai]), and *Among Ourselves* (끼리끼리 [kkirikiri]), as well as Yonsei University's group *Come Together*.

The first formal Korean gay rights organization was named *Chodong Society* (초동회 [chodong-hoe]) in 1994. However, it soon broke up due to fights between the organization's members. *Between Friends* (친구사이 [chingu sai]) was created in the same year, in the wake of *Chodong Society*'s breakup (Youn 1996: 4). Defining their organization as a „friendship group that was based on dignified relationships between homosexuals” (Suh 2001: 72), they aimed to create a more wholesome gay culture (Kwon Kim, Cho 2011: 211).

*Sappho*, named after a Greek poet<sup>5</sup>, was the first lesbian organization established in South Korea. Created by an African-American soldier named Toni, the organization began growing as it allowed foreign gays and lesbians to meet (Youn 1996: 4; Kwon Kim, Cho 2011: 210–211).

*Among Ourselves* (끼리끼리 [kkirikiri]) was the lesbian counterpart of the ex-*Chodong Society* group. Unlike *Between Friends*, who were able to form their group within a month after the breakup, *Among Ourselves* needed almost a year to recruit members and establish the organization. According to Suh (2001), this was due to the patriarchal ideology of Korean society. The main goal of *Kiri Kiri* was to create a network with various Korean women's organizations to strengthen their political and social bases (Kwon Kim, Cho 2011: 211).

Yet it wasn't only these organizations that spearheaded the pro-LGBT in South Korea. Many gay and lesbian university groups

---

<sup>5</sup> Sappho (ca. 630 BC—ca. 570 BC) is known for her lyrics poetry. A symbol of love and desire between women, ‘with the English words sapphic and lesbian being derived from her name and her home island respectively’ (Rayor, Lardinois 2014: 2–9).

appeared on campuses (i.e., *Come Together* at Yonsei University or *Maum 001* (마음 001 [*maeum kongkongil*] at Seoul National University). Among the organizers of these groups, Lee Jungwoo (이정우) and Suh Dongjin (서동진) became the representatives of the movement. They also became co-organizers of the Sexual Politics Festival (성정치 문화제 [*seongjeonchi munhwaje*]) at Yonsei University in 1995.

What undoubtedly helped the Korean LGBT community to grow and raise self-awareness were discussion groups on central Internet servers. Thanks to those, many Korean gays and lesbians rediscovered their “dark secrets” of homosexuality (Cho 2020: 271). However, these soon ended up being banned, as materials that contained homosexual content were classified as ‘harmful’ and ‘obscene’ and blocked on all public computer facilities by the Ministry of Information and Communication (Kwon Kim, Cho, 2011: 213, 216).

#### **4. LGBT community in contemporary South Korea: the hardships of the fight for a more inclusive future**

Since 2003, homosexuality has been no longer classified as harmful and obscene (Bicker, 2019). However, despite an increase in acceptance of LGBT individuals, South Korea still has a very low *Rainbow Index*<sup>6</sup>, ILGA Europe’s analysis of LGBT rights in countries, and discrimination against sexual minorities is still widespread. As of 2016, South Korea was among the countries with grossly low indices, scoring only 13% out of 100% possible (*SOGILAW* 2016: 17–19). According to the 2018 Stonewall Global Workplace Equality Index, 79% of South Koreans still insist that there are no people with a non-heterosexual orientation around them (*Stonewall* 2018: 2). Furthermore, according to The Korea Social Integration Survey quoted by Bicker (2019), almost half of Koreans would not like to have a homosexual neighbor, friend or even a colleague at work. What further confirms the lack of social acceptance is the coming-out of the celebrity Hong Seokcheon (홍석천), who in 2003 publicly admitted to his sexuality (Han 2000).

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope/2020> . Accessed 27.03.2022.

As a result, his acting and modeling careers took a hit, and Hong was not welcome on television for several years.

The biggest issue faced by the LGBT minority in South Korea is the lack of laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While citizens' rights are generally respected, according to *Human Rights Watch* (2022), there are still concerns about their human rights. For example, a comprehensive law protecting LGBT people from discrimination has been discussed in congress several times. Yet, it has never passed the discussion phase (*Stonewall* 2018: 2). According to Todd (2020: 2), the absence of such rights is supported by Korean Christian conservatives who argue that "anal sex is not a human right"<sup>7</sup>. Protestant Christians are the largest group opposing the anti-discrimination law. Introduced in the early 2000s, the "homosexual agenda" remains one of the most important arguments of protest by Protestants to this day (Kim 2022: 4).

This creates an unsafe environment for most LGBT individuals, as coming out to co-workers might end with them losing their job or being bullied and mobbed by their colleagues. This lack of anti-discrimination policies is more striking, as globally LGBT-friendly employers do not show this same friendliness in South Korea (*Stonewall* 2018: 2).

As of May 2021, the Ministry of Education had yet to introduce any guidelines on the topic of LGBT representation in school textbooks, as well as the integration of conversations about these topics in the official school curricula (*Human Rights Watch* 2021: 44). What is more, alike in the case of equality in the workplace, there are no guidelines for anti-discrimination policies that would protect LGBT students from bullying regarding their sexual orientation or their gender identity (*Human Rights Watch* 2021: 73).

Furthermore, LGBT individuals frequently face challenges dealing with mental health and the South Korean healthcare system. According to Bicker (2019), "a survey of under-18's in the LGBTQ community discovered that almost half – around 45% – have tried to commit suicide". As mental health issues are still stigmatised by a considerable part of society, the concern about being criticised or refused mental health services by the providers once they learn of the sexual orientation or gender identity of their patients, LGBT South Koreans are faced with a double burden (*Human Rights Watch* 2021:

---

<sup>7</sup> '항문섹스 인권이 아니다'.

38). This also raises the question of patient confidentiality. What further deepens the problem is that very few mental health providers are competent enough to work with LGBT people, as they are not legally required to undergo training on these issues (*Human Rights Watch* 2021: 38).

Another issue is the case of institutionalised homophobia in the military. According to article 92.6 in the 1962 Military Criminal Act, sexual acts among soldiers are punished with up to two years in prison. This, allegedly, is supposed to maintain discipline in the military. However, this article openly violates South Korea's international human rights obligations. Reid, the LGBT rights director at *Human Rights Watch*, even mentions that criminalising consensual intercourse between adults should have no place in Korean society, especially since this law only applies to military service (2019). However, last April, South Korea's Supreme Court overturned the conviction of two men prosecuted under article 92.6 of the Military Criminal Act. Military authorities had accused the two men of engaging in sexual activities while off duty, convicting them of two-year-long prison sentences (Thoreson 2022). The Supreme Court said that „the authorities' 'use of article 92.6 to punish consensual sex outside of military settings jeopardises the autonomy, equality, and dignity of soldiers” (Thoreson 2022).

However, the movement for equal rights for the LGBT minority in South Korea grew significantly over the years. In over 20 years since the start, back in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, South Korean society grew more accepting of the minority, and LGBT-friendly groups and communities like *HaengSeongIn* (행성인), *the Korea Sexual Minority Culture and Rights Center* (한국 성적 소수자 문화 인권 센터, *hanguk seongjeok sosuja munhwa ingwon senteo*) and the well-known *Chingusai* (친구사이) have provided support for LGBT individuals.

What is also worth noting is the growing representation of LGBT individuals in media, especially in movies. In their article on queer cinema, Singer and Kim (2011) break down the history of Korean queer cinema into three chronological periods and how queer content is displayed. The periods are the Invisible Age (1976–1998), the Camouflage Age (1998–2005), and the Blockbuster Age (2005–present).

The name for the Invisible Age was created due to the invisibility of homosexual-themed movies. Though the directors tried to bring them to the front, the social pressures made it impossible

(Singer, Kim 2011). For lesbian love, the first film was *Ascetic: Women and Women* (금욕: 여자와 여자 [geumyok: yeoja-wa yeoja]), directed by Kim Suhjong (김수형). Filmed in 1976, it tells the story of Yeonghwi and Miae, which ends with Yonghwi's unhappy marriage and Miae's suicide. The film received awards, but remained unknown. One of the first films to feature same-sex love between men was *Broken Branches* (내일로 흐르는 강 [naeillo heureuneun kang]) by Park Jaeho (박재호) in 1995. Divided into three parts, the film tells the story of a family. In the third, the fate of two closeted men, Jeongmin and his lover, Seonggeol, are presented.

Thanks to the popularity of Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1996), Korean directors increasingly undermined freedom of expression as the new liberal government helped bring a more sympathetic policy to the LGBT community and relax 'ethical' standards for films and other artistic works, which characterises the Camouflage Age (Singer, Kim 2011). These were especially popular among art house and independent filmmakers, who often presented their works at festivals like the 'Rainbow' Queer Culture Festival. During this time, movies like *Memento Mori* (여고괴담 두번째 이야기 [yeogogwidam dubeonjjae iyagi]), *Bungee Jumping of Their Own* (번지점프를 하다 [beonjjeompeureul hada]) and *Road Movie* (로드무비 [rodeu mubi]) were made. Whether the themes of homosexuality were camouflaged in the movies or not, the increasing LGBT presence in Korean cinema gave the impression that an openly 'homosexual movie' would soon make a splash at the mainstream box office (Singer, Kim 2011).

After around 2005, the themes of homosexual love became a sort of "spicing up" of the usual heteronormative plot lines (Hong 2008 in Singer, Kim 2011). At this time modern classics like *The First Shop of Coffee Prince* (커피 프린스 일호점 [keopi peurinseu ilhojeom]), *Personal Taste* (개인의 취향 [gaein-ui chwihyang]) and *Life is Beautiful* (인생은 아름다워 [insaengeun areumdawo]) were created. Some of the more modern movies that talk about homosexual love are *A Frozen Flower* (쌍화점 [ssanghwajeom]), *Two Weddings and a Funeral* (두 번의 결혼식과 한 번의 장례식 [du beon-ui kyeolhonsik-gwa han beon-ui jangryesik]), *The Handmaiden* (아가씨 [ahgassi]) and *Our Love Story* (연애담 [yeonaedam]).

Moreover, it should also be emphasised that the LGBT community is also increasingly appearing on social media and is openly endorsed by celebrities. As an example, mention Hong Seokcheon,

mentioned earlier, has recently started to reappear on TV shows and give interviews. Another almost legendary figure is Harisu, the first transgender celebrity performing on stage since the early 2000s. You can also think of drag artists like Nana or Hurricane Kimchi, who fight for LGBT rights through their performances (Williams 2023). Support for the LGBT community is also shown at the recently popular k-pop concerts, where idols run around the stage holding the rainbow flag – the hallmark of LGBT.

However, despite the increased representation of gay people and their relationships in the media and growing acceptance, there are still issues that need to be resolved for members of the LGBT community to feel safe in their workplace, school, and other public spaces and for them to become truly equal members of society.

## 5. Conclusions

When talking about the subject of LGBT minorities in any country, it is impossible not to mention the cultural realities that most strongly influence the perception of society on this subject. In the case of South Korea, this cultural background is the philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism and the ideas contained in them. It was through the concept of *yin* (陰, 음 [eum]) and *yang* (陽, 양 [yang]) and The Three Fundamental Bonds and the Five Constant Virtues (三綱五倫, 삼강오륜 [samgang oryun]), that heteronormativity was constituted as a social norm that, despite the absence of official opposition, became the duty of every man and woman. It is worth noting that increased hostility towards same-sex love came with the introduction of Christianity. The negative perception is also reflected in the language – in it, terms for gay, lesbian, and same-sex relationships are often synonymous with perversion or some sexual anomaly.

However, it should be remembered that despite the hostility towards homosexual people, this does not mean that all individuals hide their sexuality. Cases of more or less open admission of one's 'true self' have been immortalised in the pages of history, including *Samguk Yusa* (三國遺事), the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty* (朝鮮王朝實錄, 조선왕조실록 [Joseon wangjo sillok] and *Hallimbuilgok* (翰林別曲, 한림별곡 [hallimbyeolgok]), being a confirmation that



homosexuality is not a modern invention. Kings, princesses, and ordinary people were part of what we now call the LGBT community. Contemporary attitudes have shifted from somewhat hostile indifference (or tolerance) towards LGBT people to negative and sometimes even demonising.

However, it should be remembered that despite the hostility of some social groups towards the LGBT community, support and acceptance for them is growing each year. Non-heteronormative individuals more and more often appear in the public spotlight or are presented in films, series, or books, which means that they are no longer a foreign concept and theory and have “become people of flesh and blood”. As an example, it is enough to mention characters such as Hong Seokcheon or Harisu in a popular reality show based on a Korean series in which the topic of homosexual attraction appeared.

Although over time, more and more scientists have dealt with LGBT topics and their stories hidden in the pages of history, it should be emphasised that this research is still scarce. It will be a long time until the investigation is satisfactory. Still, it is hoped that from year to year, we will learn much more about LGBT representatives and the realities of their life in antiquity, modernity, and the present day.

## Bibliography

- Adamczyk, Amy, and Yen-hsin Alice, Cheng. 2015. Explaining Attitudes About Homosexuality in Confucian and Non-Confucian Nations: Is There a Cultural Influence?. *Social Science Research*, vol. 51: 276–289. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.10.002>
- Arnold, Matthew David. 2016. *Queer Korea: Identity, Tradition, and Activism*. Master of Arts Dissertation. Duke University. [https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/13472/Queer%20Korea%20Final%20Thesis\\_Arnoldpdf.pdf?sequence=3](https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/13472/Queer%20Korea%20Final%20Thesis_Arnoldpdf.pdf?sequence=3)
- Berry, Chris, and Martin, Fran. 2003. Syncretism and Synchronicity: Queer'n'Asian Cyberspace in 1990s Taiwan and Korea. In: *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, ed. Chris Berry,

- 87–114. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384380-005>
- Bicker, Laura. 2019. Gay in South Korea: ‚She said I don’t need a son like you’. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49751410> (Accessed 25 Jan. 2023).
- Chen, Pei Jean. 2020. Problematizing love: the intimate event and same-sex love in colonial Korea. In: *Queer Korea*, ed. Todd A. Henry, 117–145. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpn09.7>
- Cho, John (Song Pae). 2020. The three faces of South Korea’s male homosexuality: pogan, iban, and neoliberal gay. In: *Queer Korea*, ed. Todd A. Henry, 263–294. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpn09.11>
- Chung, Edward Y.J. 2015. *Korean Confucianism: Tradition and Modernity*. Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies Press.
- Das Wilhelm, Amara. 2004. *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex: Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism*. Xlibris Corporation. E-book: ISBN: 9781450080576.
- Encyclopedia Britannica*. “Li. Chinese Philosophy”. [www.britannica.com/topic/li-Chinese-philosophy](http://www.britannica.com/topic/li-Chinese-philosophy) (Accessed 30 Mar. 2022).
- Francoeur, Robert T. 1992. Sexuality and Spirituality: The Relevance of Eastern Traditions. *Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S.*, 20 (4): 1–8.
- Francoeur, Robert T., and Raymond J. Noonan (eds.). 2004. *The Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*. Bloomington: Continuum. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199754700.001.0001>
- Ha, Shinae. 2020. Femininity under the wartime system and the symptomacy of female same-sex love. In: *Queer Korea*, ed. Todd A. Henry, 146–174. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpn09.8>
- Han, Heesok. 2004. Women’s Life During the Choson Dynasty. *International Journal of Korean History*, vol. 6(1):113–160.
- Han, Hyunwoo. 2000. Hong Suk-Chun Comes out Some More with Mini-bio. *The Chosun Ilbo*. [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2000/12/26/2000\\_122661301.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2000/12/26/2000_122661301.html) (Accessed. 25 Jan. 2023).

- Helkama, Klaus. 2009. *Moraalipsykologia*. Helsinki: WS Bookwell Oy. Edita Publishing Oy.
- Hilton, Anne. 2008. *Out of the closet and onto the big screen: Portrayals of homosexuality in Korean cinema*. Master of the Arts Dissertation, University of Columbia.
- Human Rights Watch. 2019. *South Korea: Military ‘Sodomy’ Law Violates Human Rights*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/07/south-korea-military-sodomy-law-violates-rights> (Accessed 22 Mar. 2022).
- Human Rights Watch. 2021. *‘I Thought of Myself as Defective’: Neglecting the Rights of LGBT Youth in South Korean Schools*, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/09/14/i-thought-myself-defective/neglecting-rights-lgbt-youth-south-korean-schools> (Accessed 22 Mar. 2022).
- Human Rights Watch. 2021. *World Report 2021: South Korea*. [www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/south-korea](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/south-korea) (Accessed. 22 Mar. 2022).
- Human Rights Watch. 2022. *South Korea. Events of 2022*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/south-korea> (Accessed. 25 Jan. 2023).
- ILGA-Europe. 2020. *Rainbow Europe 2020 / ILGA-Europe*, <https://ilga-europe.org/report/rainbow-europe-2020/>
- Ilyon. 2006. *Samguk Yusa. Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms and Ancient Korea*. Transl. by Taehung Ha and Grafton K. Mintz. Silk Pagoda. E-book: ISBN: 9781596543485.
- Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin, and B. Puranen. (eds.). 2014. *World Values Survey: Round One – Country-Pooled Datafile Version*. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.
- Kim, Minah. 2022. Religious Governance as Collaboration for the Resolution of Disgust: The Case of Protestantism in South Korea. *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 11: 1097. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111097>
- Kim, Sang-un (김상운). 2014. 고승과 소년의 사랑 묘사한 이규보 “뭐가 해로우랴” (Goseung-gwa sonyeon-ui sarang myosahan Lee Gyu-bo ‘Mweoga haerourya’). *The Donga Ilbo*. <https://www.donga.com/news/Culture/article/all/20141218/68606425/1> (Accessed: 25 Jan. 2023).

- Kim, Young-Gwan, and Sook-Ja, Hahn. 2006. Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, vol. 8, no. 1: 59–65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050500159720>
- Knapp, Keith N. 2009. "Three fundamental bonds and five constant virtues: Sāngāng wūcháng". *China Connect U*, <https://chinaconnectu.com/wp-content/pdf/ThreeFundamentalBondsandFiveConstantVirtues.pdf> (Accessed 27 Mar. 2022).
- Kwon Kim, Hyun-young, and John (Song Pae), Cho. 2011. The Korean Gay and Lesbian Movement 1993 – 2008. From „identity” and „community” to „human rights”. In: *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, eds. Giwook Shin and Paul Chang, 206–227. London: Routledge.
- LeBlanc, Bruce. 2015. Envisioning Homosexuality within Daoism - The Orientation and Sexual Dimensions of Yin and Yang. *International Journal of Behavioral Research & Psychology*, 3 (8): 151–156. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19070/2332-3000-1500027>
- Lee, Peter H. 2013. *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks: The Haedong Kosung Chon*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Lim, Hyun Sung, and McNown Johnson, Miriam. 2001. Korean Social Work Students’ Attitudes Toward Homosexuals. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 37(3): 545–554.
- Murray, Stephen O. 2002. *Homosexualities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Naaranoja, Kata R. 2016. *South Korean University Students’ Attitudes toward Homosexuality and LGBT Issues*. Master of Arts Dissertation. University of Helsinki. [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/162883/Naaranoja\\_Kata\\_Pro%20gradu\\_2016.pdf](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/162883/Naaranoja_Kata_Pro%20gradu_2016.pdf)
- Oh, Hyeonggeun (오형근). 1996. 묘정 (Myojeong). In: *한국민족문화대백과사전 (Hangug Minjog Munhwa Daebaeggwa sajeon; Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture)*, <https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Article/E0018885> (Accessed 27 Mar. 2022).
- Parent, Mike C.; DeBlaere, Cirleen; Moradi, Bonnie (June 2013). Approaches to Research on Intersectionality: Perspectives on Gender, LGBT, and Racial/Ethnic Identities. *Sex*

- Roles*, 68 (11–12): 639–645. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-013-0283-2>
- Rayor, Diane, and Andre, Lardinois. 2014. *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rurarz, Joanna P. 2009. *Historia Korei*. Warszawa: Dialog.
- Rutt, Richard. 1961. The Flower Boys of Silla (Hwarang): Notes on the Resources. *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society vol. XXXVIII*. Seoul: Korea Branch, Royal Asiatic Society. [http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/transactions/VOL38/KORS0749D\\_VOL38.pdf](http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/transactions/VOL38/KORS0749D_VOL38.pdf) (Accessed: 25 Jan. 2023).
- Singer, Colin, Kim, Pilho. 2011. Three periods of Korean queer cinema: Invisible, Camouflage, and Blockbuster. *Acta Koreana*, 14(1): 117–136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18399/acta.2011.14.1.005>
- SOGILAW. 2017. *한국 LGBTI 인권현황 2016. 한국어-영어 합본 발간* (*Hangug LBGTI ingweon hyeonhwang 2016. Hangugeo-youngeo habbon balgan; Human Rights Situation of LGBTI in South Korea 2016*). 22 July 2017, <https://sogilaw.org/70?category=588043> (Accessed 27 Mar. 2022).
- Stonewall, 2018. Stonewall Global Workplace Briefings 2018: South Korea. [stonewall.org.uk. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/south\\_korea\\_global\\_workplace\\_briefing\\_2018.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/south_korea_global_workplace_briefing_2018.pdf) (Accessed 22 Mar. 2022).
- Suh, Dongjin. 2001. Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea. *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 40, no. 3/4: 65–78. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v40n03\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v40n03_04)
- Thacker, Todd Cameron. 2013. Wu Chang. In: *The Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao, 660. Routledge: Abingdon.
- Thoreson, Ryan. 2022. *South Korean Court Limits Military ‘Sodomy’ Law*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/25/south-korean-court-limits-military-sodomy-law> (Accessed. 25 Jan. 2023).
- Todd, Henry A. 2020. Introduction: Queer Korea: Toward a Field of Engagement. In: *Queer Korea*, ed. Todd, A. Henry, 1–52. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpn09.4>
- Williams, Sophie. 2023. The South Korean drag queen raising LGBT awareness. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64102833> (Accessed. Jan 25. 2023).

- Woo, Hyunjoo. 2017. *The stories of South Korean religious lesbians: The voices of the women struggling with ceaseless conflicts*. Master of Arts Dissertation. Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.  
[https://library2.smu.ca/bitstream/handle/01/27084/Woo\\_Hyunjoo\\_MASTERS\\_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://library2.smu.ca/bitstream/handle/01/27084/Woo_Hyunjoo_MASTERS_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Yi, Huso. 2004. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviours. In: *The Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*, eds. Francoeur, Robert T., and Raymond, J., Noonan, 947–949. Bloomington: Continuum. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199754700.001.0001>
- Youn, Gahyun. 1996. „Do Human Rights Exist for Korean Gay Men and Lesbians?” *Stigma, Human Rights, and Sexual Orientation – International Perspective*. Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada August 9-13, 1996.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED400505.pdf>
- Youn, Gahyun. 2017. Attitudinal Changes Toward Homosexuality During the Past Two Decades (1994-2014) in Korea. *Korea Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 65, no. 2: 100–116. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1310512>

## List of reviewers

Anna Diniejko-Wąs (Senior Lecturer, University of Warsaw, Poland)  
Choi Seoyoon (Professor, GIST, South Korea)  
Han Laehee (Professor, Soongsil University, Baird College of Liberal Arts, Seoul, South Korea)  
Lee Minjung (Lecturer, Seoul National University, South Korea)  
Lee Yeong Mi (Research Professor, Inha University, South Korea)  
Na Jonghyun (Research Professor, Seoul National University, South Korea)  
Park Jongseong (Professor, Korea National Open University, Seoul, South Korea)  
Yoo Hyun Jae (Professor, Gyeongsang National University, South Korea)

## 심사위원들

나중현 (연구교수, 서울대학교, 대한민국)  
박종성 (교수; 한국방송통신대학교, 서울, 대한민국)  
안나 디니에이코-몽스 (전임 강사; 바르샤바대학교, 폴란드)  
유현재 (교수, 경상국립대학교, 대한민국)  
이민정 (강사, 서울대학교, 대한민국)  
이영미 (연구교수, 인하대학교, 대한민국)  
최서윤 (교수, 광주과학기술원, 대한민국)  
한래희 (교수; 송실대학교 베어드학부, 대한민국)