

**Art and Design  
Faculty of Humanities**

**Exilic Experiences and Creative Practice:  
Insights from the lives and art of Scholar-Artists exiled on Cheju  
Island during the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910)**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
Curtin University**

**November 2012**

## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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## **Abstract**

During the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), under Korea's exile system, hundreds of scholar artists and politicians were prosecuted for political crimes including disobedience to the royal command or to political policies. Of the hundreds of regions around the Korean peninsula to which the exiles were banished, Cheju Island, located some 140 kilometres away from the South Korean mainland in the East China Sea, was one of the most notorious. Choson exiles were banished from their hometowns and their movements severely restricted within their places of exile on the distant island. The exiles were forced to adapt to a life of isolation amongst suspicious local islanders and their unfamiliar local customs, religions and rituals. Additionally, unpredictable climatic conditions, infertile land, contaminated water systems, disease, and poor supply of everyday necessities such as food and medical care led some exiles to succumb to despair and lose all hope and will, while for others such harsh conditions fuelled their artistic creativity to new levels. Many exiles made art and literature their primary avenue for discharging their thoughts and emotions of loneliness, despair and anguish. Today, their outputs form an invaluable window into the lives of the Cheju Island exiles during the period.

The aim of this research is to examine the exilic experiences of three notable scholar artists who were exiled to Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty: Kim Jeong (1486-1521), Lee Geun (1614-1662) and Kim Chonghui (1786-1856). By examining the artists' personal letters, poetry, calligraphy, records, paintings and other works of art and literature, as well as other remaining historical records, this thesis presents insight into the lives and experiences of some of the politically prosecuted exiles of the period. Kim Chonghui's artistic achievements during his nine years in exile, which have been lauded as having made an enormous contribution to Korean art history, stemmed from his exilic experiences on the island. Likewise, Kim Jeong left writings, which were later compiled into two collections, providing insight into some of the pain and despair of life in exile on Cheju Island. Lee Geun left a journal and a record detailing his personal experiences and emotions during exile.

Western exile literature suggests that, though exile can be a miserable period of suffering, it may also present an opportunity for positive self-reflection and

cultivation of one's creativity. It would assert that the political, cultural, social and material circumstances an exile is subjected to during his sentence, in combination with his will to turn his plight into an opportunity, would impact upon his creativity. However, this research has found that the exiles' experiences were so physically and psychologically torturous and demanding that their mentality bore little room for optimism. This research proposes that their artistic and literary pieces were more the products of a struggle to overcome their pains than the results of any positive willpower to convert misfortune into opportunity.

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## **Acknowledgements**

During the long haul of researching and writing this thesis, my thoughts, way of life and perspective of the world have experienced significant change. It has served as a precious and valuable opportunity to ruminate upon my life thus far. Although the writing process, at times, brought distress and loneliness, at the same time it awarded me the power of self-control, and feelings of disconnection from the outside world brought me the opportunity to build my own space.

Enormous thanks must go to my supervisor, Professor Christopher Crouch, who at a critical time of my thesis guided me through the final stages to completion. I would also like to express my deep appreciation for my thesis committee members: Associate Professor Julian Goddard, Dr Ann Schilo and Simon Blond.

Dr Terence Love has been a crucial source of mental support throughout the long and daunting process who constantly reminded me of the importance of maintaining a work-life balance. It is his kind advice, patience and guidance that urged me to press on to the finish line and for this I am most grateful.

I must thank Dr Hyun Chang for his advice during the initial stages of my research, and Mr Changseok Ko for providing me with invaluable sources of translation material before they were published. I am also grateful to Cheju University's Professor Seongbo Oh and his many Masters students for their great contribution.

Many thanks go to all who helped me collect research material. Although it would be beyond my capacity to name them all, I thank the staff members at the Seoul National University library who helped with the photocopying process; to the managers of the site where Kim Chonghui's exile house is located who, despite the blistering cold and snowstorm, kindly supplied detailed expert information and resources; and the scholars at the Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics for their patience in answering my many questions.

Sincere thanks go to my friend Fong Yeng Soon and her husband Teng-kee Tan, who helped with the arduous process of deciphering Chinese characters; Miss Song for

proofreading my draft thesis; and Ms Tracy Hayward for editing my final copy on such short notice.

Finally, I thank my family for their patience and support throughout the entire process.

## **Notes on Transliteration**

The surnames of some Korean references constantly overlap throughout this thesis because some common surnames are shared by millions of Koreans. The most common Korean surname of all, Kim, is shared by approximately 20 per cent of the South Korean population. Hence, a large proportion of references used in this thesis are inevitably to those with the surname Kim.

In some countries including Korea, one's surname comes before the forename. Any Korean names mentioned in this thesis have been written in accordance with this convention.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This research emerges from the candidate's interest in how the exiled artists of the world (whether they were exiled forcefully or otherwise) lived their lives and practiced art in their places of exile. The candidate had a personal interest in Korean artists in exile, especially those sent to Cheju Island, because she spent her youth on Cheju Island and is currently in voluntary exile (immigration) in Australia. Even after happily calling Australia home for more than 15 years, deeply entrenched ideas of her roots meant the new territory often felt like a place 'far from home.' Her experiences of transferring from rooted territory to a new land and culture cultivated a desire to investigate how historical figures lived in confinement in unfamiliar territory. Moreover, the candidate was interested in understanding how their art practices affected their lives in exile. This has led her to examine other artists in voluntary exile, their lives and artistic activities, and the lives of forcefully or voluntarily exiled Western artists. These investigations eventually led the candidate to form a particular interest in the experiences of artists of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) who were forcefully exiled to her previous home, Cheju Island, located some 140 kilometres away from the South Korean mainland in the East China Sea.

This thesis focuses on the conditions of exile the artists were subjected to on Cheju Island, an open air prison and a colony of exile during the Choson Dynasty, and how they expressed their mental and physical pain through letters, poetry and paintings. Exiles' experiences, circumstances and mental states are usually mentioned only briefly in much of the existing research on Choson exiles, for example as background information in introductory paragraphs. Their artistic achievements, however, have received much more attention. Much of the existing body of research on Choson exiles has also focused primarily on Korean exile without venturing into the exilic history and notions of other countries. Hence, this thesis aims to address these issues by examining the mental, spiritual, emotional and personal experiences that Choson exiles were subjected to for crimes that were, at least by today's standards, often minor or unjustly arbitrated.

Additionally, this thesis aims to identify the relationship between the exilic experiences and creative practices of the Choson literary artists on Cheju Island. Western literature on exile suggests that although forceful exile can be a miserable period of suffering, it can also be developed into an opportunity for self-reflection and cultivation of one's creativity, with an ultimately positive outcome. The critical analysis in this research demonstrates that several environmental factors were highly influential in the establishment of such positive outcomes for some artists: the political, cultural, social and material circumstances that influenced their creative practice, as well as the positivity and fervour with which they endeavoured to seize the opportunity to practise their talents in dire circumstances.

Another aim of this thesis is to analyse the emergence of exile studies and creativity by examining historical and current studies of exile literature in general, and tracing an array of Korean historians' concepts of exile. Some Cheju Island exile artists and literati produced exceptional exile writing and artwork that later had substantial influence on mainstream Korean art and literature. The lives and work of exiles who were skilled in the three perfections, however, have received less veneration from researchers. A review of the literature also reveals a relative lack of in-depth analyses of the personal experiences of Korean exiles compared to those that have been conducted in Western studies. This is possibly because Western studies have examined living individuals with first-hand experience of exile, whereas this is clearly impossible in the study of historical figures of the Choson Dynasty who died centuries ago. Korean studies could nevertheless benefit firstly by accessing the Choson exiles' accounts of their experiences in historical documents; and secondly, by shifting towards an approach similar to that often taken in Western studies where exile is researched not only as a cultural and political phenomenon, but also as an examination of the exiled artists' mental and physical state.

Another possible reason for the tendency of existing studies to overlook the personal lives of Choson exiles lies in the possibility that exile during the Choson Dynasty is regarded by many modern researchers as a systematic policy that was set by national law, a historical form of punishment for criminals. In other words, it may be regarded as a distant historical and political phenomenon that was once a common and

inevitable by-product of politics, but not one that is easy to sympathise with today. This view has contributed to a general tendency of existing research to focus on the art forms, styles and motifs of exiles' work rather than on the personal experiences, occurrences and conditions they faced. Again, this information gap could be filled by taking a more ontological approach to the lives of Choson exiles, and this is one of the aims of this thesis.

The evaluation of exilic experiences and creativity through paintings, poetry and personal letters has been a key methodology of this thesis. There is a lack of existing research material on the conditions of exile as it is not widely recognised as a genre within which to analyse exiles' artwork and experiences. This may be because existing research has rarely looked beyond the exiled artists' finished art pieces.

In an effort to engage in the tasks and aims outlined above, this research focuses on three Choson scholar-artists: Kim Jeong (1486-1521), Lee Geun (1614-1662) and Kim Chonghui (1786-1856). These artists, who were exiled to Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty, are recognised in Korea as artists skilled in the 'three perfections': a form of bodywork that combined painting, calligraphy and poetry. This research analyses the spiritual and transcendental elements (emotional, visual and linguistic expression) in painting and the associated letters, poetry and journals of the three scholar exiles.

Existing research on exiled scholar artists of the Choson Dynasty is largely restricted to publicly renowned exiles. Because of this, many lesser-known artists have little attention in past research, despite the aesthetic richness of their work and lives (Cho 2003, 1; Kim 2006, 3). Lee Geun and Kim Jeong and their literary work and status as politicians and scholars have been documented to some degree, but the fact that they were skilled in painting, especially in the three perfections, has failed to attract much attention from researchers. Despite their artistic talents they are relatively unknown to the Korean public, and with the exception of some superficial references there is little existing research material on their work and history. The two exile artists have been selected for analysis in this thesis for these reasons.

The primary focus of this thesis, however, is the scholar exile Kim Chonghui, whose

work is renowned in Korea but whose personal experiences and moments of artistic creativity during exile have received little attention. This thesis uses a critical realist point of view to cross-reference the information available about his life, his relationships and his attitudes (as inferred from his letters, poetry and paintings); the historical and conceptual aspects of philosophy that he experienced, learned and valued; and his art. Such critical realist analysis differs significantly from the perspectives evident in existing literature about the artist, most of which either illustrate his life using semi-fiction or focus predominantly on his art, particularly his calligraphy.

This thesis also reviews the exile system of the Choson Dynasty with a focus on the history, punishment methods and social effects of the exile system in a political and historical context. In addition, it will investigate the history of Cheju Island before the formation of the colony of exile, the impact the arrival of exiles had on the island's communities, and the conditions exiles faced.

## **Background**

The Korean government in the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) employed an exile system influenced by Ming China (1368-1644) as a means to banish and eliminate political rivals and those who caused controversy during the hostile political circumstances of the time (Yang 1984, 53-54; Rhyi 2005, 186). Choson society was held together by a form of central reigning government, and with acts of reinforcement in place, it was possible to tighten the regulation of officials as concrete law (Jang 2000, 24). Under the system, hundreds of Korean intellectuals, politicians and literary artists were banished by the Korean government, often for life, to sparsely inhabited regions and islands where they faced lives of poverty and seclusion (Han 1990,174). This was considered by the government as an act of charity—a generous and compassionate alternative to execution. Most exiles were politicians, scholars and outspoken critics of the government who became scapegoats of political oppression. In the case of political exile, many never repented because they knew that their punishment was the result of defamation, whereas those exiled for other crimes often expressed regret (Ko 1986, 55).



More than two hundred people, including politicians and scholar-artists, were sentenced to exile on Cheju Island. During the Choson period, the island was known as a place scarcely fit for human life and was one of the most notorious exile destinations among the hundreds of exile regions around the Korean peninsula. The island is of interest to this study not only because of its diverse indigenous customs, religious history and imperial rituals but also due to the scholar-officials who were forcefully sent there. In official historical records, the island was regarded as a land of serious felons guilty of crimes of disobedience to the royal command or to political policies. Some serious offenders were under constant surveillance and restricted from communicating with anyone outside their place of confinement.

Kim Jeong (1486-1521), a descendant of the 37th king of the Silla Kingdom, Kyung sun, was a political victim in the period between early and middle Choson, a period of great change. Any Choson nobleman involved in politics during this period was at risk of exile, as Yang (2011) notes. During his political career, Kim Jeong was exiled as a result of opposition from dissenters of the political reform he and his faction members supported. After Kim Jeong joined a group of Choson scholars and politicians in a violent *Sahwa* uprising (discussed further in Chapter 2) which aimed to reshape Choson society, his passionate efforts to bring positive change to the country led to his banishment to Cheju Island. Before he was executed by poisoning at the age of 36, Kim Jeong left behind writings (some of which was later compiled in *Chungamjib*, a two-volume collection, and *Cheju Pungtorock*) describing the natural characteristics of Cheju Island's climate and customs, as well as poems revealing some of the pain and despair of life in exile on the island.

Kim Jeong was a politician, scholar, and an artist known to be exceptionally talented in the three perfections. However, his exile sentence, which he served for two years before he met his end on the island, stifled his many talents and skills. He was a Confucian who studied Confucianism extensively, and under its influence he was devoted to his family, especially to his mother, and was a loyal servant to the king. Before his exile he enjoyed painting birds and flowers, composed many poems, and lived life with diligence. Greatly saddened by the islanders' poor standard of living, he endeavoured to improve the poor cultural foundations of the island that were

largely a result of its physical isolation. Although he was a highly influential figure among the island's residents, and the period of his exile sentence was relatively short, it appears that he spent many of his days on the island in loneliness and regret. He did not leave behind many pieces of art but he is known to have been especially adept at painting birds.

Lee Geun (1614-1662) was another artist talented in the three perfections who was also fond of painting birds and flowers. A grandson of King Seonjo (1552-1608), Lee was born during a period of political turmoil in the Choson period. Though he had enjoyed a prosperous lifestyle of the ruling classes in his youth, the fate of he and his entire family were to take an unexpected turn. When Lee Geun was 15 years old his father, Lee Gong (1588-1628), became involved in a plot to reinstate King Gwanghaegun (1575-1641) to the throne. He was sentenced for treason and exiled to Jindo, an island in the south Jeolla province. In the same year, at the age of 41, Lee Gong was sentenced to death and was forced to take his own life by drinking lethal poison. Because of his father's treason, the rest of the family—Lee Geun's old mother, three brothers and two sisters, were sentenced exile to Cheju Island. Lee Geun spent approximately eight years in exile with his family. During these years he endured difficult circumstances as did most other exiles, but because Lee had not been exiled for his own crime he may have not received the usual irrational and unjust treatment from others. Years later, Lee Geun was freed after his father was posthumously acquitted of his crime. This was only after Lee Geun had experienced great mental and physical suffering, battled many contagious diseases and witnessed the deaths of those he was close to, including his younger sister. His palate, which was presumably accustomed to fancy food, had to adjust to daily meals of millet, and the family's exile home was infested with snakes and insects. Lee Geun left important historical testimonies: *Cheju Pungtogi*, a detailed record of his exilic experiences similar to that of Kim Jeong, and *Kyuchangyugo*, a journal of exile. Lee Geun, like Kim Jeong, was intelligent, and as an artist skilled in the three perfections left behind many paintings. Influenced by his royal family, Lee Geun frequently painted elegant and proud white herons and cranes. It is generally believed that Lee Geun painted after his release but not during his time on Cheju Island.

Kim Chonghui's (1786-1856) great-grandmother was Princess Hwasoon, the second daughter of King Youngjo (1694-1776), the 21st king of the Choson Dynasty, and hence Kim Chonghui had been born into a royal in-law lineage. With royal support from his family, he had a distinguished childhood and a good education. In his teenage years, however, Kim's life took turns in several unfortunate directions, starting with various family crises such as the deaths of his biological mother and close relatives. Despite these setbacks, he successfully continued in his career as a scholar and government officer, and his achievements earned him a good reputation. However, Kim's later life was plunged into deep crisis by his conflict with an oppositional political faction, and in 1840 he was sentenced to exile on Cheju Island at the age of 55, where he was incarcerated for nine years. His artistic achievements during these nine years have earned praise as an enormous contribution to Korean art history, and consequently Kim has been lauded as one of the greatest artists in Korean history. His artistic development distinguished him from other exile artists in that while others limited their scope of work to producing narratives of their lives in exile, his practice of art was seemingly without boundaries. The praise for his artistic achievements, however, has overshadowed aspects of his exilic experiences, and so this research aims to shed light on a more personal account of his state of mind and the conditions of exile he faced on Cheju Island.

### **Leading to the Research Problem**

Many scholars of the Choson Dynasty were skilled in the three perfections because these skills were tested as part of *kwageo*, the highest-level state examination used to recruit ranking officials during the Choson Dynasty. Although the Choson exile system persecutory and destroyed intellectuals' creative capacities, a small number of artists managed to use their exilic experience to produce works of art depicting their emotional turbulence and spiritual quest, mainly in the form of the three perfections (painting, poetry and calligraphy), gaining inspiration from their surroundings and experiences in their new environment. Such work consisted of manifestations of inner and outer exilic experiences, whether in the form of literary works such as journal writing, letters or poetry, or pictorial images such as paintings. These form an outline and evidence of their time in exile.

Western studies suggest that despite dire circumstances, many exiled artists, regardless of personal background, often used creative practice as a means of alleviating the fear and pain of a life in exile and that, for some, these creative practices led to positive outcomes in one way or another. Edward Said (2000b, 173) notes that ‘exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.’ He observes that, although from an exile’s understandably pessimistic perspective their circumstances are detrimental, they may also bring new vision that leads to a rediscovery of oneself as an artist and may even signal a new life (186). Thus, the time and experience of exile may serve as a positive opportunity for creativity, as well as a chance to look back upon life. From this perspective some researchers have focused on the positive outcomes; that is, the many achievements of those who have experienced exile.

It is, however, important that researchers ensure their research is not one-sided. Suleiman (1996, 283) questions whether exile could, in reality, bring a ‘spurt to creativity’ or the ‘opposite’ effect. As Said argues:

[T]here are stories portraying exile as a condition that produces heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in a person’s life. But these are no more than stories, [an] effort to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of any exile are permanently undermined by his or her sense of loss’ (Said 1984, 49).

Said’s message appears to be that positive appraisal of the exiles’ success stories without recognition of their suffering is a glaring contradiction. It is a firm reminder that the success was a by-product of the artists’ pain and loss. Analysing only the outcomes—the exiles’ artistic success—could lead one to believe all exiles achieved something during their ordeal, but from another perspective it is entirely possible and probable that many artistically talented exiles lived lives of oppression and were denied the chance to let their talents flourish. Current research argues that in addition to the artistic success of some exiles, the conditions that led other exiles to artistic failure should be given consideration. An argument needs to be established as to

whether a new way of life in a new environment gave exiles fresh artistic inspiration and served as momentum for new creations. Existing research on Choson exiled artists often focuses on the accomplishments of a successful figure. Artists who accomplished little during their exile, on the other hand, are quickly and easily forgotten. This thesis proposes that due attention be given to the artists whose exceptional artistic talent was obscured by the constraints of exile. Exile may offer an individual a separate space and time and thus a chance for introspection, but it is an aim of this thesis to examine whether this was solely an ideal environment for artists to unleash their creativity, or one that was also accompanied by inner conflict and pain.

It would be difficult to discuss creativity in the Choson Dynasty without an understanding of the artist's internalisation, as the aesthetic principles are connected to one another. Creativity joins one's internal instinctive and emotive response, according to the philosophical assumptions in the three perfections (Murck and Fong 1991, 64). Based on this supposition, this research endeavours to re-evaluate the relationships within the artists' inner experiences and creative activity during exile.

As far as the candidate can ascertain, Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui—the three artists on whom this research focuses—have not been the subject of any research efforts to understand the deep inner world of exile artists in Korea. Existing research on Kim Chonghui is nonetheless diverse. His religious philosophy (Lim 2006; Shin 2005), relationship with Chinese scholars (Cho 2003) and literary work (Yang 1983, 1987, 1991; Jeong 2008; Choi 1976) have been thoroughly researched. Fujitsuka Chikashi (1879-1948), a Japanese scholar, was the first non-Korean scholar to take an interest in Kim Chonghui as a researcher and has made valuable contributions to knowledge of the exile artist.<sup>1</sup> Researchers in general have considered Kim Chonghui's achievements a case of 'optimism,' regarding him one of the greatest exile artists of the Choson Dynasty. This might be the case if judged solely on his list of achievements, but the question lies in the definition or standard of 'success.' If his life and mental and physical health were crushed beyond recovery,

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<sup>1</sup> (See more in Fujitsuka, 2009)

would it be fair to label him a success solely based upon his magnificent artwork? Was Kim's successful creativity really the result of a positive attitude and, if so, how did this positive attitude help him, as Said (1994 and 2000a) argues, in 'challenging the system' in a new environment?

Such questions have yet to be answered, largely due to the general trend in Korea's exile studies where the structure and content of Choson scholars' literary works, such as poetry or letters, have received most of the attention. Poetry, in particular, has been a favoured subject matter in the study of Korean exile literature, and Korean art historians have mainly focused on interpreting Choson artists' paintings. Meanwhile, the concrete reality of their lives, the physical conditions they encountered during exile and their emotional and physical states have largely been overlooked. In comparison to perceptions of the genre of exile studies in some other countries, the perceptions commonly adopted in Korea are constrained. According to the research carried out in this thesis, many Choson artists were skilled in the three perfections, yet their exilic experiences and creativity have not been perceived as a genre in past studies. Yang Soonpil and Yang Gingeun, a father and son both born and raised on Cheju Island, have dedicated themselves to researching the island's exiles, but their research, like those mentioned previously, takes on a literary approach and focuses mainly on analysing the exiles' letters and poetry. Yang Soonpil (1984) discusses the Cheju Island exiles' everyday routines and the influences of the island's climate on their lives by scrutinising their poetry and compiling a short article, but this can be extended further by examining these elements from the artists' perspectives.

There is a lack of specific research focusing on the impact of an environment like Cheju Island, the 'land of exiles.' Additionally, there has yet to be comprehensive research conducted on the influence of the conditions of the island on exile artists' art practices and on the visual or verbal language through which such influences were expressed.

## **Research questions**

The central questions addressed in this research are as follows:

- In what ways do the visual or verbal language of Choson scholar exiles express a life of sequestration on Cheju Island and how does this relate to their artistic practice (paintings and associated writings)?
- Could Said's concept of a positive way of life in exile be applied to the Cheju Island scholar artists?
- Is it fair to judge that there was an interaction between Cheju Island scholar artists' exilic experience and creativity and that exilic experience itself can be a 'spur to creativity' that brings a 'positive outcome'?
- How can we define the Cheju Island scholar artists' 'particular sense of achievement' in a realm beyond their life in exile?

To answer these questions with regard to the three artists Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui, there are several issues to be addressed: what creativity meant for them during their time in exile; how they engaged with the moment of creativity; how their artwork represented their mindset; how they structured the visual and verbal meaning to be communicated; and what methods they chose to cultivate their new identity. This research briefly discusses the allegories and meanings imbued in Choson paintings. It will uncover symbolic and allegorical meanings that usually convey notions of the visual, verbal, physical, and spiritual realm. By identifying and classifying artistic symbols, the meanings and allegories which relate to the artists' psychological implications and which formulate exilic experiences under appropriate contexts will be discussed.

## **Significance of the research**

This thesis critically analyses the cultural and historical context, neglected traditional values, and spiritual identity and self-identity in the confined exile environment. It is proposed that this research will help to add 'exile art' to studies of Korean traditional aesthetics, art theory and cultural education. The proposed new approach to studying Korean exile art points to the establishment of a new framework that includes exile art and Korean study, and a means to evaluate the intrinsic value of exile art. The research outcomes will introduce the potential for spiritual fulfilment of the rift between Korean artworks and 'exile art,' and will contribute to the knowledge of Korean art history by revealing forgotten attributes of exiled scholar artists. Presenting a broader picture of understanding of exile in Korea will contribute to a better understanding of Korean history. This research builds on literature from the past to develop its potential in ways that have been overlooked to date.

Traditional Choson paintings have become a less attractive topic of interest for some researchers (and thus under-researched and underestimated) due to the influence of Western and Japanese art which brought cross-cultural impact on modernisation and an identity crisis in the Korean art industry (Lee 2000, 28). According to Jungmann (2004, 14), Korean art 'has not gained the attention it deserves' from East Asia or the West despite extensive research by Korean art historians. No English-language research that focuses primarily on exile artists on Cheju Island and their exilic experiences and creativity has been published to date. In this context, it is important to shed new light on visual and verbal sources relating to exile artists who have contributed to traditional art and literature in Korea. Finally, this research will conclude with an analysis of the exiles' legacy in Korean history, which has motivated contemporary scholars and writers internationally. It is hoped that this study will spark re-evaluations and new reflection on the forgotten lives of the exiles of the Choson Dynasty.

## **Historical sources**

This research bases the majority of its observations and analyses on primary sources.



Taking into account the importance of observing other exiles' experiences, it refers to Kim Jeong's and Lee Geun's lives in exile in relation to their creative practices. The primary sources include a Korean translation of Kim Jeong's *Chungumjib*, a published collection of the exile's poems and writings, and a Korean translation of Lee Geun's *Kyuchangyugo*. *Cheju Kogimunjib*, published by the Cheju Culture Centre (2007), comprises of two parts: Kim Jeong's *Cheju Pungtorock* and Lee Geun's *Cheju Pungtogi*, which the exiles wrote on Cheju Island. Owing to a lack of published literature on these two artists, secondary sources are scarce and hence primary sources will be referenced most often. Among the work of other researchers that will be used, one of the most significant historical references on Cheju Island is *Tamla Munhunjib*, published by the Cheju Education Committee (1976), which details the island's customs, regional products, defense, education, climate, and geological features.

In the analysis of Kim Chonghui, the artist's poems and letters, especially those contained in volumes 1 (1995), 2 (1985), and 3 (1996) of *Wandangjib*, have been combed for relevant pieces. The *Wandangjib* volumes are published compilations of Kim's letters and poems, mostly translated by classics translators from their original Chinese to Korean. The letters Kim wrote his wife in Korean, which are compiled in *Chusa Hangul Pyonji* (2004), will also be analysed.

Scholars' contemporary writings and research materials will form the secondary resources in this thesis. Because Kim Chonghui is little known outside of Korea, most research to date has been conducted within Korea. The materials used in this research have been written in Korean as well as in Chinese, as many contemporary Korean researchers still prefer using Chinese characters. Because Kim Chonghui held great interest in Chinese culture, the Chinese scholars he was influenced by, as well as their relationship to Kim, will also be investigated.

According to Cheju Culture and Art Foundation cultural assets research director Ko Changseok, in a phone interview conducted during the candidate's field research, Lee Geun's exile journal *Kyuchangyugo* has never been properly researched partly owing to the fact there is no Korean translation of the document, which is written in traditional Chinese. Fortunately, however, Ko advised the candidate that his Korean

translation of the original document was in progress and due to be published in the near future, and gave the candidate a first working copy of the translation. According to Ko, no literary work by Lee Geun, with the exception of *Cheju Pungtogi*, has been translated into Korean, and, owing to many past incidents and rebellions on Cheju Island, the majority of historical documents on Lee Geun have been destroyed by fire. Ko advised that although some short notes on *Kyuchangyugo* exist,<sup>2</sup> he knew of no one else who had translated the document in its entirety. This thesis, with reference to *Cheju Pungtogi* and the newly translated *Kyuchangyugo*, will examine Lee Geun's time in exile on Cheju Island. *Kyuchangyugo* is a short, eight-page record of his family's journey to Cheju Island and their consequent time in exile, the endemic disease his mother and other members of his family contracted and the suffering this caused, his own near-death experience with the same disease, and the day of the family's release.

This thesis includes exiled scholars' paintings and contents of personal diaries and letters to friends and family that have been collected by local organisations, museums, libraries, galleries, and Cheju University. It has placed particular importance on visualisation of the actual exile sites as a tool to realistically conceptualise the conditions and experiences of the exiles.

A selection of Kim Chonghui's paintings believed to have been painted on Cheju Island, and Kim Jeong and Lee Geun's paintings believed to have been painted before or after exile will be analysed. Images used in this research, other than paintings, were collected from various sources including galleries, museums and online as stated throughout the chapters. Materials and photographs directly obtained by the candidate during field research to Cheju Island have also been used.

The trends in Western exile literature are reviewed in the research issues section, and the conditions Choson exiles were subjected to are comparatively scrutinised. The review of Western literature focuses on the mental and psychological impact of the conditions of exile, the trouble exiles had in adjusting to a new and unfamiliar environment, the unfamiliarity of different cultures and customs, assimilation

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<sup>2</sup> (See for example, *Cheju Kigomunjib: Korean Translation and Annotation* 2007)

problems, and notions of exile and creative activity.

### **Translation issues**

Before *Hangeul*, today's Korean alphabet, was created by King Sejong (1397-1450) in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese characters were used in Korea, including in the late Choson Dynasty. Even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Kim Chonghui was born, noblemen preferred Chinese characters over *Hangeul*; thus it has been necessary for classic scholars to translate written materials from this period. Primary and secondary sources originally written in Korean or Chinese have been translated by the candidate into English unless otherwise referenced.

### **Research Methodology**

#### *Interviews, surveys and site visits*

In the course of this investigation, the candidate conducted first-hand field research at the actual site of exile on Cheju Island. This involved gathering information, conducting semi-structured interviews, recording a reflective diary, taking photographs, visiting historical sites and tracing historical sources from museums and libraries. The process of field research was undertaken through personal inspection of the exile houses and the surrounding environment. Photographs of the exile sites and their surroundings have been taken as evidence of the investigation, as well as for purposes of information gathering and historical documentation. This process of field research was invaluable: instead of relying solely on written documents during the course of the investigation, viewing the actual environment of the exile sites led to a clearer understanding of the exiles' experience and conditions in which their creativity flourished.

This research also includes descriptions of the actual structure of the exile house in which Kim Chonghui lived. The positions of its rooms, kitchen, and toilet are examined through photographs taken during field research, thereby providing deeper insight into aspects of Kim's life in exile that cannot be expressed in words alone. Therefore, photographs used in this research were taken by the candidate during her field research in Cheju Island in January 2010, unless otherwise stated. The exile

houses of Kim Jeong and Lee Geun are known to have burned down during rebellions on Cheju Island and, unlike that of Kim Chonghui, never restored.

### ***Iconographical and Iconological Analyses***

Iconological and iconographical analysis will be conducted in Chapters 4 and 6 to identify and analyse the text and imagery of the exile scholar paintings of the Choson Dynasty. This type of analysis is a method of reading the deeper meaning in a work of art by examining it within its historical, social, and philosophical context, and analysing the ideas implicated in its imagery (Cosgrove and Daniels 1989, 2). It involves identifying images, stories and allegories with reference to ‘subject matter as opposed to form’, assuming familiarity with traditionally spoken or written ideas and concepts (Panofsky 1955, 35).

Cesare Ripa developed the concept of iconography and iconology in 1592 in the text *Iconologia*. The study of iconography first began with Renaissance handbooks of symbolic imagery and followed a long tradition of theoretical and historical expression on the idea of imagery. It culminated in the terms ‘*iconography*’ and ‘*iconology*’ in the interpretation of Renaissance imagery by Aby Warburg (1866-1929) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) later formulated iconographical and iconological analysis by distinguishing between identification of inscribed symbols ‘in the narrower sense of the word’ and ‘in a deeper sense’ (Mitchell 1986, 2-3).

Iconological and iconographical analysis is well suited to this research because it provides a means of analysing ‘underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion’ (Jewitt and Leeuwen 2001, 101). The use of iconological and iconographic analysis is significant in the Korean context with regards to identifying the artistic consciousness of scholar exiles through iconic signs, underlying patterns, coding messages and images expressed in their paintings and poetry associated with their historical, cultural and religious contexts. This research will help regenerate the currently unstable history of multiple discourses on identity in Korean visual arts and may make further contributions to East Asian art.

Erwin Panofsky's (1955, 40-41) iconological and iconographical analysis method, outlined in the 'synoptical table' below, will be used for each painting:

***Synoptical Table***

OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION	ACT OF INTERPRETATION	EQUIPMENT FOR INTERPRETATION	CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION
I – <i>Primary or natural</i> subject matter- (A) factual, (B) expressional, constituting the world of artistic motifs.	<i>Pre-iconographical description</i> (and pseudo-formal analysis).	<i>Practical experience</i> (familiarity with <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).	History of <i>style</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> were expressed by <i>forms</i> ).
II – <i>Secondary or conventional</i> subject matter, constituting the world of <i>images</i> , <i>stories</i> and <i>allegories</i> .	<i>Iconographical analysis</i> in the narrower sense of the word.	<i>Knowledge of literary sources</i> (familiarity with specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).	History of <i>types</i> (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific <i>themes</i> or <i>concepts</i> were expressed by <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> ).
III – <i>Intrinsic meaning or content</i> , constituting the world of 'symbolical' <i>values</i> .	<i>Iconographical interpretation</i> in a deeper sense ( <i>Iconographical synthesis</i> ).	<i>Synthetic intuition</i> (familiarity with the <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> ), conditioned by personal psychology and 'Weltanschauung.'	History of <i>cultural symptoms</i> or 'symbols' in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> were expressed by specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i> ).

Although iconology and iconography was developed for Western art, it has proven to be especially useful in analysing non-Western art.<sup>3</sup> There is already an established

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<sup>3</sup> (See for example in Ortiz 1999: Hartman 1993: Wright 2002 and Kim 2007)

tradition of using iconology and iconography in East Asian art by Western and Eastern art historians. Iconological and iconographical analysis has undergone development in Eastern Asian art as art historians became interested in interpreting other cultural and historical contexts of study. For example, Ortiz (1999) studied Chinese landscape paintings associated with the poems in *Dreaming the Southern Song Landscape* using Panofsky's iconological and iconographical analysis. Ortiz (1999, 64) argues that while European landscape painting has 'no conventional subject matter' but only natural ones with meanings plain to the eye, Chinese landscape painting informs its iconology by the 'landscape forms, factual and expressive; the conventional or symbolic meaning carried by those forms...the particular story told by the landscape; and the socio-intellectual circumstances which give the story its contextual significance.' Ortiz illustrated the pictorial expression of poetic ideas which reflected the 'evocation of atmospheric and seasonal changes, allusion to political exile, to reflection about the illusion of phenomena' (3-4). Hartman (1993) has also studied Chinese painting in *Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-ch'uan's Crowe in Old Trees*, examining the iconography of cultural contexts, 'both literary and visual,' examining the symbolic value of the iconographic elements and articulating the symbolic meanings in the history of Chinese painting. Moreover, Rosemary Wright (2002), in *Iconology of a Korean Shamanic Icon*, examined the iconography and iconology of the classical Confucian-based tradition of Korean painting (mainly folk icons) in the Choson Dynasty. Kim (2007), in *Sign system in Korean painting*, also examined Korean traditional paintings using iconological analysis illustrating mental and physical expression and its relationship between the natural environment and the human mind within landscape paintings. Moon (2004, 2), in *Task and Methodology of the Korean Art History*, especially stressed that more iconological studies need to be conducted on Korean paintings in order to provide fragmentation in visual/verbal language in terms of its application and development.

## **Overview of the Chapters**

The seven chapters of this thesis examine some complex themes of Choson scholar artists' exilic experiences and creativity: the cause and effect of Choson exile punishment, the exile colony of Cheju Island, the conditions of exile, the exiled

artists' mental and physical conditions, and their creative practices on Cheju Island. The three artists on whom this study focuses (Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui) are examined using several different approaches. Firstly, the thesis aims to scrutinise the conditions of exile by analysing the actual environment the artists were subjected to during their time in exile. Secondly, it re-evaluates their exilic experiences in relation to their internal and external struggles by examining the letters and poems they wrote while serving time. Thirdly, their engagement with artistic creativity in the land of exile will be discussed, along with an exploration of the iconology and iconography of their paintings. Finally, it concludes with an examination of the legacies of Cheju Island and elements of Korean history that have not only motivated contemporary scholars and writers, but also sparked re-evaluations and reflections on the Choson Dynasty's forgotten lives of exile.

The current chapter describes the research problem and the research questions that have defined this research, and sets the context of the research by discussing the relevant historical backgrounds of the subject matter, identifying the significance of this research and the sources and methodology used to achieve outcomes. It concludes with a discussion of the existing literature on the topic of exile.

Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of the political, social, and cultural backdrop of the development of the exile system in the Choson Dynasty. It consists of a literature review of contextual and historical analyses and focuses on the cultural context of the banishment system and its impact on society and scholars at the time. With advances in Neo-Confucianism, the Choson Dynasty saw the formation of countless factions. Political warfare that grew beyond the king's control drove the country's politics into chaos. Meanwhile, the eat-or-be-eaten system of politics that gave birth to numerous factions led to the victimisation of countless individuals. The exile system, which had been in place since the Koryeo Dynasty, became national law that would see those ousted from politics banished to places from which they could not reasonably hope to return. Countless innocent victims met with a fate that could only end in death. This chapter will examine the ways in which such a political context affected Choson society and the eventual outcomes it brought.

Chapter 3 focuses on the physical and cultural environment of Cheju Island as a

home for exiles, painting an historical and climatic picture of the island and the contributions the exiles made. Kim Jeong's *Pungtorock*, Lee Geun's *Pungtogi*, numerous writings by other exiles and scholarly reviews and analyses will be reviewed to shed further light on the physical and cultural characteristics of the island during the Choson Dynasty. Kim Jeong and Lee Geun's records, in particular, are a good record of the island's peculiar characteristics, including its unique climate and customs.

Cheju Island was once a remote, uncultured and primitive island that accommodated over 200 exiles. The barren conditions meant that even its local residents were struggling to feed themselves, making the local communities' positions as the hosts of such large numbers of exiles an important topic for discussion. The difficult conditions that hindered access to even the most basic necessities, such as food, clothing and shelter, and the effects they had on the exiles will be investigated. Finally, the chapter will examine the efforts of many exiles to help ease the harsh reality they faced and improve education and quality of life of the residents of the largely unexplored island.

Chapter 4 looks at the life and exilic experiences of the two 'three perfections' artists Kim Jeong and Lee Geun and discusses their literary work in relation to their exilic experiences. The context of these two scholar artists' exile as depicted in their writings is also reviewed and investigated. The chapter also analyses the many pieces of poetry Kim Jeong wrote during exile, as well as Lee Geun's journal *Kyuchangyugo*. It focuses on the circumstances they faced as artists and, as is done with Kim Chonghui's paintings in Chapter 6, makes an iconographical and iconological interpretation of the paintings known to have been painted by Kim Jeong and Lee Geun before or after their exile.

Chapter 5 presents an investigation of Kim Chonghui's life and experiences: his internal and external experiences during exile as articulated in his letters and poetries. Such writings aid in interpreting the reality he faced during exile. This chapter examines his psychological and physical condition following the occurrences and circumstances that greatly affected his life and provides biographic details of his life before his exile to Cheju Island. It also paints a picture of his exile journey, his first



impressions after landing on the island and his first days there. It makes a close examination of the place of his residence on the island where he spent most of his nine years in exile. The circumstances which inevitably led to his exile will be discussed, with reference to the political circumstances of the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century Choson Dynasty. This chapter will examine his time in exile with the assumption that his formerly wealthy background made the period especially difficult to bear both mentally and physically. Kim wrote many letters to his family and friends and composed many pieces of poetry while in exile, and his expressions of his inner self and his experiences in these documents will be scrutinised.

This chapter also briefly examines the poems written on Cheju Island by other exiled poets, including An Dowon (1777-1800), Kim Chuntaek (1670-1717), Chong Chol and Yun Sondo (1587-1671), whose writings may support the understanding not only of Kim Chonghui's life but of others on the island. These poets were best known for composing poetry about their own exilic experiences. Their work has been favoured as topics for Korean literature studies and will contribute to an understanding of the context of exile of the period.

In addition, the chapter will report on the information and visual aids obtained by the candidate in the course of field research, including photographs of the reconstructed exile house of Kim Chonghui—its rooms, kitchen and toilet. Through examination and scrutiny of the actual site of Kim's exile, it is hoped that an insight into aspects of his life that are indecipherable through his writings will be gained.

Chapter 6 examines Kim Chonghui's engagement with artistic creativity on Cheju Island and forms an iconographical and iconological interpretation of his paintings and artistic criticism. It observes his paintings and creative environment to investigate visual and verbal languages of internalisation—an emotional and psychological expression embodied in the creation of artwork during exile. It is an inquiry into the core of Kim's creative engagement within the exile environment.

During his lifetime Kim Chonghui not only wrote many letters and poems but also painted numerous paintings. This thesis focuses on the iconographical and iconological meanings of the paintings he painted on Cheju Island. The fundamental

meaning of the paintings may be unintentionally or unconsciously expressed by him. These meanings are analysed firstly to study the paintings' subject matter, and secondly to examine the significance of the subject matter in social, religious and philosophical context of the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> century Choson Dynasty. Third comes a brief discussion of Kim's thoughts and philosophy as a scholar and his artistic criticism as a literary artist. Fourthly, as an examination of Kim's influences is necessary to better understand Kim's thoughts and art, the Chinese literary artists that influenced him most will be examined through relevant research materials. Drawing on his aesthetic ideas, it will observe how the expression of subjective emotions relates to the kinds of visual languages instilled in his art. Finally, his letters and poems are analysed to assist the contextual understanding of the period in which he painted his paintings and how these writings relate to his experience as an exile. It also examines the relationship between the place, the artist, and the creativity which connect Kim's exilic experiences through the process of adaptation and assimilation in a new place.

Chapter 7 summarises the research outcomes and discusses implications for the direction of future research.

### **Definitions and concepts**

Key concepts that recur throughout this thesis and which warrant translation or further explanation include exile, exilic consciousness, *guiyang*, *Kyungkook Daejeon* and *Daemyunryul*. These concepts are explained below:

Exile and exilic consciousness:

An exile is a person compelled to leave his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime), hoping to return to his fatherland when circumstances permit, but unable or unwilling to do so as long as factors that made him an exile persist.

In such circumstances as described above by Talbori (1972, 27), an exile would spend each day in despair, plagued by the uncertainty of how his or her life would end and by the scant hope of release. In parallel, Ibrahim (1996, 2) defined exilic consciousness as ‘the desire to belong ... both to where they came from and where they must live,’ and argued that the consciousness of the exile state often brought the subject ‘a sense of not belonging’ to the present place and ‘a desire to belong’ to one’s previous environment. Ibrahim also claimed that exilic consciousness ‘initiates the resistance that subject identities confront’ and defined it as a desire to ‘escape from systems of oppression’ which ‘encompass the sphere of belonging not to your own but to another people.’

#### Choson Exile: *Guiyang* and *Yubae*

Korea’s exile stems from the concept of *guiyang*—a word that originally described the process of sending one back home—meaning the punishment of depriving one from his or her official position and sending to exile. Under *guiyang*, a criminal in the Koryeo and Choson Dynasty was banished to the distant countryside or to an island and constrained to a set area. The word was later altered to take its current form of *yubae*, meaning exile.

The *Kyungkook Daejeon*, a complete collection of Choson’s fundamental code of law, defines exile as ‘the punishment given a serious criminal when the death penalty is too harrowing to be imposed to banish them to a distant location, never to return to his homeland again’ (Ko, 1986, 54). An exile sentence was considered a severe punishment second only to the death penalty, and the lack of a stipulated length of sentence meant it was, in effect, a life sentence except in the very unlikely event that the king granted a pardon (Kim 2006, 71).<sup>4</sup>

#### **Delimitations**

As Brooke-Rose (1996, 290-296) outlines, various forms of exile exist, including

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<sup>4</sup> (Kim 2006, 71, and see also in Rhyi 2005)

relocation to a foreign land in hopes of finding a better life or new artistic motivation, or a political scapegoat's banishment from his homeland, which usually leads the victim to feel 'unhappy, poor, bitter [and] nostalgic.' This thesis focuses on political exile and the lives of Korean exiles who were forced to leave their hometowns in the Choson Dynasty. The scope is limited to those who were exiled forcefully rather than as a result of voluntary will, displacement, or migration. One might argue that the domestically exiled subjects' experiences differ to that of the transnationally located, but it can also be argued that they share a similar set of experiences in that, as Grinberg & Grinberg (1989, 158) stated, 'they are bitter, resentful, [and] frustrated' and experienced 'the loss of a defining identity.' The thesis, in this regard, aims to examine the exiles' internal and external experiences.

Of the 408 exile regions of the Choson Dynasty, Cheju Island was selected as the geographical focus of this research partly because the candidate grew up there and is thus familiar with its history and culture. The three exile artists Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui and their lives, exilic experiences and creativity were selected as the primary topics of this thesis because they are the only artists, among more than 200 Choson exiles who were sent to Cheju Island, who are known to have been skilled in the three perfections.

## Literature Review: Reflections on Exilic Experiences and Creativity

The various types of exile and the individual experiences resulting from them are all unique, and analysing everyone would be a task bordering on the impossible. A restricted focus is inevitable, as the political, historical and cultural characteristics of each country and its exiles are so distinct. Even a study on the exile condition cannot always be overarching, for the individual experiences of each exile varied according to their circumstances. A literature review on exiles must similarly have set boundaries for its focus. This thesis sets that focus to exile in Korea—it reviews the notions that have been recent topics of debate within Western research circles.

The thesis is not an attempt to compare Korean exilic experiences with those of other countries, but rather refers to certain aspects of Western views on exile that have direct relevance to the present thesis. It is an attempt to identify questions and their implications by taking a new and distinctive perspective and approach that have not been assumed in the existing body of research in Korea.

There is a large body of Western research literature today on the topic of exilic experiences and creativity and conditions of exile. Paul Tabori (1972) examined the semantics of exile by addressing the controversial notions arising from a historical, political and philosophical point of view. Huma Ibrahim (1996) discussed the ‘exilic consciousness’ that most exiles may have experienced: symptoms of confused identity and belonging without belonging in the present culture and environment. Autobiographies such as Edward Said’s *Out of Place* (2000) and Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation* (1989) describe first-hand experiences of exile life, which appear to be of most critical significance in the discussion of exile literature and creativity. The exile conditions these works describe include internal and external experiences and physical surroundings. Other exiled subjects throughout Europe and the West have written about their exile experiences, whether in autobiography, letter, or prose and poetry format, describing their struggles with redefining self-identity in a new environment.<sup>5</sup> The reality of a life in exile, recorded in literary form by these individuals, appears a world separate and unbeknownst to common society. With the aid of these primary resources, studies on exile literature have accelerated into

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<sup>5</sup> (See more discussions on this topic in; DeSantis 2001; Hanne 2004 and Suleiman: 1998)

interdisciplinary areas of research that tap into psychological viewpoints, social, cultural and political phenomena and the environment of artistic creativity.

DeSantis (2001, 2) stated that exile has become an important subject matter for socio-scientific researchers in recent years, involving the study of an exile's 'emotional and cognitive state.' He noted that these studies have focused on the exiles' efforts to find new ways of life in new environments and on their notions of 'homeland,' 'identity,' and 'return.' The findings from these studies, he suggested, provide insight into exilic experiences and explore the issue of exilic conditions, in which 'contradictions, simultaneities, and dialectic tensions' are abundant.

Psychoanalytic studies of exilic experience suggest an association between the conditions to which exiles are exposed and mental and emotional trauma.<sup>6</sup> They indicate that exiles' experiences of displacement may cause emotional problems such as unconscious or disorienting anxiety, the phenomenon of exile anxiety and problems with environmental and cultural assimilation (see, for example, Grinberg & Grinberg 1989 and Akhtar 1999). These studies have found that exiles placed in unfamiliar territory often encountered problems with the 'ambivalences, adjustment, and assimilation into the new culture' as well as profound psychological problems that varied upon the conditions and circumstances of exile. Grinberg & Grinberg (1989, 19) propose that most exiles who were forced to leave their hometown were probably stricken with substantial fears; for example, the fear of 'losing established structures, fear of losing accommodation to prescribed social guidelines,' feelings of isolation, insecurity and loneliness and a weakening of a 'sense of belonging to an established social group.' They also suggest that many exiles may have suffered from 'survivor syndrome,' in which they perceived their lives as being in the land of the dead, which led to symptoms of scepticism, disillusionment, despair, bitterness, resentment, frustration and nostalgia (156-159). Tabory (1972, 17) also declares that exiles may feel the 'surface symptoms of the deepest desire to be like the others'; a desire to feel a secure sense of belonging in one place.

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<sup>6</sup> (See for example Grinberg & Grinberg 1989; Akhtar 1999; Barudy 1989 and Hollander 1998)

The implications of this can be projected into theories about the experiences of exiles in general. For example, when an individual is exiled to another country he leaves behind what may be the only territory familiar to him. As a result, memories of a normal everyday life may bring about feelings of emptiness and exhaustion due to a sort of 'psychic depletion' (Akhtar 1999, 123). Nostalgic feelings could even be considered a 'psychic luxury to the exile,' as Akhtar (1999, 126-127) suggests, which causes feelings of guilt because the 'pleasure of nostalgia ... [leaves] nothing but bitterness.' However the exact intra-psychic processes of mourning and adaptation would depend upon the conditions and circumstances of exile that are suffered by each individual.

Edward Said's sense of exilic experience is well described in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994, 407), in which he asserts that '[e]xile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexperienced, unwelcome loss.' For Said, as he defines in *Reflections on Exile* (2000, 180-181), an exile is 'anyone prevented from returning home' and who feels he is 'always out of place.' He notes that '[e]xile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider.' Said (2000b, 174) advocates that the mental and physical suffering of exiles in any country differs only in scale and time:

In other places and times, exiles had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks. The difference, of course, between earlier exiles and those of our own time is scale.

The relationship between conditions of exile and artistic creativity is noted in Western literature in discussions of ambivalence of creativity in concrete exile reality.<sup>7</sup> A topic of debate in exile cultural studies has been whether the circumstances of exile can stimulate creativity and become 'a cause for optimism' for

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<sup>7</sup> (See for example Said 2000a, 2000b, Nochlin 1996 and Suleiman 1998)

exiles who feel 'a falling away from some original wholeness and source of creativity' (Suleiman 1998, 1). Some researchers have claimed that life in exile can be a challenging time for individuals in two directions: the flip side of dichotomy, depending on the perspective of how the exiles adapt to situations by negotiating the ambivalence of positive or otherwise negative consequences for individuals.<sup>8</sup> The positive view is that the circumstance of being in exile may serve as an opportunity to re-evaluate the self and the past and present. Nochlin (1996, 318-319) states that 'the conditions of exile have especially ambiguous or even ambivalent implications' and 'enables a radical revision of home and exile.' Janet Wolff (1995, quoted in Nochlin 1996, 318-319) claims that:

[D]isplacement ... can be quite strikingly productive. First, the marginalisation entailed in forms of the relationship between places and ... of the relationship between places. Second, the same dislocation can also facilitate personal transformation, which may take the form of 'rewriting' the self, discarding lifelong habits and practices of a constraining social education and discovering new forms of self-expression.

Edward Said's notions of a positive perspective of exile are convincingly illustrated in *Reflections on Exile* (2000b), *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) and *Out of Place* (2000a). In his memoir *Out of Place* (2000a), Said describes the conditions of exile from his own experiences as an exile in Africa, Egypt and America. He conducts a critical analysis of exiles in Palestine, his country of origin. His observations on exile have to this point focused largely on the emotional aspects of the exilic experience and emphasised the trauma and suffering in a country of alienation. He saw that modern life and exile are deplorably entwined and proposes that this brings an ambivalence of positive and negative consequences for individuals. He claimed that from a positive viewpoint, time in exile can be an opportunity for some intellectuals to form a critical perspective about their culture (Said 2000b, 186).

Said (1994, 407) questions, 'what is it about them that anchors or roots them in

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<sup>8</sup> (See for example writings in Suleiman 1998, Said 1994, 2000a, and 2000b)



reality? What would you save of them, what would you give up, what would you recover?’ He suggests that in order to answer these questions, exiles need to become independent and disconnect the ‘sweetness’ of their past lives and accept that it would be ‘impossible to recapture the sweetness’ of the privileges and identity they enjoyed in their previous lives. He argues that exiles can be ‘offered a new set of affiliations’ which can be ‘develop[ed] [into] new loyalties’ and ‘[t]o refuse this state of affairs [or not] is the exile’s intellectual mission’ because ‘[i]t is [theirs], after all’ (2000b, 182-184).

Said’s concept of exile would assert that exile can lead one to view life from an alternate viewpoint. He argued that while most individuals have one culture, setting and home, exiles have two or more. This, Said (2000b, 186) asserts, ‘gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*.’ The term, according to his wife Mariam Said (Telmissany and Schwartz 2010, xv), describes two contradictory themes playing at the same time and creating a harmonious melody.’ She also notes that: ‘all of the instruments in an orchestra are equal. When another instrument leads, the one that had been leading has to listen and follow. Thus members of an orchestra learn to play in concert by leading and listening, which is crucial in interacting and forming relationships in society.’ In other words, Edward Said would consider exile as being formed by two cultures, two contradictory life experiences of old and new, and no matter how dire the circumstances for an exile in a new environment, a positive outcome can result from an exile’s positive perspective.

In describing his notions of a ‘contrapuntal vision,’ Said states that the conditions of exile may give birth to new and different experiences through which other experiences are born, ultimately giving rise to better outcomes than those of a complacent life. Said suggests that the experience of exile could facilitate conceptualisations of reality that are fresh, innovative, and provocative. He claims that:

[E]xile can produce rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it

can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future' (Said 2000b, xxxv).

Said, as cited in Barbour (2007, 293), claims that a perspective of the exile situation can be determined by 'challenging the system,' that one can find the way of life and the self and create a 'sacred space, the space of exile [which can be] in certain respects similar to a religious myth in its shaping influence on [one's] life.' Said (2000b, 173) questions, 'if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture?' adding that exile can offer 'a unique pleasure' if one can moderate between memories of the old and new environment, leading to a 'particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be' (186). Said explains that exiles have two cultures—past and present—while most people have only one culture; and the way in which exiles view and use this idea could result in more advanced literary output.

Said's idea of a positive perspective of exile presents the possibility of a positive way of life in exile, formed by extending an exile's potential and transforming a negative state into an optimistic way of life. In this way, the production of art can be 'sharpened and enhanced' by a positive perspective that would drive one to 'a particular sense of achievement' (Said 2000b, 186).

Said (2000b, 184-185) suggests the place of one's birth and upbringing is his comfort zone and that if he were to remain there he may unintentionally become trapped like a prisoner in familiar territory. He argued that a comfortable and complacent life could hinder vigorous creative activity, deny experience and encourage prejudice; thus the experience of exile, if used wisely, could allow one to 'cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.' He quotes St. Hugo thus:

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already

strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his (Said 1994, 406-407).

This argument criticises the passive want to settle in the place of one's birth and upbringing. Said (2000b, 185) asserts that the attitude described by St. Hugo is the binding requirement for one to undergo and properly record varied and specific experiences, and that if he does not adopt such an attitude, he would live with biased views instead of the freedom of knowledge. Said (1994, 407) also claims the "strong" or "perfect" person achieves independence and detachment by *working through* attachments, not by rejecting them.'

Part of the analysis is whether the exiles' restricted daily routine was a personal choice. How the exile used the time may have set a direction that would become the direction to their future way of life. The lack of any occupation would have put them in deeper emotional turmoil; so in this regard, engagement in productive activities is likely to have rewarded them with space for escape from emotional challenges.

The Western debate of exile and creativity discussed thus far suggests that exile is not necessarily detrimental in every aspect; that in fact a positive outcome can be obtained if the new environment and circumstances of exile are treated as an opportunity. Displacement by external force from the land of one's birth and settlement may bring loneliness and mental and physical hardship during the adjustment period, but it is also true many exiles have experienced artistic success by turning their misfortune into advantage.

### **Exile in China**

Similarly to the case of the West, there have been countless numbers of notable exiles in China. Most of these individuals began receiving attention post-exile. For example, Chinese scholars including Su Shi (1037-1101), Qu Yuan (around 300

B.C),<sup>9</sup> and Du Fu (712-770) were sent to China's Xiao Xiang region, best known as a colony of exile. The Xiao Xiang region was similar in many aspects to Cheju Island. Alfreda Murck (2002, 3) describes the region as the 'dreaded place of exile for disgraced officials during much of the first millennium A.D.,' a repulsive area with unpleasant people, unfamiliar customs, disagreeable weather and widespread malaria. Here the scholar artists created numerous pieces of art and historical documents. Today's research on these scholars spans several genres. For example, Alfreda Murck (2002), in her book *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent*, analyses the artwork of Chinese literary artists such as the 'Eight View of XiaoXiang' and discusses the emotions and system of politics that were rife during the pieces' creation.

Many theses and articles have been published about Su Shi. Among those, Ronald C. Egan's book *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* contains an in-depth discussion of Su Shi's ideas, philosophy and religious influences. With Su Shi's exilic experiences as a backdrop, the book analyses Su Shi's inner strife during a state of extreme vulnerability. Bada Shanren (1626-1705) was another important exiled figure who made an enormous contribution to China's art history. A great body of research, including biographies, has been conducted on him, a significant proportion of which focuses on his exilic experiences along with his artwork. Wang Fangyu, who conducted some of the most extensive research on Bada Shanren, thoroughly investigated Bada's state of mind and wrote the book *Master of the Lotus Garden: The Life and Art of Bada Shanren (1626-1705)*.

According to Croizier (1990, 26), Chinese exiled artists including Qu Yuan produced paintings that reflected their thoughts of persecution and unfairness, expressing through visual language their resistance towards the power of authority. The traces they left behind, together with their work, have undergone great scrutiny from researchers. In the case of Su Shi and Bada Shanren, research on the two scholars not only focuses on their physical achievements of art and literature but gives equal weight and context to their exilic experiences and often analyses their lives from an ontological position. This is parallel to the idea that in order to understand an artist's

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<sup>9</sup> (See more in Croizier 1990)

art and literature one must first understand their mental state and the conditions to which they were subjected.

### **Choson Dynasty Exile and Artists**

The conditions that an exile in Korea's Choson Dynasty were exposed to might differ somewhat from that of an exile in the West. Most Western exiles forcefully removed from their hometowns may at least have been at liberty to choose the exile destination in which to start their new life and allowed to carry out some regular activities there. Most Choson exiles, however, were imprisoned in prescribed houses in specifically stipulated regions and islands. The majority of Choson exiles were under constant surveillance, though some exiles consistently exhibiting good behaviour were rewarded with some freedom of activities within the district areas. It may also be argued that from a materialistic or environmental perspective, it is not suitable to compare the lives of Choson Dynasty exiles to those of modern exiles. However, one of the arguments of this research is to demonstrate, as Said argued, that exile brings misery to its sufferers regardless of the era or culture.

Existing research on aspects of Korean history, including art and literature, form part of ongoing investigations of Korean literary artists and their work, philosophy, art theory and aesthetics. Research on Choson Dynasty exile artists and the intrinsic value of their inner and outer state during imprisonment is, however, lacking in scope and number. The subject of exile has been largely overlooked in Korea. Most existing studies leave unresolved some of the most basic and fundamental issues about the exile experiences of the scholar artists who were removed from society and imprisoned on remote islands, and how the situation affected the scholar artists' lives and artistic practice.

Rather than focusing on the concrete realities of exiles and their experiences as viewed from an ontological perspective, the general trend of literary research in Korea has been to focus on interpreting and examining the exiled artists' work, such as poetry and lyrics.

Existing research on Korea's exile can generally be divided into two categories. One

regards exile as a type of punishment and studies it as a study of law,<sup>10</sup> while the other takes a literary interest in exile writings. To date there is a lack of research that points out and expresses concern that a large proportion of artists who combined poetry, painting and calligraphy as a single art form during the Choson Dynasty were exiles; nor is there sufficient research that has studied exile and artists as a genre or cultural phenomenon.

Korea's exile literature, which dates back to the Silla Dynasty, started to take the form of *gasa* (a Korean poetic structure similar to rhyme-prose) and Korean rhymed verse (also used as song lyrics) during the Choson Dynasty. They often reflected the exiles' everyday feelings and reflections upon distressing incidents during exile. Exile literature is a subject of research for many literary scholars and students, but there is a tendency for overrepresentation of exile *gasa* in existing research. The main research scope often extends only to the composition, characteristics or pattern of exile *gasa*.<sup>11</sup> Chung Iksun (1989) allocated exile *gasa* to two categories: one written by an exile from first-hand experience, and one artistically written by a third party from imagination and reasoning of exilic circumstances. Choi Kanghyun (1982) studied travel *gasa* and defined it as a literary creation which takes the form of Korea's unique literary *gasa* structure and consists of the visual, aural, sensual and emotional experiences of the traveller (the exile) during the spatial and temporal process of travel. Kwon Sungjun (1989) approached exile *gasa* from an aesthetic viewpoint, conducting a focused analysis of his theory of categorisation and applying it to the study of exile *gasa*. In his thesis, Lee Jaeshik (1993) studied the exiles' feelings by categorising exile *gasa* according to form, motivation for composition and symbolic meaning of flora and fauna.

Some English-language translations of Korean literature, such as *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Choson, 1392-1910*, (2009), edited by JaHyun Kim Haboush, is an anthology of letters produced by the country's literate classes during the Choson Dynasty. It illuminates the social history of

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<sup>10</sup> (See for example; Choi 1992: Rhyi 2005 and Jang 2000, 2001)

<sup>11</sup> (See for example; Woo 2005: Yu 2005: Kim 1998: Chung 1989: Choi 1982 and Noh 2011)

communication by scrutinising the letters that the social classes wrote as an auricular confession or political judgment.

Peter H. Lee, who has dedicated his work to translating Korean literature into English, has produced some anthologies of Korean literature. *Anthology of Korean Literature : From Early Times to the Nineteenth Century* (1981), which primarily consists of literary excerpts and poems originally written in Chinese, and *Pine River and Lone Peak : An Anthology of Three Choson Dynasty Poets* (1991), a collection of Korean poetry, are examples. Additionally, Younsoo Lee Chun has converted his Masters thesis into a book: *Chusa Kim Chong-Hui: the development of Chusache through the Chinese metal and stone movement* (1996).

David Nemeth's *The Architecture of Ideology; Neo-Confucian Imprinting on Cheju Island, Korea* (1987) is a reflective examination of the architectural system of Cheju Island. Hall (1926) looked into the writings of Hendrik Hamel (1630-1692), a Dutch voyager whose yacht 'De Sperwer' was en route to Nagasaki, Japan, carrying 64 sailors and cargo, encountered a storm and was shipwrecked on the southern coast of Cheju Island on August 16, 1653.

None of the aforementioned publications, however, have focused primarily on exile artists on Cheju Island and their exilic experiences and creativity.

### **Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui**

Only a small amount of literature exists on Kim Jeong and Lee Geun. As discussed previously, it has not been widely acknowledged that the two artists were skilled in the three perfections. Because of this, theses and articles on their paintings are virtually nonexistent, as is research on their time in exile or their art practices. There is some research on the customs of Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty as portrayed in Kim Jeong's *Cheju Pungtorock* and Lee Geun's *Cheju Pungtogi*.<sup>12</sup> In 1985, Yang Soonpil analysed *Hedorok*, a published collection of Kim Jeong's poetry written during exile and which is found within *Chungamjib*. Kim Sangjo (1997b),

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<sup>12</sup> ( See for example; Kim 200: Yang 1978, 1980, 1981 and Pack 2009)

noting the lack of research on Kim Jeong, investigated the artist's life and stream of consciousness as recorded in *Hedorok*. In Lee Geun's case, partly due to the fact he left almost nothing of historical significance, there is very little existing research on his exile save for Yang Soonpil's 1978 study of *Cheju Pungtogi*.

Jeong Hoosoo (1996) investigated Kim Chonghui's life in exile by examining the letters and poetry the artist wrote on Cheju Island. The study, however, contains only a brief and superficial discussion of the circumstances that Kim Chonghui faced during the period. Kim Ildu (1997), in investigating the types of exile punishment, studied Kim Chonghui's ordeal, while Cho Pyungwhan (2007) centred his investigation on Kim Chonghui's lifestyle as seen through his exile letters. Despite such various analytic approaches taken by researchers, investigations of Kim Chonghui's inner and outer turmoil have remained shallow. Studies have tended to place much heavier emphasis on the theory of Kim Chonghui's art.<sup>13</sup> Interest in his paintings, such as paintings of orchids or landscapes, was expressed more often by PhD and Masters researchers than by scholars and historians.<sup>14</sup> A common characteristic of existing research appears to be a focus on the form, style and technique of Kim Chonghui's paintings, while the artist's personal experience of exile is displaced as a separate and disconnected topic of research. There is thus a lack of iconological interpretation of the intrinsic value of his paintings.

Lim Hyungtaek (2002a, 18), citing Jung Inbo, has criticised researchers' tendency to focus only on exile artists' work. 'Generally speaking, there is an emphasis only on the calligraphy and Old Learning of *Gong* [Kim Chonghui], who had deep understanding of the roots of study, but how many have grasped his 'authenticity'?' (Jung Inbo, as cited in Lim Hyungtaek, 2002a, 18). Lim points out that this flaw has yet to be rectified, and that there is relative lack of, and a need for, profound research on Kim Conghui's inner self.<sup>15</sup> He expresses concern that this lack of 'authenticity' means the 'scholarly pursuit may, in fact, be giving rise to decomposition of the

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<sup>13</sup> (See for example; Kim 2001; Jung 2006; Kim 1989 and Hwang 2005)

<sup>14</sup> (See for example; Lee 2007 and Yoon 1997)

<sup>15</sup> (Seen more in Lim 2002a)



target.’ This view is not applicable only to historical studies of Kim Chonghui but possibly to that of other Choson artists in general.

What, then, is the method of discovering the ‘authenticity’ of the artists’ lives and work? Firstly, the research could scrutinise an artist’s nature in relation to his nurture. Secondly, the origin and direction of flow of an artist’s ideas could be interpreted in light of the individuals who influenced him. Finally, the aspects of an artist’s life and experiences that have been neglected by researchers need to be thoroughly analysed and investigated in depth.

### **Summary**

This chapter has described the foundations of this research by introducing the research problem and issues and proposing reasons for the necessity of this research. This was followed by a brief description of the research method to illustrate justification of this study, an overview of all main chapters, and an introduction to the three artists upon whom this thesis focuses. The role of the comparative literature review was to support the analysis of how the scholar artists’ emotional reaction to exilic experiences is reflected in their literary work and paintings in ontological terms. In addition, the literature review on exiles’ psychoanalytic viewpoints examined selected material in order to understand the exiles’ state of mind, exilic consciousness and artistic creativity in the conditions of Cheju Island. Building upon these foundations the current research will take on a more concrete and in-depth analysis.

## Chapter 2

### Exile in the Korean Context: Causes and Effects

This chapter provides a historical overview of the social structures relating to the *problematique* of the Korean exile punishment system during the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) and its unavoidable repercussions for literary artists and society. There is a large body of literature on Choson Dynasty studies in Korea. This chapter, which limits its focus to Choson exiles, primarily examines the Choson literature that deals with exile punishment, in particular the causes and effects of the Choson Dynasty's exile policy.

The Korean exile system was developed and managed in line with the specific political and historical context of Choson dynastic rule of the time. In spite of widespread problems that were present in Choson society, studies of Korean exile have not been widely recognised as a specific research agenda but instead regarded merely as a natural part of a general social and political phenomenon of the period. Thus, it is important to review the exilic events and processes that formed part of the historical background of Korea's Choson period with a focus on the political and social ramifications in place at the time.

Although a small number of researchers have taken different approaches to analysing the exile phenomenon of the Choson Dynasty, such as by examining exile as a punishment and law,<sup>16</sup> and the proportions of exile regions,<sup>17</sup> the existing body of research has remained distant from examining the personal influence the experience had on the exiles themselves. In particular, the cause and effect of exile events in society and culture and their effect on literary artists in the Choson period have not been explored in depth. This chapter therefore focuses on the *problematique* of the exile system in Korea's Choson Dynasty period, particularly in relation to literary artist members of the high-class or *yangban*. The chapter follows the conventional

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<sup>16</sup> (See for example, Choi 1992)

<sup>17</sup> ( See for example, Jang 2001)

French meaning of the term *problematique* as extending the sense of the research question to include matters of *definition, contextualisation, and problematisation*. The chapter focuses on using the existing literature to identify: the causes of exile, the perspectives of different groups within Choson society on the policy of the banishment system, and direct and indirect repercussions on Korean society, in particular its scholar artists.

### **Historical background**

The Choson (Yi) Dynasty (1392-1910) was the longest ruling dynasty in Korean history. The Choson monarchy ruled for 500 years under the reign of 27 Choson kings. Spanning such a long period of history, the quality of the Choson dynastic regime was unsurprisingly varied, and passed through various vicissitudes. King Taejo, Yi Seonggye (1335 – 1408), a military commander and founder of the Choson kingdom, established a dominant position during 1388 by accumulating socio-political power.

At the foundation of the Choson Dynasty in 1392, the Choson bureaucratic government was created by employing intellectuals who rose to their status by succeeding in a system of civil examinations and studying the doctrines of Chu-tzu, which formed the basis of Neo-Confucianism. Under King Yi's leadership, intellectuals became political leaders who organised aristocratic and military power to seize control of the country's economic, political, social and public order.

In 1392, drawing on the power of its new king, Yi and his support group of Neo-Confucian influenced scholar-bureaucrats, the central government bureaucracy—or civil service—of Korea began a program of reform. Existing institutions were transformed by changes in overarching social, political, and economic policies to align with the ways of a new Neo-Confucian philosophical ideology adapted to Korea's geo-political and socio-cultural circumstances. The goals of Yi's reformation of Korea's institutions were to improve the fiscal foundations of the Korean state, whilst at the same time reducing the size and power of the central-government class of officials, and opening up what was a 'paralysed political system' (Duncan 2000, 204).

From the early Choson period, the establishment in Korea of Confucianism developed and intensified under Choson rule. The strong religious belief system of Confucianism was deeply rooted and its domination underpinned society, economy, culture, religion, and politics throughout the dynasty. Neo-Confucianism began to become more widely adopted in the Choson society as an official political ideology across many governance systems, social and cultural organisations and institutions, even including those of the background religious milieu.

Neo-Confucianism was originally introduced to help enhance and improve Korea's political system, to help in managing the ruling institutions, and to strengthen the general welfare of the society, including protecting the landowners' power over the peasants.<sup>18</sup> Over time, it eventually became part of the state ideology, whereby a new Neo-Confucian social order was increasingly established by restructuring the traditional Confucian order. Its primary effects were mostly beneficial to the ruling classes.

While the earlier Choson rule transitioned to this new political era, there were inevitable conflicts between leading ideologists of the old and new over political and social order and policies. The political supremacy of Confucian elites created great tension and oppression amongst factions. As the Korean state increasingly evolved into a Neo-Confucian culture, significant tensions occurred between supporters of the new and those of the old traditions, and this resulted in fierce debates between ideologists with different political convictions. The increased emphasis on governing Korea using Neo-Confucian perspectives was supported by many Choson scholars and members of the *yangban* class, as it would be more advantageous for them than the earlier Confucians policy. In the world of *yangban* and government officials and ministers, deep conflict formed between the groups and individuals holding differing vocational positions. Those holding contradictory Confucian or Neo-Confucian positions had all been appointed to political service as government officials and ministers. As would be expected during a change of direction from an older ideology to a newer one, the tensions were largely an old versus young conflict. Older members of the government with more Confucian ways of thinking and working

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<sup>18</sup> (See further discussions in Do 2004)

were afraid of reform, and worked to maintain the conventional ideologies. On the other hand, the leading members of the Neo-Confucian reform movement insisted on new perspectives on social and human values. They did this in part by gathering supporters for reformation to change the conventional Confucian way of political policy development. Underlying this drive for some parties to want to align with Neo-Confucianism was the deep-seated change in power and potential wealth that it offered.

Confucianism in Korea was deeply and classically conservative. It provided a strict and comprehensive set of social rules that guided the behaviour of everyone in society at all times. Its effect was that those with wealth and power not only remained wealthy and powerful, but also that wealth and power would follow a preferential flow towards them. In contrast, Neo-Confucianism had a more meritocratic dimension in that those who were more proficient were offered opportunity for power, wealth, and roles in government based on merit. Over time, those with better skills would replace those in government whose position had been achieved as a result of family and social relationships, hence producing a significant shift in the ownership of power and, over time, in the distribution of wealth. There were obvious benefits in terms of improving Korea's quality of governance by improving the levels of skill and intelligence in the cohort of government officials. Many naysayers were those who had the most to lose by this shift to a more meritocratic method of selecting government officials. The consequence was a long and tumultuous era of uprising from representative scholars and politicians. The existing cohort of government officials holding on to Confucian dogma used their power and policy to respond, including accessing and controlling the legal system that included the social control mechanisms of execution and exile. Whilst it was relatively difficult to directly attack Neo-Confucian-minded government officials who were already appointed, it was much easier to use power to remove Neo-Confucian artists and scholars who got in the way of Confucian-minded government officials or their family, friends and descendants. These tensions and conflicts in the upper levels of Korean society, along with the disruptive pressures from peasant uprisings, contributed to the high number of executions and exile sentences.

Lee Songmu (1994, 3-28) studied the causes of factional strife in the Choson Dynasty, and identified several factors. There was strong competition between social classes regarding regulation of social order as well as economic issues. Lee suggests that one factor was, drawing from Yi Ik's (1681-1763) point of view, intense competition for the professional and government jobs typically held by scholars. Choson scholars had to compete for scarce government official positions because the state examinations were held frequently and produced 'too many people eligible' for positions. These candidates regularly blamed long-term government officials—described by Yi Ik as 'the evils of lineage'—who had inherited their positions and refused to step down:

Since King Seonjo, one divided into two, two became four, and again four became eight to kill and be killed like enemies. This is passed down from one generation to another. They hold government posts under the same royal court and live in the same land but do not have any intercourse with each other until they become old and die. (Yi Ik, 2006, as cited in Kang, 366)

According to Lee Songmu (1994, 3-28), the hegemonic struggle to control the appointment of government officials in which existing government officials vigorously advocated their descendants to the Selection Office in the Ministry of Personnel to have them positioned as potential new members of the government official class.<sup>19</sup>

Many Choson scholars and *yangban* (members of the high-class society) were interested in getting involved in political government institutions. Emphasising Confucian ideology, developing education, social stability and managing a good government were priority for Korea in the Choson Dynasty. The use of a formal civil service examination was the main method of selecting effective civil servants and government officials. Passing the examination was a path to more wealth and higher

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<sup>19</sup> (Writings on Choson's factional conflict are well presented by Kang Jaeun (2006) in *The Land of Scholars: Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism*, published by Homa & Sekey Books. It was originally written in Korean and translated into English by Lee, Suzanne.

status, and so it was viewed as a criterion of success. Scholars and *yangban* could potentially gain a role in a political government institution displaying their skills, knowledge and abilities. To gain political status, the *yangban* scholar not only had to pass the civil service examination but also possess a good knowledge of literature, including poetry. This, as Yang (1984, 53) notes, was the only way to gain official employment in the Korean Choson government. The opportunity to take the civil service examinations were only offered to *yangban*, such as the noble class. In the Choson dynastic period, about 10 per cent of the population were *yangban* (Connor 2009, 23). The remaining 90 per cent of society—commoners and lower classes<sup>20</sup>—could never become a direct part of, or be represented in, the government or its political processes.

The first hundred years of Choson society had been a steady period while efforts were made to establish new formats and cultures of the ruling system, based on Confucian ideologies for the sake of the high-class *yangban*. Under the influence of Confucian ideologies, the society became a feudal state, creating a central power scheme of the ruling class consolidating the bureaucratic system which governed political activity, social economics, and military forces. The social authorities with prevailing powers—the wealthy *yangban*—were the imperial citizens possessing absolute power. It allowed them to control the regional economy as they possessed the majority of land in the Choson kingdom. The Choson government policies were constructed largely for the benefit of the *yangban* while ordinary peasant villagers were all but neglected. These ideologies ultimately caused social and economic turmoil and the drive for rebellion and factional strife.

### **The Cause of Increasing Exile**

The more conservative centralised government bureaucracy enforced policies based on traditional Confucian ideologies, brought deep ideological conflicts to the surface and resulted in a variety of forms of factionalism within the political civil service. In

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<sup>20</sup> (Choson society had three status groups: the *yangban* (the nobility), the *sangmin* (the commoners), and the *chonmin* (the lowborn/the humble man). This social pyramid identifies people in terms of their status. See more in Palais 1975).

the midst of confusion and political turmoil, many leading scholars led constituted rebellions against the centralised government. The Choson Dynasty at the time of the reign of the 10<sup>th</sup> king Yeonsangun (1494-1506) was a period of conflict when a massacre by the new rising faction began taking place. From the period of the 14<sup>th</sup> king Seonjo (1552-1608) onwards, the prolonged conflict between groups meant a repetition of bloodshed and party strife, which led to an increase in the number of exiles (Lee 1967, 536).

During the Choson Dynasty, four violent purges—or *sahwa*—of literati took place in 1498, 1504, 1519, and 1545 (named *muo*, *kapcha*, *kimyo*, and *ulsa* respectively). Scholars were massacred in untold numbers throughout the Korean peninsula. The *sahwa* were a consequence of the tensions between social groups due to the unstable social, political, and economic circumstances and moral crises of Korea at the time, and they led the Korean state into devastation. The *sahwa* were primarily a result of the political war between the ruling powers of Confucian scholars and the dire political and economic situation facing the commoners in the provinces, many whom objected to the doctrine of aristocratic control. These problems reflected the discrepancies and contradictions between the political ideologies in Confucian scholarship. During this time, the government executed and tortured under interrogation large numbers of intellectuals, sending many to prison or exile.<sup>21</sup> The consequences were significant repercussions on the world of literature and arts and serious after-effects with lasting implications for Korean society.

This intense political conflict continued from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century until conventional social order was gradually reconstructed by leading members of Korean society, who engaged in driving political transformation towards a new modern world. The government, which was predominated by aristocratic landowners, was too afraid to change the social structure, which by design benefitted the monarchy and central bureaucrats; instead, its members strengthened their positions of political power and the ‘preservation of its social, economic, and political privileges’ to control the country (Do 2004, 4). Gradually convinced by intellectuals’ words of social criticism, some Confucian scholars became disenchanted and turned away

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<sup>21</sup> (For further discussions on *Sahwa* in Choson Dynasty, see Choe-Wall 1994, 113-131)



from conventional Confucian values, instead searching for new ways of addressing social concerns. These intellectuals began to employ more pragmatic solutions, adapting *Silhak*, a Chinese ideology which emphasises practicality rather than conceptual religious ideology with regards to human rights and social equality. This *Silhak*-based movement re-established social order and contributed significantly to the transformation of Korea throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Silhak* movement reflected the trend toward modernity and nationalism, and was opposed to the preoccupations of orthodox Neo-Confucianism. Leading scholars, who were influenced by Western science and Chinese scholarship, strived to advance the social equality of the nation by supporting radical human rights ideas which emphasise equality of social order.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, after King Jeongjo's (1776-1800) death, the stabilising political policies the king had established ended. This coincided with the collapse of the supremacy of Neo-Confucian ideology as the main factor shaping Korea's governance (Duncan 2000, 126-127). After King Jeongjo died in 1800, his 12-year-old son Sunjo (1790-1834) took the throne, ruling from 1801 until his death in 1834. Because of the new king's youth, his mother, Queen Jungsoon, handled the nation's affairs in the beginning. This was part of the cause of the great confusion that followed. As the Choson Dynasty entered the 19<sup>th</sup> century, political conflict was inherent in the new monarchy. Under the influence of the royal in-laws, King Sunjo married a daughter of Andong Kim Chosun (1765-1832). The Andong Kim and Pyungyang Jo lineages, established from King Jeongjo's regime, continued for sixty years, through the reign of King Sunjo (1800-1834), Hyunjong (1834-1849) and Chuljong (1849-1863). The *Sedo* political group, led by Andong Kim's lineage, controlled social and political power and established the most significant power group until late in the Choson Dynasty.

Despite King Sunjo's efforts to participate in the government administration, the key figures from *Sedo* seized power, controlling government policy and authority over personnel affairs. Andong Kim maintained power by placing blood relations in vital positions of government. His political group became all-powerful by punishing any

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<sup>22</sup> (For further information on the Practical Learning in Choson Dynasty, see Setton 1992)

attempts for reform, and King Sunjo was impotent against them. The Andong Kim members held authority in all positions including civil examination policies and personnel affairs. They held the highest social positions, from military commanders to prominent government officials. With their power, they produced great confusion in the public and social order.

### **The philosophical underpinnings of the Korean exile system**

During the Choson Dynasty, establishing public order was regarded as an important spiritual foundation of society even in the Neo-Confucian form preferred by king Yi and his government and supporters. This echoed the underlying Confucian philosophy, which was in essence conservative and shaped by defined moral imperatives and structures. This can also be seen in the ways this historical era in Korea defined one's moral obligations in terms of traditional patriarchal or power-based roles between man and woman, high and low class, and social rank. The Choson government chose to base its laws on a basic Confucian ideology: that the virtue and moral obligation of man can be reformed and a criminal guided in the right direction.<sup>23</sup>

In 1485, during King Sungjong's (1457-1494) rule, *Daemyungryul* (the Great Ming Dynasty Law) from Ming China (1368-1644) was restructured to better suit Korea's state of affairs, and became the fundamental code of law of the Choson Dynasty (Oh 1984, 297). It was implemented as Korea's federal law with the intention of stabilising the country's political, social and public order, partly through the use of banishment and exile (Rhyi 2005, 7). *Daemyungryul*, under which the Choson government implemented the practice of exile, became increasingly popular as the dynasty entered the 14<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in politics and the politico-civil service framework. However, because *Daemyungryul* was a collection of laws developed under the principles of Confucianism, it was heavily influenced by Confucian ideologies. This was why *Daemyungryul* placed more emphasis on proper social behaviour than on law, and applied toleration over execution. In other words, it was considered more compliant under the Confucian ideology of *Daemyungryul* to send a

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<sup>23</sup> (See further discussions in Park 1983)

criminal to an island unfit for human life and so distant he or she would have little hope for return, rather than taking the exile's life.<sup>24</sup>

The *Kyungkook Daejeon*, a complete collection of Choson's fundamental code of law, contains five punishments written in *Daemyungryul*—one of which was exile punishment:

1. Beating with a light stick, up to 50 strokes
2. Beating with a heavy stick, up to 100 strokes
3. Penal servitude
4. Life in exile: exile at 2,000, 2,500 or 3,000*ri* (10*ri* = approximately 4km)
5. Death by strangulation or decapitation.<sup>25</sup>

The fourth punishment of the Chinese penal code stipulated that distances of up to 3,000*ri* (approximately 12,000km) be covered by foot or carriage, but the distance between Seoul and the far north Hamgyung province was only 1,680*ri* (approximately 660km) and that between Seoul and the far south Gyeongsang province 1,230*ri* (approximately 485km). Due to the much smaller geographical size of the Korean peninsula compared to China, implementing this punishment was problematic. Subsequently, the exile system was amended to suit the Choson context, and the exiles were made to walk the set distances by taking circuitous routes (Kuack 2011).

### **Exile punishment and its effects**

Throughout the long history of the Choson kingdom, the exile system adapted from Ming Chinese culture permanently changed the Korean state system and its politics. Incumbent political authorities implemented the system as a permanent feature of

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<sup>24</sup> (The articles on *Daemyungryul* Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture (The Academy of Korean Studies Published 2009, accessed December 18, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?cid=1592&docId=534939&mobile&categoryId=1592>)

<sup>25</sup> (Bilancia 1981, 751 and see also in Mote 1988)

government and law as a means to reinforce their power, maintain their political positions and execute or at least render powerless those who opposed them. Exile was a politically useful and widely used strategy that could be used to eliminate political rivals and those who caused inconvenience to the government during the hostile political circumstances of the time (Yang 1984, 53-54). It was also a strategy to banish troublesome individuals to maintain social stability and public order. Most exiles were 'nominated' for banishment by members of opposing political factions and their cases were treated as high treason. The exile system was not only an effective way of not only 'imprisoning' opponents but also of isolating them from the rest of society.

According to Jang's (2001, 2-21) study, approximately 5,860 cases of exile occurred in the period between the founding of the country (1392) and the end of the Choson Dynasty (1910). Approximately 700 of the 4,000 representative intellectuals of the Choson Dynasty were among those exiled. Jang found that treason was the most common charge, followed by violations of the three cardinal laws and the five constant virtues as specified in the feudal ethical code. These violations included embezzlement of public funds, abuse of power, writing something that may be politically problematic, and religious crimes.

Under *Daemyungryul*, the Korean exile punishment policy was applied irrespective of social rank, class or gender. It was applied to those of royal lineage, scholar officials, politicians, religious persons and civilians (Choi 1992, 100). Politicians in high positions as government officials or from royal lineages, who had committed heavier offenses, were placed in most severe quarantine (Ko 1986, 57). Powerful individuals who held superior roles in running the country could lose everything overnight and be imprisoned on isolated islands around the Korean coast, with little hope of return. This exile punishment also extended to the individuals' families, who would face social and economic annihilation. Colleagues who had supported the exiled offenders were also often demoted from their positions; some were also

tortured and exiled.<sup>26</sup> Exiles' assets were also confiscated under the name of *Daemyungyul* (Ko 1986, 53).

Officials were charged with exile punishment mainly for involvement in factional strife, including rebellions, while political conflict was intensified by problems in social and political committees. Consequently, various political and socio-cultural organisations, both in the capital city and in regional communities, laid charges against individuals who opposed policies that were preferential towards established institutions and power holders.

In the indiscriminate warfare between political factions, winners had the power to bring the opposing party to political demise. The potential gains from winning a political battle included sovereign power and procurement of financial funding, not only for themselves but also for their families and extended clan (Rhyi 2005, 47). In contrast, defeat brought serious consequences: the loss of power and political rights, reduced access to resources and wealth, and downfall in social ranks. For a politician to maintain the winning position for as long as possible in the face of a rapidly changing political situation, a powerful strategy for factional winners was to impose the harshest punishment on the opposition, such as executing or sentencing them to exile to faraway islands.

In some cases, cheating in the civil examination could also lead to criminal charges and prosecution, while criticising government policies was another serious offence. Many exiles, however, were unjustly punished as a result of schemes from the political opposition whose purpose was to send their political enemies into exile. The state's policy was that any scholar who made philosophical arguments for greater social justice would be persecuted. Many intellectuals, politicians and scholars submitted letters of appeal which criticised government policies—an act that could be punished by exile. Lee (1991, 5) asks: 'Why should a piece of paper – a memorial

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<sup>26</sup> (See more in Yang 1984 and Rhyi 2005)

– send one to a remote no-man’s-land with unpalatable diet and insufferable discomfort?’ and questions ‘why no questions were being asked by those who were being treated unfairly but accepted it as if they deserved to be sent.’

Other religious movements, such as Christianity and Catholicism adapted from the West during the reign of King Chongjo from 1777 to 1800, became popular among rebellious scholars who studied Western ideologies. The beliefs gradually spread throughout the Korean peninsula, but were suppressed by the Confucian orthodoxy and struggled to find a foothold in a country where conventional Neo-Confucianism was already deeply rooted. Many followers of these religions were prosecuted for causing social agitation by rejecting the dominant social order of Neo-Confucianism, which emphasised human egalitarianism and ritual sacrifice to ancestors. Many Christian and Catholic devotees were arrested for propagating their beliefs and sentenced to exile. Among them was Tasan Chong (1762-1836), one of the most prominent scholars of the century, who spent 18 years in exile.

In 1420, during King Sejong’s (1397-1450) reign, it was decided that in order to re-establish the political discipline crushed by party strife, the members of the opposition should be exiled, and that the heavier the crime, the more isolated and hazardous the chosen exile destination would be (Kim 1995b, 124). Those with the heaviest criminal charges were placed as far as 840km from Seoul, effectively segregating them from society. The distance of each exile’s location from Korean civilisation (such as Seoul, the capital city, or their homes) was determined according to the level of crime for which they had been banished.

According to records on *Daemyungryl*, as cited in Jang (2001, 11), 408 locations throughout the country were chosen as exile destinations. The quality of each exile’s residential arrangements depended on the perceived severity of his or her crimes. For example, exiles who were thought to have committed serious crimes were placed indefinitely in exile locations furthest from their home towns, such as Cheju Island, which had very poor living conditions. Most Choson Dynasty exiles were imprisoned in prescribed houses where no visitors were allowed, on sparsely inhabited and inhospitable islands where they faced a life of poverty and seclusion.

The form of exile an individual was subjected to differed according to the crime. The segregation of the criminal from society through banishment to a location at least *1000ri* from his homeland; banishment to a place of exile where he was supervised by the local official of the jurisdiction in the case of a civil servant; and *anchi*, the restriction of an exile's movements from set boundaries (Yang 2001, 325). There were four categories of *anchi*: *bonhyang anchi*, the incarceration of the exile within a fixed space in his homeland; *jeuldo anchi*, the banishment to an island distant from the mainland; *weerianchi*, a form of house arrest where the door is locked from the outside and the perimeters of the house lined with thornbush like barbed wire; and *cheongeuk anchi*, the harshest punishment of all, where thornbush is placed around the perimeters of the room in which the exile is incarcerated. These *anchi* punishments were usually reserved for royal descendents of high status or high-ranking officials and were especially common on Cheju Island (Yang 2001, 327).

Many exiles were sentenced to *weerianchi* (images of a *weerianchi* house where an exile was held can be found in Chapter 3 and 4). One of the five main forms of the exile punishment system, *weerianchi* was adopted from China during the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392). It was considered a very severe punishment, second only to the death penalty, because the exiles were not only incarcerated inside houses but were also forced to obey many stringent rules. It was mainly imposed on political offenders and royal family members who had been sent to the most remote islands after committing the most serious offences (Yang 1982, 52). *Weerianchi* imprisonment was commonly imposed at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Yeonsangun (1476-1506), the 10<sup>th</sup> king of the Choson Dynasty, who, out of fear that the exiles would seek revenge, sent exiled prisoners to the most distant islands within Korean territory (Lee 2005a, 34). Regarded by many as a tyrant with brutal tendencies, King Yeonsangun initiated bloody purges which produced numerous literary exiles and killed hundreds of Choson literary scholars.

The *weerianchi* rules stipulated that the exile house had to be locked from the outside and fully fenced with thorned branches of a species of thorny orange tree (Lee, 2005a, 34-35). This was to prevent the exiles from escaping and to stop visitors, who were

not permitted inside. The orange tree from which the thorn entanglements were made grew in the Jeolla province—off the southern coast—and on Cheju Island. Communication with the outside world was prohibited, and only a supervisor was allowed to come and go. Meals were provided by the owner of the house through a hole between wooden doors, and exiles were required to supply their own water by digging a well inside the fenced area. Unlike some other exiles who were permitted to bring family members along to serve time in their company, those under *weerianchi* imprisonment conditions were granted no such privilege. For these exiles, the loneliness and despair may have been more punitive than the exile sentence itself.

The movements of many *weerianchi* exiles were restricted to strict boundaries. In some cases, however, these exiles under ‘enclosed placement’ were not literally restricted from moving outside the thorn entanglements. Since the duty to watch over and control exiles was wholly within the regional authorities’ discretion, some authorities treated it as a mere formality and granted exiles under their jurisdiction considerable freedom of movement.

Historical records show evidence that the creation of the exile punishment and its repercussions during the Choson Dynasty created issues of self-identity. It appears the Choson society and its people, especially scholar politicians, suffered from the immense turmoil that permeated their lives as well as that of their families and lineages, and many never recovered their previous social statuses or quality of life. In his article, Kim Jeongju (1995b, 212) notes that this political tragedy destroyed social cooperation and harmony, gave way to fatalistic resignation and seclusion, created a tendency to focus on the past and caused rampant political hostility and jealousy. Although the exiles’ literary work reflects their personal, subjective thoughts and emotions, it also mirrors the political, social and psychological problems of the time.

The ramifications of exile also affected the regional host communities. The increasing number of exiles led to shortages in basic amenities, and so many host villagers, faced with harsh living conditions, were often cold and unsympathetic. Corrupt regional authorities accepted bribes from exiles, the amount of bribe money determining the quality of the host house the exile was sent to. While there was high



competition among the villagers to bring wealthy exiles into their homes, most turned away from poorer ones. The villagers themselves were in short supply of food and other necessities, and did not receive reimbursements from the regional authority; they were scarcely in the position to show unselfish acts of kindness for the poorer exiles (Lee 2001, 128).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the historical and cultural aspects of the Choson exile system as recorded in historical sources. It saw that during the Choson Dynasty, each time the reigning government was replaced a new power dominated the political scene, driving the old forces out of power. The resulting party strife led to the social phenomenon of exile, which destroyed the futures of countless talented individuals. As Yang Jingeon mentioned in an interview with Gwangju MBC, exile in the Choson Dynasty was such a common occurrence it was considered a punishment that any scholar or artist who was involved in politics would expect to go through at least once in their lives (Kuack 2011). The following chapter examines Cheju Island, the colony of exile, investigating its history and environmental conditions in relation to exiles' personal lives on the island.

## Chapter 3

### The Colony of Exile: Cheju Island

This chapter reviews the brief historical background of Cheju Island in relation to its role as a place of exile and investigates the environmental conditions in terms of its colony of inhabitants during the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910). Cheju Island, located in the East China Sea about 140 kilometres away from the Korean mainland, was for many years used as an open-air prison for political exiles in the Choson Dynasty. Historical research suggests that, in the long Choson Dynasty period (1392-1910), the island was the most well-known exile destination of the 408 exile regions around the Korean peninsula.<sup>27</sup> At the time, exile punishment was considered a liberal alternative to execution (Ko 1986, 54), and sending offenders to such a harsh and distant region as Cheju Island was considered a relatively charitable response by government justice officials.

Undertaking this review of the historical role and environment of Cheju Island proved more problematic than expected because the candidate discovered that much of the existing literature about the history of Cheju Island does not stand up to close scrutiny. There are multiple, often conflicting accounts, many of which have internal inconsistencies and do not support more established accounts of related historical events. This experience aligns with that of other researchers who have identified that much of the historical literature about Cheju Island in the Choson Dynasty is compromised.<sup>28</sup> The factors for this include the influence of deeply established cultural and historical myths and representations shaped and influenced by storytelling (and retelling); religious influences, and the contemporary need to provide information about this period and Cheju Island that is beneficial to historical research.

In spite of these widespread problems with much of the literature, there is sound

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<sup>27</sup> (See for example in Jang 2011)

<sup>28</sup> (See further discussions in Nameth 1987; Yoon 1976 and Chin 1977)

information about Cheju Island and the conditions of the indigenous inhabitants, and those exiled there, available. This can be derived from a variety of first hand sources, such as the letters and journals of those exiled, and scientific information about the island. The amount and value of these alternative sources appears to have been underestimated. Significantly, they provide a different picture from the everyday public 'picture' of Cheju Island as a colony of exile that has developed in the present.

This chapter examines primary historical records derived directly from the writings of those exiled to Cheju Island. Two representative examples are *Tamla Munhunjib* (1976), and *Cheju Kogimunjib* (2007) which these have briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Both resources have long been recognised as important sources for historical research on Cheju Island and are favoured sources for researchers in many historical research institutions in Korea. *Cheju Pungtorock* and *Cheju Pungtogi*, comprised in *Cheju Kogimunjib*, contain records of Cheju Island's climate and customs as recorded by Kim Jeong (1489-1521) and Lee Geun (1614-1662) during their time in exile (see further discussions and case studies of Lee Geun and Kim Jeong in Chapter 4). Such direct sources, especially when compared and contrasted with the outcomes of other scholastic research into Cheju Island and its conditions, can be used to more accurately identify the living context of the Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty.

Lee Geun's *Cheju Pungtogi* is a short piece of writing, spanning only about eight pages, that briefly describes Cheju Island's folk religion, climate and farming conditions, customs of the *haenyeo* (women divers) and other women, the tyranny of government officials against residents, and the island's animals and plants. In nine years of relatively unrestricted exile, Lee Geun was able to explore and experience the island and record his observations. Kim Jeong also wrote an account of Cheju Island's customs and geographical environment in what is known as *Cheju Pungtorock*, a collection of letters he sent his nephew. To this day it remains an important historical document that greatly influenced historical studies of the island.

Though most sources focusing on Cheju Island's history have been written by Korean researchers, there are some Western sources. Hall (1926) investigated the writings of Hendrik Hamel (1630-1692), a Dutch voyager, while Nemeth (1987)

focused more broadly on the island's history. Both sources will be reviewed in this chapter.

### **Geographical History**

Cheju Island is a volcanic island whose landscape is dominated by Mt. Halla, an extinct volcano. Consisting of basalt and lava, Mt. Halla is the highest mountain in South Korea at a height of 1950 meters and approximately 6000 feet above sea level. The island was created entirely as a result of volcanic eruptions approximately 2 million years ago. It is the largest island in Korea with a coastline of 253 kilometres around 1825 square kilometres of land, and is also the most distant Korean island from the main peninsula.

In earlier times, Cheju Island was once an independent kingdom, believed to be 'a Blessed Isle' or 'an Island of the Blest' (Nemeth 1987, 80-81). Historical research suggests the Chinese believed Mt. Halla to be a 'Mountain of the Blessed Isle' that 'formed a kind of bridge between heaven and earth' (Bauer 1976, quoted in Nemeth 1987, 80). The island has been represented in various oral traditions that relate to mythic tales and legendary stories. According to the island's mythology, 'there were no humans on Cheju Island. Eventually, three men, the descendants of 'three clans,' surnamed Yang, Go, Bu 'bubbled up' to the island surface (Nemeth 1987, 78). They are said to have emerged from 'Samsung-hyeol': holes or caves near or on the northern slopes of Mt. Halla. One day, the tale continues, the three brothers dressed in leather were wandering around the island hunting live meat when suddenly they found a purple wooden box floating along the eastern shore, and inside there were a man and a stone box. Inside the stone box, there were three women dressed in blue robes, a calf, a pony, and five kinds of seeds. The man declared:

I am an ambassador from the Blue Wave Nation.<sup>29</sup> Our wise and omniscient king wishes to present his three princesses to you, the three spiritual beings of this Western island, who

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<sup>29</sup> (Nemeth (1987, 79) suggested that '[m]any consider Japan the 'Blue Wave Nation' referred to in the legend.')

have no wives with which to begin your own nation. So marry with them and accomplish great things (Nemeth 1987, 78).

Upon delivering the message, the ambassador ascended to a cloud and disappeared. The three brothers then chose a wife each and journeyed in search of land with clean water and fertile soil. They planted five seeds and began cultivating animals, and this became the founding of the island.<sup>30</sup> The element of the island's foundation myth was driven from combined and fused illustrations, which known to be shifted from neighbouring countries such as Japan and China, and become naturalised to a new creation.

In old times, because of its isolated location, this legendary island was believed to have sacred plants and mushrooms that offered immortality (Nemeth 1987, 80). A famous legendary story links Cheju Island and the First Emperor of Qin China, Qin Shi Huang (259-210 B.C.). In the story, Qin Shi Huang received advice from Xu Fu, one of his magicians, about immortality after Huang succeeded in conquering many East-Asian regions. Xu Fu suggested to Huang that 'immortality could be achieved by obtaining an elixir from immortals residing in a celestial island' (Emperor's Elixir 2010). With this, Qin Shi Huang 'became obsessed with obtaining "drug-plants giving longevity or immortality" that were to be found on islands in the Eastern Sea' (Needham 1971, quoted in Nemeth 1987, 80). Huang ordered Xu Fu to travel to find these magical plants, and, on his voyage to find the celestial island containing the plants of immortality, Xu Fu reached Cheju Island. Cheju Island's oral tradition claims that Xu Fu climbed Mt. Halla and left the inscription 'Xu Fu was here' on the cliff of Chong-bang waterfall in Sogwipo, the 'south-coast settlement' on Cheju Island. There is no evidence, however, that Xu Fu succeeded in finding the plants (Yoon 2008, 30-31). The island's mysteries of nature were originally described by Ssuma Chien (145-187 B.C), an ancient Chinese historian, as quoted in Nemeth (1987, 80):

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<sup>30</sup> (The mythology on Cheju Island Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture (The Academy of Korean Studies 2010, accessed December 20, <http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?cid=1614&docId=573221&mobile&categoryId=1614>)

[The island is] in the midst of the Eastern Sea ... not far removed from human habitation, but, unfortunately, at the very time when one is on the point of arriving at the [island], one's boat is blown back by the wind. In ancient times, to tell the truth, there were people who succeeded in reaching the [island]. It is there that the immortals may be found, and even birds and quadrupeds are white. The palaces are made of gold and silver. No one ever succeeds in reaching the [island] a second time. They see the [island] from a distance like a cloud, but when they approach, the island becomes submerged in the water. When they come quite near, the wind suddenly forces their boat into the open sea. In short, no one has been able to land.

Cheju Island was also known as the sacred land where shamanic gods and ancestors built foundations for life and community. The shamanic shrines and deities reflected the historical consciousness of the indigenous people, who perceive and imagine the island as a single universe.<sup>31</sup>

In Choson Dynasty, Cheju Island has a subtropical climate, warmer than the rest of Korea, with four distinct seasons. The temperature and weather in Cheju Island varies greatly throughout the seasons, with unpredictable fluctuations of climate such as strong winds, heavy rain, drought, heavy snowfall, cold waves, and strong and frequent typhoons.<sup>32</sup> Half of the summer was rainy, and the winter was fairly dry. These environmentally difficult circumstances led many Cheju Island residents to adopt super naturalistic beliefs, especially shamanistic folk beliefs, invoking new religious entities such as 'the Wind God.' The creation and adoption of shamanic shrines and deities reflected the historical consciousness of the indigenous Cheju

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<sup>31</sup> (For detailed accounts of Shamanism in Cheju Island, see Kim 2004b: Yoon 1976 and Chin 1977)

<sup>32</sup> (Further discussions on Cheju Island's weather conditions in Choson Dynasty, see Kim 2009)

Island people (as distinct from newcomers, invaders and imprisoned exiles) who perceived and imagined Cheju Island with its land, mountain, plants, animals, ocean, people, ancestors, ghosts and weather as a single universe. Mountain spirits, river goddesses, and cloud deities had been the representations of this mystical shamanistic nature-worshipping religion of ancient times.<sup>33</sup> According to Kim Jeong's (1486-1521) *Cheju Pungtorock*, most Cheju communities attempted to pursue and respect the rituals of ghosts and were in awe of ghosts, as if gods from heaven.<sup>34</sup>

Cheju Island was also recognized as the *samda-sammu-do*, 'island of three abundances: women, wind and stones, and three absences: burglars, beggars and water. Having many women, polygamy was normal, each wife having her own house, visited by her husband in turn with the other wives' houses. Women were therefore economically dominant, and men easily became idlers. The ideologies of patriarchy and the notion of 'man should be a king' in the domestic realm were the basis of the Neo-Confucian ideology in Korea. In Cheju, however, the domestic structures were more female-centred and frequently dominated by women. Cheju Island's matriarchal tradition in the Choson Dynasty was a social phenomenon that had been retained due to the geographical isolated from the mainland. Many Cheju women were "Amazons" who worked as divers to support the family while the husband looked after children and did the housework. Most men in a family were jobless and depended on a wife's economic support. The Choson Dynasty education system for women was distinguished by status. Amongst the lower classes, no education was available except home tutoring within the family.<sup>35</sup>

The spoken language or dialect of Cheju Island differed significantly from the languages and dialects of mainland Korea at that time. The Cheju Island dialect was heavily influenced by the Mongolian and Japanese languages due to the invasion and control of Cheju Island by the Mongols during the time of the Koryo kingdom (918-

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<sup>33</sup> (See more in Kim 2004b)

<sup>34</sup> (See more in *Chungamjib* 1998)

<sup>35</sup> (For further discussions on women divers and role of women in Choson Dynasty Cheju Island, see Yoon 1976 and Kim 1990b)

1392). The Cheju dialect has different characteristics to other Korean regional dialects and this makes its translation difficult for mainland Koreans, then and now. This has made the Cheju Island dialect valuable to those studying Korean language. Some researchers, such as Kang (1983) and Kim (1983), have undertaken phonetic studies of the Cheju Island dialect through historical documents and stressed that the spoken language on the island is distinguished in its sound and tone. Yang (1985, 51), in his analysis of the sounds used in dialects, found that the sounds crash into each other, creating a barbarian tone that is difficult to understand.

### **The Colony of Exile**

Cheju Island became a colony of exile from the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392), when the island was laid siege under the Mongol Empire, which comprised much of Western China at that time. From the time since the ruler of the Mongol Empire, Genghis Khan, established the Yuan Dynasty in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and gained power in China, the Mongolian hordes reached the Koryo peninsula in six major invasions between 1231 to 1270. The Mongolian government sent envoys to Koryo and demanded what were perceived as excessive tributes of goods such as rice and horses.<sup>36</sup> The envoys acted with an arrogant attitude and the Koryo government grew to regard them with hostility. During one period of active communication, an envoy from the Mongol government was killed on their return to China. This provoked the Mongol government, which used the incident as an excuse to invade the Koryo peninsula. As part of this invasion, the Mongolian government used their armies to take the capitals throughout Korean peninsula including Cheju Island. From then, the island was occupied and directly controlled by Mongolian forces. The strong influences of Mongolian culture had effects throughout Cheju communities. This can be seen, for example, in changes in dialect and a transition towards Shamanistic belief. The Mongol Empire remained in possession of Cheju Island until they were forcibly driven out some one hundred years later, and, in 1367, the island was returned to the Koryo government.

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<sup>36</sup> (Nelson 1967, 59 and see more discussions on the history of Mongol and Cheju Island in Chaille-Long 1890)



During the long years of Mongolian occupation of Korea and Cheju Island, the Mongolian government used Cheju Island as one of the main locations for breeding horses and for the detention of criminals. From 1275, the Mongol government sent hundreds of criminals, mainly thieves, to the island. These exiles were regarded as brutal criminals and were imprisoned in a limited area. During this period, the Koryo government also sent political and criminal exiles to the island (Nemeth 1987, 92). In 1277, the Mongol government sentenced an additional seventy three public offenders to Cheju Island. Between 1388 and 1392, the Ming government in China exiled eighty royal families to Cheju Island. These were royalty who were considered a potential threat to the royal family and royal authorities (Yang 1984, 3).

From a Korean perspective, Cheju Island is regarded as foreign, overseas land due to its location nearer to the borders of China and Japan. Characteristically, those who were exiled to Cheju Island had been judged as ‘severe felons,’ guilty of committing a crime of disobedience to the King’s royal command or disloyalty to the central government policies. Generally first-class criminals were sentenced to Cheju Island charged with a life sentence of exile. These persecuted exiles on Cheju Island included royal families who were in conflict with their peers, persecuted political exiles, their maternal relatives, high class *yangban* who were highly-educated scholar-officials and involved in government affiliated organisations, scholars, monks, government officials caught cheating the civil examination, and everyday criminals who had committed serious crimes.<sup>37</sup> Among many exiles sent to Cheju Island, there were also the oppressed minority of individuals caught preaching non-Confucian religious practices, such as Christianity and Buddhism, targeted under the domination of the Neo-Confucian society.<sup>38</sup>

Cheju Island was an ideal place to quarantine exiles due to the great difficulties of getting to and from it, its geographical distance from the mainland, its cultural and

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<sup>37</sup> (See further discussions in Cheju National Museum 2003)

<sup>38</sup> (Kim (2011) investigated the characteristics of exiles on Cheju Island in the Choson Dynasty, especially focusing on exiles’ status and their criminal background and is valuable reading in terms of historical background of Cheju exile)

administrative isolation and its perception as the furthest frontier of exile land.<sup>39</sup> A small ferry was the only available transportation from the mainland to Cheju Island (Yang. 1984, 100). The ocean journey to Cheju Island and landing on the island by small boat often put exiles in perilous situations. The fact that it was difficult to travel to and from Cheju Island is also expressed in Lee Geun's *Cheju Pungtogi*:

To get to this island a northWestern wind is necessary, and to get out a southeast wind is needed ... Therefore it is easy to get to the island by boat as it goes down with the flow of the tidal current, but when getting out one must go against the current, making it difficult to sail so hardship doubles when getting out compared to going in. (*Tamla Munhunjib* 1976, 194).

Historical records also showed that numerous boats were shipwrecked while voyaging to Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty due to frequent typhoons around Cheju Island and the surrounding ocean.<sup>40</sup>

Exile punishment in the Choson Dynasty was applied regardless of gender or age. In 1637 Gwanghaegun (1575-1641), the 15<sup>th</sup> king of the Choson Dynasty, was sent to the island where he spent four years in exile and died at the age of 67. The youngest person exiled to Cheju Island, Kyungangun (1644-1665), the youngest son of Crown Prince So-hyun (1612-1645), was only four years old. He was exiled to Cheju Island in 1647 with two older brothers, aged twelve and eight. The oldest person exiled to Cheju Island was Sin-Yim (1642-1725), a 84-year-old civil official, who was imprisoned on Cheju Island in 1722. The first female exiled to the island was Joung Nanzoo (1773-1838), who was exiled to Cheju in 1801. She was involved in preaching Christianity in the time when many Christian believers suffered from persecution by the Neo-Confucian Choson government. This flood of exiles to Cheju was described by Kim Yunsic (1835-1922), exiled to Cheju Island in 1897, who stated in his journal *Soac-yuem-chung-sa* ('a journal in the cloudy and clear day'),

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<sup>39</sup> (Yang 1978, 274 and see more in Kim 2011)

<sup>40</sup> (See more in Yang 2001; Hall 1926 and Chaille-Long 1890)

'[t]he amount of exiles in the island are increasing every day as if [they] fill the whole Island.'<sup>41</sup>

### **Environmental Conditions during the Choson Dynasty**

The residents of Cheju Island claimed that 'joy is as small as a grain of sand, sorrow as large as a boulder' on the island.<sup>42</sup> The weather and geography presented an extreme environment, including an unpredictable climate, infertile land, shortage of water, and propensity to disease. These aspects greatly affected the physical and emotional wellbeing of the indigenous islanders as well as the exiles who resided there.

Historically Cheju Island was known to be the poorest province and the least civilised country in Choson Dynasty.<sup>43</sup> Kim Ohjin (2008) noted that Cheju Island's unpredictable climate conditions impacted not only on the economic growth in the community but also the travellers from the mainland. A deficiency in both quantity and quality of water was one of the most difficult problems. It was observed that 'the water of the few springs is commonly acrid' (Hall 1926, 65). The porosity and chemical composition of the base rock shifting from the mountain also contributed to the poor quality of the water. The water deficiency and very porous soil hindered the growth of rice and other main crops, although rice was the residents' staple food. Fast-growing, hardy crops were only temporary alternatives in times of famine (Sokol 1948, 65). The distance from the mainland also meant that goods from the outside were difficult to transport to the island (Yang 1984, 55-56).

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, people in the Cheju Island communities suffered from famine and starvation, and the exiles were no exception. The island's earth crust was comprised of volcanic acid which made the soil infertile and prevented farmers from cultivating crops on it. The island lacked a system of manufacturing its own goods

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<sup>41</sup> (Yang 2001, 331 and see more in Kim 2011)

<sup>42</sup> (Kang 1988, 45)

<sup>43</sup> (See Yoon 1976a, 4; Yang 1984, 54-55)

and was plagued with difficulties in taking their produce in and out of the mainland. In addition, natural disasters, such as constant damage by floods and typhoons, also contributed to poor harvests and a lack of necessities for the island's residents. The worst natural disasters on the island, which were recorded between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, flooded hundreds of villages and, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, more than 10,000 villagers had died from the natural catastrophe and starvation (Yang 1984, 55).

Historical research suggests that years of famine on Cheju Island continued from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the dynasty in 1910. In his study, Yang (1984, 55-56) argues that the Cheju people suffered from starvation from constant damage from storm and flood which continued until the end of the Choson Dynasty. He also states that the island's strong wind, drought, and heavy rain contributed to the extinction of crops and this resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Hall (1926, 60) states that the Cheju Island people had 'an extremely low standard of living ... [and] soil, surface, and drainage conditions generally are unfavourable ... the poverty and the shiftless manner of living is due to a miserly environment and too dense a population.'

Despite their strenuous efforts, many communities struggled merely to survive from day to day. The shortage of food drove at least one member of each family between their 20s and 50s to move to the mainland or nearby Japan in order to find a better life. By 1620, the increase in migration rates meant the island experienced low population growth, which meant the government received a low portion of tributes paid by communities. The government eventually introduced an imprisonment policy which banned departure from the island.

Exiles were placed in scarcely inhabited areas, such as the Daejong district – the southernmost part of the island – which was known to have the worst living conditions, some islanders even considering it unliveable (Yang 1984, 123). The central government chose the district to improve the community through the influx of residential scholar exiles. However the area was seriously contaminated by toxic substances produced by volcanic acid and heat from volcanic eruptions that spurted from under the ground (Yang 1984, 97). The situation would turn deadly especially during the summer season. The residents of the Daejong district, as a result, were

most severely affected by such conditions and some died as a result. Water contamination, strong winds and cold weather during the winter contributed to the miserable lives of the local residents (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 77).

The harsh climate and the use of land for rearing horses and cattle meant the conditions were ideal for nesting and breeding activity of pests. Various works of literature written by the exiles themselves supported this claim; for example, Kim Chuntaek's record *Suhaerock* (confined in the ocean) and An Dowon's poetries. An Dowon, quoted in Lee (2003, 237), wrote of the various poisonous and detestable animals and sporadic insects on the island such as snakes, serpents, scorpions, centipedes, flies and gadflies. In *Cheju Pungtogi*, Lee Geun also writes:

It is believed that if someone kills a snake, disaster is inevitable and he would die on the spot before he could take a step backwards. But in the eight years I have stayed here I have killed hundreds of big serpents as well as small snakes but I met no such disaster,' sarcastically referring to the Cheju Islanders' ignorant and blind belief in folk religion (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007).

Studies on the myths of Cheju Island point out that the worship of snakes had been a common practice of the islanders since the Koryo Dynasty (Hunt 1990, 29-30). They generally regarded snakes as the spirit of the gods and were often taken for granted as a part a dwelling. Outbreaks of endemic disease spread by pests often affected the lives of exiles. Yi Chinyu (1669-1730), cited in Lee (2003, 237), referred to unwelcome creatures in his poem *Continued Hymn of Constancy*, believed to have been composed sometime between 1725 and 1727, referring to a 'snail shell of a hut' infested with vermin. He was exiled to Chuja, an island adjacent to Cheju in 1724. Kim Jeong (1489-1521) also noted the pests in his writing *Cheju Pungtorock*—a record of the customs and climate of the island—stating that many kinds of vermin on the land, especially hordes of flies and mosquitoes, infested the island. Lee Geun also described in *Pungtogi* the experience of living with these creatures.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> (See more in Kim 2000; Yang 1985b)

Many historical records indicate that the island suffered from endemic disease contributed by the humid conditions of the summer and the toxic compounds spurting to the surface from under the soil due to volcanic activity. A lack of proper medical facilities meant the majority of the population died without treatment or depended on traditional folk remedies.<sup>45</sup> Cheju society, which was relatively behind the times compared to the Korean mainland, failed to emerge from its old-fashioned way of life. Its geographical isolation meant self-sufficiency was crucial and its residents were keen to preserve its strong traditional culture (Yang 1984, 54).

### **The Land of Invasion**

Cheju Island was almost unexposed to outside culture, and from the Choson Dynasty onwards it became an internal colony of the mainland state. It was subjected to political subjugation and economic discrimination from the central government.<sup>46</sup>

From its founding in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Choson government established policies on centralisation in order to hold control over the regional administration which extended to small villages. To facilitate a strengthening of policies, the government despatched government officials to each region. The officials' tasks were to exercise strict control over the regional power groups by weakening their position with the intention of complete subjugation and to observe and report on the administration system to the central government.<sup>47</sup> The Choson government established ruling organisations in order to control Cheju Island by implementing policies on social economy, administration, and social justice. Political authorities on Cheju Island were governed by the governors of bureaucrats who created political subjugation and economic discrimination, and the people of Cheju were described as 'barbarians with a "rough and rebellious character" who need to be enlightened and civilised by the Confucian dominant culture' (Kim 2004d, 60).

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<sup>45</sup> (For detailed accounts of how the Shamanistic 'folk practitioners' influenced the medical system on Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty, see Lee Geun's *Cheju Pungtogi* (Kim, 2011); and also critical investigations by Yoon 1976a)

<sup>46</sup> (Kim 1992 and for further discussions, see Kim 2011)

<sup>47</sup> (See more in Lee 1989)

As well as the appalling environment and natural catastrophes, Cheju people had to endure heavy taxation policies. In 1408, the Choson government established a ‘tributary payment enforcement’ against Cheju Island. The tribute was payable with regional products rather than money, to monopolise on regional specialities including manufactured goods.<sup>48</sup> The native islanders typically depended on the fishing industry and cattle rearing, which constituted an important source of food and fertiliser, in order to support their families (Hall 1926, 67). Until the mid-Choson Dynasty plenty of marine products including fish, seaweed, oysters and abalone were caught using fishing tools. The regional *hea-nior* –expert women divers of the island – collected seaweed, shells and pearl oysters and often exchanged them with other provisions or sold them for cash.<sup>49</sup> Much of the products, however, were taken by the central government as bribes. The enforcement of this bribe policy created an enormous pressure on the community which had to work strenuously to meet the requirements (Park 2004, 136). Kim Sok-ik (1976, quoted in Nemeth 1987, 132), refers to the situation thus:

The mountain is high, producing wind disasters; the valleys are deep, producing flood disasters; the soils are sterile, producing drought. These three disasters overwhelm the island people, and therefore threaten the annual revenue. If they are heavily taxed, then they cannot subsist.

In *Cheju Pungtogi*, Lee Geun states: ‘Women divers go to much trouble picking abalone but the corrupt local officials plunder most of them and the divers struggle in poverty.’<sup>50</sup> Abalone was a common food even for the humble classes on Cheju Island until the Koryeo Dynasty, but from the Choson Dynasty it began to be

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<sup>48</sup> (See in Kim 1995b, 158-159; and for more writings on Cheju Island’s taxation policies during the Choson Dynasty, see Kang 1988.)

<sup>49</sup> (Park 2004, 139 and for further articles on Cheju Island *hea-nior*, see more in Ko 1994: Park 2004, 2007, and Yoon 1976)

<sup>50</sup> (*Cheju Kigomunjib* 2007 and see more in Kim 1990b)

regarded as precious food that was even offered to the king. Lee Geun thought the residents' plight, illustrated by the truth behind the women divers' work, to be unbearably pitiable.

Although Cheju society tried to create its own autonomy and identity by trying to escape from the central government's constant interferences, the natives' wishes continuously clashed with the central government's expansion of political control over Cheju Island. The introduction of compulsory tributes and embezzlement of crops and fishery products severely provoked Cheju society. The central government's acts of exploitation which included reserving the land for breeding horses characterised Cheju Island as a land of productivity and an important economic resource. As a consequence, the shortage of farming land meant many people faced starvation.

Cheju Island also had a long history—from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century until the end of the Choson Dynasty—of uprisings by its own people. The majority of uprisings were against the government's policies on tax as well as against its mistreatment and neglect of the people (Merrill 1980, 142). In 1813, the landed gentry, Yang Jeahea, and several of his colleagues plotted a rebellion against 'misadministration and government abuse' and planned to reform the social and economic sector. A second revolt followed in 1863, initiated by the islanders and aimed to reform the taxation system and to execute the local governors who unlawfully accumulated wealth through corruption and stealing tax money. Three more revolts followed until 1901.<sup>51</sup> These uprisings were some of the most serious events on the island. Countless people were killed and the uprisings brought destruction and devastation to the island.

In an interview with Kwangju MBC broadcasting, Yang Jingeon (2011) stated that many influential exiles on Cheju Island led revolts which their descendants, under their influence, later continued. Exiles were uncompromising against the system and these attitudes permeated the whole of Cheju Island. According to Yang, these

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<sup>51</sup> (For further articles on Cheju rebellions, see Merrill 1980: Bang 1985: Kim 1969 and Kim 2000b)



rebellions, which were centred on and radiated from Daejung where many exiles lived, became highly influential, their impact resonating even to the island's modern history.

### **Exiled Officials and the *kisaeng***

It was common practice in Choson society for high-class *yangban*—even while serving an exile sentence—to have mistresses or *kisaeng*.<sup>52</sup> There are many tales from this era of relationships between exiled *yangban* and *kisaeng*. Historical research indicates many exiled literati in the Choson Dynasty had affairs with *kisaeng* or courtesans during exile, and some even recorded their experiences in poetic form. For example, *Sockwumchongsa*, a collection of poetry by Kim Yunsick (1835-1922), appears to contain detailed records of his relationships with *kisaeng*. Similarly, the writings of Kim Chuntack (1670-1717), Yun Yanglea (1673-1751), Kim Chinhyong (1801-1865), and Kim Chonghui (1786-1856) may be some of the most representative writings detailing such relationships. While most exiles were struggling just to survive, it appears some managed to find the time and capacity to enjoy close relationships with local women. The couples not only had personal relationships but also shared their artistic skills, mainly by painting and composing poetry and literature. Some *kisaeng* offered warm companionship and comfort for exiles during a time of turmoil.<sup>53</sup>

*Kisaeng* were female artist-entertainers and professional hostesses of the Choson Dynasty who were also artists skilled in music, song, dance, and even poetry and fine art. Most *kisaeng* were highly trained, fashionable, accomplished, intelligent, well-educated professional women entertainers who performed at various functions for government officials and high-class *yangban*. Their vocation was to accompany and entertain the aristocratic men in various ways by dancing, playing music and reciting poetry at feasts and banquets, as well as submitting to their sexual demands. Although the *kisaeng* were considered low-class in the tightly hierarchical society,

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<sup>52</sup> (See for example in Park 2004b and Cho 2004)

<sup>53</sup> (See more in Choi 1980; 1998, 515-557; Kim 1995b, 141-142; and Cho 2004)

they were given considerable freedom in many respects; their low social status was no barrier in their freedom to converse with high-class *yangban*. Young girls from poor backgrounds were often forced to sacrifice their futures and live as *kisaeng* to provide for the family. It was common and acceptable for them to engage in relationships with *yangban* despite their difference in social status. Through their roles and their skills, *kisaeng* provided sources of artistic inspiration and influence for literary artists. For example, Kim Chonghui had an impression from Juck hiang's painting which prompted him to write a complimentary poem (further discussions made in Chapter 5). Many exiles on Cheju Island, in an effort to curb their loneliness, held regular meetings with each other and not only formed relationships with *kisaeng* but also had children with them (Pyo 2012).

The treatment Choson exiles received depended partly on which area they were displaced to. Some received severe treatment while others were received hospitably by the local authorities and were even permitted to attend banquets with *kisaeng*. In particular, Kim Jinhyung (1801-1865), who was exiled to Hamkyung province, was well treated by the local leaders and recorded in writing his romantic relationship with the local *kisaeng* Gunsanweol who helped him forget his yearning for home.<sup>54</sup>

In his newspaper article *Cheju exiles and women*, Pyo (2012) states that the permanent recording of the relationship between a Choson Dynasty nobleman and a *kisaeng* or their children was regarded taboo, and so any such records are difficult to find. He states that because the exiles staying on Cheju Island were geographically isolated, it was common for even married exiles to see local women as consolation for their loneliness. Choson noblemen were permitted relationships with multiple *kisaeng*, and some even married and had children, many of whom eventually made important contributions to the progress of Cheju society. Many formed such relationships primarily in order to put the *kisaeng* to housework, such as making meals. However, when the exiles were freed the ramifications of returning to their hometowns with the *kisaeng* would be great. Second marriages were not permitted in the Choson Dynasty, and so married exiles who had married for the second time to a *kisaeng* and brought her back to their hometowns would not be looked upon kindly.

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<sup>54</sup> (See more in Choi 1980 and Moon 1981).

Although the *kisaeng* had cared for the exiles who had had nowhere else to turn and even had children from their loving relationships, the exiles who left the island did not look back. Families were torn apart and the *kisaeng*, as single mothers, had no choice but to raise their children on their own.<sup>55</sup>

### The Living Contributors



Figure 1: Cheju *hyang-kyo* situated on Cheju Island (Digital culture website)

The influence of Neo-Confucian ideology which dominated Choson society also governed the Cheju community (Nemeth 1987). The Choson central government established and developed a Neo-Confucian milieu throughout the island by building regional government education buildings known as *hyang-kyo* (Fig.1). The government's aim was to civilise Cheju communities and also used them for commemorating rituals to Confucius. These schools were believed to be used as places for political and social group meetings as well as for teaching local students using Confucian manuscripts. The members of the meeting often included exiles, and the Neo-Confucian scholar officials' role was to help create an enlightened environment which would help to civilise the community.<sup>56</sup> (Exiled scholar-artists'

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<sup>55</sup> (See further discussions on life of women and *kisaeng* in Cheju Island in So 1995)

<sup>56</sup> (For further discussions on Cheju exiles and their contributions to the island, see Yang 2001)

activity in relation to the Cheju local communities are further discussed in Chapter 5 and 6).

Evidence of the imprisonment of exiles on Cheju Island still remains throughout Cheju Island. Such evidence can be found in a wide variety of places, poetic inscriptions on the rocks, memorial areas, and exact replicas of the exile houses. For instance, the memorial shrine of '*Ohyundan*' (Fig.2) contains monumental tablets commemorating five exiles who devoted their time to developing Cheju Island's regional communities during the Choson Dynasty. This shrine was built for the later generations to praise the achievers of '*Ohyun*' – five men often revered by Confucians who are believed to have had benevolent hearts and good educations. This shrine is located in the heart of Cheju and today attracts many tourists and schoolchildren on field trips. Among the five representatives of exiles commemorated by the shrine, three of them were literary exiles: Kim Jeong (1489-1521), Song Siyeol (1607-1689), and Chong On (1569-1641).



Figure 2: The *Ohyundan* shrine with the five tablets. (Anonymous website)

Throughout the Cheju region, many inscriptions by exiles still remain. In many cases, these consist of prose and poetry inscribed on rocks and walls. Song Siyoul (1607-1689), who was a prestigious Neo-Confucian and politician before he was exiled to Cheju Island, inscribed his feelings about his exilic experiences in the poem

*Heajungyougam* – a regret in the middle of the ocean (Fig. 3).<sup>57</sup>



Figure 3: Commemorative tablet for Song Siyoul *Heajungyougam* inscribed in stone. (Digital culture website)

### *Heajungyougam*

An old man, over eighty  
has come to the centre of endless blue waters  
One couldn't say one utterance is such a sin  
but after being thrice driven out my path is blocked  
I turn towards  
the palace that lies north  
but only the monsoon blows in the river south  
When I think of past indebtedness  
a lonely sense of loyalty makes the tears flow.

Song Siyoul was executed by poisoning in 1689 at the age of 80.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>57</sup> (See more on Song Siyoul's exile life and writings in Yang 1992)

This chapter has briefly outlined the historical conditions of exile on Cheju Island to provide the context in which exiles' experiences took place. By investigating the geography of the exile land and its environmental conditions, this chapter has provided a historical and cultural understanding of the exiles' milieu on Cheju Island in the Choson Dynasty. Many prestigious political officials and brutal criminals were forcefully displaced there by the Choson government. Some luckily survived to be released to their homeland, while many others were executed on the foreign island. The island suffered from subjugation, neglect and discrimination by its own government for a long period as well as various attacks from nearby countries. Its residents planned numerous revolts against the government to resist the policies that were in place, the consequences of which were the loss of thousands of lives and the destruction of villages and important heritage.

The island's appalling climatic conditions and the spread of disease affected the lives of countless exiles. Its infertile soil hindered food productivity and led to starvation, not only of the local residents but also the exiles who were sent there. The following chapter will discuss the reality of exiles' lives on Cheju Island and their exilic experiences by analysing their writings including prose, poetry and artwork created during the time of exile.

## Chapter 4

### Exilic Experiences and Creativity: Kim Jeong and Lee Geun

In this chapter, the creative works of two Cheju Island exile artists, Kim Jeong (1486-1521) and Lee Geun (1614-1662), are analysed to provide insight into their life, exile experiences and art on Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty.

Kim Jeong and Lee Geun are better known for their writings, *Cheju Pungtorock* and *Cheju Pungtogi*, which also contain records of the natural characteristics of Cheju Island at that time. The exile punishments of Kim Jeong and Lee Geun significantly predate the exile of Kim Chonghui (discussed in Chapter 5 and 6): in Kim Jeong's case, by over 300 years, and for Lee Geun by 200 years. The slow pace of cultural and physical change in Korea and on Cheju Island, however, offers insights, information about their lives, art practices and life contexts, and some opportunities for comparison in areas in which other detail is lacking. A review of the literature relating to the artists of this place and period reveals almost no information exists in relation to the these two artists' art practices on Cheju Island, and, therefore, this chapter will examine their artistic activity through *Cheju Pungtorock* and *Cheju Pungtogi* as compiled within a collection of Kim Jeong and Lee Geun's work, *Cheju Kogimunjib* (2007); and *Chungamjib* (1998), a collection of Kim Jeong's journals and poetry; and *Kyuchanhyugojib*, an exile journal of Lee Geun, all of which are Korean translations of the original Chinese. This chapter also briefly examines the history and meaning of Kim Jeong and Lee Geun's art focusing on the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century *youngmohwa* style of bird and flower painting, which both artists favoured, to gain a better understanding of their artistic world.

Despite great talents in 'the three perfections' of both these exiled literary artists, to date none of the paintings believed to have been completed by them on the island have been found to date. This may be because the paintings were destroyed in the chaos that ensued on Cheju Island during rebellions there. Alternatively, it may be that the assumption they continued to paint during their exile, like Kim Chonghui, is false. Nevertheless these two artists' artistic development during exile is deserving of closer inspection.

Kim Jeong and Lee Geun were Korean literati and ‘the three perfections’ artists: that is, they were writers, poets and visual artists of a very high standard. While Kim Chonghui is publically renowned for his achievements during exile, Kim Jeong and Lee Geun are less so. Through comparative analysis of these exile artists’ lives and the different exile conditions they were subjected to, the way in which the conditions of exile interacts with creativity will be explored.

In Korean historical research into art, it appears that the writings of Kim Jeong and Lee Geun have occasionally been viewed as important elements of the form of exile literature. The paintings remaining today were most likely painted before exile, or, as in the case of Lee Geun, afterwards. This chapter will use an iconographical and iconological interpretative perspective along with their background to examine their paintings from before and after their exile, and will do so with reference to formal allegorical concepts associated with elements in their paintings that contribute to the understanding of their work.

### **Kim Jeong (1486-1521)**

Kim Jeong, pen name *Chungam*, composed around 600 poems and wrote 57 books in his lifetime (Yang 1985a, 520). *Headorock* is a collection of 41 poems from *Chungamjib*, written during his exile on Cheju Island. In addition, Kim Jeong wrote *Cheju Pungtorock*, providing facts and insights into the environmental conditions and customs on Cheju Island. Rather than being a text in the conventional sense, *Cheju Pungtorock* is a collection of the letters Kim Jeong wrote in exile on Cheju Island published in 1552, thirty years after his death. This collection comprises the responses of Kim Jeong to questions from his nephew about the climate and local produce in Cheju Island.

Kim Jeong was a recognised Confucian philosopher, politician, civil servant and artist in his own time in the Choson Dynasty. He was a descendant of the 37<sup>th</sup> king of the Silla Kingdom, Kyung sun, who was on the throne between 927 and 935 (Kim 1994b, 13). Kim Jeong was educated from the age of three by his grandmother and was considered a prodigy. He shocked those around him by composing a poem about



the peony blossom, titled *Moranc*, at approximately six years of age. By the age of ten he had mastered the *Four Books* of the Confucian doctrine. At the age of 14 he not only passed the *Byeolshi-Choshi*, the first stage of one of the civil examinations one was required to pass to enter politics, but gained the highest score. The *Byeolshi-Choshi* was held irregularly at times of national celebration or when the government needed talented recruits. In his youth, Kim Jeong focused on the study of Neo-Confucianism, the doctrine of Chu-Hsi (1130-1200). After passing the civil examination in 1507 at the age of 22, he began his political career, which continued steadily until 1514. At that time, Kim Jeong was an active participant in the reformist politics led by members of the *Sarim* faction (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 11). In 1515, however, Kim Jeong's political and personal life underwent significant change for the worse after he wrote a lengthy (2,500 word) letter to the king arguing that because the former princess *Sin* (wife of King Jeongjong) had been forced out of power through no fault of her own, she ought to be reinstated (Kim 1997b, 21). This claim caused enormous controversy among politicians and eventually led to Kim Jeong's exile.

Kim Jeong was first exiled to Boeun, in the region of Chungcheongnam-do, in the Midwest of Korea and was released after about three months. Disillusioned by politics, he studied and wrote poetry in a Buddhist temple on Mt. Sockli, North Gyeongsang Province, for three months (Hwang 2006, 77). A short time later, in 1517, Kim Jeong was tempted back into politics at the age of 32 and became one of the rising talents among scholar-officials. This successful career trajectory did not last. At 34, in 1519, he experienced a second ordeal as a target of *Kimyosahwa*, a widespread literary purge. The *Kimyosahwa* resulted from a conflict between the *Sarim* and *Hungu* political factions. The *Sarim* faction contained aspiring political figures from the restructured government and was controlled largely by those Neo-Confucians with a meritocratic outlook on the distribution of political power. Members of the *Sarim* faction were reformist and often highly critical of existing ways of doing things. This resulted in their being in frequent conflict with their opposition, the *Hungu* faction, primarily comprised of established aristocrats in the central government. The conflict between the *Sarim* and *Hungu* political factions resulted in several purges and the ensuing death or exile of many scholars (Yang 1985a, 519). As a member of the *Sarim* faction, Kim Jeong was caught up in this

conflict. In 1519 he received the death sentence (Kim 1997b, 26). As a consequence of the efforts of his colleagues who campaigned to save him, his death sentence was commuted to exile. In this second period of exile, Kim Jeong was first sent to Keumsan in Chungcheong-do then transferred to Jindo in Jeolla-do. While he was serving time in Jindo, Kim Jeong was informed that his mother, who lived in his hometown, was seriously ill. Kim Jeong's father had died when Kim Jeong was 15. Kim Jeong visited his mother, ignoring the legal strictures on him not to stray from his place of exile. For this transgression he was transferred to Seoul where he was flogged 100 times with thick sticks, the standard method of punishment given before one was exiled, then transferred in the company of his younger brother to Cheju Island where he was sentenced to the *weerianchi* form of exile. Before he was sent, Kim Jeong tore his clothes apart in prison and, on the pieces of cloth, wrote the king a letter of appeal. This occurred not once, but three times. One of the appeals read:

This courtier is 34 years old. In my youth I was foolish and intolerant in character, and presumptuously dishonoured the Six Ministers. I have lived my life striving to abstain and repay the kindness of the nation. At the place of discussion of national affairs I strived to comment with a sound way of thinking, and spent each day and night deliberating. They say I formed cliques and overturned public opinion and every day led the politics of government amiss, but there is no truth in this. (Kim Jeong, quoted in Hwang 2006, 79).

### **Exile life, Poetry, Death and Restitution**

As is the case with many other exiles, Kim Jeong's writings reflect the many hardships he experienced. In *Cheju Pungtorock*, he wrote that Cheju Island was an abhorrent place to live. It appears he often relied on alcohol to reduce the pains of this difficult period. Alcohol is mentioned in more than half of his exile poetry, suggesting he may have been at least slightly intoxicated more often than not. An example:

The distant clouds cast a shadow over the small window

Alone in an empty house I tilt drink into the glass  
In the woods I hear only the sound of birds  
So with a bottle by my side I enjoy the spring. (quoted in Kim 1997b, 40).

In another poem he wrote: 'Fungus from alcohol is all over my old clothes and half the books are moth-eaten' (*Chungamjib* 1998, 121-122). The mention of books in his poems suggests he had some books and indicates his realisation that the life he once pursued was over, and he was living a life of failure. In his writings, he alluded to the confusion he felt as his life, previously busy, became one of idleness. He wrote: 'Exhausted and lazy I am foolish as if in a dream' (*Chungamjib* 1998, 128).

### *Laziness*

Exiled and detached from the world's affairs  
I in fact am well-matched with laziness.  
My writings are incoherent from the dizziness  
And the devastated fields are not even half plowed.  
Sleep is only enough if it is until midday  
And my pillow and bedding move in pursuit of coolness.  
After the people have dispersed and I am sober  
The moon shines bright in the peaceful night. (*Chungamjib* 1998,  
128).

In his poems, Kim Jeong also wrote about his experience of fighting against extreme loneliness. He wrote about nightly dreams of finding his way home across the sea separating Cheju Island from the mainland. Kim Jeong was imprisoned in a house surrounded by thorny bush and was profoundly lonely as he had only a young servant to rely on. He wrote: 'My youth is drawing to an end, but where stays the royal offspring?' questioning his identity as a descendant of the king abandoned on the exile island. He lamented the fact he, someone of royal lineage, instead of participating in politics and governing the world, was left on unfamiliar land with no one to visit and with nothing to do.

*A Region Disconnected from the World*

The Farthest seas

No one visits me in the farthest seas

My body is though in the lonely *Weerianchi*

.....

Relying on the servants as a brotherhood

Oppressed sorrow appears under the ear hair

No clothes to wear in the frosty wind. (*Chungamjib* 1998, 107).

The loneliness Kim Jeong experienced during exile tormented him.

*Dream*

The tide of the sea is blocked by a thousand layers

And it seems my hands could touch the mountains back home  
where the wormwood must have grown.

I miss you but we cannot meet

And only the heavens understand me.

...

Against waves spanning a thousand miles

I try to tell the Isle of Eternal Youth of a dream

That way, the king cannot see

And only the heavens shall know of me. (*Chungamjib* 1998,  
105-106).

*Rain*

Rain falls on the dry branches of the tree standing in the wild  
city.

Sitting alone in an empty house

I feel I am a thousand miles away

On whom shall I rely on my empty mind? (*Chungamjib* 1998,  
126).

*Comforting my sad thoughts*

The ocean district is always dreary  
And all day in the bleak village the wind blows  
As if they know the spring, the flowers bloom by themselves  
And the moon rises in the night sky  
In an alien land a thousand miles away I shall long for my  
hometown  
And spend the rest of my life on a lonely island in the distant sea  
This, the heavens have chosen for me  
So why cry that I have reached a dead end? (*Chungamjib* 1998,  
98).

.....

I rarely roam outside, for I fear the national laws  
It is only once or twice a month  
And sometimes not even that.

...

My flesh and bones are isolated and there is no news from my  
close friends. Many of those I played with in the old days are  
now dead; what more misfortunes does this lonely being have to  
face? (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 199).

However, some of his writings suggest many people visited him during this time. The departure of his visitors was the basis for poems he composed expressing the sorrow of parting, such as this:

*Meeting Each Other*

I am so saddened, it feels like a dream  
That we can only meet for one night  
Because it is rushed, rather than feeling happiness  
It leaves only melancholy and worsens longing  
There is so much to say but the night is painfully short

And my heart is swamped but the day, too, is short  
I want us to become a pair of birds  
And take off and play in the blue skies  
When should we pledge to meet again?  
(*Chungamjib* 1998, 142-143).

Kim Sangjoe (1997b, 27) argued Kim Jeong's poem *Hedorok* is an interpretation of the solitude of exile and the resignation of life, or the stage at which one takes a philosophical view on life. Kim Sangjoe suggested Kim Jeong, in a state of despair, wrote as if he had resigned himself to the loneliness of living in solitude on Cheju Island and had lost all hope.

Kim Jeong was well versed in the fields of Confucianism and Buddhism. However, commenting on having learned 'The Way' through religion, he wrote: 'It saddens me to have learned 'The Way' when it is out of place with the world' (Kim 1997b, 36). The spirituality of 'The Way' he pursued was to 'study and analyse Zhuzi's *sohak*, elementary learning, to develop a bond in teaching the foolish and teach the people ethics by publishing the *hyangyak* (Kim 1997b, 24). *Hyangyak* was the set of regulations of local administration that were founded on Confucian concepts and directives by the Choson Dynasty's *yangban* hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> At that time, moral philosophy was an important aspect of government and was regarded as a branch of Confucianism. The aim of the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Sarim* faction with which Kim Jeong was affiliated, was the reform of the national regime intended to create a country of sound moral justice through self-taught gentlemen's customs and traditional common social practices.<sup>59</sup> This endeavour was quashed in the conflicts with the opposing *Hungu* faction. Kim Jeong and other leading proponents of Neo-Confucianism promoted the teachings of Zhuzi's *sohak* elementary learning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to encourage a fundamental morality to actions in Choson society. This was about the time when Choson society began to take Neo-Confucianism seriously. Kim Jeong and other *Sarim* members stressed the inner cultivation of the self as founded upon the *sohak*,

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<sup>58</sup> (See more researches in Rhyi 2005)

<sup>59</sup> (See more discussions on Kim Jeong's political engagement in Hwang 2006)

and aimed to realise the ‘right path’ through it (Hwang 2006, 76). They emphasised the fundamental duties and moral principles for individuals to abide by, and showed bravery by risking their lives by rejecting corruption and injustice. These efforts led to Kim Jeong’s eventual exile.

Through the teachings of religion via Confucianism Kim Jeong closely studied the fundamental qualities an individual requires to successfully live and mingle in society acting to the highest moral standards. He attempted to share this knowledge with society and collided with harsh realities. During and after his exile he appeared to become aware that what he had learned and read differed to real life. His writings suggest the resulting disappointment led to a sense of guilt and a desire to abandon everything, including himself. Confusion led him to what may in his case be seen as self-punishment in the form of drinking and laziness during his exile instead of reading and studying.

A particular aspect of Kim Jeong’s life was his keenness for practicing the ‘five bonds of human relationship’ taught in Confucianism (Kim 1997b, 36). As a result, he placed exceptional importance on filial piety. It appears to be for this reason that he illegally left his place of exile on the mainland to visit his ailing mother and was charged for the additional offence that led to his more extreme exile to Cheju Island. Also as part of his practice of the ‘five bonds’ he lamented being unable to serve his king, writing ‘the body is disgraced and I cannot serve [the king]’, for example in the poem *Imjuelsa* (see Fig. 4 later this chapter). Kim Jeong lamented he had wasted his life thus far and that he had studied the old classics and teachings and knew right from wrong, but out of laziness had lived life without devotion.

Though I learned many old teachings in my youth  
Because I am worthless and lazy I believe I have done  
many foolish things.  
I have enlightenment but what use for honour?  
Danger naturally follows a place in government  
And the nature of things is predetermined  
But I lived without that knowledge...  
Spending the rest of my life with regret

Would make up for the mistakes, I suppose.

(Kim Jeong, quoted in Kim 1997b, 38).

Some might say his assumption about his enlightenment was premature. It seems he became more aware of his attitudes and circumstances only after he was exiled to Cheju Island. His assumptions about his personal enlightenment might have resulted in him placing more importance on the practice of moral philosophy, and the study of theory, and dreams of devoting his life to the country and the king rather than being critically aware of himself and the realities of his situation. This may have underpinned his reasoning, confidence and apparent bravery in boldly pointing out flaws in the king's political judgements.

On the other hand, what he meant in asserting he had learned enlightenment which was out of place might have been that although he wished to share the meaning of 'The Way' with the people of Cheju Island, it did not suit them. He took interest in the communities around him during his time there and recorded their relatively uncultured ways. He lamented the prevalence of the superstitious worship of animals and made great efforts to educate the Cheju Island populace (Yang 1985, 519-520). In Kim Jeong's eyes, the people of Cheju Island did not generally live stable and culturally well-developed lives. The residents as he saw them were behind in many cultural aspects and even appeared somewhat uncivilised. Kim Jeong devoted some of his time on Cheju Island to 'civilising' the people on the island and even sank wells around the villages, some of which remain to this day, to provide the communities with fresh water (Yang 1985b, 56). He was critical of the residents and claimed 'very few individuals are literate and they are ungenerous' (Kim Jeong, quoted in Yang 1985, 519-520). He described himself as having been 'thrown onto the land of barbarians where the feeble body has half died' (Kim Jeong, quoted in Kim 1997b, 29-30).

Like other exiles, Kim Jeong was afflicted with many illnesses. The peculiar climate of Cheju Island can be difficult, especially the sweltering heat and humidity. Kim Jeong (quoted in Kim 1997b, 29) wrote: 'The earth seems to be burning ... but there is nowhere to run.'



The island [Cheju Island] climate is different [to other regions]  
And the steaming heat torments the ill.  
Even in winter the miasma would not stop  
So I fall ill before summer.  
When the clouds part I am startled by the heat  
And the sun sets before I know it.  
The worriesome fog is always dense  
So I am harassed by thick fog. (Quoted in Kim 1997b, 29).

He was also troubled by insects, especially at night, an experience he depicted thus: ‘The greedy fleas attack all night and the thirsty mosquitoes come at me before the sun has even set’ (quoted in Kim 1997b, 28-29).

Goblins make regular appearances in Kim Jeong’s poetry, suggesting he suffered from delusions about the legendary creatures. He once wrote: ‘I have to stay with the *tochaebi* [goblins] for the rest of my life; an empty field causes me worry about *tochaebi*’ (*Chungamjib* 1998, 35). Goblins, called *tochaebi* on Cheju Island, are worshipped as shrine deities ‘revered as the omnipotent rulers over the village land, holding the register of births and deaths of their people.’<sup>60</sup> Their role is believed to be to expel demons from the human spirit.

Approximately a year after his exile to Cheju Island, the bureaucrats of the restructured government brought to attention the fact that Kim Jeong had broken the law to visit his ailing mother during exile and requested the death penalty. The king, having little choice but to accept this request, ordered Kim Jeong be put to death by poisoning at the age of 36 (*Chungamjib* 1998, 11-12). Before his execution Kim Jeong wrote: ‘I endeavoured to accept life and death as the way of nature, but thinking that I must die I cannot help but feel dreadful (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 199). Kim Jeong’s feelings towards his death were echoed in his poem *Imjuelsa* (a word for confronting death):

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<sup>60</sup> (See more writings on *tochaebi* in Cheju Island in Kim 1992b, 58)

To be a lonely spirit abandoned on a remote island  
 I have left my mother and dared to break filial piety  
 Even if I meet this world and my life comes to an end  
 I will ride the clouds and reach heaven's door  
 Though I want to follow Gul-won and wander about  
 When will the long, dark night end?  
 To bury my gleaming, unwavering devotion in the rough fields  
 Is to break a dignified and admirable goal in its midst  
 Oh! May the million years know of my sorrow. (*Chungamjib*  
 1998, 177).

This poem has since been engraved on a plinth on Cheju Island (Fig. 4).

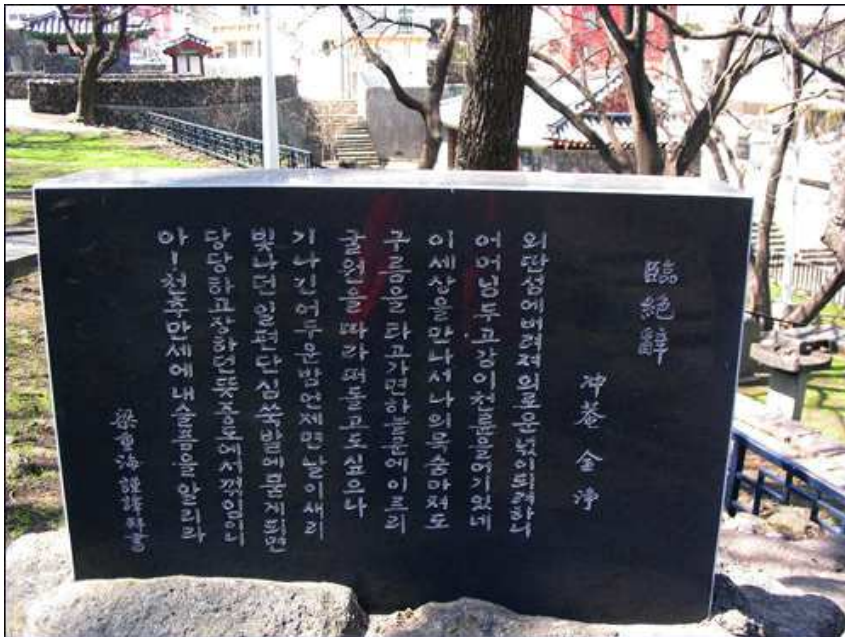


Figure 4: Engraved poetry *Imjuelsa* on stone, located on Cheju Island (Anonymous).

*Imjuelsa* comprises the last known written words of Kim Jeong. The poem describes his distress and guilt about being forced to die earlier than his mother and without upholding fidelity to his siblings. He was ashamed that his death would prevent him from serving the king or fulfilling his filial duty to his parents, and suffered greatly from his guilty conscience. Twenty three years after his execution, in 1545, the conviction of Kim Jeong was overturned and his place in public office restored (Hwang 2006, 80).

## Art practice

Kim Jeong was a poet, scholar and politician who possessed great talent in painting birds. He was well trained as the ‘three perfections’ artist, and specialised in *youngmohwa*—paintings of flowers, birds and other animals. *Youngmo* denotes the feathers of a bird, while *mo* denotes the fur of an animal. *Youngmohwa* was originally known as *hwajohwa*—painting of birds and flowers—but with the passage of time other animals, insects and flowers came to be integrated within the style and its name evolved to its present form.

The *youngmohwa* approach was influenced by Chinese decorative style paintings and was popular in Korea during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was a period in which the early Choson Dynasty heavily influenced by China was coming to a close and leading into the more ‘Korean’ second half of the Choson Dynasty period. The strong Chinese theme predominant in art was giving way to a new genre: a uniquely Choson, realist style of landscape and life painting. These Choson paintings were a Korean reinterpretation of a new Chinese style of painting (An 1987, 159-160). Thus the paintings of this period were predominantly characterised by noble artists’ reinterpretation of a style of painting heavily influenced by Chinese art into a Korean style, which involved the complete elimination of background and an emphasis on the subjects—birds and trees, for instance—using a monochrome style.<sup>61</sup>

During the Choson Dynasty period, *youngmohwa* was not considered as important a style as landscape and figure paintings in spite of its long history. *Hwajohwa* (on which *youngmohwa* was based) was developed in China during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) and introduced into Korea during the earlier Koryeo Dynasty (918-1392) when it was painted in the style of a ‘pure painting’ (the essence of which is formed by the expression of the beauty of colour and light). Later, during the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) *hwajohwa* underwent full-fledged development into the *youngmohwa* style as it is known today (Ha 1991, 244).

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<sup>61</sup> (For further writings on *youngmohwa* paintings in Choson Dynasty, see An 1987 and Ha 1991)

Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the Zhepai painting (Zhe school of painting) style of China's Ming Dynasty (1368-1643) became wildly popularised<sup>62</sup> and, at the same time, the lyricism of Korea was widely expressed through *youngmohwa* and *hwajohwa* styles (An 1987, 159-160), although many paintings maintained the pure painting style of the early Choson period.

Two popular subject matters in *youngmo* paintings of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> period were domestic animals and a pair of birds playing by flowers. Water or rocks were sometimes used to complement the subjects because it was believed integrating nature's many creations into a painting brought out human thoughts and emotions and helped in 'airing them out' (Ha 1991, 246). It was conventional to paint these subjects of *youngmo* in realistic detail, and they were usually painted in ink-and-wash monochrome. In the latter half of the Choson Dynasty the range of conventionally used subjects expanded to include not only flowers and birds, but also dogs, cats and other animals. Such subjects were not typically used to deliver, as ancient scholars did, poetic, idealistic or intellectual messages. Rather, they were a means to express simple, ordinary subjects with a sense of friendliness (Ha 1991, 244). The paintings, whose unique features were expressed using ink, were a method of self-expression of thoughts and sentiment for the artists, and exhibited a form of natural beauty as indicated by their recognition and establishment as a genre of art in Chinese-derived cultures (Baik 2001, 82).

In Asia, birds and flowers have been seen as not only beautiful but also symbolic. Mandarin ducks, for example, symbolise marital fidelity in China, Korea, and Japan; and hawks symbolise military skill.<sup>63</sup> Korea's *youngmo* paintings are believed to contain symbolic expressions of Asian views of nature including human qualities. Birds, in particular, were used to symbolically reflect the human consciousness, desires and philosophical perspectives on life. Ha (1991, 244) claimed birds were regarded as symbols of a bridge between sky and earth and between this world and

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<sup>62</sup> (For further readings of Zhepai painting style, see Watson 2003, 175-185 and An 1977, 24-26)

<sup>63</sup> (More writings, see *A Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* by Henk J. Herwig in Schaap 2007)

the next. Based on Shamanistic beliefs, birds were considered intelligent, which in religious terms also assumes a bridge between the earthly and spiritual. Historically, it is believed that nature and the human spirit become one and through the logic of the universe become integrated into the lives of the people. Thus the depiction of objects visible to the eye are sublimated through views of nature within, or exceeding, the domains of realism, and are expressed through symbolism that reflects the aesthetic consciousness of Korean customs.<sup>64</sup> The symbolism of plants and animals appears to have been shaped through the Koreans' preservation of their way of everyday life through their views of nature. The idea that rivers and mountains, as well as plants and animals, have spirits, and thus carry messages within paintings, contrasts significantly from the predominant views in the West.<sup>65</sup>

McMahon (2003, 71) emphasised the visual symbolism of birds and plants in the painting:

In looking at bird pictures, one sees of course the dark and light suggestivity. Also important is the alert turning of the heads of birds, which points to vitalism and change, and to the Taoist idea of alert living. There is also the sense that the controlling form of forms has given the different inner spiritual essences for the different kinds of birds. And there is always the hint of flight, of soaring upward toward the realm of Heaven and the immortals. The intuition that relates plants and birds to the presence of Tao as form of forms developed early, around 170 B.C. in the School of Names. In his history of Chinese philosophy, Fung Yu-Lan notes that this thinking reaches the "Concept of Platonic ideas or universals," and is mystical because in each lesser *Li* form, the "Supreme Ultimate in its entirety is inherent."

Kim Jeong, along with Lee Geun, was a painter of *hwajohwa* during the Choson

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<sup>64</sup> (Further discussions on nature and its symbolism in human life see, Ha 1991 and An 1988)

<sup>65</sup> (See *A Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* by Henk J. Herwig in Schaap 2007 (ed), 59)

Dynasty who used a monochrome style to express a sophisticated and concise imagery of birds as the ‘sketching of ideas’ rather than emphasising forms and styles of images. Painting *hwajohwa* became well-established with a uniquely Korean flavour during the Choson Dynasty period. Ha (1991, 252) commented, ‘The *hwajohwa* of the early Choson Dynasty strongly embraced Chinese influences, and with the backing of [Korea’s] cultural growth it developed into a painting style that took on strong Korean characteristics.’ In his critique of Kim Jeong’s bird paintings, Ha suggested that Kim Jeong emphasised the Korean characteristics with lyricism and simplicity, and added the pen and ink style characteristic of Chinese paintings to emphasise expression rather than portrayal.

In his painting of two birds perched on a thorny briar rose (Fig. 5). Kim Jeong used monochrome ink, and by rounding and emphasising the birds’ outlines, the animals are made to stand out. The clear and simple expression is a manifestation of the representative painting style of the time.



Figure 5: *The Birds*. Kim Jeong (1486-1521). (32.1x21.7cm). Monochrome ink on paper. Private Collection (*Chungamjib* 1998)

In two other paintings (Fig. 6 and 7) a lone bird is portrayed in contrast to the first painting (Fig. 5) of a pair of birds. Portraying two or more birds was the convention of bird paintings of the time. Painting single birds was notably unusual. Seemingly the bird in Fig. 6 depicts the blank look of one waiting alone after one's partner has departed. Again, as in Fig. 5 and the bird in Fig. 6 is located in a thorny surrounding while the lone bird in Fig. 7 appears ready to flutter off in search of a lost partner.



Figure 6: *Youngmo jeuljido*. Kim Jeong (1486-1521). (43.9 x 65.5cm). Monochrome ink on paper. (*Chungamjib* 1998).



Figure 7: *Youngmo sansudo*. Kim Jeong (1486-1521). (40 x 65.5cm). Monochrome ink on paper. (*Chungamjib* 1998).

The significance of the supplementary idioms of the bird's context is unclear. The bird in Fig 7 has been painted amongst short grasses while the birds in Figs 5 and 6 perch unsteadily on thorned branches of a flower and a thorn bush. The first two may represent a garden or a farm (thorny plants are typically all that is left after animal grazing). In contrast, in *Youngmo sansudo* (Fig. 7), the grass the bird is perched upon as well as the characteristics of the bird itself suggest the backdrop is that of a marshy coastal or riverine environment.

There is little evidence as to whether the paintings were painted before or after Kim Jeong's exile to Cheju Island. In fact, there is little evidence Kim Jeong painted at all during his exile to Cheju Island except for his apparent disclaimers that he did not. In many of the poems he wrote on the island, he expressed a frequent desire to paint and his sadness at being unable to do so. His poems contain many references to him drinking. It seems when his mood improved after drinking he felt a desire to depict this through painting, and when he saw a beautiful landscape he wished to transfer it to canvas. For example, he wrote: 'I am drinking a fragrant drink at a good gathering.



If I could put this pleasure to a painting I shall stay drunk for a thousand years' (*Chungamjib* 1998, 92). This may be interpreted as a reminiscence of the pleasure he felt when painting and a lamentation of the fact he could no longer paint. Alternatively, it may be the pleasure and beauty of the gathering and the effects of the alcohol were beyond what could be painted. He also wrote: 'There is splendid scenery around me but it is a pity I cannot paint it' (Kim 1997b, 44), which could be interpreted in one of several ways: he did not possess the motivation, inspiration or skill, the proper painting materials, or the permission to paint; or perhaps the beauty of the scenery was beyond what one could humanly transfer onto canvas with due skill. However, he portrayed the scenery through his poetry instead—a depiction possessing a certain liveliness as if one was seeing a painting through closed eyes. His poems possess much of the vividness of a painting. For example, one excerpt from his poem depicting a view from a sea cliff:

When the cloud clears and the fog lifts  
The painting of an auspicious mountain comes to life.  
The waves of the sea soar to swallow the foot of the mountain  
And the abysmal ravine sinks under the thick clouds.  
The cliff precipitous in layers, as if woven together with silk,  
Lights up when the sun shines in the east sea. (*Chungamjib* 1998,  
132).

It seems as if the outline in words of a piece of great landscape painting is contained within this poem. Kim Jeong expressed all elements of landscape painting: clouds, fog, a mountain, the sea, the foot of a mountain, a cliff that appears to have been cut away, and light. Many of his other poems, too, contain such poetic clauses as expressed here. Instead of painting physical paintings he left many such pictorial poems. This is the 'three perfections' aesthetic principle by Su Shi: 'Painting is mute poetry, poetry is speaking picture' (Ortiz 1999, 72) or the same meaning asserted by Kuo Hsi (1001-1090): 'A poem is a painting without form and a painting is a poem with form' (Sargent 1992, 272). Yan Yu's (1180-1235) definition also supports this claim: '[P]oetry excels by its transparent luminosity ... It is like echo in the air, color in form, the moon reflected in water, or an image in a mirror; words have limits, but the meaning is inexhaustible' (Ortiz 1999, 65). Kim Jeong showed an obsession with

the visual world, in contrast to the rich poems of Su Shi that depict human relationships and feelings or Kim Chonghui's very human letters of discontent. Excluding these other ways of understanding the world, Kim Jeong focused on the visual aesthetics of life as if it were a painting. This may not have offered the introspection required to adapt to adversity and may have contributed to his dependence on alcohol.

The reasoning that a poem's text, in the form of motifs, could be reminiscent of a painting is one of Su Shi's notions which has been well described in Sargent's (1992) research. Sargent rejected a poem could present a motif with as accurate a physical visualisation as an image within a painting could, but asserted according to the colophon Su Shi left after reading Han Kan's poem *Fourteen Horses*, that one could read a poem as if he were viewing a painting: it could be a 'word-picture as a representation of the painting' (Sargent 1992, 269):

When Mr. Han paints a horse it truly *is* the horse;  
When Master Su writes a poem, it is like *seeing* the painting.  
In this world there is no Po-lo, no Han, either:  
This poem, this painting—who is worthy to view them?

Kim Jeong composed poems as if they were paintings, and hence, perhaps due to his strong interest in *youngmohwa* painting, there is an abundance of metaphors of birds in his poems, especially wild geese, mandarin ducks, nightingales and swallows (*Chungamjib* 1998, 16-19). Through the imagery of birds, Kim Jeong compared the animals to a spirit that wants to be free, and expressed his loneliness of living away from home.

### *Swan*

A white bird plays by the riverside,  
and the green hills stretch out for 10*li* (4km).  
The smoke of cooking lazes in the old town,  
and darkness casts over the dwelling in the deep green  
mountains.

I lament the retreat of springtime as time passes  
But it is pleasant keeping company with the fish by the riverside.  
(*Chungamjib* 1998, 22).

Kim Jeong lived a solitary life even before and after he was exiled. He endeavoured to practice a kind of politics that would set society right and wished to help the ignorant gain enlightenment, but inside he harboured a lonely spirit, as is well expressed in his paintings and poems. He tended to paint one lone bird in his paintings. This can be explained in part from poems from his pre-exile days, in which he indicated he often worked in rural areas far from home and family (*Chungamjib*. 1998, 44-46). Kim Jeong's writings of that time indicate that during his time alone he was commonly afflicted with illnesses. It appeared he was often lonely, even before his exile, and perhaps painting lone birds was his way of expressing this. The sense of loneliness is strongly evident in this poem, written before his exile:

Standing alone, my gloom mounts from groundless worry.  
And thinking of my parents I stare long at the sky with white  
clouds.  
My mind hangs on the crescent moon so when can I go back?  
My home is distant and it has already been a year since I left.  
(*Chungamjib* 1998, 88-89).

## Lee Geun

Lee Geun (1614-1662), pen name Kyuchang, was a grandson of King Seonjo (1552-1608). His father Lee Gong (1588-1628) was King Seonjo's seventh son. Like Kim Jeong, Lee loved to read from a young age, including Chu-tzu's *Sohak* and *Deahak*; and Primary Learning and The Great Learning, among the *Four Books* in the Confucian doctrine. He was devoted to his parents and intelligent—he passed the first test of the *byeolshi*, a state examination to enter the ranks of officials.<sup>66</sup> Lee,

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<sup>66</sup> (For more writings on Lee Geun, see Oh and Hong 1998, 563-564 and *Tamla Munhunjib* 1976, 193)

like Kim Jeong, possessed skill in *youngmohwa* painting and studied the poetry of Du Fu (712-770), one of the most outstanding poets of China's Tang Dynasty; this earned Lee Geun a reputation as a 'three perfections' artist. Du Fu, who was known as a 'poet-sage' by Chinese critics, composed many poems about human psychology and the laws of nature, producing approximately 1,500 poems and numerous paintings.

### *Life in Exile*

Lee Geun's exile differs from most other cases. The youngest son in the family, Lee was sent to Cheju Island in 1628 at the age of 15 when his whole family was sentenced to exile there as part of the punishment for his father's treason. His father Lee Gong (1588-1628) had become involved in a plot to reinstate King Gwanghaegun (1575-1641), the 15<sup>th</sup> king of Choson who ruled from 1608 to 1623, to the throne. In 1628, Lee Gong was exiled to Jindo and forced to kill himself by drinking poison. Lee Geun and his family were labelled the family of a rebel and were exiled to Cheju Island. Lee Geun, overcome by shock upon hearing of his father's coerced suicide, wore traditional clothes of mourning for three years and, as the chief mourner of the family, devoted himself to the funeral. It is said people who witnessed this marvelled at his devotion (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007).

From 1628, when Lee Geun was exiled, until nine years later when he was released, Lee Geun recorded his experiences on Cheju Island in a document named *Cheju Pungtogi* and *Kyuchangyugo*. The fifteen-year-old was inexperienced in worldly affairs due to his previous sheltered life as a royal descendent. What he recorded focused primarily on strange and unfamiliar objects and occurrences in rural areas. It considered observations of his unrestricted travels around Cheju Island. Lee Geun had not been exiled for his own crime and it is believed he was not imprisoned within thorned fences or severely restricted in his movements like most other exiles, although he was often transferred from house to house. Lee Geun wrote not only about the occurrences on the island but also about the direness of his circumstances. The different quality of food and the day-to-day problems with poisonous wildlife were subjects:

In this island... the distressing thing is eating cooked millet. The most fearful things are snakes and scorpions. The sound of waves from the sea is sad to hear. (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 179-180).

There is nothing more fearful on the island than the *Imoogi* serpent,<sup>67</sup> and winter or summer there are *Imoogi* here and there. In the summer when it is dark and damp because of the long grass, they penetrate everywhere, including the main room, the eaves, under the dining table and under the mat. So in the nighttime when it is dark and I am deep asleep, I cannot cautiously avoid them and that is what scares me most.

...

Any islander who sees an *Imoogi* calls it a 'numen' and sprinkles fine rice or clean water and prays; he never kills or harms it. If someone were to kill it, it is said disaster will strike and he would die before he can take a step backwards. (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 170).

As a royal descendent Lee Geun's meals would have consisted of white rice and generous servings of high-quality food. His Cheju Island meals consisted of hard millet, and this would likely have been a punishment in itself. Having previously lived in a palatial residence, encountering snakes, scorpions and other pests within and around his dwelling would have caused him fear. He lamented the difficulty in cultivating rice on the barren fields largely covered in sand and gravel (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 170).

Lee observed that because of the humidity during the wet season water flowed from the walls, centipedes crawled about and frogs hopped around in the kitchen (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 170).

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<sup>67</sup> (A large snake was considered a legendary animal on Cheju Island. See more in Hunt 1990)

Because his father was executed for treason, Lee Geun had no dignity or privileges for his royal lineage; rather, he was constantly under surveillance. Support from the mainland or from the government office was almost non-existent as Lee Geun and his family were branded as traitors. Lee Geun's mother Yoon, in order to resolve the family's hardships, arranged marriages between Lee's three older brothers and women on Cheju Island. Pyo (2012) infers that these women, who married men of royal lineage, were likely from families with a strong economic footing and thus played a part in the survival of Lee Geun's family. Pyo also argues that Lee Geun's mother chose to push ahead with the marriages of convenience so that his family could survive without abandoning their royal lineage.

Lee Geun may not have suffered from loneliness as much as some other exiles to Cheju Island because his family had been exiled there together. He could not, however, escape the endemic diseases that plagued Cheju Island communities at that time. The *Kyuchangyugo*, a collection of Lee Geun's journal writing contains his descriptions of the obstacles he and his family faced on Cheju Island. The *Kyuchangyugo* also contains a description of Lee Geun's final three years on Cheju Island, and his release from exile.

Lee Geun contracted one of the diseases particular to the island and was afflicted for several months, during which he suffered from bloody discharge and fainted several times. He wrote: 'I gave up on life and lived on alcohol while lying in my room' and:

When my body is diseased, the only thing I could do is to wait to die. There is no way to access medicine or acupuncture. This island is a prison selected by the government and is unfit for human life. (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 179-180).

His older sister also perished from the disease and, two years after he arrived on Cheju Island, his younger sister also died. Lee Geun wrote her a letter after her death:

I worried about your illness last night

And this morning you are unmoving; what sorrow  
If you can, from the other world  
I hope you remember that your old mother is still alive (quoted  
in Pyo 2012).

Lee Geun (quoted in Pyo 2012) also wrote:

Smallpox is not always around in this area but I have experienced the pain of the death of my younger sister. Smallpox, which circulates once every 10 years, is spreading here again after a 15-year hiatus. Possibly because it has returned after 15 years it is lingering and afflicting a great number of people. Countless children are ailing from smallpox, and not a small number of adults have suffered and died from the disease.

In August 1633, the sixth year of Lee Geun's family's exile, when Lee Geun was 21 years of age, his father was acquitted and the government ordered both an investigation of the family's unjust imprisonment and early release of Lee Geun's family. There was opposition to freeing Lee Geun's family and claims the king's orders were a form of protection of rebels. The consequence was that the king was forced to rescind his decision in December that year and Lee Geun and his family were forced to remain on Cheju Island. Two years later, in 1635, as part of a national celebration, another order was issued to free the family. Again, an adversary declared to the king: 'If a crime is severe and heavy the prisoner cannot be released even during a national celebration,' and this led to controversy. Advocates later argued against this statement in a declaration to the king: 'During 10 years of exile [the family] received no benefits in the event of national festivities. The men will never marry and neither will the women. Bearing bitter resentment they will die on the island in the middle of the ocean. This is the reason your highness must not treat them as the other exiles.' As a result, Lee Geun's family was freed from Cheju Island.

In October 1635, when Lee Geun had recovered considerably, local Pastor Shingong gave a banquet in celebration of their release. Many islanders joined them and

celebrated with drinks and some *kisaeng* performed dances and songs. The villagers were sorry to part with Lee Geun's family, so Lee Geun composed a poem for them for their kindness. The next month, November, the family was ordered to relocate to Yangyang in Gangwon-do on the mainland. Despite their plans to sail for the mainland in early December, their journey was delayed due to strong winds and bad weather. After waiting 24 days, the family travelled by ship the shorter distance to Chuja island near Cheju Island. There their journey was further delayed by weather. They finally departed for Yangyang on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1636.<sup>68</sup> Lee Geun wrote a travel journal about the 1,355*li* (532km) journey. Geun eventually married, had seven children and returned to politics until his death at the age of 49 (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 5).

Although Lee Geun had the opportunity to marry during his exile, like his older brothers, he remained single (Pyo 2012). It appears he did form a relationship with a *kisaeng* on Cheju Island; he left her this poem as he was leaving:

Drinks mounted on a black donkey, she comes alone  
And comforts this drifter with tender will.  
Two streams of tears, too much sorrow  
A tune of a song of farewell feels priceless.  
Could she have been a flower in the past?  
After he leaves he could no longer hear the sound of jade  
Today this drifter's emotions are piercing  
And brooding in the white cloud fog, he recites (quoted in Pyo  
2012).

After his release from Cheju Island, Lee Geun, unable to forget his difficult time there, wrote several pieces about the experience. Though the idea may seem peculiar by today's standards, Lee Geun described exile as the one of the country's important norms and attributed his survival through the difficult circumstances to the honour of the king and his ancestors who looked over him. This psychologically odd way of

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<sup>68</sup> Lee Geun's *Kyuchangyugo* analysed here is Ko Changseok's Korean translation from the Chinese, personally obtained by the candidate during field research.



viewing exile demands further study: it is also implied in Kim Chonghui's letters in Chapter 4. Lee Geun wrote:

Cheju Island is the nation's exile land; exile is an important norm in national law. The 10 years were the longest [in my life], and I am the weakest among the people with no power to help. The weakest-bodied was endowed with exile, an important norm, to the exile land Cheju Island, endured many years, almost became fish bait in the sea, and after narrowly avoiding death was able to return alive in a handcart, and returned to the ranks of the Court, sitting and enjoying the years of peace. This is due to the kindness of the holy king and the generosity of ancestors, so one cannot think otherwise but as a matter of congratulation. Even during sleep-talk in the deep of night I often shed tears in appreciation. My descendants must take this to heart and strive towards filial piety for generations to come. (*Cheju Kogimunjib* 2007, 180).

### *Art Practice*

Lee Geun was known to be exceptionally skilled in 'the three perfections' (*Kansongmunhwa* 2003, 162). King Sookjong (1661-1720), who ascended the throne from 1674 until his death, evaluated Lee Geun's artistic talents thus:

I had heard and known of the filial piety of royal offspring [Lee Geun], and there is as much good fortune as there are many offspring, like Bunyang [Guo Ziyi (697-781), prince of Fenyang in the Tang Dynasty China]. The [Lee Geun's] poetic sentences are already beautiful but he is also dexterous in calligraphy and painting; he has already pursued Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei and learned Woogun [Wang Xizhi]. (*Kansongmunhwa* 2003, 162).

Gu Kaizhi (344-406), Lu Tanwei (450-490), and Wang Xizhi (307-365) were among the Four Great celebrated artists of the six dynasties period in Chinese history. King Sookjong is comparing Lee Geun's artistic talent with those of three of China's most renowned Four Great artists of the time.

There is, however, little information or research on Lee Geun's art practices and this presents several difficulties in examining the role of art in his life and his work. *Pungtogi* and *Kyuchangyugo* are the only sources known to contain comprehensive material on the artist. With the exception of a few pages in *Kansongmunhwa* (2003) and an article recently written by Jeon Enja (2009) and published in the newspaper *Jemin Ilbo*, research sources do not make many references to his paintings.<sup>69</sup> The book *Kansongmunhwa* (2003) published by the Kansongmunhwa Art Museum, stated that the creative processes of writing and painting were a form of relief for Lee Geun in enduring nine years of sorrow and exhaustion in exile. The validity of the book's claims, however, are tempered by its lack of identified artwork or evidence to suggest Lee Geun undertook such creative practices during his time in exile on Cheju Island. This suggests a need for further research to critically review the book's claim.

Lee Geun frequently painted birds, especially white herons (see Fig. 9 & 10). In addition to the two introduced here, there are several other bird paintings by Lee Geun. However his bird paintings, like Kim Jeong's, did not receive widespread attention from researchers, presumably because the *hwajohwa* was only popularised after 18<sup>th</sup> century Korean art (Ha 1991, 249). Before this, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, few artists other than Lee Geun and Kim Jeong painted *hwajohwa* paintings. Additionally, after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, splendid, decorative tones were often used to attract the attention and interest of audiences—a stark contrast to the monochrome, visually unattractive tones of the *hwajohwa* (Hong 1999, 539-540).

The fact Lee Geun created so many crane paintings suggests the bird may have held special significance for him. This may be due to his nature and upbringing. As the grandson of King Seonjo, it is likely Lee Geun lived a royal life, perhaps leading him

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<sup>69</sup> Article available at: <http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=225045>

to favour a correspondingly proud figure: the crane. The book *Kansongmunhwa* hints at this idea in noting Lee Geun was heavily influenced by the paintings of the Choson royal family and close relatives. In particular it emphasises the significant influence of the paintings and pen and ink techniques of his uncle Yun Shinji (1582-1657), husband of Princess Junghae (*Kansongmunhwa* 2003, 162).



Figure 8: *Seulwoljomong*. Lee Geun. Monochrome ink on silk scroll (22.6x29.4cm). (*Kansongmunhwa*).

*Seulwoljomong* is the painting Lee Geun created a year before his death. It was painted for his son Lee Yang (1645-?) who was then 17 years old. The inscription on the right of the painting reads ‘For Hwasun [Lee Yang] in the summer of the *shinchuk* year [1661].’ This, however, is in contrast with the title of the painting: *Seulwoljomong* (Dream of a Bird in a Snow-covered Moonlit Night). The painting is of a bird in the moonlight, resting with its head retracted in a silent and lonely atmosphere. The rocks and trees are angular and the strokes defined, forming a vivid painting. The indigo colours that form the light and shade give the work a particularly unique atmosphere.

*Kansongmunhwa* (2003, 163) interprets the meaning of the painting as Lee Geun showing his love as he paints a chilly winter scene to soothe his son’s discomfort in

the sweltering heat of the summer. In contrast, Fig 9 depicts a white heron, pleased to have made its catch, wading away with the fish in its beak.



Figure 9: *White Heron Swallowing a Fish*. Lee Geun. Monochrome ink on silk scroll. 22.6x29.4cm. (*Kansongmunhwa*).

In its surroundings the lotus bud stands upright from the shallow water amongst the waterweeds, adding to the peacefulness of the scene. In the book *Kansongmunhwa* it is stated the two white herons and lotus bearing fruit symbolise the passing of two *Kwageo* (highest-level State examinations in the Koryeo and Choson dynasties) at once (*Kansongmunhwa* 2003, 161). Such images, it states, formed important subjects in the *hwachohwa* of the Choson Dynasty. Additionally, although this painting of a white heron depicts only a sole bird it is a symbolism of the passing of *Kwageo*, it is described as the gem of mid-Choson white heron paintings (*Kansongmunhwa* 2003,

162).



Figure 10: *White Heron*. Lee Geun. Monochrome ink on silk scroll. 67x20.5cm. (National Museum of Korea collection).

Near the top of the painting (Fig. 10) is attached a separate piece of paper with King Sukjong (1661-1720)'s handwriting:

I do not favour particular things  
But I only enjoy paintings that have names.  
From this I came across and collected many paintings  
And I've come to search only for what is exceptional.  
King Sukjong in late summer of 1711.

This short piece expresses the king's fondness for Lee Geun's painting and admits that it is exceptional. The painting portrays birds playing in the lake and reed leaves portrayed vividly like lotus leaves with the backdrop of ripening lotus pips. In paintings of white herons, it was common practice to paint lotus pips and reed together. It is thought that such paintings also symbolised classical scholars' wish to pass the civil examinations, *Kwageo*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the exilic experiences and paintings of Kim Jeong (1486-1521) and Lee Geun (1614-1662), two artists exiled to Cheju Island during the Choson Dynasty, and described the bitter days the two artists endured. Whilst Kim Jeong and Lee Geun were exiled at different times during the Choson Dynasty they appeared to suffer similar fears, pain, despair and abandonment. They were unusual

in that they both left records of Cheju Island's customs, weather and religious faiths and described the living conditions and attitudes of exiles on Cheju Island. These records have lasted to serve as invaluable materials in the study of the Choson Dynasty and Cheju Island, and in this case, provide significant background to help understand the context and factors affecting painter Kim Chonghui, (see Chapter 5 & 6).

Through the depiction of birds in many of his poems, Kim Jeong expressed his desire to be a free spirit. His birds appear to have represented his dreams and thoughts in the bird paintings apparently painted before his exile. It can be viewed that his living conditions during exile did not offer him an opportunity to paint, and so he resorted to using vivid, scenery-like expressions in his poetry.

Similarly, there is lack of evidence to suggest that Lee Geun painted this painting on Cheju Island. Even if the two artists did paint there, their work may have been destroyed in the numerous riots and rebellions that took place on the island and led to the burning of many districts. Hence speculations regarding their work and their background need to be supported with further investigations by historians.

## Chapter 5

### **Exilic Experiences: Chusa Kim Chonghui (1786-1856)**

This chapter examines the epistolary literature and poetry that reflect the exilic experiences of Cheju Island scholar exiles of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) predominantly Kim Chonghui. It analyses the exiles' literary works including personal letters and poems produced during exile on Cheju Island and historically relevant exile-related writings. It is proposed this investigation will provide an understanding of the exile artists on the island and provide support for critical arguments on exile and creativity in Choson Dynasty Cheju Island. Many literary artists among more than 200 politicians and civilians exiled to Cheju Island wrote about their experiences in exile, especially emphasising the mental and physical struggles and living conditions they endured.

Some of their experimental writings allowed exiles to let out their anger and frustration, an action which at the same time reflects their social self-restraint. Many of these writings have been preserved and were available for research (see, for example, Chungam Kim Jeong (1486-1521), DongKae Joung On (1569-1641), Kyuchang Lee Geun (1614-1662), Kim Chuntaek (1670-1717), Yi Chinyu (1669-1730), An Dowon (1777-1800), and Chusa Kim Chonghui (1786-1856)). Some of these writings described in detail the environmental, cultural and social context of Cheju Island, while many others expressed their reflections of exile, including the internal and external struggles involved.

As part of its investigation of various exile letters and poems, this chapter closely examines personal letters and poems written by Kim Chonghui between 1840 and 1849 during his exile on Cheju Island. Kim's exile literature has been one of the most reproduced among that of Choson Dynasty Cheju Island exiles and has remained a valuable resource for historical research. It is not known precisely how many letters and pieces of poetry Kim produced during exile. Yoon (2001, 69-70) estimates his output to be approximately 45 poetry pieces and 82 letters written in the Chinese language, mostly sent to friends and family members, and another 13 letters written

in Korean which mainly consisted of those sent to his wife.<sup>70</sup> While many historical sources were destroyed during rebellions on the island, many of Kim Chonghui's literary works were preserved by close relatives. This chapter nevertheless limits the area of investigation by examining only relevant phrases in the writings that relate to the theme of the artist's exilic experiences. It examines the book *Wandangjeonjib*, a compilation of translations of Kim Chonghui's writings, and *Chusa Hangul Pyonji*, a collection of Kim's letters in Korean.

In one of his letters Kim Chonghui expressed a wish for his writings to be destroyed: 'I don't want my journals to be preserved. Please tear up the letters I sent you' (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 18). This led to a delay in the publication of his writings. His request may have reflected a concern about provoking the opposition and other parties by revealing his personal thoughts and opinions. Min Kyuho (1836-1878), one of Kim's pupils, noted that Kim once burned his writings from his younger years as he was not fond of the publication of his writings (Choi 1976, 9).

Kim Chonghui's letters were mainly sent to close family members and scholar friends to help continue his business and personal relationships while in exile. The letters mainly detailed his exilic experiences and displayed his fragmented mental and physical state. He found it difficult to adjust, emotionally as well as physically, to the sudden change in lifestyle. The characteristics of his exile writings can be divided into several contexts. The main subject matter was an account of his emotional state in the context of exile. The emotional instability which he described in most letters caused him great agony and a sense of estrangement, especially from friends and family. He explored the basic instincts of human desire through providing vent to deep emotion that he failed to control. A former nobleman accustomed to a fancy lifestyle, Kim was tortured in his daily life by being stripped of tasty food and he continually expressed his cravings in his letters. He demanded various necessities in almost every letter and complained about the physical pain brought on by the abnormal climate and sudden environmental changes on the island. Finally, he condemned Cheju Island's 'uncivilised' residents and social and cultural framework. Additionally, he criticised the political and social injustice that drove him to exile in

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<sup>70</sup> (See also in *Chusa Hangul Pyonji* 2004, 233)



his writings.

Exchanging letters via personal courier was the most common communication method among the educated Choson scholars during the Choson Dynasty (Haboush 2009, 171). There was no institution or organisation providing the facilities for transporting post and packages between Cheju Island and the Korean mainland so instead, letters were mainly delivered by servants' hand (Yang 1983, 21). Most high-class Choson literati possessed slave-servants in their households. Choson Korea was considered a 'slave society': 80 to 90 per cent of high-class households had slave servants<sup>71</sup> and most exiles preferred to take slaves with them. Kim Chonghui had four servants who helped him while he lived in exile and also delivered supplies and letters in and out of Cheju Island (Yang 1983, 21).

Kim Chonghui has been widely regarded as a scholar-artist of great influence in Korean art history. Research on his influence in the areas of literature, philosophy, religion and art criticism has been broadly developed, and opinion on his influence has been divided into criticism and appreciation. Despite his achievements in these research fields, most scholars and historians in Korea and elsewhere in the world have ignored the fundamental value of Kim Chonghui's work; they have not carried out a critical examination of his psychological experiences and the characteristics of the physical environment that disturbed the state of his health during exile.

The discussion of the psychology of Kim Chonghui's exile is in counterpart with an examination of the house in which Kim Chonghui was confined on Cheju Island. As a result of rebellions and other invasions on the island many historical resources and evidence of exile are believed to have been destroyed. After more than 150 years Kim's exile house was reconstructed after the original structure was destroyed. Today the house and its settings remain well preserved and a new memorial gallery dedicated to Kim's legacy has been established. The candidate's field research on Cheju Island investigates the place as a tool to conceptualise the realistic, concrete conditions of exile. Various photos taken from the field research will be analysed in a visual investigation which will help to comprehend the authenticity of exile life and

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<sup>71</sup> (Excerpts from the Pangye Surok: Yu Hyongwon on Abolishing Slavery 2000, 2)

the physical landscape. In this chapter, some photographic examples of Kim's Cheju Island exile house taken by the candidate are provided as reference.

### Family Background



Figure 11: *Portrait of Kim Chonghui*. 1856. Huiwon Yi Hanchul (1808—?) (Gwachun Cultural centre website)

Kim Chonghui (1786-1856), pen name Chusa, was a well-known Korean scholar and artist in Korea's nineteenth century Choson Dynasty and was skilled in 'the three perfections': painting, poetry and calligraphy. Kim's reputation was established with the representative calligraphic work *Chusache* (Chusa style) followed by epigraphy, archaeological methods, poetry and painting. Kim was famous not only as a great artist and calligrapher but also as a leading intellectual, pioneering the transformation of stream of thought, converting conventional ways of ideological structure and adapting new dimensions of cultural trends from China.

Kim Chonghui was a descendant of the scholar-official Kyongju Kim family with a royal lineage: that of King Youngjo (1694-1776), formed in the marriage between the king's daughter, Princess Hwasun (1720-1758) and Kim Chonghui's great-

grandfather, Kim Hanshin (1720-1758). During Kim's earlier years, many of the skilled calligraphers in his family, on both paternal and maternal sides, influenced him both in his life and artistic pursuits. Kim was regarded as a dutiful child and caring brother who was interested in reading all kinds of books and composing poetry (Choi 1976, 6). At the age of six, his talent for calligraphy was first recognised when his now-famous writing *Ipchuncheop* was posted outside the gate of his house (as a seasonal custom for good luck and good health, pieces of writing were often posted on the wall or gate of a household at the onset of Spring). It attracted the attention of passing scholar Pak Chega (1750-1805), well known to literary artists of calligraphy and a leading member of the North Learning movement in the Choson Dynasty. Park entered the house and told Kim's father the boy would become famous for scholastic and artistic success and expressed his wish to teach and guide Kim towards achievement. Park became a great teacher to Kim and taught him to build the foundations of scholarship which would influence him throughout his life. (Another famous anecdote for the writing *Ipchuncheop*, was that Choson Dynasty premier Chae Chegong (1720-1799) read the writing while passing the house and gave word to Kim's father that Kim could one day become a great calligrapher but, as a double-edged sword, his life would meet great tragedy if he kept pursuing his career as a calligrapher and became famous. Despite this prediction, however, Kim's pursuit of creating calligraphy, paintings and poetry continued, and in a way the premier's prediction could be considered to have come true in that Kim met tragic life experiences—most notably a death sentence which later gave way to a life in exile.

Throughout recorded history, mythical stories about Kim, which often consisted more of false accounts than of true fact, asserted that he spent twenty four months in his mother's womb, nearly three times the length of a typical pregnancy; and by the time he was born, his teeth were already showing, along with signs of physical and mental maturity. In addition, it is said that his birth gave life to the withered pine trees in the *Palboun* Mountain and filled a drying well with fresh water.

Kim Chonghui was adopted by Kim Noyoung (1747-1797), an older brother of Kim's father Kim Nokyong (1766-1840) who had no legitimate son. At that time, adopting a child from a sibling was common practice in Korean society, in keeping

with a custom of the late Choson period that the family line must be carried on by the eldest legitimate son (Deuchler 1992, quoted in Haboush 2009, 317).

Kim's younger years were filled with loss; between the ages of nine and twelve, he experienced the tragic loss of his grandparents, his adoptive father Noyoung, and an elder cousin. As the only son he was responsible for his family; he married, at the young age of fifteen, Lady Lee from Hansan. At sixteen, however, more misfortunes began. His biological mother died and while grieving, his respected teacher Park Jeaga was exiled. At 20, he endured the death of his first wife Lee after five years of marriage (there are very few references to Lady Lee in historical documents). This was followed by the death of his adoptive mother when he was 21.

When Kim turned 23, his hardships seemed to abate when he was remarried to Lady Lee from Yean (his second wife having the same surname as his first), with whom he fell madly in love. He also began to find success in his career as a scholar. In 1809, at the unusually young age of 24, Kim passed the civil service examination, the single most important channel for entry into society in the Choson Dynasty (Duncan 2000, 118). Just after this he was presented with the opportunity to visit China with his biological father, Kim Nokyong (1766-1840), the deputy chief of the embassy at the time. Kim stayed in Beijing for four months, and during his stay he met many Chinese scholars, perhaps most significantly Wang Fenggang (1733-1818) and Ruan Yuan (1764-1849), both of whom were to become some of the most influential figures in Kim's scholastic career.

Although his second marriage brought him a happy and stable life, Kim had no children until the age of 32. He adopted his nephew Sangmoo as his heir and in 1817 also had a son, Sangwoo, by a concubine (employing a concubine to have children was common practice in the Choson Dynasty) (Haboush 2009, 197). This son received immense affection from Kim.

With the aid of King Sunjo (1790-1834), Kim Chonghui and his father Kim Nokyong, who were political supporters of the king, walked a safe political path. Kim Chonghui was a civil member of the government official scholars, with the

prestigious position of Deputy Minister of Military Affairs (Shin 2005b). In 1827, King Sunjo entrusted his only son Hyomyung, who had just become an adult, with political matters. However Hyomyung died unexpectedly in 1830. With his death Kim Nokyong's position was threatened by the opposition, Andong Kim's *Sedo* political faction. Kim Nokyong became the subject of baseless slander and allegations by the ruling party and was sentenced to exile in 1830 to the remote Gogeu Island in the Jeolla region at the age of 45. He died in 1840.

In 1840, Kim Chonghui was arrested for being implicated in an incident involving Yoon Sangdo (1768-1840), an act from ten years earlier for which his father Kim Nokyung was partly responsible. Despite Kim Nokyong's death, Andong Kim's political members requested a review of his wrongdoing from 10 years past (Choi 1976, 22-23). The largely forgotten incident was brought to light by Andong Kim Honggen (1788-1842) who wrongly accused Kim Chonghui of taking part, and of unruly behaviour (Yoo 2006a, 136). This was part of Andong Kim's tactics to throw the anti-Andong Kim family out of power. The result was his removal from the political scene in the capital, and a post on Cheju Island. At the time, Kim had just been appointed as the deputy chief of the embassy and was about to have the opportunity to revisit China, something he had yearned for since his first visit at the age of 24. Kim was in fact saved from execution by the help of his friend, Jo Inyoung, who wrote a memorial to the king on Kim's behalf. On 20th August 1840, immediately after his mandatory punishment and without the chance to bid his family farewell, Kim was exiled at the age of 55. He experienced two periods of political removal: the first, exile on Cheju Island between 1840 and 1849, and the second, exile in Bukchong, South Hamgyong Province, between 1850 and 1853 (Choi 1976, 8).

Most exiles typically received a hundred strokes of flogging on the buttocks with a cudgel before being sent to the exile destination (Rhyi 2005, 79). Although no historical records remain detailing the exact methods of punishment imposed on Kim prior to his exile, a few supporting pieces of evidence have been discovered, such as in Kim's letters he wrote to his friend, Kwon Donin (1783-1859) a Minister of Punishment, describing the flogging he received while strapped to an instrument of

torture for 40 days before he was exiled (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 206). This would suggest that he, like other exiles, received a hundred strokes.<sup>72</sup> Kim Chonghui briefly mentioned the disgrace in a letter to Kwon Donin:

Shabby appearance was the worst humiliation of my life and, I would say, the more awful thing is to be whipped. Now, I get both punishments. In the last [forty] days, I experienced a sadness and harshness as never before. When millions of people try to kill me, you are the only who cried for me.<sup>73</sup>

For those exiled, the quality of each exile's journey to his exile destination depended on the distance and the manner in which he was transported (Kim 1995b, 124). It has been suggested that many Choson Dynasty exiles who were government officials or of the *yangban* class would be accompanied by personal servants to their exile destinations. Most exiles walked unless they were fortunate enough to be provided with cow- or horse-drawn carriages. This meant exiles might walk across several provinces. According to historical records, some were forced to walk 80-90 *li* (between 30-35km) every day for months, depending on the distance and road conditions during the journey.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> (See Chapter 2 for further discussions on methods of punishment)

<sup>73</sup> (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 206. Adapted from translation by Chun 1996, 16)

<sup>74</sup> (Further discussions on how the exiles being transported to exile destination, see Kim 1998c and Chung 2002)



Figure 12: Replica of a person being transported to the exile land. (Culture content website)

Figure 12 illustrates a small sculpture replicating a typical scene of an exile being transported to his exile destination, in this case in a cage mounted on a bullock cart. Transportation by bullock cart was one of many methods used.

Kim (1995b, 124) claims that no historical records remain describing the exiles' journey from the capital to the other regions and, in Kim Chonghui's case, it appears no historical records remain describing his journey from Seoul to Jeolla Province. However, the first letter he sent to his brother Myonghui since his exile contains some information about his journey from the mainland to the island (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 115-118). Historians have claimed that exiles typically had to walk months to first reach the Jeolla province in south-Western Korea, the point of transit by boat to Cheju Island (Kim 1995b, 124, cited from *Daemyungryul*). From Seoul to Cheju Island, Kim presumably travelled across many regions of the Korean peninsula—from Seoul to Chunan, then through Namone and Naju, and finally through Haenam in Jeolla province where he was stranded for several days because of the severe weather, before boarding a boat to travel to Cheju Island. This travel route is known to have been taken by most Cheju Island exiles during the Choson Dynasty (Kim 1988, 5).

From his letters and other sources it is known that one of Kim Chonghui's servants and guides nominated by the government accompanied him on his journey to exile (in his letter written to his second brother, Kim Chonghui expressed his appreciation for the guide who accompanied him all the way to Cheju Island) (Choi 1976, 262-263). The primary tasks of the 'observers/guides' were to both guide the exiles to their destinations and prevent them from escaping.<sup>75</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3, the journey across the sea to reach Cheju Island was a long and often life-threatening journey for exiles, but according to Kim Chonghui's account his journey was not a particularly painful one:

On the day that I left, the wind and waves were so fierce and biting in the afternoon that the ship was violently rocked by the waves, and many people, including me, for whom it was the first time on board a ship, complained of light-headedness and there was not one face that did not change colour. I, however, would sit at the bow of the boat and eat alone or talk of the joys and sorrows of life with the boatmen in a joint effort to ride the wind and overcome the waves. How could I call myself strong, after all the sins that I have committed? It is but the king's divine powers delivered from afar, powers handed down out of pity from the heavens. (Kim 1840, quoted in Jeong 1996, 36).

Despite the difficulty with which he crossed 150 km of what is now called the South China Sea, Kim Chonghui described the experience almost with joy and pride.

Additionally, in the first letter he wrote his wife after arriving, Kim notes that while many others on the ship suffered seasickness that prevented them from eating for a whole day, he suffered from no such symptoms and ate well (*Chusa Hangul Pyonji* 2004, 234). Min Kyuho (1836-1878), one of Kim's pupils, quoted in Choi (1976, 7-8)

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<sup>75</sup> (See more in Chung 2002)



recalled in his writing the mysterious performance by Kim onboard ship:

Cheju Island, which lies in the middle of the sea, had such blustery weather that it always took voyagers anywhere from ten days to a month to travel across its seas. On my attempt to cross it the winds and currents were so strong that I couldn't be sure whether I would survive. All aboard the ship were wailing, out of their minds with worry, and likewise Dosagong, [the chief boatman] his knees knocking, could not bring himself to go forth. I sat upright on the bow of the ship, composing and reciting a poem in a voice so loud that the winds and waves could not drown it out. Raising my hand to point, I declared, "Dosagong, turn the rudder with all your might and go in that direction." We sailed quickly and the ship, which left in the morning, arrived at Cheju Island in the evening. The people of Cheju Island were astounded and said that we had crossed the seas by soaring through the sky.

In his writing, Min Kyuho claimed that it took from ten days to a month to get to Cheju Island by boat, however, historical documents claimed that, with a good tailwind, a boat could travel "as fast as an arrow flying through the air" and arrive at the island within a day (*Tamla Munheunjib* 1976, 297). Kim quite possibly neglected this fact intentionally in an attempt to feel superior, to distract himself from the frightening reality of his situation. Nonetheless, as he stated, the unusually quick arrival of their boat was much talked about on the island.

### **Life in Exile**

After a thousand miles over the sea,  
At last, I reach Cheju Island.  
I walk inland, a desolate place,  
And look around in all four directions.  
What I see is only the ocean,

What I hear, stormy waves.<sup>76</sup>

This poem was written by An Dowon (1777-1800) when he first arrived at his place of exile and illustrates his feelings of disorientation at the time. Exiles typically arrived on Cheju Island without prearranged accommodation. The first challenge for an exile was finding a temporary host family. From the islanders' points of view, the exiles were unwanted outsiders to be treated with suspicion, considering their criminal backgrounds. Offering to accommodate an exile meant a strain on a host family's limited stock of food and goods, and considering the fact that most people on the island were already suffering from deprivation of basic necessities, it was unlikely that many islanders were willing to offer a helping hand.

Usually, influential members of the community were specifically chosen to become hosts for exiles and were responsible for supervising, observing, and caring for them (Yang 1984). All related matters were overseen by the local governors who authorised the community's administrations including watching the exiles' movements. Higher-class exiles who successfully bribed the local governors were supplied with spacious rooms and quality goods and were at least given the impression of being welcomed into the community. These claims were described by exiles, such as An Dowon (1777-1800): poor exiles who could not afford bribes, of course, would have disapproved of this practice. An Dowon criticised the regional administrators who illegally accumulated wealth from high-class exiles and used their authority to convince host families to accept bribes from exiles who in turn had to sacrifice much of their assets.<sup>77</sup>

An Dowon, a middle-class man, was charged with embezzling money from the public treasury and accused of gambling. At the age of 34 he was sentenced to exile to Chujado, a region roughly halfway between Cheju Island and Jeolla Province on the southeast coast of Korea. An Dowon composed the poem out of sorrow at the difficulty in finding a place to stay. Instead of expressing anger and blaming the local

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<sup>76</sup> (An. n.d., adapted from translation by Lee 1981, 183).

<sup>77</sup> (See more exile writings by An Dowon (1777-1800) in Lee 2003; 1981)

residents, he accepted his situation on the basis that he was, after all, an exile. He was critical, however, of the residents' unsympathetic behaviour stemming simply from the fact that he was poor and of low social status.

The host family often judged the exiles on their background: their assets, social status, and potential for recovering to their previous political positions all played a part. Exiles with wealthy backgrounds who were willing to use bribery found a host family more easily than poorer exiles with lower social status, who could be left homeless. Poor exiles would often be abused not only by the host family but also on the streets, and some slept in the horse stable instead of in the house (Kuack 2011). This was evidenced in An Dowon's poem entitled *Manonsa (Song of Ten Thousand Words)*, describing the poor exiles' despair:

Where will I lodge?  
Whose house shall I seek?  
Tears blind my eyes, and I stumble with every step.  
I go to the next, the master makes some excuses.  
Who would like to put up an exile as his guest?  
Only because of court pressure, they agree to take me in.  
They dare not protest to an official, but pour out their chagrins  
to me. (An Dowon, quoted in Lee 2003, 237).

Within this culture of relationships between exiles and host families, Kim Chonghui, from a wealthy, high-status background, would likely have found a host family without difficulty, although because of his sentence, not necessarily in the best conditions. Kim was a descendant of a wealthy royal lineage and was used to a life of luxury. This might have made the prospect of living a life of squalor on the island especially challenging for him, and it frequently prompted an outpouring of emotion in letters to his closest confidantes.

When he first arrived on Cheju Island on September 27 1840 Kim was confined in the most isolated suburb in the Daejunghyun district. As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, this was an area that had the worst living conditions for exiles and the worst weather conditions, situated in a low lying area and very close to the coastline. He

was offered the first house owned by Song Gyesoon and is believed to have stayed for only a short period of time before he was transferred to a house owned by Kang Hosoon (Fig. 13), who may have been an influential person in the region. It is speculated that Kim was transferred to several other houses in the Daejunghyun district before finally settling in Kang Hosoon's house, where it is believed Kim stayed for the remaining nine years of his exile.



Figure 13: Kim Chonghui's house of exile in Cheju Island. (Gwacheon Cultural Centre website)

Kim Chonghui's house of exile has been well-preserved by the Cheju regional council to this day. It has been recognised as a symbol of exile history and become a significant tourist destination. The Cheju Islanders have paid tribute to Kim's honourable achievements by crediting him as a pioneer of civilisation since his residence there from 1840 to 1849. The house is located in an ordinary residential area in the Daejunghyun district where a modern suburb meets historical dwellings with hundreds of years of historical difference between them. The house has been reconstructed after the original house was burned down during what is now known as the '4.3' rebellion or the 'Cheju April Third Incident' which lasted from 1948 until 1954. In 1984 the Cheju regional council reconstructed the house based upon

descriptions of the original structure provided by a descendent of Kang Hosoon.<sup>78</sup> Some parts of the original house, including doors and parts of the kitchen, were reused during reconstruction to preserve as much of the original structure of the house as possible.

Figure 14 shows the house in which Kim was born and raised, still preserved to this day. The scale and size is noticeably larger than his exile house.



Figure 14: The house in Yeasan, Chungcheong Province in which Kim was born.<sup>79</sup>

Despite it being the place of his imprisonment, Kim Chonghui's attitude towards his new exile home, as described in the letter below, was quite positive. The letter, which described the conditions and structure of the house, was written for his wife and brother, and was his first description of the host house to his family:

I arrived at Daejunhyun house on October 1. The house is

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<sup>78</sup> (The candidate had a personal communication with the site manager on January, 2010)

<sup>79</sup> (Photographs used in this research were taken by the candidate during the field research in Cheju Island, January 2010 unless otherwise stated)

reasonably spacious and suitable. It has one bedroom and a living area with wooden floors, and because the walls are clean there is no need for a re-papering; in fact, this is over the top for me. (Kim 1840, quoted in Yang 1983).

At the time of arrival at the exile destination, Kim had already accepted his transgressions and the fact he was a prisoner, and this is a likely reason he considered the exile house reasonable and even ‘over the top.’ In another letter to his brother he elaborates on his impression of his new home:

...After arriving in the village I found the neighbourhood smaller than I had imagined. Jung<sup>80</sup> was to arrive first and rented a missionary home from a host called Song Gyesoon, a military officer, which is located in a nice area in the lower part of the neighbourhood and is adequately clean and luxurious. There is a heated room to the south with an eyebrow-shaped porch, a small kitchen to the east, another kitchen about the size of two rooms to the north of the small kitchen, and also a storage room in the outbuilding. Also there is another main building where the host stays. If one of the outbuildings is divided in two and a small kitchen and heated room added, I think guests or servants could stay there. I heard that it is not difficult to do this. (Kim 1840, quoted in Choi 1976, 263-264).

His letter to his second brother Myonghui displays a relatively relaxed attitude toward his future life on the island. Kim distanced himself from the hardships and despair of being an exile, even praising the king who, in his mind, still cared for him:

The place I’ve finally reached after weathering the storm.

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<sup>80</sup> It is not known who Jung was, however s/he is believed to be one of Kim’s servants who accompanied Kim to the island.

The king's blessing shining upon the South Pole [Cheju Island]; the waves are calm.

...

The homeowner is very simple and cautious, and I am pleased about this. I am filled with wonder why I do not find this situation painful. I will put up with any other trifle matters that cause discomfort. What else can I do? (Kim 1840, quoted in Choi 1976, 263-264).

Supporting the possibility that some exiles did not form negative first impressions of Cheju Island appears in a piece of writing by Kim Yoonsik (1831-?), a member of the literati exiled to Cheju Island in 1897, in which he recalls his first impression of his house of exile:

The house is beautiful and spacious...and the garden is suitable for a leisurely walk. The host provides good service and is easy-going; the food is plentiful, delicious, and suited to my tastes, and tastes identical to food from Seoul. As an exile I almost feel spoiled. (Kim 1840, quoted in Kang 1988, 114).

Kim Chonghui was sentenced to a form of house arrest called *Weerianchi*, which is discussed in Chapter 2.



Figure 15: Kim Chonghui's exile house.

Figure 15 is a photograph of a reconstruction of the house that Kim Chonghui lived in during his exile. Thorn bushes sit above the front rock fence, and historical records indicate the height of the thorn bushes originally rose above the height of the house. During reconstruction of the house after the fire, thorn bushes were newly planted at a lower height. The towering height of the original bushes had meant that sunlight was reduced, adding to the feeling of isolation from the outside world (Lee 2005a, 35). Kim Chonghui described the *Weerianchi* site in his writings thus:

A fence was built around the outline of the house and a space was made between the rocks where food can be passed through; I feel this is more than is necessary. (Kim 1840, quoted in Choi 1976, 263-264).

### **Psychological conflict**

Forced to adapt to a new country and environment, it was not only Kim Chonghui but also most exiles on the island likely faced psychological alienation, loneliness



and desolation. Myonam (1833-1906), who was sentenced to exile in Cheju Island in 1873, also described his emotional feelings in a poem:

I am filled with emotion after arriving here at a place plagued  
with endemic disease.

...

I am aged but reading books to my heart's content in a cave...

My only work is to mend fishing rods...

With the onset of cold weather I can finally understand the icy  
heart of pine trees.

...

Now that my king and my parents are so distant

To what do I devote my fragments of a mind?

...

Looking north, heaven is so distant

And looking south, land has reached a dead end

All my sorrow is passing like the flow of water

The sail of the boat left to the winds.

...

Upon sparing some time to climb to the attic bathed in  
moonlight

I am overwhelmed by a desire to return.

People take delight in fine weather

But the chirping birds and withering flowers sadden the  
wanderer. (Myonam n.d., quoted in Han 1990, 169-174).

The rigors of life in exile are likely to have brought out some of the most vulnerable sides in the exiles. The conditions may have distorted their sense of self and their views of the world as well as to their lifelong history of self-cultivation.

In Kim Chonghui's case, the positive attitude he adopted on his initial arrival on Cheju Island did not last long, and he gradually became conscious of the realities of life in exile. Many exiles were apparently overwhelmed by their immediate circumstances and suffered from intense nostalgia and other strong emotions. From

the difference in tone between Kim's letter written immediately after his exile and the one written several months later, which we will discuss next, it is possible to deduce that he grasped the bleakness of his future. Kim realised he was condemned to a life often lacking even the bare necessities of life, such as food and water. After his initial optimism disappeared, Kim complained and lamented his circumstances in letters to his brother Myonghui, admitting he was no longer the strong-minded person he used to be:

...My deep longing so far from home never ceases to overwhelm me even for a moment. Throughout this month, a feeling of sorrow has kept pressing me down continuously, but I am putting up with it. (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 265).

The letter below echoes the despair Kim would have felt as he writes that he may be unable to contact his family because he is surrounded by sea on a lonely island. Kim also describes his sense of estrangement from his brother, realising there is no hope of reuniting with him:

The end of the ocean seems close to sky that I could not see. Just thinking about the distance makes me dizzy and, at this circumstance, I may not be able to contact you anymore. (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 260-261).

To his brother Myonghui, too, Kim writes:

I am surrounded only by ocean, feeling far distance from nowhere which we could never come and go each other and it strikes my sentiment deeply. This universe is one house and what is different while we are together every day. Only my hope is to live longer with happiness and peace together. (quoted in Choi 1976, 273)

Historical evidence indicates Kim Chonghui wrote more than eighty letters during

his nine years in exile.<sup>81</sup> Many of these letters were to close friends and family members, in particular his wife and brothers. The letters suggest he had an especially strong relationship with his two brothers Myonghui (1788-?) and Sanghui (1794-?). The strong bond between Kim's brothers was expressed in the many letters they wrote each other, which may have been influenced by the three virtues in Confucian orthodoxy: filial piety, fraternal respect, and compassion (Setton 1989, 386-387). Kim's two brothers were not only concerned for his well-being, they also shared the pain and burden brought on by his exile. Kim was the eldest son in the family and it appears Kim treated his brothers with great devotion even after his exile. In the following letter to his second brother, Myonghui, he showed his care and devotion while asking questions and showing his concern about the well-being of each and every family member. It appears from the letter that he met his two brothers during the journey to his exile destination, after which he grew concerned about their sickly appearances:

Is everyone well? Are my cousin, sisters, stepmother, and the situation in Seoul all right? You and your younger brother looked dark and very thin. I worry that you might get sick in the future. I am praying a thousand times for you, that you make an effort to eat and take your medication so I would feel better and not have to worry so much from such a distance. I am worried about you even with the ocean lying between us and I miss you all so much. Did you have time to reunite with your younger brother? (Kim 1840, quoted in Choi 1976, 260-261).

This was the first letter Kim wrote his second brother Myonghui when he arrived on Cheju Island. Despite the harsh reality Kim faced, he remained loving and concerned for his family, whose well-being was his responsibility as the eldest son. In Korean tradition, the eldest son in a family becomes the successor when his father dies and takes upon new responsibilities of caring for the family. In the letter below, sent to his brother Myonghui in 1844, Kim expressed great concern about Myonghui's ill

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<sup>81</sup> (See also in *Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 233 and Yoon 2001, 69-70)

health and advised him to care for his health despite his own dire circumstances in which he was struggling to stay optimistic. The sudden transition from a life of power and reputation to one of imprisonment may have led to emotional instability, but despite the sense of loss and despair, he tried to remain faithful and continued to express care and concern for his family through his letters.

I worry that the symptoms of your freezing hand have not been cured yet. Keep taking your prescription medicine and see how it goes. Take more care of your health as spring approaches, and exercise is beneficial too. How well are you eating and sleeping? It is good to have light meals and to get some rest. I miss you every moment I spend so far from you, and this month especially I have been feeling sad from time to time but I am enduring so I can see the bigger world. (Kim 1844, quoted in Choi 1976, 265).

Throughout the exile period, it appears Kim was constantly worried about his family, thus his many letters. In the following letter to his brother dated 1848, the last year of exile, Kim wished him a happy birthday:

When did you receive the letter that I sent you[?] As autumn comes, your 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday has arrived. Since we all have lived enough for what it meant to be, how can we only be so cheerfully great it, not to mention being in this circumstances. Only, how can we stop younger brother from doing meaningful things for old people like us, celebration with a big party. (Kim 1848, quoted in Choi 1976, 273).

The reason Kim Chonghui had little choice but to worry for his family is likely because he was unable to fulfil his role as a father figure. In spite of his exile, he strived to help his family as much as he could but it appears that he often fell into despair, realising he was physically too far away.

By various pieces of evidence it appears Kim was constantly reminded of, and

tortured by, the fact that he was the cause of his family's tribulations. In his view, his family was on its knees because of him. The discord between his love for his family and his sense of guilt led him to be profoundly distressed and aggrieved. Perhaps as a feeble attempt to care for his family from afar, in many of the letters he wrote to his brother, Kim wrote thorough instructions commanding the way family matters should be handled. Lamenting the distance which separated Kim from his family, he expressed his sense of hopelessness and estrangement from the outside world.

Although he was imprisoned, there is substantial evidence in Kim's writing that he was permitted to partake in some activities outside prison under district law (see brief discussions in Chapter 2). In one poem, quoted in Jeong (1996, 90), he wrote: 'The only thing that gives me pleasure is to go fishing and to collect dried trees [firewood] from the forest and fields.' Aside from those activities necessary to Kim's existence, writing letters, composing poetry, and creating art (see Chapter 5) were daily diversions which allowed Kim to vent his emotions and communicate with close friends and family living outside the island. It is possible that writing to his loved ones allowed him, if only for moments at a time, to experience a sense of emotional healing instead of feeling vulnerable or alone. This may explain the sheer number of letters that he wrote his friends and family.

### **Clothing matters**

Cheju Island, lacking in many basic human resources and facilities as discussed in Chapter 3, was an inherently disadvantageous place for people to live and survive in. Access to essential goods such as clothing, food, and medical facilities was a constant battle for most exiles, and this has been documented in various exile writings, and will be analysed in more detail in following paragraphs. Kim Chonghui was particularly vocal in complaining of these difficulties to the point where the majority of his letters seem to be filled with incessant, almost obsessive criticism. Kim wrote, however, only four or five letters a year, and so although he complained in most of them, such letters were not frequent. Kim's complaints reached a peak during the first years of his exile. Two years after his imprisonment, however, his supportive, loving wife died, and so he lost the only friend to whom he could complain relentlessly, which will be more elaborated later paragraphs.

It was common for most exiles to wear the same clothes through four seasons (Kim 1995b, 148). According to Kim Jeongju's (1995b) study, most exiles wore the same piece of quilt clothing in the summer and, therefore, the smell of sweat became a rotten stench. The island had four distinctive seasons. Summer was often suffocatingly hot and winter was terribly cold. The exiles carried an unpleasant stench especially in the hot summer and, judging by appearances, the locals may have rejected and treated them like beggars. An Down (1777-1800) described his experiences as an exile in filthy clothes in his poem *Manonsa – Song of Ten Thousand Words*:

What I call my clothes  
Only draw a long sigh.  
Under a burning sun and sultry air,  
My unwashed quilted trousers  
Wring with sweat and grime –  
A straw mat stuffing a chimney!  
I wouldn't mind heat or filth,  
But what about its stink?<sup>82</sup>

It appears Kim Chonghui was in a better position than others in gaining access to goods from the mainland. His dedicated wife faithfully delivered what he needed to the island. In the following letter he requests that she makes sure to prepare his winter clothing. The conditions on the island drive him to reveal his careful and practical personality, which can be sensed in his letter:

I've been wearing the same jeogori [jacket] for some time, and it is so filthy and worn that it is hard to have on, but since it is difficult to exchange clothes with others, I think I will have to endure. It would be good if you could have another garment made for me and send it before autumn approaches. It should be sent in advance so that I can wear it while it is in season,

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<sup>82</sup> (An. n.d., adapted from translation by Lee 2003, 238)

otherwise I will not be able to wear it yet again. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 233).

The estimated date of this letter was on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1841; hence he may have been wearing the same jacket for six months since his arrival on Cheju Island.



Figure 16: *Wandang seonsaeng haecheon illipsang*. Sochi Heoryeon (1809-1892). Undated. (Gwacheon Cultural Centre website)

The illustration (Fig. 16) portrays Kim Chonghui's appearance and clothing during his exile. It was painted by one of his beloved disciples Sochi Heoryeon (1809-1892) who visited Kim on Cheju Island. Sochi, seeing the shabby outfit that did not at all match his noble teacher's usual appearance, realised the harshness of life as an exile. Sochi, who regularly replicated Su Shi's (1037-1101) portraits, knew that his teacher, Kim Chonghui, had always admired Su Shi, the great master of Chinese scholars, and so upon the body of the figure in Su Shi's portrait (Fig.17), he drew Kim's face to create the *Wandang seonsaeng haecheon illipsang* (Fig. 16).



21 동파입극도 東坡笠屐圖  
 9면  
 1847丁未初秋 / 42.0×13.2 / 사인  
 추사의 문인 허유(許維 小藏, 1807~1890)가 그린 소동파상. 추사의 벗인 권동원(1783~1850)이 찬문을 적었다. 이 그림은 후에 완당을 그린 그림의 모태가 되었다.

Figure 17: *Dong-pa ipkeukdo*. Kim Chonghui (uncertain). Undated. Ink on paper. (85 x 22cm). (Gwacheon Cultural Centre website).

The creator of the original portrait of Su Shi, *Dong-pa ipkeukdo* (Fig. 17), is the subject of unresolved debate; some argue that it was originally painted by Sochi himself, while others believe it is the work of Kim Chonghui. Evidence for the former argument is formed by the fact that the clogs and bamboo hat in Sochi's *Wandang seonsaeng haecheon illipsang* (Fig. 16) bear such a close resemblance to those in Su Shi's portrait (Fig. 17) that it is likely Sochi who replicated the work. On the other hand, it is believed by some that Kim Chonghui, too, had painted a portrait of Su Shi in the past. Kim, who had been deeply moved by a portrait of Su Shi during his visit to Weng Fenggang in China, later obtained Chinese artist Wu Li's (1632-1718) portrait of Su Shi named *Dong-pa ipkeukdo* (Fig. 17) and made a close copy. Kim's reverence for Su Shi influenced later generations of artists, and his portrait of Su Shi was also copied by many Choson artists including Sochi Heoryeon (1809-1892).



Kim Chonghui often considered his own life as a parallel to that of Su Shi, in that both of them had been spared execution and, instead, sent to exile. Su Shi was exiled to Huangzhou China and Kim to Cheju Island. Both were placed under conditions constraining their movement and activities on their respective exile islands for indefinite periods.<sup>83</sup>

It appears Su Shi's portrait was painted by many anonymous and professional Chinese artists. For example, Chinese literati painter Li Gonglin (1049-1106), believed to be a friend of Su Shi, painted Su Shi's portrait numerous times.<sup>84</sup>



Figure 18: *Portrait of Su Shi (1037-1101)*. Rubbing from a stone. (Anonymous artist)

Two of Kim Chonghui's letters show how sensitive he was about his everyday attire and his will to wear 'appropriate' clothing. In the letters, he demanded of his wife on the mainland that his clothing be made the way he wished it to be made, including choosing the material. These snippets from his letters also illustrate his strong self-motivation to prepare for the following year.

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<sup>83</sup> (See more articles on Su Shi in Fogel 2006 and Egan 1994)

<sup>84</sup> (See more details in Pan 2007 and Park 2008)

I think during the winter I can wear the clothes that I brought with me; it would be good if you could send me in around January some clothes to wear during Spring, and if they can be sent through someone please send them in advance. If you don't send them until spring actually arrives I think it'll be too late to wear them...I need long-sleeved clothes here, so please send plenty. Thin, padded clothing with cotton inside would be nice although it's for the spring, and quilted jackets and trousers would be good. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 233).

I will send you the clothes that I wore during winter; I think you should hurry and mend them again, and send them back to me. Here, it's best to prepare for winter in advance, during summer. Mend the cotton pants and send them to me; don't worry about the silk trousers. The yellowish silk trouser that I have here is a bit thick so I haven't been wearing it. Mend and send me the two Durumagi [outer coat]. A silk Durumagi would be useless because it doesn't suit the lifestyle here and there isn't much chance to wear it, so don't worry about sending it. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 231).

Kim Chonghui's demanding and detailed instructions to his wife with regards to the preparation of his clothes and his preferred choice of material reveal a meticulous personality that often seems more than a little obsessive. The second excerpt illustrates Kim's increasing practical awareness that what had once been appropriate attire (silk trousers and coat) was no longer appropriate in exile.

The main reason Kim was sensitive about his clothing may have been because it reflected his status; clothing marked social rank and symbolised one's status in the Choson Dynasty.<sup>85</sup> Outfits and ornaments reflected the wearer's financial status and

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<sup>85</sup> (Pack 1990, 29; for further discussion on Choson clothing and social status, see Jo and Yu 1999)

social standing and rank, and at the time served as an indicator of each tier of power and the wearer's position in the power system. Kim would have worn the clothes of a *yangban* (nobleman) before his exile. Such clothes were highly stylised and decorated, and typically made of fine fabrics such as silk and cotton. Consequently, for Kim, the prisoner's outfit he was forced to wear during his exile tormented him—as did the fact that he could not afford to change his clothing to correspond with the change in seasons. It is likely that wearing the same old and soiled clothing for extended periods was an unbearable punishment for him.

While Kim was in exile, a person by the name of Chung questioned him about how the *Shimui*, an old attire worn by high-class nobleman, should be constructed and Kim responded with a detailed description spanning two pages (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 124-131).

### **Craving for Food**

Obtaining food was another great challenge for many exiles, particularly in communities that were already suffering from shortages. Evidence of exiles' preoccupation with obtaining food is found in exile's writings. For example, An Dowon stated that:

After spending a sleepless night in tears,  
I was served barley with thin soy sauce.  
I pushed it aside after a spoonful.  
Even that is scarce sometimes,  
As I spend long summer days on an empty stomach.<sup>86</sup>

In his poem, An Dowon expresses self-pity at having only barley and soy sauce to eat and decides he would rather not eat. It illustrates the sense of status and conceit retained not only by An but other exiles in which they refused to accept the reality of their exile. With their privileged backgrounds, some exiles may never have experienced hunger in their lives. Most exiles from high-class backgrounds were

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<sup>86</sup> (An. n. d., adapted from a translation by Lee 2003, 238)

likely accustomed to good quality food prepared and served by servants.

Being in exile on an island with ‘an extremely low standard of living’ (Hall 1926, 60) and experiencing food shortages for the first two years in exile, Kim Chonghui understandably suffered from cravings. Generally speaking, his living standards were higher than that of many other exiles. Kim had servants to look after him and lived in a house owned by a generous landowner who respected Kim and regarded him as a high official. It seems from the records, however, that Kim could not help but cling to the memories of his previous affluent lifestyle and regarded his wife as someone he could write to, to confide and complain about his intense feelings of longing and unhappiness. Realising he was desperately short of food, he constantly asked his wife for foods that he previously used to eat, to benefit his health and increase his appetite. Such battles with the food shortage, food cravings, and other realities of a life in exile are evidenced in many letters he wrote to his wife. For example:

About the food, I will try to endure it, since I still have some side dishes that I brought with me...Beef is too scarce while some abalone is occasionally available. I have a feeling I might be able to beg some beef from somewhere. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 234).

This letter reflects Kim Chonghui’s appetite for the food enjoyed by the wealthy and those of high status. He mentions beef, which was, at the time, considered a luxury food and was very expensive. It shows his strong craving for beef that he even considered begging for it. Despite the great troubles his wife endured to send Kim quality food, it perished during the months it took to reach the island from the mainland, as described in Kim’s letter sent to his wife six months after he arrived on Cheju Island:

...This is not living. I’m not really ill, but how could I describe the strain that I am under? My meals, for example... I’ve no choice but to endure it, I guess. I can’t eat the side dishes that you have sent me, as they have gone stale... Despite your

efforts to prepare them for me, they take from two months to even seven months to arrive here, so how could the food last? But you sent them all the way from Seoul, and I am starved, so I should bear it and eat them. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 233).

In the same letter, Kim ordered that his wife send various side dishes preserved to last, including a few bottles of fish sauce and pickled vegetables and added that ‘...I will be able to eat the sciaenid fish you sent me this time. It was better than the one before.’ Kim asked again for high quality oil that he could not find on the island, along with dried and salted fish spawn, which were normally made from rich fish eggs of salmon, sciaenid, and flathead mullet. In one letter to his wife, Kim even gave specific instructions on how his food should be prepared to ensure it arrived that way:

The *jangjorim* [beef boiled down in soy sauce] you sent was in good condition and I can keep it for some time. I would like you to prepare food the same way the next time you send more. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 232).

The sea was the only available route by which goods and necessities could be obtained from the mainland and the lengthy turnaround time meant, to Kim’s dismay, that food often arrived rotten or sour.

The side dishes you sent me had all gone bad... All the *injeolmi* [rice cake] is rotten... The pickled vegetables are fine but the seasoned radish slices have gone sour. The pickled radish is a little stale but edible. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 231).

Please pick out the smooth, soft croaker fish when buying and sending them over. The flesh of the ones that were sent here has rotted and cannot be eaten. There must be flavoursome mustard there so please send plenty. Please send some fish

eggs, too, that are good for eating. It is probably not difficult to obtain quality dried persimmons there so please send four or five hundred by ship. (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 233).

...I am doing much better nowadays. My appetite is also better than last summer. I often have opportunity to eat beef; I am grateful. The side dishes you sent me arrived safely, however I cannot help but feel that I am getting treatment I do not deserve. This time the soybean paste tasted good with no spoilage, and even if there was, how could I dare complain? (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 231).

These comments differ in tone from his earlier readiness to command the exact way he wanted goods prepared for him. The difference between the tone of his earlier and later letters to his wife and brothers suggests he may have changed in his attitudes through the course of his exile. Alternatively, it may indicate an inner clash between human greed and guilty conscience. His personality had been shaped by a life of high status and not unexpectedly this condition would often reveal itself, although sometimes he seemed wrought with shame about it. It appears from his letters that Kim experienced severe feelings of guilt about living a normal life despite his status as a sinner and his background, education and conditioning as a high-class *yangban*. In his letters to Kwon Donin, he used the word 'sinner' repeatedly to refer to himself. The quote from the letter indicates he felt he was being treated too well for a man of his exiled position. Similarly, he uses words of self-deprecation to infer he must comply with the circumstances he found himself in and undertake the life that lay before him. Kim exchanged many letters with Kwon Donin during his years in exile, usually engaging in discussions of a political nature as well as expressing his thoughts on art, Cheju Island's strange customs, trivial occurrences around him, the difficulties of life as a prisoner, and the chronic physical pain he was in.

It was not only in letters to his wife that Kim Chonghui complained about the quality of his food. He also complained about food to his friend Kwon Donin and to Kim's two brothers. Kim was particularly vociferous in his complaints about food he could not eat: meat, in particular. In his letters to Kwon, Kim described his grudging

reliance on a vegetarian diet:

...As the slaughter of cows has been banned throughout the summer, I have been relying on a vegetarian diet consisting of Chinese yam, Malt, and Tuckahoe, as if I were practising some religious precept; it's extraordinary how I've managed to keep alive to this day. (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 215).

It appears Kim's obsession with food peaked after the first two years of his exile whilst his wife was still alive. His letters after this period refer more to his ill health than to food. From this, it might be reasonably inferred that his obsession with the food that he had enjoyed in the past stemmed from his perception that the food available to him on Cheju Island was unpalatable, perhaps not-unjustifiable considering his situation. Later, however, he expressed a fondness for herbs after realising wild herbs and vegetables considered rare on the mainland grew in abundance on the island. Having easy access to something that was rare in his previous life may have reinforced his sense of increased status relative to those he had left. He sarcastically remarked that people in the community hardly ate them (Cho 2007, 193). This may also suggest an ego-building strategy that gives Kim a reason to feel a bit superior to those he had left on the mainland.

Kim Chonghui's demand for food continued in almost every letter he sent his wife in the first two years of exile.<sup>87</sup> The types of food he requested were those which were consumed by mainland *yangban* and could not be attained on the island. His demands for food seem to have been driven by an attempt to retain his previous lifestyle of luxury – a life he could not let go. These almost obsessive acts relating to his appetite represent his emotional ambivalence: the longing to keep a hold on the memories of his past life by refusing to accept his dire situation. Some researchers analysing Kim's letters reason that he was a particularly fussy man with an ill-temper who filled the pages of his letters to friends and family with complaints (Kim 1988, 40).

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<sup>87</sup> (See more letters in *Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004)

## Life problems and disease

Many Cheju Island exiles described the dire living conditions faced by exiles at different points in their writings. For example, Jeong On (1569-1641), who was exiled to Cheju Island in 1614, wrote of a discussion he had had with a local resident of the island, in which he was told new exiles were particularly susceptible to disease because their immune systems could not stand the harsh climate, while the locals had grown immune (*Dongkyejib* 2000, 163). According to the resident, as Jeong On described it, the unseasonable weather conditions in the Deajunghyun district—the area to which the highest number of exiles were sent—had various diseases and vermin that normally would have disappeared during winter (*Dongkyejib* 2000, 163). Jeong On himself was confined to his room for long periods of time after being stricken with a chronic illness brought on by the unusual conditions. His deteriorating health isolated him from the community because people were fearful of contracting his disease and hence were reluctant to visit (*Dongkyejib* 2000, 132-133). He lamented the absence of doctors in the community:

Recently this lowly person's illness has been causing seizures on and off. It seems now it has come to a recession, but I cannot believe it. Disease flares up every day like bamboo shoots sprouting through rock. There are no doctors to ask about the illness and no medicine to procure. (*Dongkyejib* 2000, 132-133).

Most of all, many exiles suffered not only from disease but also from skin disease resulting from the humid atmosphere and from insects in and around their homes. For example, Kim described his exile house (Fig.19) as a small house with a thatched roof and shaped like a crab carapace where not a breath of wind passes through. He complained that in the house, the stifling heat of the summer and the mould and humidity in the rooms were difficult to bear.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> (More letters by Kim Chonghui are quoted in *A Great Synthesis of Art and Scholarship: Painting and Calligraphy on Kim Jeong-Hui* 2006, 256-260)





Figure 19: Kim Chonghui’s exile house in Cheju Island’s traditional house style.

Like the other exile houses, Kim Chonghui’s dwelling consisted of four structures built around a *mardang* (ground yard). The structures were built using traditional methods; three of them had thatched roofs and faced each other so that they would be protected from the outside, and one was placed at the rear and used as a guest house. This style of construction was representative of the traditional way in which most cottages on the island were built for centuries—it can be traced back over 600 years.<sup>89</sup> This style of construction was greatly influenced by what was known as the tradition of ‘Practical Learning’ *Silhak* —an idea spread by scholar exiles in the community which emphasises practicality rather than abstraction. In those times the houses on Cheju Island had to be built with caution to protect against bad conditions including strong winds and frequent typhoons which occurred in most seasons.<sup>90</sup> Materials included the abundant basalt stone bedded together on a clay mortar with the roof thatch usually weighed down with rocks.

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<sup>89</sup> (Connor 2009, 28 and for more on Cheju Island house style in Choson Dynasty, see Choe 2007)

<sup>90</sup> (More discussions on Cheju Island’s climate conditions, see Nemeth 1987, 49 & Kim 1997, 107)



Figure 20: The traditional style kitchen in Kim Chonghui's exile house.

The traditional style the house was built in is exemplified by the kitchen (Fig. 20) which simply contains a cooking area that provided minimum facilities and utensils used in cooking. Cube-shaped stones were used as supports for the cooking pots, and pine needles and straw made of barley and foxtail millet was used to burn a fire, while a small window allowed the ventilation of smoke.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> (See more details on traditional house style, especially kitchen, in Cheju Island Kim and Lee 2003, 21-22)



Figure 21: An inside view of Kim Chonghui's exile house.

As in any climate, the building materials, such as straw and wood, may easily have provided a breeding ground for vermin such as rats, mice, snakes and insects within and around houses. The figures are photographs of Kim Chonghui's exile house after it was reconstructed and refurbished and do not portray the exact conditions Kim faced as he described in a letter discussed earlier this chapter. For example, a clean, new coat of plaster covers the walls today, but this was added only in recent years for the sake of visitors to the site. In reality, most houses may not have had wallpaper and only a mat covered the floor. An Dowan once wrote:

I obtain a corner in the room,  
its walls plastered, but not papered.  
Every wall is gaping,  
every crack full of insects.  
I won't be afraid  
of snakes and centipedes.  
The host picks up larger ones,  
and throws the small ones at me.  
...  
With only a piece of mat,  
I settle down under the chilly, damp, leaky eaves.  
Vermin of all sorts swarm about,

snakes a foot long, green centipedes a span long.  
they ring around me – how terrible, how disgusting!<sup>92</sup>

In Kim Chonghui's case, described for example in a letter to his cousin, insects inflicted skin conditions upon him and left him itching and unable to sleep due to a breakout of scale-like spots all over his body:<sup>93</sup>

... My skin condition has not cleared up and the itchiness has not gone away, which keeps me from sleeping at night. I have insomnia to begin with, and it has gotten worse. All of this is rather hard on me.<sup>94</sup>

One of the reasons for the abundance of insects in the area may be due to livestock that were kept near the house:

Sitting cross-legged near the cowshed and pigsty  
In front of my balled-up topknot old books are piled up high.  
(Kim, n.d., quoted in Jeong 2008, 113).

This writing suggests Kim's study room was located adjacent to the cowshed and pigsty. This is not unusual as animal shelters such as barns and pens were commonly built near houses (Nemeth 1987, 174-175). The proximity of such shelters, however, potentially contributed to unsanitary conditions around exiles homes, leading in some cases to contagious diseases. Anderson (1914), quoted in Nemeth (1987, 147), noted '[h]ouses we passed were just hovels of two or three rooms, with a cowshed and a chicken-coop, and most important to the *Quelpartan* [Cheju Island], a pig-sty in close proximity.' A pig-sty (Fig.22), a traditional toilet (called *tongsi* in Cheju dialect), is an open outdoor toilet with walls made of black volcanic stone and a rectangular squatting hole. The pig-sty derives its name from black-haired

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<sup>92</sup> (An, n.d., adapted from a translation by Lee 2003, 238-240)

<sup>93</sup> (Kim complained about his physical conditions in many letters. See *Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 156 & 208)

<sup>94</sup> (Kim, n. d., adapted from a translation by Haboush 2009, 329)

domesticated pigs which were kept underground beneath the hole; the pigs fed on excrement and kitchen waste that were sent down the hole, and were kept as a source of fertiliser and meat.<sup>95</sup>



Figure 22: A pig in its pig-sty. (Nemeth 1987, 288)

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<sup>95</sup> (Further details on animal shelter and toilet system in Cheju Island, see Nemeth 1987, 145-175 and Nelson 1998, 14-19)



Figure 23: The outside toilet in Kim Chonghui's exile house.

The toilet lacks any provisions for privacy save for the low-set walls. Glimpses of movement and light could be caught through the holes in the stone walls, and there is no roof or door. The area within the walls—less than a square metre—can barely fit one person squatting down (see Fig. 23). As most households struggled to keep food on the table, the ‘poo-pigs,’ as they were often called (approximate translation), were considered a cheap and efficient resource.

According to Hall's (1926, 65) study, the water systems used by Cheju Islanders were, in many parts of the island, contaminated and it may have become another major hazard to Cheju residents' health. The water in most areas had the porosity and chemical composition of the water flowing through the base rock from Halla Mountain. Nemeth (1987, 59) supported these arguments by claiming that, due to the lack of natural springs, residents had to rely on artificial ponds as a source of drinking water, while other communities relied on drinking wells. These claims were evidenced in Kim's writing:

The quality of the water is inadequate. Occasionally I'm forced to cook using rainwater in the summer and melted snow in the wintertime. This year has not been particularly dry but because the well is located about 2km away it is

extremely difficult to collect water from it. (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995 215-216).

### **Physical deterioration**

It appears Kim Chonghui suffered from a wide variety of diseases, the same as many other exiles. Endemic disease, which at the time was common on Cheju Island, is mentioned in many of his letters. He complained of its symptoms including itching, arm pain and chronic indigestion. He often complained about his illnesses:

I have sores on my tongue and a congested nose, and I have been going through this anguish for five or six months already. I tried to treat myself using medication but could not; how tiring and hopeless can things get? Not only is it difficult to swallow, the food gets caught at the pit of my stomach and impedes digestion; I don't know what to do. If this life, hanging by its thread, were to pitifully continue on, all I could do is bring you news. My arms tingle and itch; I cannot figure out what *karma* from my past life keeps bringing me this agony. (Kim 1844, quoted in Choi 1976, 266-267).

Kim's complaints of physical pain intensified over time. His chronic indigestion, likely exacerbated by his confinement and associated stresses, placed him in a mentally and physically fragile state. It appears from the letters, that Kim often dwelled on his misfortunes by questioning whether it was retribution for his actions in a former life—*karma*—and lamenting about not being able to find a doctor or find medicinal herbs on the island.

To treat disease, residents of Cheju Island traditionally used folk remedies based on Shamanism, rather than more conventional methods of medical treatment.<sup>96</sup> As described in Chapter 3, Shamanism played a strong influence in Cheju Island's

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<sup>96</sup> (For detailed accounts of Cheju Island's Shamanism and its medical anthropological studies, see Yoon 1976)

communities, and many islanders strongly believed that shamanic deities provided the wisest source of understanding about human wellbeing. Healing ceremonies performed by local folk practitioners such as indigenous fortune-tellers and geomancers were a common practice on the island.<sup>97</sup>

Without the medical treatment that Kim Chonghui might have expected on the mainland prior to his exile, Kim fought his illnesses alone throughout his time in exile. Symptoms of indigestion, eye infection, and skin disease tormented him throughout his sentence. His illnesses and skin problems flared up repeatedly, and Kim responded with even more frustration at the dire circumstances he faced. Kim described such health problems in the following letter written in 1848, the year before his release, and this showed some resignation to his situation:

...Recently my eyes have been blurry and my symptoms of indigestion worsening; when I face the table to eat, nausea sweeps over me and so there has been no food passing down my throat, and I fall to such low spirits that I can't pull myself together. I've been meaning to write this for several days already but I only now wet the end of my brush to write. Even now I can't bring myself to continue writing and just can't figure out why. I suppose I've no choice but to continue living like this. If I had medication I would attempt treatment but as I do not have the ingredients for medicine I cannot do anything. (Kim 1848, quoted in Choi 1976, 274).

Kim's health problems and the difficult environmental conditions on Cheju Island seemed to form the main challenges to his life in exile; sometimes immobilising him to the extent he could not write. Entrapment in a confined space, discomfort and chronic illnesses broke his spirit and reduced his previous self-importance, as is apparent in his letter to Kwon Donin:

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<sup>97</sup> (For further discussions on Shamanism and its impact on Cheju communities, see Kim 2009; 2004; Chin 1977)



I, the sinner, am, as I informed you last time, as dark as stone, and I am only growing duller by the day. While each day feels as lengthy as a whole year, a disarray of thoughts emerge like a swarm of bees and rush in like the morning current, and my insides feel like they're doubling over. What's more, I must sit still and never wander outside, so the flesh of my thighs has worn away and I cannot sit comfortably without laying down a thick layer of bedding; how could this be the means of living of someone who lies on the underbrush and sleeps upon a lump of earth? I feel such intense misery and pity for myself. (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 261).

This letter was written relatively early in Kim's exile while he was still grieving his wife's death from only a year earlier. He described the conditions of his house arrest and the prohibition on outdoor activities. He described the state of his body thus: 'The blood and flesh of my body is drying up and the change occurs every day, every hour' (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 211). It is possible that some of his symptoms and complaints may have been due to the loss of body fat following the deterioration in the quality of his diet.

As demonstrated, Kim's letters written between 1845 and 1848 contain a particularly large number of complaints about his illnesses; for example, he complained he could not eat properly due to indigestion, and in 1845 he wrote a letter to his second younger brother Myonghui about a sore arm preventing him from writing:

The pain in my shoulder is still severe, and it comes down to my elbow. Though I long for you deeply, the pain is such that I barely managed to write this letter.<sup>98</sup>

Mentally, he seem filled with a mess of emotions, having been dealt a blow to his ego and feeling humiliated and discouraged—an effect the government probably

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<sup>98</sup> (Kim 1845, adapted translation from Haboush 2009, 323)

induced deliberately in exiling him and others. However, Kim often reminisced about his past life and dreamed about the future, fantasising about becoming a freed spirit:

Thoughts of this and that, thoughts become far away  
How did this life reach *Gusu*?  
When could I have a good dream sitting in the returning boat  
And climb the 'Chun-in-suk', the Thousand Men Rock? (Yang  
and Kim 1991, 72).

The *Gusu* Kim Chonghui mentions in the poem is a reference to Gusu city, better known as Suzhou, the former capital of the state of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period (BC 770—BC 476) in China. Yang and Kim (1991, 72) compare the rise and fall in the history of the states of China's Wu and Yue, which were in hostile relations, with the vain ups and downs of Kim Chonghui's life. Kim's message in the poem may be a lamentation of the political strife he was embroiled in. The *Thousand Men Rock*, a subject favoured by other poets, is a huge rock located in the path up Tiger Hill, about three kilometres northwest of Suzhou, China. The rock is known as a place of preaching Buddhist principles to a thousand men (Suzhou History). Kim, expressing sorrow for the unpromising future ahead, at the same time daydreams about the bygone days to which he desperately wishes to return. It is uncertain whether Kim visited the site while he was in China or was using the rock as a metaphor for his dreams of returning to a desirable place.

### **Kim Chonghui's love for his wife, Lee**

Kim heard the devastating news of the deaths of two members of his family while in exile on Cheju Island. Three years into his exile his wife Lee died, and two years later his older sister followed. Kim and Lee's love for each other is evident in the 31 letters that historical researchers have identified, 13 of them written after Kim's exile during the two years leading up to his wife's death.<sup>99</sup> These 13 letters mainly contain

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<sup>99</sup> (Kim 1988, 34 and see more letters in *Chusa Hangul Pyonji* 2004, 220-245)

enquiries about the welfare and wellbeing of his wife and other family members, along with requests for basic necessities such as food and clothing in his fussy, difficult manner. After Lee died following chronic illness, Kim Chonghui could no longer write letters to her to complain about the various problems he faced as an exile on Cheju Island. It is interesting to note that although Kim expressed concern for Lee's ailing health in almost all of the 13 letters, he nevertheless persevered in asking her to fulfil various requests such as those for food and clothing.

The loss of his loving wife during his time in exile affected Kim deeply and put him in a fragile state. It appears the couple shared a special relationship, as suggested in the strong affection he expressed in many of his letters. During his exile, Kim was deeply concerned for his family back home and especially for Lee because she had been suffering from *nohack*, a type of chronic malaria (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 156). Kim's desperate wish for his wife to recover is evident in his words, 'I will wait every day for the news that you have recovered from your illness' (*Chusa Hanguk pyonji* 2004, 226). After Kim was exiled, his entire extended family was forced out of their homes, which were confiscated. Lee was left with no choice but to move into her parents' home and was handed the heavy burden of responsibility for the family in Kim's absence. Because he felt his duty was to fulfil the responsibilities of a father figure, the physical distance that separated Kim from his family was a great punishment that placed him under enormous stress. Knowing his wife was too ill to handle all her responsibilities, the fact that he could not stay by her side or do anything but worry caused him fear and anxiety, and so he constantly asked about her health in his letters.

Kim lost both his biological and adoptive mothers at an early age, and one may speculate that this resulted in Kim depending on Lee not only as a wife but also a mother, older sister, and good friend to whom he could share the deepest of his personal emotions and problems. In most letters Kim tried to describe to his wife through elaborate stories and accounts, every element of his daily life in exile. Sharing his emotional turbulence with Lee seemed to play an important role in helping lift some of the burdens from his life which, compared to his previous life as

a respected member of the *yangban* class, was bleak. In his writings, it is apparent Kim sometimes attempted to be strong and to suppress his emotional turmoil; however, his writing often indicates his desperate inner struggle in the circumstances. His letters suggest that over this two year period before his wife died, his confinement and isolation from the outside world was wearing him down and aggravating his distress. His incessant and obsessive requests for necessities to be sent seemed to reduce as Lee's health deteriorated. Lee eventually lost the battle with her chronic illness and died before she could respond to Kim's last letter, which read:

Now the winter solstice approaches. I wonder how you are dealing with your illness.

...

It is not a symptom that can be gotten rid of quickly, and I am terribly worried about the extent of your suffering from a decrease in energy and generally run-down state of health. I feel so helpless and defeated that even though I am distraught and concerned for your health, separated as we are by this immense distance, I can do nothing about it!

...

Are you sleeping and eating well? What about your other daily routines? What kind of medicine have you been taking? Are you so weak that you are bedridden? I cannot stop my fears and concerns from growing worse and worse...

...

It is really the seriousness of your illness that makes me anxious day and night, and it is even more frustrating that I do not know what is going on, since I have no news from home. Sometimes, anxiety and impatience drive me utterly to distraction, and my heart burns as though inflamed.<sup>100</sup>

Kim, having no means of speedy communication with the outside, did not hear the news of Lee's death until he had already written two more letters. When he was

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<sup>100</sup> (Kim 1842, adapted from translation by Haboush 2009, 323)

finally informed of her death, he vented his pent-up emotions of guilt for inevitably neglecting her while she suffered in his lengthy absence. The news that he had lost the one person dearest to him, a wife who had devoted her life to her husband and family, came as an enormous shock. He expressed his emotional anguish thus:

I parted with my wife when she was still alive, but then she parted with me in death and caused me great pain. The fact that I could not follow her in her permanent departure pierced me in the heart.

...

Even after I was imprisoned when an implement of torture is in front of me while the southern island following me and exiled to an island I had a steady mind, but now I cannot pull myself together from the shock the news of my wife's death has brought me; what should I do? Everyone is going to die one day, not just my wife, but she had no reason to die and that is why I am so stricken and bitter.

...

Oh, for 30 years she was so devoted and virtuous that all the relatives were full of praise, and even people who were not friends often complimented her, but she was so modest in saying that she was only fulfilling her duties.

...

In the past I jokingly told her that if she were to die, she ought to do so after me and that it would be better that way, and she was so shocked she ran away with her ears covered, refusing to listen. I was not just joking. But now she has died first. There is nothing good about dying first. I would only show myself living alone as a widower; my sorrow is echoing endlessly through the blue seas and wide skies. (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 309).

He later asked for the letter to be placed as an offering in the ritual ceremony for her death. He appeared to brood over the meaning of existence and looked to the rest of

his life with dread: 'I see myself alone with endless lament, which seems to spread between the ocean and the sky' (Kim, n.d., quoted in Choi 1976, 258). Kim expressed his sorrow at being unable to be with Lee at her death in the poem *Mourning* composed in her memory:

I may plea to the *Wello* in the heavens  
You and I will be born in different lands in the afterlife  
If you remain a thousand miles away after I die  
How will you know this sadness in my heart? (*Wandangjeonjib*  
1996, 297).

Legend has it that there was a matchmaker known as *Wello*. The poem suggests asking the matchmaker to switch the couple's positions so that Kim would be born as the wife and Lee as the husband who outlives the wife, so that Lee would know how it feels to lose a loved one.

Lee's death was another turning point in Kim's life. She may have been the closest person in his life, a companion who accepted him for who he was despite his undesirable traits. There was a silver lining, however: Lee's death seemed to provide Kim with newfound motivation to convert his grief and suffering into creativity instead of allowing the grief to overwhelm him. The difficulties of this period eventually lead Kim to achieve significant creative outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Great numbers of Cheju Island exiles lost hope in life and passed the time aimlessly or waited to die after the government sentenced some of them to eventual execution. Kim Chonghui, too, spent the first years of exile in despair and grief but eventually found peace and spent the rest of his time in exile working on various forms of art including poetry, painting and calligraphy. These works of art are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Writing, whether in the form of letters or poetry, was one of the very few communication methods available to exiled scholars of the Choson Dynasty. Various

scholars and politicians exiled to Cheju Island expressed their traumatic experiences through writing as a form of resistance. Exiles' physical estrangement from their hometowns posed an emotional challenge that caused suffering to hundreds of individuals. Not only were the exiles imprisoned in a house, their movements were restricted and controlled by the government authorities, whose power acted as a weapon capable of freely manipulating their lives. In addition, the island's climatic conditions, infertile land and contaminated water system spread disease. The shortage of basic necessities such as food, clothing and medical facilities posed an additional challenge in the exiles' everyday struggle to survive and to maintain their mental and physical health.

This chapter analysed Kim Chonghui's poems and letters written to his wife, relatives and friends on Cheju Island. His writings reflect his difficult and lonely experiences as he was forced into a transition from a prosperous life as a nobleman of a royal lineage to a life where food and clothing were scarce and disease was rampant. Judging from the letters written in the first two years of exile it appears Kim's former social status, education and knowledge offered him no relief from his suffering; rather, he struggled to endure each day as it came while in a state of despair, discontent, regret and anxiety. Tomorrow was not guaranteed for the exile; if a death sentence was imposed he could die within the next day, and the unbearable psychological pain he suffered is reflected in his writing.

Kim Chonghui's special affection for his wife and family was a significant theme in his letters and poems. As the eldest son and now, in some sense, the head of the family, Kim's concerns and affection for his family weighed heavily on his shoulders as an exile, and he deeply regretted being unable to fulfil his duties. The deaths of those close to him and the fact he could not attend important family events including family celebrations or memorial services for his older sister, wife and father added to his despair and suffering. The following chapter will analyse Kim Chonghui's art works and his engagement with creativity on Cheju Island.

## Chapter 6

### **Exile and Creativity on Cheju Island: Kim Chonghui**

This chapter analyses Kim Chonghui's artwork and his art practices during his years in exile, and extends to a brief discussion of the works of other artists. It critically reviews the kinds of art the exile artist devised, and interprets the exilic experiences expressed within those works of art, and how Kim's creative activities impacted his difficult life in exile. Kim not only succeeded in overcoming his punishment, but also transformed his time in exile into a period of academic and artistic productivity, during which he produced substantial amounts of artwork.

The selection of Kim's artwork reviewed and analysed in this chapter comprises only the works he produced during his Cheju exile that have been identified as authentic to Kim Chonghui. This is not unproblematic. Past studies have suggested that many artworks believed to have been produced by Kim during his Cheju exile were not authentic; many were works by other artists. For example, Lee and Lee (2005c, 341-342) claimed that a chaotic array of his work, authentic or otherwise, was in circulation. By citing from Yoo Hongjun's claim (2006), Lee and Lee argued that approximately 90% of artwork widely thought to be Kim's work could in fact be that of other artists.' Most of Kim's paintings are unsigned and undated, hence the debate surrounding their authenticity.

It was common practice for Choson artists, as for Chinese artists, to learn by mimicking the paintings and calligraphy of ancient masters, and therefore so many of their finished products were inevitably imitative. This leads to great difficulty in determining the authenticity of an artist's work. Fong (1969, 397) pointed to the same problem in Chinese paintings, asserting that to detect an artwork's authenticity one must 'go beyond structure' through three methods. First, one must determine whether its structure parallels that which may be expected from work of the attributed period. Second, it must be determined whether the painting leads to a better perspective of the artist's style and 'explains the transmitted image of the master's manner in later periods.' Thirdly, one must be able to attribute a painting deemed inauthentic to another era and style of another artist.



This chapter introduces artworks that appear to have been produced by Kim in Cheju Island that, with the exception of the painting *Sehando* (the coldest winter) (Fig. 24), have largely been neglected by other researchers. One possible explanation for the neglect of these artworks may lie in the fact that there is very little existing information about the works and what motivated Kim to create them. Another reason may be due to difficulties in interpreting them because of the need to understand Chinese philosophical and religious influences on Kim and how they instilled Kim's creative motivations. The following analyses draw attention to the significance of understanding how these Chinese factors influenced Kim and provided a background to his own understanding of the world in order to properly understand some of his work. This extends the scope and foundations of analysis into Kim's artwork into the multicultural realm in ways that offer deeper insights. For example, in the case of Kim's paintings *The Narcissus* (Fig. 29) and *Mojildo* (Fig. 32), examined later in this chapter, only short introductions have previously accompanied these works in earlier studies, and there is little evidence of further research on them. This chapter will use iconological interpretation and examine in depth these two artworks, including their background and the root of what may have motivated Kim to create them.

### **The Philosophical Influences and Art Criticism**

Kim Chonghui was a distinguished Choson *Sadebu*, an illustrious official, who maintained his intransigent attitude by differentiating himself from other Choson scholars: he stubbornly sought new scholastic philosophical studies from China. His intellectual pursuits reached beyond the traditional leaning which had presided over society and culture throughout the ages. His highly sophisticated attitude bred a strong desire to assimilate with Chinese scholars and an admiration for their art of calligraphy and philosophy. Kim's intellectual confidence brought him to study all kinds of philosophy, spanning the Chinese classics such as Confucian classics, epigraphy, archaeological methods and Son Buddhism. He admired Chinese scholars' wide-ranging research activities and new trends.

To understand the art of Kim Chonghui requires an understanding of his Chinese influences, which is believed to have begun in 1809 when he visited Beijing at the

age of 24 and had an opportunity to meet many Chinese scholars such as Weng Fenggang (1733-1818) and Ruan Yuan (1764-1849), which widened Kim's view point of art and scholastic study. Wang Fenggang was a well-known scholar-official; a renowned calligrapher, poet and critic of Qing China. Ruan Yuan (1764-1849) was also a distinguished scholar-official; in his case, well known for his classical learning and his research of the mid-Qing dynasty.

At the time Kim visited China, Chinese epigraphic work led by Wang Fenggang and Ruan Yuan had reached the height of its popularity. This fashionable epigraphic work influenced Kim's perceptions, particularly his studying of cultural philosophy and scholastic documents. Kim was also strongly influenced from his study of earlier Chinese masters from the Ming and Qing dynasty. Weng Fenggang influenced Kim's new perspectives in studying Chinese classics, epigraphy, and methods of calligraphic writing as well as accomplishing his own style of paintings and calligraphic works. Through the influences on the Chinese scholars, Kim studied epistolary, a method of analysing ancient documented poetry literature and Confucian classics, and achieved his own unique style of calligraphic work, *Chusache* (Kim's style). Wang Fenggang had a special relationship with Kim, despite the 53 year age difference. When Wang lost his son, Xugun, who was born the same year as Kim, Wang took Kim Chonghui as his son (Chun 1996, 33).

These influences from the research of Chinese scholars' resulted in Kim becoming known for importing these methods of examining historical epigraphic studies, and this foundation later resulted in Kim developing new methods of analysing archaeological sources in Korea. Kim also adapted the methods of 'evidential research' for poetic criticism from Qing China that had been formulated by Wang Fenggang, and modified the 'pith and marrow' of these methods to study ancient historical documents of Korea. The development by Kim of these methods have affected various areas of study in Korea, particularly the study of ancient monumental inscriptions and the study of Confucian classics, graphology, history, geography, and astronomy. By synthesising and integrating various styles of such art theories, Kim developed a new theoretical system that was specifically adapted to Korean historical studies. These Korean-focused evidential research methods were published in various journals of ancient studies. The publications became a legacy of

Korean historical achievements and became the materials of choice for many Choson scholars who taught archaeology.

During the time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which Choson society was experiencing a period of transition from old traditions into a new culture, Kim Chonghui became the leading member of the North Learning, *Silhak* movement. *Silhak* is a division of *Silsakusi* a research method in Chinese classics developed by the Chinese scholar from Qing China, Ruan Yuan (1764-1849). Kim was taught *Silsakusi* by Park Jega from a young age. The emphasis of *Silsakusi* is that, instead of making metaphysical speculations, methods of studying Chinese classics should follow an objective approach based on strong empirical evidence that rejects any prejudice present in previous studies. The purpose of *Silsakusi* lies in analysing the truth of existence via empirical means, incorporating experimental methods that utilise the senses of sight, hearing, and touch to reach objective and undeniable observations and accurate judgments and conclusions. It is claimed that intellectuals of the Choson Dynasty, in an effort to find a practical as well as innovative research method, judged the *Silsakusi* to be a convincing plan to secure a sense of identity in a transition period of national culture. This way of thinking confronted the contradictions of society resulting from social, political and economic fluctuations and the general state of late-Choson society. It provided an ideological basis for social reform and the foundation for a justification for a new society distinct from the traditional social system of the *Sunglihak*, Neo-Confucianism.

Amongst Korean literary civil servants, Kim Chonghui's background was both unique and prestigious because of his visit to Beijing and influence from prestigious masters such as Wang Fenggang and Ruan Yuan.

Kim Chonghui's reverence for Su Shi almost resembled spiritual worship. Su Shi (1037-1101) was an important influence on Kim Chonghui during the course of Kim's exile. This was not only from Kim's study of ancient Chinese classics but also because Su Shi's life and writing helped Kim's process of spiritual healing. Kim hung Su Shi's portrait in his bedroom as an amulet to which he appeared to feel a

sense of reverence, wishing Su Shi's spirit would bless him and his life in exile.<sup>101</sup>

Like Kim Chonghui, Su Shi was exiled twice for a total period of more than ten years. (Kim's second exile was to Buckchung for two years after Cheju Island). In a letter to his younger brother dated 1848, Kim requested a copy of a collection of Su Shi's poems written during exile in Huangzhou, which Kim may have acquired before his own exile (Choi 1976, 299). By comparing their pains, Kim could both empathise with Su Shi and be consoled by reading about how Su Shi survived his own exile. It seems reasonable to suggest that Kim, unlike many other exiles, was able to endure the traumas of life as an exile and produce a large number of artworks at least in part due to the influence of Su Shi's writing and artworks, and those of other Chinese scholars.

Egan's (1994, 208-221) examination of Su Shi's exilic experiences in the book *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* offers insights into why Kim sympathised so deeply with Su Shi's life experiences. The similarities can be seen in a brief overview of Su Shi's life. According to Egan (1994), Su Shi served as an outspoken government official whose involvement in national policy debates and criticism of reform policies got him into trouble, resulting in the order for his removal by political opponents. Su Shi was spared execution and instead was exiled for an indefinite period to Huangzhou. Accompanied by his elder son on his departure, he had no choice on his arrival but to take care of ten members of his clan who had come to his place of exile. Once he realised there was no one who would support him financially, he borrowed money from a friend, bought land at his place of exile, built his own studio, and became self-sufficient through farming on the land. He once told a friend that if one becomes famished enough, even cabbage soup becomes a full-bodied meal.

While in exile, Su Shi continued to receive persistent attacks from political enemies and was forced to move his abode several times. He suffered many illnesses, suffered psychologically, and was reported as becoming more 'withdrawn, apprehensive, introspective, and self-critical' than ever before, constantly speaking of 'closing his

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<sup>101</sup> (See more in Cho 2003)

door and refusing to receive guests.’ However many hardships he encountered, he did not allow them to become a justification for laxness in self-discipline. Eventually, aged 64, sick and weary, Su Shi died, having once again been instructed to relocate his place of exile. While exile disrupted Su Shi’s psychological strength, he believed that the hindrance to his life and career did not justify failure to upkeep his moral values or to neglect the cultivation of the self through learning. During his exile, Su became a scholar of Confucian principles and even studied medicine and alchemy to benefit his health, in spite of being frequently targeted by political enemies and having friends who were largely unsupportive and uncooperative during his exile. Su Shi’s accomplishments helped him to stand out from his peers, both then and for centuries after, to be remembered as one of the most important scholar artists in Chinese history. It is likely, given what is already known about Kim Chonghui’s veneration of Su Shi, that Kim may have wanted to follow in Su Shi’s footsteps through similar strenuous effort, and this may explain how Kim was able to accomplish so much whilst in exile.<sup>102</sup>

Kim Chonghui studied the strengths of great Chinese artists and masters and created his own artistic world by shaping those strengths to his own style. Influenced by Chinese ideologies, Kim insisted an artist must seek out a master whom he would respect and choose an area of study he would familiarise himself with, to discover a path to developing his own artistic style (Ho 1985, 138). Kim believed that true artists should be able to use conventionally inherited methods as a way of creating art, and that the artist’s ultimate goal was to attain enlightenment by endlessly practicing the combination and discipline of their energy, or *ki*. If successful, the practice would grant the ultimate stage in self-discipline—the union between Man and Heaven (Lee 2007, 13).

The Korean ancestors recommended learning another skill in addition to one’s major profession in order to cultivate one’s character and eventually allow it to reach maturity. This was why many of them were not only calligraphers but also poets and artists. They would not hesitate to call anyone who was proficient at or biased towards only one particular skill a “-monger”. By today’s standards this attitude may

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<sup>102</sup> (More readings about Su Shi’s life and art, see Egan 1994)

be easily dismissed as prejudice, but Korean society at the time viewed it as a matter of course. This was how a new genre of art, ‘the three perfections’, was formed.

Imitating the work of great Chinese masters was a tradition among Korean literary artists in the Choson period (Yi 2006, 143). The idea was originally preached in the *Ongojishin*; this idea of imitating earlier masters as the basis for one’s own development was earlier referred to in the Analects of Confucius, Chapter XI: ‘The Master said, If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others’ (Legge 2009, 149). Fong (1969, 388-397) describes development based on imitating earlier masters thus:

When a painter paints in the manner of an ancient master, he borrows first the obvious identifying brush idioms, from elements and compositional motifs. If he hopes to produce a close likeness of his model he also tries to capture its expressive qualities. In expanding the original solution, and giving it fresh understanding, however, the copyist deviates from the original and makes subtle structural changes, thus bringing his work to a new visual position. The copyist, in short, shows in his work not the real ancient master, but a transmitted and transformed image of him. While qualitative differences are difficult to argue about, structural changes can be more easily detected and described.

Su Shi (1037-1101), quoted in Egan (1994, 300), also preached the importance of learning and familiarising oneself through the work of ancient masters as a way of improving artistic merit. He similarly described how masters’ art developed and formed over time to the date of his writing, at which point he considered the arts to be developed as far as was possible:

Men of wisdom create things anew, and men of ability transmit them. Nothing is brought to its final and perfect form by a single person. The learning of superior men and the crafts of the various artisans began in the Three Dynasties, continued through the Han, and culminated only in the Tang. So it was that when poetry reached Du

Zimei [Fu], prose reached Han Tuizhi [Yu], calligraphy reached Yan Lugong [Zhenqing], and painting reached Wu Daozi, all the transformations of ancient and modern times and all possible excellences in this world were completed.

Su Shi created his own style by merging the strengths of earlier masters of poetry, prose, and calligraphy and developing it into a new form of artistic criticism. Egan (1994, 300-301) asserted that the end result was the creation of work so splendid others paled in comparison.

Kim Chonghui also believed that creating calligraphy was centred upon the creation of literary spiritual worlds. Painters tried to convey spiritual states through the energy (*ki*) of the calligraphy, and thus used the power of strokes or followed the aesthetics of word forms to create landscape paintings which traditional scholars termed the ‘fragrance of words’ or ‘word energy’ (*ki*) and which Kim strongly constructed in his artistic criticism (Ho 1985, 140-144). These underlying concepts are described in Kang’s (2005, 212) study:

[T]he [Choson] literary scholars practiced self-contemplation, examined what was learned from that practice, and pledged self-cultivation. Through this process, they formed another image of self, between the self that represents oneself, and the self that is represented. The Choson literary scholars emphasised the process of introspection and self-cultivation to see the portraits as a medium of this process ... ‘image of mind’ in complimentary remarks was the real image scholars wanted to paint. (Kang 2005, 212).

Chinese art history analyses often support these arguments that creating calligraphy and the resulting letter forms can act as a window on the artist’s character, reflecting their innermost thoughts. The process of creating calligraphy, then, can lead the practitioner to the realm of self-reflection and enables them to cultivate themselves. It was also believed that the act of creation was considered a highly formalised means for expression and communication. The creation of letter forms, in particular, could be viewed as requiring a balance between control and spontaneity.

Kim Chonghui emphasised the connection between the spiritual world and interior experiences into the artistic form rather than emphasizing the focal point of created motifs.<sup>103</sup> In other words, the ultimate goals of learning and creation had to be identical to making art, and that art must reflect the artist's spirit as realised by nature, rather than stressing technique and skill (Ho 1985, 132-133). Thus Kim believed the act of creation should come from the artist's soul driven by emotional experiences based nature but with its refinement based on education and training. He believed that all art developed from spiritual exploration, and that the creation of poetry required a fulfilled soul and refinement. If not, he considered it a skill, not an art (Ho 1985, 132-133). Kim strived to change the traditional art style dominant in Korean culture at the time, which comprised mainly of 'true-to-life' illustrations of the landscape. He pursued and created spiritual experiences and ideological expressions of what existed beyond reality in art.

Kim Chonghui insisted that artistic merit primarily comes from artists' superior backgrounds.<sup>104</sup> He claimed that even artists well-acquainted with literature and painting theory also needed to be judged upon their backgrounds and whether they came from a *Sadebu* (high-class) upbringing to qualify as an artist. This was in effect an extension of moral development and the concept that artistic merit can be determined not only by the number of practices borrowed from ancient ways of penmanship, but also by the social status of an artist. Kim's thoughts on the importance of superiority in practicing art may have been influenced by Su Shi (1037-1101) who first incorporated such thinking into painting theory (Ho 1985, 132-133). The logic was that well-educated, socially superior scholars from nurtured backgrounds were more likely to have innate skills in literary painting than professionals. This was because literary painting was normally practiced by amateur scholars as a form of leisure and natural experimentation; while professional artists, who were often middle and lower-class, practiced art to make a living (Yi 2006, 81).

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<sup>103</sup> (For more readings, see Choi 1976 and Kim 2001)

<sup>104</sup> (Ho 1985, 132-133 and see further in Kim 2001)



This theory was also referred to by Dong Qichang (1555-1636) (Kim 2001, 56) a Chinese scholar who published six methods of painting theory. Dong, cited by Kim (2001, 56) insisted that artists' artistic merits are innate, but can also be achieved through profound and strenuous practice which involves reading ten thousand books and travelling ten thousand *li* (4,000km). This would mean that the refinement and nobility of artistic merits could only be achieved by those wealthy enough, and hailing from a high enough class, to be able to meet those requirements.

Similarly, Choi (2002) supported this view that literary painting, unlike paintings by professional artists, has been evaluated based upon the artist's status, education level and discernment. Choi claimed that an outlook on the world penetrating the essence of material requires the force of a brushstroke that gives philosophy form. Choi concluded that for the literati, painting was not only a leisurely or pleasurable activity, but also a method of cultivating one's view of the world, symbolically expressing self-cultivation and exploring the self while at the same time providing enjoyment as intellectual entertainment. This divisive thinking, in which noble and lower classes are segregated on the basis of art production meant Kim Chonghui held strong elitist views about literary principles and was very conscious of other Korean artists' status. This may be considered a catch-22 situation in which to be wealthy and upper class one must be an artist, but one can only become an artist if one is born into the wealthy upper class.

It has been speculated by scholars that Kim Chonghui's sharp criticisms in the realm of art would extend to other matters such as that of his country. Kim is believed to have dishonoured his country's national values and criticised his fellow Choson artists such as Chong Sun (1676-1759), the great painter of 'true-view' landscape painting, and Yoon Duseor (1668-1715), the great master of portrait and custom painting. Kim's criticism was that, relatively speaking, they were too idle in developing methods of creating literature and art (Kim 2001, 51-53). In his attitude to art, it is clear that Kim was in many ways a "Sinophile", being enthusiastic about many aspects of Chinese culture and holding a strong desire to integrate himself in Chinese culture and people, perhaps opposing Korea's traditional order. Choi (1976, 25) states that 'in Korea, there were no other scholars with whom he could share his knowledge.' Kim wrote:

As my intentions are large and profound, I want to have friends everywhere—even abroad. I am prepared to die if I could find someone who satisfies my need. Since hearing about the great scholars over the horizon, I cannot restrain my eagerness to meet them or my envy of these prominent scholars.<sup>105</sup>

Kim's somewhat arrogant attitude and distinctive artistic philosophy may have been a key aspect of his motivation to continue pursuing artistic achievements during exile despite his unfortunate and daunting circumstances. Such of his characteristics are well imbued in Kim's *Sehando* (Fig. 24), and this partly accounts for many Korean art historians' description of the painting as a 'masterpiece of the three perfections.'

Kim Chonghui's thoughts on art were based on 'the three perfections': painting, poetry, and calligraphy, that shaped important affiliations in the 19th century Korean art history. While the work of traditional Korean painters were usually confined to realistic representations of the cultural landscape, Kim and his colleagues, such as Cho Huiryong (1789-1866) and Heo Ryeon (1809-1892), adapted the Chinese concepts that lay in 'the three perfections.' Kim Chonghui and his cohort identified the essence of unity in 'the three perfections' by elucidating that the poetry and painting is a single work of art (Ho 1985, 134).

The phrase 'the three perfections' was coined in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in China, and this style of literary painting was introduced to Korea around the 12<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Song dynasty Chinese artists, most notably through the work of the Chinese scholars Wang Wei, Dong Qichang (1555-1636) and Su Shi (1037-1101).<sup>106</sup> The Chinese three perfections style was recognised as a solitary discipline that often emphasised the 'lyrical ideas that resonate beyond the forms' (Baker 2010, 31). This conception was largely developed by Su Shi (1037-1101): 'poetry in painting and painting in poetry,' in the Northern Song dynasty (Fong and Murck 1991, xv). Fong

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<sup>105</sup> (Adapted translation from Chun 1996)

<sup>106</sup> (Further discussions on the three perfections, see Fong and Murck 1991)

Wen and Alfreda Murck (1991, xv-xx) described Su Shi's thoughts on the three perfections thus:

[F]eelings and descriptions can fuse in mood only if a painting was composed as a poem [and] the written language and visual illustration are two distinct forms of expression ... that aims to present mental images and emotional states rather than to represent the physical world realistically.

Through Chinese influences, the ideas in 'the three perfections' developed into Korean literary painting theory and became part of the literary tradition in Korea. Korea's three perfections is an art form that emphasises spiritual philosophy rather than rich subject matter or brilliant colours, and highlights the ideas of three representative Chinese philosophies: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Thus 'the three perfections' emphasise not the representation of realistic visuals but the artist's spirit, character and academic elements or ideology; it thus differs from artist to artist. Kim's art criticism suggests that nature in its true form should not be painted true-to-life, but must contain the artist's spirit within it.

Korean art is also influenced by Eastern religious philosophy, mainly Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shamanism. Buddhism was introduced to Korea from China in 372 and has been a source of profound spiritual life.<sup>107</sup> At around the same time, Korean art and culture underwent a process of transformation by accepting Buddhism as an indigenous religion (Shim 2001, 2). During the Choson Dynasty many scholar paintings were influenced by Buddhist ideology depicting an expression of grandeur and the mystery of nature (Kim 1990, 18). This was despite the deterioration of a Buddhist influence due to the adoption of a new national unity of Confucianism by the Korean political system (Yang and Henderson 1958, 262). In the Korean mind, Buddhism is commonly associated with everyday life; has deeply influenced Korean arts and society; and plays a decisive role in determining Korean mentality and consciousness (Kim 1998b, 18). The religious spiritual background and philosophy of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Shamanism is often

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<sup>107</sup> (See more in Na 2003, 10-29)

reflected in Korean art (Zo 1973, 49). Koreans view Shamanism as the mother religion that authenticates the cultural legacy of Koreans as well as reflecting the relationship with the cosmic dual force (Hang, 1997, 143). The unique character of each religion, however, is influenced by individual artist's spirituality. Scholar painting is part of a broader religious philosophy that forms the basis of much of East Asian philosophy. In line with this, Lee, the chief curator of Ho-Am Art Museum, (1996, quoted in Shin, 2007, 370) said 'Korean aesthetic is deeply rooted in the Korean soil and Eastern thought' implying that the Korean aesthetic is shaped by the illumination of the coexisting unity of humanity and nature, perceiving 'the self and nature as one.' On the other hand, Korean art can also be viewed as a 'pan-naturalism', meaning that nature portrayed in Korean art can be seen as an 'expression of an omnipresent view of nature that bespeaks both the consciousness of human beings and the source of life' which becomes a possible way of expressing genuine Korean art (Kim 1998b, 3).

Kim Chonghui's kind of philosophical qualities were also strongly influenced by his religious studies of Buddhism. Synthesising religious ideologies was part of his aim of achieving sublime artistic outcomes and characterised most of his art and literary criticism. From the beginning of the Choson Dynasty, Buddhism became increasingly rejected and Confucianism became the founding principle of the nation. Regardless, Kim continued pursuing the study and practice of Buddhism, refusing to be obscured by the ideologies of *Sunglihak*—Neo-Confucianism. Kim's family had a strong Buddhist background, and his upbringing naturally included elements of Buddhist teachings. Kim's ancestors owned a temple called Hwaam-sa on Mt. Aengmubong near Chungnam village where he grew up. The temple still exists. His beliefs in Buddhism contributed to his practice of cultivating his spiritual character. During the course of his life, Kim's interest in Buddhism increased. In his exile he became particularly interested in Son Buddhism, and this led him to maintain friendships with various monks throughout that difficult time. With them he shared discussions and criticisms of Buddhist studies and compositions of Buddhist poetry (Lim 2006b, 230). Along with many others, Kim often shared his thoughts on religious ideologies with Pak Jega (1750-1805), his long time teacher, and the monk Choei (1786-1866), an artist and scholar. Researchers understand that both visited Kim on Cheju Island several times despite the significant distance from the mainland.

Their friendship helped their spiritual development and healing, and helped them overcome their ideological disagreements, which could become intellectual battles. One of Kim's arguments was that:

...Buddhism and Confucianism, I see they came from the same origin. As I read the Sutra named *Pulsolsasip ijangkyong*,<sup>108</sup> Buddhism also promotes virtue and reproves vice. [In Buddhist Sutra], there is a story about paradise and hell; however, these are just to give humans a lesson, and do not exist. These [stories about paradise and hell] are not true.<sup>109</sup>

Kim Chonghui had a close relationship with Son master Choei (1786-1866), who was the same age as Kim and was also a leading member of *Silhak*, as well as a master of 'the three perfections.' Choei was a distinguished scholar and artist. The combination of Kim's fastidious criticism and Choei's distinguished scholasticism meant they not only shared religious and philosophical ideas, influencing each other's intellectual interests in the process, they also became close friends. Choei visited Cheju Island many times while Kim was in exile despite the fact it took him days to travel across the ocean. While Kim was being transferred to Cheju Island, he stopped by a Buddhist temple, *Il-ji arm*, to visit Choei, and stayed the night there.

Choi (1976, 45) notes that Kim's religious perspective on worldly things influenced his research in logic and theories, and later influenced his focus on artistic creativity after freeing himself from these ideologies and worldly desires. On the contrary, it is clear that Kim had not freed himself from 'worldly desires' – even his drive to discuss things with Son master Choei is an indication of his attachment to worldly concerns.

### **Creative practice on Cheju Island**

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<sup>108</sup> (Writings of Buddhist Doctrines)

<sup>109</sup> (Adapted translation from Chun 1996, 14)

The first three years in exile for Kim Chonghui had apparently been unsettled and disorienting, and Kim Chonghui had trouble adapting to the new environment on the exiled island. During this early period of his exile he was more occupied with writing letters to his family for advice about various complications and expressing his confusion over the circumstances of his exile.

In the scholarly world of the Choson Dynasty, creative practices such as literary painting were regarded as ideal leisure activities among Choson scholars in that it allowed them to form close connections by sharing ideas and philosophical thoughts (Yi 2006, 81). A tragic, life-changing event such as being exiled usually signaled an end to such leisurely activities regardless of the scholars' interests and talents. Various obstacles hindering scholars' creativity during exile included an uncultured society and harsh environmental conditions. The exiles' material and financial circumstances and psychological and physical pains stood in the way of their artistic aspirations, and the resulting frustration may have added to their suffering. A lack of proper art supplies also hindered their study and creation of art.

Kim Chonghui's artistic achievements, given these factors, are commendable, and apparently took great effort. In the period of his exile after 1844, Kim's creativity appeared to reawaken, after he had recovered from the news of his wife's death. Kim actively sought and requested through his letters art materials and research books from the mainland and his artistic and literary creativity flourished. In 1844, he produced a painting, *Sehando* (Fig. 24), which has become the most famous of his paintings.

*Sehando (The Coldest of Winter)*

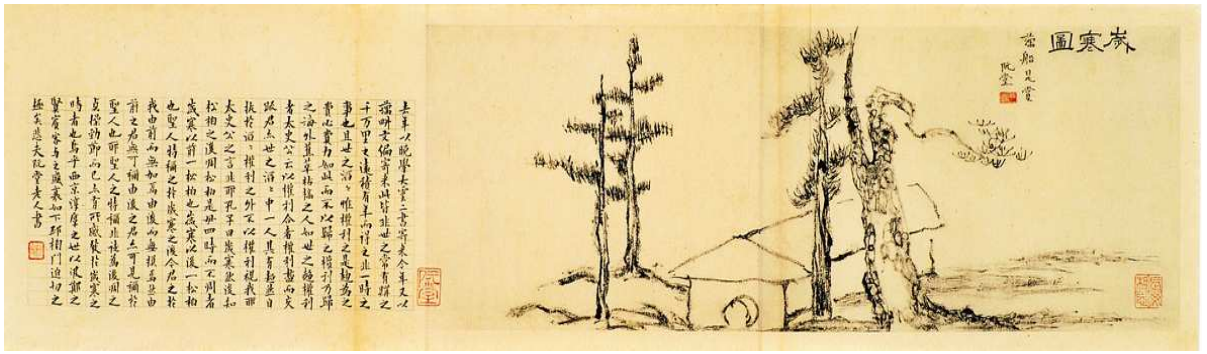


Figure 24: *Sehando*. Kim Chonghui. 1844. (23.5x108.3cm). Monochrome ink on paper. Private Collection.

The painting *Sehando* which, with his calligraphic work *Chusache*, has now been designated in Korea as National Treasure No. 180, is one of the most widely recognised artworks in Korea. Historical researchers in Korea believe this monumental piece of painting changed the flow of ‘the three perfections’ and also created a new trend in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Korean painting style. Researchers argued that *Sehando* has been recognised as the zenith of Choson literary painting because it represents the implication of the spiritual world rather than simply a sketch directly from nature. The painting depicts a bleak and desolate landscape scene with pine trees, cypresses, and a house that appears to be isolated and separated from other communities. The title *Sehando* comes from *Sehan*, a word of Chinese origin, which means the coldness of the winter before and after Lunar New Year’s day. The painting depicts a desolate house apparently partly built below ground level and thus appearing as if it were slowly sinking. The body of the house appears to be structured in a straight line, but upon closer inspection it in fact curves from left to right in an awkward fashion. Four trees have been planted around the house but on higher ground. Almost no space exists between the trees and the house, thus depicting an odd and illogical scene. The characteristically rough-looking brush strokes in Kim’s *Sehando* hint that the artwork was painted using a brush almost dry—a technique viewed by Kang Kwansik (2002, 209-210) as a minimalistic expression. The three perfections which Kim Chonghui sought to achieve in his art were expressed well in the painting, according to Kang.

Various historians believed that Kim Chonghui painted *Sehando* for his beloved

disciple Lee Sangjock (1804-1865) as an indication of gratitude and praise for his help in providing Kim with hundreds of publications from China by sending them to the island during his exile. This belief comes from seeing the letter Kim wrote to Lee next to the painting *Sehando*. It is believed that Kim was touched by Lee's respect and loyalty when many others had turned against him. It has been inferred that the dry and gnarled appearance of the aged tree to the far right in the painting is a metaphor for Kim's physical appearance and state of mind at the time of the painting's creation, and the adjacent evergreen pine tree, standing strong and upright, is a metaphor for Lee Sangjock (Jeong 2002, 209-210). The aged tree appears to lean against the stronger tree on the left, and this, according to Kang, represents Kim's appreciation of Lee's efforts to help his imprisoned teacher. Kang (2002, 209-210) also stated that the painting *Sehando* is a good symbolisation of Kim Chonghui's desperation in real life as an exile. Kim used an ink-loaded rough brush to paint *Sehando*, emphasising firm upright strokes in the metaphorical representation of Lee Sangjock and, in contrast, using physically deteriorated strokes in areas representing himself. Kang states Kim, using this method, exposed the silence existent in his inner state by creating and producing feeble portraits of his exilic identity.

*Sehando* is commonly believed to have been completed in 1844, although the exact date remains unknown because the painting was undated. The reason for this is unclear, but some have suggested that calligraphers and painters of the time shunned dating and signing their work (Oh and Hong 1998, 276). The four trees in Kim's painting, *Sehando*, are sometimes viewed as an attempt to portray his enduring friendship with Lee Sangjok. Opposing speculations, however, have arisen regarding Kim's motivation and purpose in painting the work. This is partly due to the strength of Kang's (2002, 209-210) argument that, although the word 'sehan' in the title signifies winter, the work was likely to have been painted in the summer. Kang's analysis of Kim's letter to his disciple Lee Sangjok adds support to this argument. Kang estimated *Sehando* was completed in the previous summer, rather than in the winter of 1844 as most people believe. Kang argued there was no evidence in Kim's letters to support the idea of it being painted in winter.

The letter Kim Chonghui wrote to Lee Sangjock (1804-1865) was attached on separate pages in which Kim expressed his gratitude to Lee and criticised the



hardened hearts of the many people who distanced themselves from him after he was exiled. In this long epistolary narrative adjacent to the painting, Kim criticised contradictory human relationships, especially in politics, which he believed were responsible for a stricken society. A thorough examination of this letter offers the basis for identifying Kim's motivation for painting *Sehando* and Kim's thoughts on society and human relationships during his exile:

[T]his act of kindness is not something one sees very often. These are books you bought from afar, and it must have been impossible to do this within a short period of time – in fact, it would have taken many exhausting years.

Currently the world is dominated by a trend of blind pursuit for power and profit. Despite this trend you have troubled yourself in searching for books for me, and these books that you found after so much effort you could have given to people who can help and be of benefit to you, but instead you have sent them to a person like me, gauntly wilting away far off across the sea – it is as if you have forgotten about your own interests.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien [145-90? B. C.] once said: "Those who unite for the purpose of gaining power and profit will dissipate once that power and profit disappear." You are a person living in the same world with the same trends but one uncontaminated and detached from such worldly trends. Was it because you did not confront me in the hope of profit? Or is Ssu-ma Ch'ien wrong?

Confucius said, "We only learn of the late withering of pines and cypresses after the coldness of winter comes about." The leaves of pines and cypresses, by nature, do not wither and fall in any of the four seasons. They are the same pines and cypresses before as well as after the cold season arrives. Despite this Confucius emphasised the period after winter's arrival.

Now that I think back, your attitude towards me has been constant and unchanging. However do you think your past and present behavior towards me corresponds to the teachings of Confucius? His emphasis of pine and cypress in winter is not only for the stout chastity of a late-withering tree but to emphasise the cold season.

Oh! Even in the Jeonhan Era [206-208 BC] when the country had such beautiful customs, good people like Geup-Um [famous retainer in China. B.C] and Zheng Dangshi<sup>110</sup> would, depending on the circumstances, unite when guests went well and dissipate when they weakened. In fact the writing<sup>111</sup> that Zhai Gong from Ha-Gyu [down the village] attached to a front gate must be one of the signs that everyone's cold-heartedness has reached the extreme. How saddening! Written by old Wan Dang.<sup>112</sup>

These words appear to express Kim's feelings of betrayal about being neglected and forgotten by others though he knew and accepted that he could no longer be a respected member of society. Citing religious and philosophical ideas from Chinese saints such as Ssu-ma Chi'ien and Confucius, Kim satirised the paradox of human relationships after his own relationships deteriorated. In the last paragraph, in particular, Kim criticised and lamented the social and political phenomena that saw people in political circles pursue power without showing regard for political subjectivity. Kim expressed his state of sorrow upon realising that, by being removed from society, the people who used to be by his side had now dissipated and turned against him, leaving him abandoned and neglected. His demotion had left him powerless and no longer attractive to those who had approached him when he had a

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<sup>110</sup> A retainer of the Crown Prince during Jing Emperor (151-141 BCE), China

<sup>111</sup> See blow page for the writing by Zhai Gong.

<sup>112</sup> (Jeong 2002, 212-214. Wan Dang was Kim Chonghui's other pen name. It is believed Kim had various pen names throughout his career.)

good position in society.

The following excerpt from Zhai Gong's writings, referred to in Kim's letter above, suggests he was beginning to understand the benefits of being less individualistic and instead of focusing only on his own work, spending time in building friendships and caring for others:

Now that I have crossed the boundary between life and death  
and back, I realise the virtue of forming relationships.

Experiencing poverty after having once been rich, I see the  
ways of associating with others.

Once noble and now humble, the human sentiment of new  
relationships has been revealed to me. (Jeong 2002a).

This inscription is Kim's admonition towards public sentiment that hung on his front gate. Kim cited from the text originally written by Zhai Gong (2nd century BCE), the Emperor of Han Dynasty China. Before he was sentenced to exile Kim had faced execution, and it was by virtue of one of his friends, Kwon Donin, who pleaded that Kim's life be spared, that he was saved. Here Kim experienced the virtue of his relationship with others, and this is expressed in the first passage of the inscription. The second passage refers to his past as a descendant of a royal family, in which he lived a life of wealth and extravagant treatment, and to his present status as a sinner fighting disease and hunger in conditions so poor he did not have access to even the most basic of necessities. This was a window into a completely unfamiliar way of life. The final passage also refers to his downfall from an important politician from a royal family to a sinner who had lost everything in an instant.

The Confucian dialectic in *Analects* 9.28 that Kim cited in the letter has been re-created many times in Chinese literature. Hartman (1993, 140) noted that the ancient viewpoints in the Confucian passage contains 'various assumptions and implications' and that 'Only when the year turns cold is the point brought home that the pine and the cypress are the last to fade.' He also stated that '[t]he pine and cypress stand for the inner virtues of superior man'—the sage—and that:

During the warm seasons, when all the trees of the forest flourish green together, it is difficult to distinguish the unequal qualities of each variety. But when the cold seasons come, the inferior man is the first to abandon principle, just as the common trees are the first to wither and fade. But the same cold brings out the inner qualities of the pine and cypress, the superior man who abides by his virtues in adverse times. Thus does the cold distinguish the superior from the inferior man.

Other researchers have noted the pine tree was the metaphoric image of choice for ancient sages and painters in comparing the strong and enduring qualities of the tree to human relations and personalities.

The word “Sehan” has been used extensively throughout Chinese and Korean works of art irrespective of the seasons. The image of two trees, the pine tree and cypress, was a favored subject for Choson literati, especially when symbolising expressions of fidelity for those living in seclusion or exiled (Kim 2003, 90). It has also been used extensively by Chinese artists to symbolise various elements, most commonly close friendships. Hartman (1993, 141) asserted the symbolic meaning thus:

Paintings of large trees, especially pines, were often inscribed and presented as tokens of friendship. The symbolic import of the pine is most evident in the subgenre of paintings known as “Twin Pines” ... where the doubling of the pine tree is clearly meant to suggest the indestructible union of the two parties.

Others, for example Lee (1994, 4), have specific interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the pine tree:

The pine tree is the favorite emblematic plant in Confucian moral rhetoric representing the faithfulness to one’s principle and firm volition, constancy, integrity, and fidelity of sage especially flourished after one went through an ordeal in life. It also associates with Taoism metaphorically used as an

explanation of the sieges' characteristics; sieges want to learn from the nature of pines.

Trees have appeared in Chinese culture as metaphors of human beings since the Chou period (1122-256 BC). 'Cold Forest', a style of Chinese landscape painting, rose from this comparison. This type of analogy compares the diverse species of trees to the differences between individuals—an analogy between a group of people and a forest, and the representation of a particular position in human society as a 'perch on a tree' (Hartman 1993, 145).

A picture of a withered tree, often seen in Chinese and Korean paintings, is a traditional Chinese metaphor for unjustly persecuted intellectuals and artists, often used by the artists themselves to represent their own distressed states. Hartman (1993, 145) noted that this 'withered tree' metaphor is often considered a 'universal symbol in traditional China both for personal and political decline, and for moral resistance to that decline.' On the other hand, McMahon (2003, 72) sees the pine tree in the symbolisation of Yin and Yang and Confucian order:

The pine tree exerts a large symbolic presence. If it is twisted by adversity, this suggests the enduring strength of human virtue and the hardness of Yang. The pine is rooted in Yin and reaches upward to the sky of Yang. The pine stays green all winter. The pine groves are sanctuaries for the soul, and the pines offer the protection and the friendship of proper Confucian order.

Kim Chonghui's intentions, contrary to Kang's analysis, may have been to express the three phrases 'sanctuaries for the soul,' protection, and 'friendship' in *Sehando*.

Kim had heard his disciple Lee Sangjock's planned to visit China, and some believe he knew Lee would show Kim's paintings and letters to Chinese scholars who knew Kim well (Kang 2002, 218-219). Kang suggested *Sehando* was Kim's deliberate intention to promote himself in China (209-210). The people with whom Kim was acquainted in his political activities turned their backs on him after his exile and he

had few people who were sympathetic towards his situation, hence his decision to turn to the Chinese scholars. The scholars who received this painting *Sehando* and letter were not only deeply moved but also sent him, through Lee Sangjock, positive feedback. The documents containing their comments are widely regarded as an important part of Korea's history and are preserved in the National Museum of Korea.

It might be inferred that Kim intended *Sehando* to communicate the coldness toward the ills of a paradoxical society, rather than to express any particular season, and that he sent these criticisms to the person who would understand: his disciple Lee Sangjok. To comprehend *Sehando* in more depth, it is important to remember Kim Chonghui's state of mind in 1844, and the situation he faced. Careful examination of the letters Kim wrote in 1844 indicates that he endured great ordeals at this time and it appears he wrote more letters in 1844 than in any other year.

The historical records indicated that Kim Chonghui wrote three letters to his second and younger brothers and his adopted son, Sangmoo (1819-) during this period. In a letter to his second brother Myonghui, dated January 1844, Kim described his feelings of depression; brought on by physical illness such as sores on his tongue, congested nose, difficulties in swallowing food, and tingling in his arms. In the letter, he also lamented his isolation from his family, which prevented him from attending important family occasions. To make matters worse, he received news that Sangmoo had lost his biological mother. This news concerned him and he was deeply concerned for Sangmoo because the loss had come so soon after the loss of his stepmother Lee, Kim's second wife.

Kim also, however, received the delightful news his second brother Myonghui had a new grandson who would be the one to preserve the family name (Kim had no biological sons from his marriage, Sangwoo having been born by a concubine). The letter indicates that despite the happiness he felt for his brother, Kim also felt a sense of sadness and isolation because he was no longer able to be part of the life of his family through good times and bad. He especially regretted being unable to hold the newborn child in his arms.

In the third letter addressed to his younger brother Sanghui, Kim described his sense

of depression as he pondered the dilemma of life and death and the lack of meaning of life for him confined on Cheju Island. Kim even worried about the matters after his death. He expressed guilt and hesitation about placing upon his servants' shoulders the responsibility of handling all arrangements after his death. He appeared to lack the physical and mental composure to face this dilemma and asked his family back home to make the decisions for him:

I've received everything you sent but even after ten million times of pondering I do not know what to do. How could I eat and sleep like nothing has happened when I've merely been prolonging my threadlike, worthless existence? Seeing the goods that remain here tells me that there is no way of living and enduring. I am just waiting to die. I am also planning to send away that servant Cheol once spring comes; what words could hold him back? But there is no one who could, once I die, collect my bones from this wretched southern land. And how should that be handled here? (Kim 1844, quoted in Choi 1976, 303-304).

Another matter for consideration in understanding *Sehando* is the paper Kim used. Kim had a reputation for being obsessively meticulous and fussy about the material for his work, especially the choice of paper and brushes: he favoured the best Chinese paper for his paintings. Unusually, Kim used rough letter paper for *Sehando*, three pages of which he glued together to make enough space to add a long inscription. Kim was a man who emphasised using high quality materials; for example, when asking for art materials from his acquaintances in Seoul. Many of Kim's letters dated around 1845 indicated he was fastidious about art materials and research books. Despite his situation, Kim was often difficult to please and was critical of the quality of materials his brothers and disciples sent him, including paper and brushes, and was not afraid to express his dissatisfaction in the letters in which he replied to them. In a letter to his youngest sibling he wrote: 'The big brushes [you sent] were all useless so I have turned them away. It is laughable [for you] to have thought only about the brush and not about the ink-stick.' He then said he had finished the Chinese ink-sticks he had brought with him in exile and requesting

purple jade light ink-sticks (Kim 1845, quoted in Choi 1976, 284-285). Purple jade light ink-sticks were ones made by Cao Sugong, who was famous during the Qing Dynasty for possessing the best skills in making ink-sticks, and were presented as a gift to Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) who, greatly impressed, gave the ink-sticks their name (Zhang 2004, 24). The ink-sticks give off a gloss and lustre as well as a soft purple light and a long-lasting fragrance. It is said that paper written or drawn on with this ink-stick will not deteriorate or become insect-eaten or discoloured, even with time, all qualities which were welcomed by Chinese painters and calligraphers. The purple jade light ink-stick Kim mentions is likely to be something he had used long before being exiled.

Yoo Hongjun (2006, 259) disparagingly suggested that Kim's perfectionism was exhausting for all those around him. Paper was likely to have been relatively rare on the island and, as an artist, Kim went as far as working on tree leaves as a substitute. An example of work he painted on leaves is a poem titled *The size of the spindle leaves are that of a palm, and one fit for writing on*:

Rain and dewdrops must have fallen in the mountains  
The leaves, like green parrot, are as green as ever in the winter.  
The high-quality, naturally formed paper  
Is just right for writing a poem reciting a spring nightingale.  
(*Wandangjeonjib* 1986, 232).

This poem indicates how absorbed Kim was in his art. Though faced with the worst of circumstances where even sheets of paper were difficult to find, his mind was that of an artist, and he saw in trees lining the paths outside ideal materials to write poems on.

As is apparent from the aforementioned letters, Kim was deeply tormented by physical as well as mental agony, and it is in part because he painted a work like *Sehando* in such dire circumstances that it achieved such recognition. Yoo Hongjun (2006, 230) wrote that *Sehando* is by no means a well painted work of art if one were to speak only of its aesthetic value. Rather, the reason for the praise it has continued



to receive is because the refinement and the energy of words, in which Kim strongly believed as an artist, come together in harmony to deliver his mind and soul. Rather than revealing his artistic genius, *Sehando* offers a new viewpoint into Kim's life in his desperate struggle to overcome the isolation he felt as an ex-politician who had been ousted from a position of privilege and authority. Kim always stated that he wished and endeavoured to deliver the feelings that formed in his mind and soul through the imagery of his art and that was the philosophy of his work. *Sehando* can be interpreted in exactly that way as the work of art through which Kim, a man physically trapped after receiving severe criticism and punishment under the uncompromising rules of society, could reveal to the world the deepest of feelings that lay inside him.

### ***1844 onwards***

By all appearances, 1844 and onwards were the most creatively active period for Kim Chonghui in creating art. He frequently asked his family and friends troublesome favours, requesting, among many other things, research materials. In the letters from 1844 until 1849, when he was freed, it is evident that Kim wrote mainly of food and clothes in the first three years of exile, while in later years the items he requested completely changed to reading materials. Myunghui and Sanghui, Kim's two brothers, and Lee Shangjock, one of his disciples (1804-1865), provided significant support to Kim in fulfilling his wishes. For example, Kim was a keen collector of books, ranging from various genres of Chinese classics to religious philosophy, which usually had to be imported from China and Lee Shangjock who sometimes travelled to China, would acquire these books for him. Apparently, the receipt of such goods from his close relations was a joyous, highly anticipated event for Kim, although, as he expressed in the letter below, he was very impatient in waiting for the deliveries:

Please send me an assortment of books little by little. I think I can find a way to soothe my nerves by reading, but as it takes three to four months or even up to six months after you send them to arrive here, I am not sure how I can keep forcing myself to hold on. (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 276).

This excerpt from a letter to his youngest brother Myunghui in 1845 is one of Kim's many requests for research materials. Despite his many health conditions which distracted him from his studies, he appeared to be possessed of great tenacity in collecting and reading books. In the following excerpt he complains of the state of his health interfering with his reading:

Reading *Heaji* has become a small task for me recently, but I feel bewildered since my eyes have become hazy, keeping me from reading with profound insight. (Kim 1845, quoted in Choi 1976, 285).

...

The flickering lamp and age-old books hinder me from harvesting [knowledge]. This old man sleeps little and so thinks of nothing but you, and the sound of [your] reading seems to blissfully reach my ears. Regardless of the pain in my mind I spend my days reciting writings like the old days (Kim, quoted in Yang and Kim 1991, 86).

Yang and Yang's (1987, 71) study have estimated Kim collected approximately 300 books during his exile, most of them from China. The *Heaji* that Kim referred to in the above quote was a series of 100 books of world geography written by the Chinese scholar Weewon (1794-1856). Receiving books from the mainland helped to enliven his spirit. In spite of this, he regretted being unable to share the knowledge with others, as he states in a letter to his brother, Sanghui:

I have discovered many interesting things from the reading material, but it is a pity that I have no one to discuss and share the knowledge with and what can be interesting by reading alone. (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 280).

The only way Kim could communicate his scholarly thoughts to others on the mainland while imprisoned on the island was through letters. It appears Kim believed that despite his circumstances, if he were to communicate to someone of high

character and discuss and share his scholarly thoughts, he would be able to better endure the loneliness.

In 1845, in another letter to his younger brother Sanghui, Kim expressed his excitement at receiving books and paper from the king, who especially enjoyed Kim's writings and would often grant Kim some paper to write on.

All the items you sent have one by one arrived safely. How could I, with a mountain of sins on my shoulders, be receiving these things today? I was moved to tears, tears that covered my face, but I cannot express in words how I felt. And to say nothing of the fact that the king thought kindly of my clumsy writing and sent paper. I am indebted to him; even the seas and mystic mountains would flinch in surprise. Recently my eye illness has worsened and I cannot write with a brush, but as I can sense the king's honour from afar I worked hard for 15 or 16 days and have completed just three tablets and three scrolls. (Kim 1845, quoted in Choi 1976, 282).

Historical research indicates that many people, including King Hunjong (1827-1849), the 24<sup>th</sup> throne king of the Choson Dynasty, desired to possess one or more of Kim's calligraphic pieces. The king, who had an interest in calligraphy, was moved by Kim's work and often requested that Sochi Heuryon (1808-1893), one of Kim's friends who often visited Kim, bring back pieces of Kim's work from Cheju Island (briefly discussed Chapter 5). The king often sent papers to Kim in exchange for, or perhaps simply to provide materials for, Kim's calligraphic artwork.

Kim felt he was undeserving of the special treatment from the king and had to repay his debts. By means of showing his faith, he perhaps tried to maintain 'vassal homage' between the king and himself. This was a convention abided by the three fundamental principles and the five moral disciplines of human relationships in Neo-Confucianism.<sup>113</sup> Some might, however, claim that this was a metaphorical attempt

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<sup>113</sup> (See further discussions in De Bary and Haboush 1985, 484)

to draw attention from the king or politicians and to encourage them to use their powers to recommend his release from exile.

### *Painting Orchids*

While landscape painting brought spiritual tranquility, the theme of the Four Gentlemen—orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, and plum blossom—were a favoured theme for Choson literary painters. They often believed both the value of innermost thoughts and personality were reflected through insights into nature. The Confucian ideology ‘Four Noble Plants’ is also a reference to the passing of the seasons and time (Cambon, Carroll, and Guimet 2005, 19). It also symbolises the four qualities of the superior man in Confucianism who kept a noble character and refused to be tainted with the ills of the world. The four noble plants have their own characteristics: the plum blossom, which survives the cold of early spring to bloom, represents the fidelity of a nobleman; the chrysanthemum, which gives off a delicate fragrance in the depths of the mountains, represents the frugality, modesty, and refinement of a nobleman; the orchid, which fights the first chills of late autumn to bloom, represents refinement, modesty, and self-sufficiency; and the bamboo, which bends but never breaks, symbolises loyalty and strength, while its leaves which stay green even in the winter symbolise a sage’s fidelity and dignity.<sup>114</sup> The orchid is also known as the ‘Ancestor of all Fragrances,’ in reference to men who uphold their high morals through the darkest periods (Koehn 1952, 132).

More than any other Choson artist, it appeared Kim Chonghui loved to draw and paint orchids. He left behind an exceptionally large number of orchid paintings which brought him fame. It appears he endeavoured to reach the realm of ‘the three perfections’ (a sign of the fully morally developed human) through endless practice of orchid paintings. He held the philosophy that, for accurate expression within an orchid painting the skill and technique had to be bordering upon perfection, and thus was not something to be ‘tried’ or taken lightly, as viewed by Choi (1976).<sup>115</sup> The

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<sup>114</sup> (See more in Morrison 2005)

<sup>115</sup> (Further discussions on orchid painting of Kim Chonghui, see Kim 2005)

letters he wrote on Cheju Island indicate he painted many orchids during his time in exile. There is no detailed indication in the letters, however, to suggest exactly how many or exactly what kind of orchids he painted, thus resulting in widespread speculation (Lee 2005b, 291). During his time on Cheju Island he received many requests from close acquaintances to paint orchids for them; he usually accepted these requests despite his frequent illnesses.

Researchers have estimated he painted more than 70 orchid paintings in his life. Among them the *Jeung Beon Sang Chon Jang Muk Ran-do* (Fig. 25) and *Sauran* (Fig. 26) are thought to have been painted on the island, but this has yet to be confirmed. Lee Wonbok (2005) argued in his book that *Jeung Beon Sang Chon Jang Muk Ran-do* was painted after Kim was freed from exile. Alternatively, Lee conceded the possibility that, judging from the confused strokes and structure and the fullness of the leaves in the painting, it may not have been painted by Kim but instead by Kim's friend Kwon Donin. An inscription on the top left corner of the painting, is widely believed to have been written by Kwon after receiving the painting from Kim. If this is true, the painting, thought to have been executed in 1848 while Kim was on Cheju Island, likely would have been a gift, a token of friendship, to Kwon. Yoo Hongjun (2006, 282) wrote that Kim painted *Sauran* (Fig. 26) for Kim's son Sangwoo who had visited Cheju to help his exiled father.

The orchid paintings may play an important role in the investigation of Kim's state of mind. He attributed more importance to orchid paintings executed with calligraphic methods than did any other literary artist, and he endeavoured to reach the realm of perfection with regards to art.

Kim Chonghui emphasised that painting orchids involved the same processes as religious practice, especially in the Confucian profession. 'Studying orchid painting methods with a concentration of the mind,' he emphasised, 'is like clarifying knowledge by studying the logic of Confucianism's four 'thou shalt not';<sup>116</sup> 'do not look, do not listen, do not say (or repeat), do not do' (Lee 2005b, 291). What this indicates is that painting orchids is more than simply depicting a subject, but

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<sup>116</sup> (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 165 and see more in Lee 2007b, 55-56)

something that demands careful consideration and an academic attitude dedicated to executing a sage's enlightenment. Painting in the East resembles a process of spiritual release—that is, spiritual cultivation. If a work of art reflects a person's mind, the endeavour for spiritual release can be said to be reflected from the first act of grinding to make the ink.



Figure 25: *Jeung Beon Sang Chon Jang Muk Ran-do*. Kim Chonghui. 1848. (41.8x32.2cm). Monochrome ink on paper. Private Collection.

The orchid flower and leaves are in the study deep in the mountains  
 From where is this autumn wind blowing and making me worry?  
 If it were to snap easily in the wind and frost  
 How could it leave an aroma in the study in the mountains for so long?

This poem was written by Kwon Donin above Kim's orchid painting, *Jeung Beon Sang Chon Jang Muk Ran-do*. The reference to the orchid flower and leaves in the poem may be Kwon's use of metaphor to describe Kim. He pitied Kim's confinement on the remote island and at the same time, it seems, he wrote the poem hoping Kim

would not yield to the turbulence in the world or lose his 'fragrance' on the lonely island.

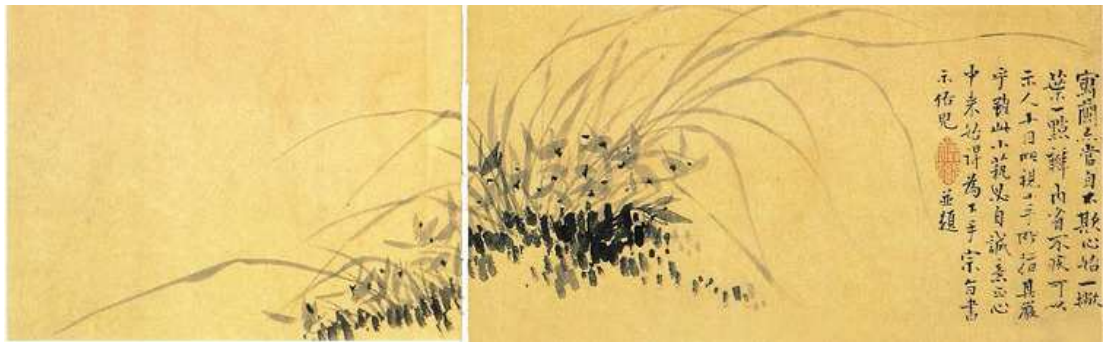


Figure 26: *Sauran*. Kim Chonghui. (23x85cm). Monochrome ink on paper. Private Collection.

The Four Gentlemen can be painted using calligraphic techniques. Literati who believed that brushstrokes reflected one's cultivation and character often painted them as an exercise of expressing their personalities through art.<sup>117</sup> In Korea, painting the Four Gentlemen involved an expression of a more personal, realistic self than in China, where it was more theoretical and abstract, and Japan, where it was more an aesthetic exercise (Cambon, Carroll, and Guimet 2005, 19). It involved efficient use of space, depth, dimension, orientation, and a more natural than aesthetic approach.

According to the book *A Great Synthesis of Art and Scholarship: Painting and Calligraphy of Kim Chonghui* (2006, 282) published by the National Museum of Korea, the orchids in Kim's paintings break standing laws of composition and have been granted a scattering of the strong strokes that form the leaves. The book added that Kim controlled thickness by repeatedly pressing down then releasing the orchid leaves, and by using the twisted method that he had stressed added variety to the leaves' structure and enhanced rhythm. Kim emphasised calligraphic style by expressing orchid flowers with specks and protrusions.

Whenever Sangwoo (1817-?), his son by a concubine, wrote asking for guidance,

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<sup>117</sup> (See more in Chee 2007)

Kim gave him attentive advice not as a father but as a teacher. Once he advised, ‘One may be a good painter, but he is not necessarily a good painter of orchids’ (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 338-339). In this letter Kim was of the opinion that a good painter of orchids must have dignity, noble character in his heart, and a fragrance and energy in their words gained through cultivation of character (the characteristics of the Four Gentlemen). In another letter to Sangwoo, Kim gave him advice on the method of painting orchids, being both gentle and firm in pointing out Sangwoo’s errors (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 154). In a letter Kim emphasised that orchid paintings should be executed using calligraphic methods. He stated the leaves, in particular, must be painted using clerical script. This is also known as the official script method, where curves turn into strokes at steeper angles and lines vary in thickness. Kim suggested that anyone with only a shallow knowledge of clerical script must not paint orchids. Kim was against painting orchids by technique alone and wrote that ‘technique’ is shunned in the orchid painting method, and so if one has technique one must not paint a single stroke using it (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 154). Kim’s intentions were that there is no set method of orchid painting; rather, the painting is created naturally from the artist’s character and spirit. He argued an artist must pour his soul, not an image, into a painting. This may be why Kim placed such importance on orchid painting and endeavoured to reach the realm of perfection it. Possibly this philosophy explains why Kim was particularly critical of true-to-life landscape painters. Kim held more austere beliefs than most about artists’ attitudes and was adamant about the importance of one’s spirit in a work of art. These beliefs, it seems, meant that he observed and criticised other artists’ work with a sharp eye.

Many of Kim’s orchid paintings are also grounded in religious ideas, especially those of Son/Zen Buddhism. Kim wrote below the orchid painting *Buriseunrando* (Fig 27):

Painting orchids for the first time in twenty years by chance, I have painted its true colours. The place I sought again and again, shutting doors, is no different to Vimalakirti’s Son [Zen]. If someone were to demand with force and use as an excuse I would justly decline with the silence of Vimalakirti [Sutra]. (*Wandangjeonjib*, Vol. 3 1996, 256).





Figure 27: *Buriseunrando*. Kim Chonghui. (30.6 x 54.9cm). Undated. Ink on paper. Private Collection.

Almost certainly, Kim would have experienced deep meditative moments through the process of painting and calligraphy and experienced some peace, and freedom from worldly notions of order. Kim's studies and creativity can be likened to what Buddhism calls the 'asceticism of self-denial'<sup>118</sup> and may have fostered this approach to overcome the torment of his lengthy exile.

Some questions, however, remain unanswered. One is that in the orchid painting, *Buriseunrando* (Fig. 27), Kim wrote that he had not painted orchids for twenty years. It is estimated that Kim painted *Buriseunrando* after he was released from exile, which leads to suggest that he did not draw orchids during his time on the island. One of his letters, however, which contains his response to Oh Kyuil's request for an orchid painting, contradicts this. His promise to satisfy the request from his disciple if Oh sent him high quality paper is contained within the following letter:

I want to fulfill your requests for my writing and orchard [paintings] but I do not even have a piece of paper. If you could get three or four pieces of good notepaper I shall

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<sup>118</sup> (See more in Hurvitz 1976)

make an effort and test my diseased arms. Thick, white paper is also very good but it must be treated paper for it to be usable. I stopped drawing orchids after arriving on Cheju Island and haven't continued since. But how could I back down on [your] request? (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995, 121).

From this letter it appears Kim drew and sent Oh an orchid painting, but no other evidence exists to ascertain its existence. Additionally, in a letter to his son Sangwoo, Kim stated that he sent him an orchid painting (Kim, quoted in Choi 1976, 313). These documents add weight to the argument that Kim painted orchids during his time on the island, but thus far it remains a mystery precisely which paintings were painted there and with what frequency.

Kim acknowledged that he experienced difficulty in mastering China's traditional methods despite 30 years of practice, and he wrote of his realisation that it was reckless for one to paint something without first mastering the method (Yoo 2006, 177). Therefore it would be wise to interpret his claim that he had not painted orchids for twenty years with a grain of salt; it is likely he had not painted orchids bordering upon masterful perfection for that time. The orchids he painted on Cheju Island perhaps were seen by Kim, as a perfectionist, as mere practice pieces.

### *Painting Narcissus*

The narcissus is the one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring and is believed to bring good fortune for the ensuing twelve months. It has been favoured by Chinese artists, who have depicted them to suggest 'the venerable genii of the Taoist Heaven, bringers of Great Happiness' (Koehn 1952, 129). The figure (Fig. 28) below is of the narcissus planted along the stone fence around Kim's exile house on Cheju Island. This flower is known to be so tenacious that it blooms even in the winds and piles of snow characteristic of Cheju Island's midwinter. There are narcissus at the site today, possibly planted in symbolic memory of Kim Chonghi's love for the flowers.



Figure 28: Narcissus planted at the Kim Chonghui's Cheju exile house.



Figure 29: *The Narcissus*. Kim Chonghui. Woodcut <31×18.7cm> (Gwacheon cultural centre website)

Kim Chonghui was known to enjoy imitating Chinese Hu Jing's poem *The Narcissus* (Fujitsuka 2009, 937), and he may have gained inspiration for this painting from the abundant narcissus on Cheju Island. The woodcut painting, *The Narcissus* (Fig. 29), is his only painting of the plant. On it he engraved an excerpt from writing by Hu Jing (1769-1845) from Qing China about the double hook brush technique:

Zhao Mengjian used the double hook brush technique to execute his narcissus before. Now, painters use a bald brush to smear to achieve the same effect/reason as the double hook brush technique. [Written by] Hu Jing. (Gwacheon Cultural Centre).

Zhao Mengjian (1199-1267) was a Song imperial artist who specialised in the use of the double hook brush technique (Fig. 30) —which had been popular throughout Chinese painting history—in narcissus paintings. The technique has been imitated by many Chinese artists since, involves drawing a thin outline around images of text and paintings.



Figure 30: *Narcissus*. Zhao Mengjian (1199- 1267). (34x341.8cm). Ink on paper. (The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

Kim Chonghui, borrowing from Hu Jing's writing, tried to emphasise the importance of the method in painting narcissus. The narcissus painting remains largely under-researched, probably due to the tendency for many researchers to focus on the better known of Kim's works, such as *Sehando* (Fig. 24). There is thus a lack of detailed commentary on this work.

Kim Chonghui's narcissus painting seems to be influenced by Bada Shanren (1626-1705). Bada, like Kim, often executed his paintings using the woodcut technique (Wang, Barnhart, and Smith 1990, 101). The Bada's narcissus (Fig. 31), originally

titled *Flowers, Fruit, and Birds*, shows Bada's approach to painting narcissus in monochrome ink. Kim's twin paintings of narcissus (Fig. 29) executed with the woodcut technique and Bada's paintings of narcissus resemble each other like mother and child. Bada's narcissus paintings are characterised by roots that are detached from the earth; and similarly, the roots of Kim's narcissuses are also distinctly exposed as if uprooted from the ground. Barnhart (1990, 101) stated that 'the orchid and narcissus traditionally symbolised moral and patriotic ideals of loyalty and faithfulness, and they also represent another realm of meaning, that of female beauty and behavior.'



Figure 31: A section from *Flowers, Fruit, and Birds*. Bada Shanren (1626-1705). Undated. (Egan 1994).

Kim Chonghui's love for the narcissus developed when he visited China with his father Nokyung at the age of 24. His first impression of the narcissus was that of a pure and fresh plant that took hold of his heart. Kim's religious mind can be observed in his poems about the narcissus, as in his orchid paintings. In his poem, titled *Narcissus*, he depicts the narcissus as pure and profound figures that resemble the Taoist Hermit who has reached nirvana.

A single winter flower [Narcissus] has blossomed roundly  
around the stem.

Their figures so pure and profound  
The apricot flowers are noble but cannot leave the island  
Seeing the clear water, it must be the nirvana.  
(*Wandangjeonjib* 1996).

The fact that Kim had a particular love for flowers is illustrated in many of his poems, letters, and writings. Kim may have been granted some time to wander around the island and enjoy the freedom of exploring the surrounding area of his place of residence. While most exiles were restricted to their home prisons, some from high-class backgrounds, like Kim, were often permitted outings under the local governor's discretion. His sorrow after seeing the neglected narcissus growing in the fields of Cheju Island might have led him to write several poems and the painting, *Narcissus*. In a letter to his friend Kwon Donin, he deplored the islanders' behaviour that devalued the flower's nobility, writing that:

The narcissus are a great spectacle here. There is not an inch or foot of this village that is not covered by the flowers. The class of narcissus is so large that each stem has more than ten flowers at most; no less than six or seven. The flowers blossom in late January or early February, and so in March the mountains and fields appear as if white snow has piled up upon them like an endless layer of white cloud. It is like this all to the east and west of the house where I live in exile, but how could the haggard existence shut up in a cave such as I make criticism? If I were to shut my eyes that would be the end of it, but when I open my eyes they fill up my view. How could I shut out my vision so I do not see them?

...

The village people here are oblivious as to the value of the narcissus; they would feed them to cows and horses or stamp on them with their feet. The flowers often grow in the barley fields too so the village grown-ups or children would dig them up with hoes, but they re-bloom even after being dug up so the people look upon them with hatred. It's a case of

something not getting its due. (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 209).

Kim wrote the narcissus poems after seeing the flowers blossoming in various places around Cheju Island.

Wherever I go, narcissus line the paths and I can even count  
them by valleys; they grow even thicker between the fields.  
The people living there, however, do not know what they are  
and dig them up with hoes when they weed the barley fields.

...

They said to dig up the narcissus  
As if to illustrate that an ignoramus cannot go where a  
mountain god lives.  
Your jade-like figure is only visible to my eyes  
An innate fragrance, by nature, cannot be tinged with dirt  
You, too, are unable to stay in the household for long.

Flinging your seeds into the blue sea and blue sky,  
I cannot break off my karmic affinity to the narcissus.  
Having dug you up with the hoe,  
I threw you, worthless thing, away.  
Yet now, you quietly grow next to my window.  
(*Wandangjeonjib* 1996).

Kim saw himself, his abandonment, and the dire circumstances he found himself in, reflected in the neglected narcissus.

### ***Mojildo***

*Mojildo* (Fig. 32) is a painting that has not been critiqued or explored extensively to date. It may have been overlooked by researchers because there is very little supporting background material about it.



Figure 32: *Mojildo*. Kim Chonghui. (26.4 x 14.2cm). Ink on paper (print). Private Collection.

The painting *Mojildo* depicts a strange looking cat sitting quietly but in anticipation. The cat, however, is an ambiguous character and appears alert and possibly tense. Its flattened ears, staring eyes and the twitching tip of its tail indicate it is concentrating on something that has caught its attention. Its bulging belly, which hides its legs and paws, may form a tense crouching position. The contours and features of the cat—the mouth, tail, bottom, and forehead are painted with dark strokes. The big eyes bearing a possibly fearful expression and the single strong black line that forms the tail may depict a cat protecting itself from danger.

The title of the painting, *Mojildo*, derives from the Chinese language. ‘Mo’ is the homonym of ‘mao,’ the word for the human age of 70 as well as the sound of a cat, while ‘jil’ is the word for the human age of 80 and 90. The figure of a cat is favoured by many Chinese and Korean painters and was often used when praying for longevity.

Cats and other animals, considered effective in conveying the sacred elements of human life, appeared frequently in Choson paintings. In Korea since ancient times, cats were believed to be intelligent creatures and people treated them with respect. Domestic cats made for good subjects in paintings as they like to linger around



people, and Choson painters were often fond of painting them against a backdrop of flowers and birds as an allegorical method of expression. Painters used animal images to emphasise the close relationship between humans and animals, and used the characteristics of animals that symbolised prosperity and longevity for humans. Choson painters such as Kim Hongdo (1745-), Byeon Sangbeok (1730-), and Chong Seon (1676-1759) were particularly fond of cat paintings. They depicted cats' psychology, behaviour and character in their often true-to-life paintings, exhibiting high levels of technical artistic skill in the area (Baik 2001, 84) (see, for example Fig. 33 and 34).



Figure 33: Byeon Sangbyeok (1730-). *Gukjeongchumyo*. (Autumn cat in a garden of blooming chrysanthemums). (22.5 x 29.5cm). Kansong Munhwa Collection



Figure 34: *Kukilhanmyo*. Chong Seon (1676-1759). ( 20.8x30.5). Kansong Munhwa Collection

These cat paintings of Byeon Sangbyuk (Fig. 33) and Chong Seon (Fig. 34) were created using light, ink-based colour layers on silk backgrounds that represent the delicate and realistic portrayals of cat paintings of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. Byeon's painting, *Gukjeongchumyo* (autumn cat in a garden of blooming chrysanthemums), is a detailed expression of a cat, crouched under chrysanthemum flowers in a warm, sunny garden on an idle autumn day, seemingly glaring at something. Its fur coat has been expressed with soft brown and black strokes of the brush. Chong Seon's cat painting, *Kukilhanmyo*, too, is a portrayal of both a cat and chamomile flowers. Bees linger by blooming chamomile flowers while a black cat, crouched and turned towards insects in the grass, stares with a playful look in its eyes. This painting is another detailed and realistic expression of a cat. The two paintings, whose style was popular during the Choson Dynasty, were painted at a similar time period to *Mojildo*, however even upon cursory observation it is obvious they contrast with the latter painting in many respects. Byeon and Chong's respective depictions of cats are presented on a backdrop of a lazy, peaceful afternoon, while Kim's cat in *Mojildo*, in contrast, appears to be conveying some silent inner message, plea, or feeling.

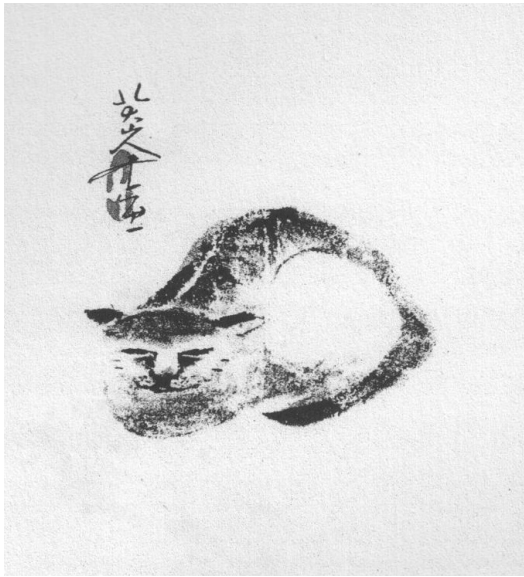


Figure 35: *Cat and Chicken*. Bada Shanren (1626-1705).<sup>119</sup>

Kim Chonghui, unlike other Choson painters whose cat images are realistically expressed with fine detail, used a calligraphic style to make quick almost dry strokes that form the image as a rough impression. In fact, like his narcissus painting, Kim's style in *Mojildo* again bore a closer resemblance to that of the Chinese artist Bada Shanren's (1626-1705) snoozing cat (see Fig. 35 *Cat and Chicken*). In the painting, Bada, who painted various cats, used the form of a cat as a 'visualization of the true spirit of Chan' (Wang, Barnhart, and Smith 1990, 157). Barnhart (1990, 108) noted that 'cats were associated with both reincarnation and the spirit of tranquility that is at the heart of Chan thought.' Bada, according to Barnhart, used the Chan Buddhist thought of reincarnation and void, 'hence the goal of Bada's mind' (Wang, Barnhart, and Smith 1990, 109). There is no direct evidence to support that Kim was influenced by Bada's cat paintings and took on a similar style. In his writing Choi (1994, 97) suggests that while both artists used a brush to paint in calligraphic fashion, Bada's technique of expressing the cat is mild while Kim's has strong personality and contains a humorous element, thus the two artists' expressions are vastly different. There is nevertheless the possibility that Kim, who had been pursuing his own unique style, combined Bada's philosophy and art style with his own thoughts about Son Buddhism in delivering *Mojildo*, instead of simply imitating

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<sup>119</sup> (See more Cat paintings by Bada Shanren in Wang, Barnhart, and Smith 1990)

the more conventional Choson style.

There is evidence that Kim studied and gained influence from Bada Shanren through his letter to Kwon Donin that outlines Kim's appraisal of a piece of art:

As I observed Bada Shanren's painting, I found that it was not a genuine painting. Although the drawing technique was truly beautiful, it was quite tinged with bad habit. Bada Shanren's paintings originally have no trace [of bad habit] left; how could this take place? (*Wandangjeonjib* 1996, 272).

The painting *Mojildo* was once owned by Jang Taeksang, who joined the Korean political circle during the Japanese rule and served as the chief police officer; he perished when North Koreans set fire to his house during the Korean War (Lee 2008b, 89). Today, only a replica copy remains. The date of execution of *Mojildo*, which some claim is 1840 when Kim was transferred to Cheju Island, remains a matter of debate. Through examination of the style of the inscribed words on the painting, Lee Ywongsoo (2005, 182) argued that *Mojildo* was painted by Kim in his mid-sixties after he was released from exile. This was the period around 1849, when Kim's own styles of calligraphy were approaching completion. The calligraphy under scrutiny in *Mojildo*, Lee argued, is made up of diamond-like strokes, written with a single dip of ink and boasting vitality. This argument, Lee was convinced, would turn the tide of previous research on the painting's content analysis. An undated reference Kim made on the right section of the *Mojildo* painting would indicate the place where the painting was executed: "I paint [*Mojildo*] on the road to Daebang." Daebang is another name for Nam-won in the Chulla province from which Kim was transferred on a boat to and from Cheju Island. The interpretation of *Mojildo* would take on different directions depending on the period of its execution and if Kim had modelled the painting on a cat he spotted crouched on the path on his way back after his release, the interpretation would differ greatly. Yoo Hongjun (2006) has suggested Kim painted *Mojildo* for Kwon Donin, his close friend, three years his senior. If it had been painted for Kwon, it is plausible that Kim painted it on his way back to the capital after his release from exile at 64 years of age, as Lee Ywongsoo argued. If Kwon were three years older than Kim he would have been about 67 at the time, and

it might be argued Kim painted *Mojildo* to wish the man approaching 70 good health and prosperity.

Ambiguities in Kim's *Mojildo* have brought about many speculations, and the views on the painting differ in many respects. Lee Ywongsoo's interpretation is as follows:

On his way back home he must have observed a cat sitting under the eaves, in a situation as pitiful as his, and illustrated the animal as a form of symbolism of himself. The body pathetic and aged, but the burn of the eyes so intense as to be able to suppress the world, and a mouth that seemingly just finished a satisfactory meal – these features seem to illustrate a sense of confidence and gratification over having taken intense hardship as a stepping stone to philosophical and artistic completion. (Lee Ywongsoo, quoted in Lee 2008b, 89).

Lee Sangkuk's (2008b, 91) interpretation is:

One has reached an age when life becomes as airy as a cat, transcending earthly fetters like a butterfly. Or it might be a painting illustrated out of a desire to become so. It is the shape of a cat formed from curt ink roughly swished across the page, but its eyes shine with a strangely mournful air, one that seems to mock the mad power of the political leaders.

While Yoo Hongjun (2006) interprets thus:

This piece of art depicting an angry squirrel, painted roughly by rubbing together the bristles of a drying ink-brush, is called *Mojildo*, meaning "old coot". It can be understood as having been painted out of the sheer injustice felt by an elderly person. What sort of squirrel would exhibit such a savage expression? This painting implies that although Wan-

dang [Kim Chonghui] escaped death by the skin of his teeth and was exiled to a secluded island, he never lost his spirit.

*Mojildo* is believed to be Kim Chonghui's only animal painting. There is very little indication he put any significant effort into painting it; it may well have been a cursory sketch. It is, however, undeniable Kim left a certain message within the painting. The title indicates his wish for good health and prosperity for a 70 or 80 year old senior; on the other hand, the distrustful look in the cat's eyes seems to be conveying a message that, it appears, only Kim would know. The suggestion that *Mojildo* was painted on his way back from exile adds credibility to this argument if one contemplates how Kim would have felt at this point. In addition to wishing his friend good health and prosperity, the cat in the painting may be an expression of his mental state after his long-awaited release from the lengthy period in exile to a peaceful life as a free man. The reason for this interpretation is due to the resemblance Kim's *Mojildo* has to Bada's cat painting. Bada emphasised man's spiritual stability and psychological refreshment through his paintings, and it is possible Kim, influenced by this technique and thoughts, attempted to express his own psychological state through the work.

### **Kim Chonghui and women**

A relationship between a *kisaeng* and a nobleman was a common convention during the Choson Dynasty. Historical records indicate that Kim, like other noblemen, was involved in several scandals with *kisaeng*. The most notorious of all is the scandal with Jukhyang, meaning 'fragrance of bamboo', a 19th century *kisaeng* who is known to have been skilled in song and dance as well as in 'the three perfections.'<sup>120</sup> Her artistic activities were said to have been enough to lure the minds of scholars and win the praise of Kim Chonghui, even though *kisaeng* were treated as lower class. The poems composed by Kim, who was around 44 at that time (Lee 2008b, 110), are thought to attest to his affair with Jukhyang, because of the ways they compliment her artistic talent, beauty, noble qualities and faith. One of the poems Kim forwarded to Jukhyang was:

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<sup>120</sup> (see further discussions on Jukhyang in Hwang 2007)

The look of the prostitute [Jukhyang] parallels her name; slim and graceful.

She sings beautifully and expresses her innermost thoughts and feelings.

Many rich men [government officials] strive to gain her heart.

Yet, the prostitute with noble qualities does not cease to be faithful to me. (Kim, n.d., quoted in Jeong 1999, 440).

Kim Chonghui rarely complimented the paintings of fellow artists or even that of his son, but he seems to have deep appreciation for the work of the *Kisaeng* Jukhyang. Upon seeing one of Jukhyang's orchid paintings, *Nan juk hwa*, he wrote:

In painting an orchid she has grasped a brush as if executing calligraphy and painted beautifully. This delighted mind lets fly the early autumn winds, and the small flowers under the orchid leaves do not hesitate to appear. The dew colours the autumn leaves and here hidden the pure and clear book. Delivering such portrayals of beautiful ink from a woman's boudoir, the old school shall attest to this mind even after a thousand years (*Wandangjeonjib* 1995).

The poem below is that which the *kisaeng* Jukhyang composed after meeting Kim Chonghui and which she later gave him:

In the window where a thousand, ten thousand willow branches hang.

The blue clouds are like shadow and so the village is invisible

A shepherd suddenly appears and passes by playing a pipe

A rain-fog filling up a lake becomes twilight and emerges. (Lee 2008b, 110).

Kim Chonghui composed in response:

The bamboo is straight and appears wad with fragrance  
 The singing is as if it was extracted from a green heart  
 A bee on a stroll wants to peek at the promise made in secret  
 with the flower  
 But integrity is high, how could one form a sly mind? (Lee  
 2008b, 110).

The poem above appears to express Kim’s wish to become closely acquainted with Jukhyang, whom he is fond of though she is tantalisingly proud and difficult to approach. Although Jukhyang was a *kisaeng* she was as skilled in ‘the three perfections’ as the best male Choson literary artist, and this ability even the critically minded Kim recognised and admired. Whether this recognition was shaped by his personal feelings towards her is unknown. Kim’s alleged relationship with Jukhyang, became public after a letter he had written his wife Lee, was discovered, in which he tried to convince her that a story she had overheard about his affair was untrue (*Chusa Hangul pyonji* 2004, 235).



Figure 36: Calligraphy work by *kisaeng* Kim Keumhong (Jin 2006)

There is supposition that Kim was involved with another *kisaeng* during his exile on Cheju Island. Following the discovery of examples of folding screen calligraphy (Fig. 36) in 2005 of the *kisaeng*, Kim Keumhong, an expert in art history believed she was strongly influenced by Kim Chonghui with regards to his technique and style of calligraphy (Jin 2006). It is believed that the eight folding screen of her calligraphy was completed by Kim Keumhong in 1856, when she was 21 years old, and,



although it remains a contentious issue, the timing and similarities of style have led some scholars to believe in the possible influence from Kim Chonghui. According to Jin's (2006) newspaper article, there is a closing phrase scripted at the end of the screen which translates to Cheju's lady, Lady Youngju, 'Kim Keumhong writes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century', as well as the phrase 'Written in the year of Jeongsa', which equates to the year 1856. Kim Chonghui was freed in 1849, and the *kisaeng* Kim Keumhong was only nine or ten years old at the time. If one assumes Kim Keumhong practiced and cultivated Kim Chonghui's calligraphy style for ten years and completed the practice in 1856, it is not an impossible task. Historical records indicate Kim Chonghui, during nine years in exile, became aware of the lagging Cheju culture and the ignorance of the residents and so taught many local students. It is unknown whether the *kisaeng* Kim Keumhong received an education.<sup>121</sup> However because at the time *kisaeng* were free to learn writing and art it is entirely possible that she learned from someone other than Kim Chonghui. There are no direct references supporting this argument and no further records of her work or how she had learnt the technique have since been discovered. There have been many speculations based on documentary evidence; there are rumours Kim Chonghui was involved with *kisaeng* other than these two mentioned, but as no reliable evidence exists this is another area for possible research in the future.

### **Kim Chonghui: Contributions to the Island**

Upon realising Cheju Island's cultural influences had fallen behind that of other regional areas, Kim Chonghui and many other exiles strived in various ways to provide assistance, for example by teaching the children in the region to read. Kim Chonghui, like most other exiles, faithfully fulfilled his duties as an educator through communication with the local residents of Daejunghyun, where Kim had spent his exile (Yang and Yang 1987, 63). Kim passed on his teaching style, which was based on the theory of 'the three perfections', to the people of Cheju Island and thus contributed greatly to the island's development. Yang and Yang (1987, 67) claim that Kim not only served to help Cheju Island residents out of illiteracy, his own method (the three perfections) also differed from other exiles' teaching methods (which

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<sup>121</sup> (For further discussions on women and education in Choson Dynasty, see Cho 1995)

focused primarily on the etiquette and state of mind when learning words) and thus Kim's contribution to the Cheju communities was invaluable. According to Yang and Yang (1987, 63-64), Kim did not teach Neo-Confucian ideology, instead focusing on the truth-based ideology he pursued. The purpose of offering education in the Choson feudal state was to train and appoint men of ability as feudal bureaucrats; and so only feudal bureaucrats' children were able to enroll in Cheju Island's education system (Kim 1994a, 304).



Figure 37: Replica of Kim Chonghui teaching local students, situated in Kim Chonghui's house of exile.

The picture (Fig. 37) is that of a full-scale replica of his house of exile which depicts a re-enactment of Kim Chonghui teaching students in the Cheju local village. Kim used two houses among the four: one was for his bedroom and living area and the other house was for his study, art practice and teaching.

Kim Chonghui's motivation for enlightening the Cheju community was driven by the thought, as shown in a letter to his younger brother Sanghui (*Wandangjeonjib* 1986), that the Cheju residents were 'ignorant barbarians' living in a society of lagging culture, who needed to be enlightened and civilised by the Confucian dominant culture. Kim Chonghui often criticised the people surrounding him in exile and suggested (possibly naively) that the ignorance and poor lifestyles of the individuals

of these ‘uncivilised communities’ were responsible for the individuals’ hindered self-development, which in turn resulted in those communities lagging far behind those in other regions, with help from the village priest who had an authorisation to release some of the exiles to have a little freedom around the area (Yang and Yang 1987, 62- 63). While staying in Kang Hosoon’s house under *Weerianchi* punishment, discussed in Chapter 3, he was nonetheless given a bit of freedom to go out like many others. While visiting local communities, he found that the local were far from civilised in terms of education and customs because of the isolation from the outside world. He started to teach children at the villages in Hyagkyo, the school for local children. While teaching students, he often discovered gifted children, whose potential talents in learning were too good to stay kept behind and sent those children to the mainland to have new experiences in the bigger world (Jeong 2008, 118-119).

After he was released from Cheju exile in 1849, Kim Chonghui was entrapped by political dispute and was exiled again in 1851 to Bukchung, North of Korea this time. Two years later, he was released from this second exile. He gave up re-entering politics, recognising the power of the opposition, Andong Kim, who was still in control of the government. His apolitical attitude after his long time of exile encouraged him to stay in Gwacheon, Seoul, devoting himself to study philosophy and Buddhism until he died at the age of 71 in 1856.

## **Conclusion**

Several Korean scholars have noted in great detail the extent to which the exile period on Cheju Island was a turning point in Kim’s emotional and artistic life. For example, Choi Wansoo (1985, 193) described Kim’s time in exile as the period during which his research and art reached completion.<sup>122</sup> Yang (1987, 10) agreed, stating that Kim might not have become the great scholar artist he was if he had not been banished as a political exile. Yang added that their circumstances gave exiles an opportunity not only for studying and creating art but also for freedom from political ideologies that had become embedded in them. From this argument, Kim Chonghui can be said to have made efficient use of his time in exile and experienced a positive

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<sup>122</sup> (See more in Kim 1985)

outcome.

This chapter has analysed the paintings Kim appears to have painted during his nine years in exile: *Sehando*, *Mojildo*, and the paintings of orchids and narcissus. Using iconographic and iconological interpretative perspectives, this chapter has explored the artistic motifs in Kim Chonghui's paintings. The conventional meaning of the art works has been critiqued using allegories and stories inherent in the art works themselves. The influence of his Chinese and other studies on Kim Chonghui's artistic thoughts were investigated and discussed to attempt to gain deeper understanding of his artwork; his philosophy, religious practices, and his psyche.

Kim Chonghui was influenced by many Chinese scholars' works, including their philosophy and art theory. His art theory was especially influenced by Su Shi and his brush methods influenced by Bada Shanren. Rather than simply copying these Chinese scholar artists, Kim created his own art work with these as his inspiration. Kim was particularly fond of the orchid and narcissus as subjects for his art because their inherent symbolism resembled the religious practices he had been pursuing that helped him cultivate his mind during turbulent times. The act of immersing himself in art echoed Su Shi's perspective on art as connecting 'between active involvement in [the] arts and knowledge or self-cultivation' (Egan 1994, 301).

It has been shown that Kim refused to allow his circumstances in exile to constrain him or constrain his creativity as an artist and scholar and instead found, through the help of others, the means of continuing his artistic creativity. Occupying himself in the study and practice of art also appeared to be important as a form of escapism from the difficult circumstances he was living in, and allowed him to cultivate his spirit. The letters, written for his brothers and sons, show that studying helped him mentally as well as in his daily life.

Kim made every effort to engage himself in his creative efforts instead of reminding himself of his chronic health conditions for which he could not receive proper treatment. In combination with reading books and producing artwork to distract himself from his burdens, he kept up his scholastic spirit by questioning the true meaning of life and conducting research in various fields of study.

The analyses revealed that Kim's art practice was an important part of his life, and suggest that he used creative activity to calm his inner conflicts. The many books Kim received from China served as consolations that soothed his pains. Even when he was so ill he did not have the strength to lift a brush, the act of creating paintings and calligraphy for his friends helped him endure his loneliness. Kim's creativity and artistic activities kept him from being forgotten by others, which in turn appears to have encouraged him to continue painting and producing art.

As this chapter has discussed, disputes still surround the authenticity of many of Kim Chonghui's works. It is likely that many works by other artists are circulated in the market under Kim Chonghui's name—an obstacle that must be resolved little by little by researchers.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion and Implications

This research has identified the relationship between the exilic experiences and creative practices of literary artists on Cheju Island during Korea's Choson Dynasty. Much of the existing research on Choson exile artists has failed to look beyond Korea or the cultural aspects, and has neglected to approach it as a comparison with the exilic history of other countries. This may have been in part due to the commonly held perception that Choson Dynasty exile artists are to be considered only in studies of Korean history. This is likely to have stemmed from a tendency to focus on cultural and racial aspects of an artist's experiences in exile rather than viewing them simply as those of a human being.

The aim of this research was to re-evaluate discussion on the exilic experiences and creative practices of these artists and to investigate the impact the new creative environment had on their lives. The exile system of the Choson period saw large numbers of politicians, scholars and artists banished to faraway locations and their hopes and abilities obliterated. A single utterance or page of text criticising political policy became reason for prosecution, and those who were not executed were exiled. Choson's political system, owing to the development of Neo-Confucianism, was formed around Confucian philosophy. This political tendency saw the creation of numerous factions among which clashes were frequent. The negative public sentiment toward government policy led to frequent purges among politicians, and the disharmony meant political disputes were never-ending. In the political world elimination of opposition factions was one strategy amongst many to ensure one's own survival, and so incriminating and banishing members of other factions was not an uncommon tactic. Choson's exile punishment was originally adapted from China during the Koryeo Dynasty and produced numerous political and individual exiles. Among those exiled were some of the country's best scholar-artists whose talents were suppressed and many of whom spent the rest of their lives in confinement. A lucky few were released but many were executed by poisoning.

This research located parallel reviews of the cultural and historical context of life in

exile and analysed how emotional turbulence during the exiles' time in seclusion affected their mentality, spiritual identity and self-identity. The aim was to critically consider the reflection of scholar artists' emotional reactions to exilic experience in their writings and paintings. This research particularly focused on the exiles' experiences of internalisation and engagement with creativity in the exile land. It used Western exilic analysis concepts to analyse some Korean exile situations. Western exile literature has explored the subject of exile in various ways, dealing with realistic, tangible experiences by capturing the world of exile from ontological viewpoints and progressing further into inter-disciplinary studies to examine humanisation and the power of human culture.

Cheju Island, considered one of the worst of the 408 regions that were designated as exile colonies in Korea, was chosen as the exile destination of focus for this research because it is one of the furthest and most isolated Korean islands from Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, to where exiles with the heaviest sentences were sent. A brief discussion of its history was followed by a description of its climatic and environmental conditions and its difficulties for human habitation. Cheju Island was designated an exile colony in the Choson Dynasty and took in over 200 exiles. The impact Choson exiles' arrival had on the island as well as the contributions they made toward the local community contributed to its cultural development.

Many Cheju exiles, however, faced humiliation as they were pointed at and even mocked on the streets, even by children. Many were short on food, clothing and housing and often lived like beggars. Separated by the sea from the mainland, the exiles suffered from loneliness and illness. Snakes, insects and contagious diseases were common, while medicines and medical assistance were virtually nonexistent.

This research investigated three Cheju Island exile artists Kim Jeong (1486-1521), Lee Geun (1614-1662) and Kim Chonghui (1786-1856) and their lives, exilic experiences and creative practices during exile through their paintings and writings. With the island as a backdrop the three artists' exilic experiences were analysed through their work and the conditions in which they practiced their art were assessed. Furthermore, the influence their art practices had on their difficult lives in exile and the messages they intended to convey through their art were identified.

This research of the three artists had several aims. Firstly, it aimed to discuss the conditions of exile by scrutinising the actual environment the subjects were in during their time in exile. Secondly, it re-evaluated their exilic experiences in relation to their internal and external struggles by examining their letters, poetry and other writings written while serving time. Thirdly, their engagement with artistic creativity on the land of exile was discussed, along with an exploration of iconography and iconology of their paintings. Analyses of the exiles' literary and physical artworks are means of understanding the distinctive nature of the Choson scholar artists' exilic experiences. Finally, it concluded with research on the legacy on Cheju Island that some scholar exiles, lamenting the fact the local residents were uncivilised and culturally and academically underdeveloped, endeavoured to help the community by volunteering for tasks such as teaching the local children.

More than 100 years have passed since the Choson Dynasty ended in 1910, and understanding the mental and physical pain of the exiles of that period depends on inferring it from the historical evidence: mainly documentary and paintings. The writings of poems, letters, journals, and paintings of Kim Jeong (1486-1521), Lee Geun (1614-1662) and Kim Chonghui (1786-1856) have formed the heart of this research, commencing with research planning, analysis, method, and writing. The iconological and iconographical investigations of these artists' paintings were of great importance in shaping a close understanding of Cheju Island exiles' experiences and in positioning these in a political, cultural and philosophical context. Through personal field research the candidate travelled to and explored the preserved remains and exile houses of Kim Chonghui on Cheju Island and collected historical documents in the field. The collected information was critical to the candidate's understanding of the exiles' lives and creative environments and the resulting findings.

A literature review of exile notions and theory in the Western context provided the motivation to ask critical questions to understand the insights of the exiled artists in Cheju Island Choson Dynasty. The works of Edward Said, Akhtar and Grinberg & Grinberg, DeSantis, Nochlin, Suleiman, and more were of great assistance in conceptualising the knowledge of the conditions of exile in the broad sense.



Investigating the artists Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui and their exilic experiences through a review of Akhtar and Grinberg & Grinberg's psychological and cultural conditions on exile as well as of Edward Said's account of his exile experiences and knowledge helped understand the life and creativity of Cheju exiles artist. This research has identified that the exiles of the Choson period encountered several problems, including difficulties in adapting to the new culture and environment, mental conflict, memories of their past and loneliness.

Alfreda Murck's critical study on exiled Chinese artists in the Xiao Xiang region, Ronald C. Egan's critical insights of Su Shi's life and art and Wang Fangyu and Barnhart's (1990) study on Bada Shanren's (1626-1705) life and art aided this research in its analysis and understanding of Kim Chonghui's Chinese influences.

Some emotional problems experienced by exiles, such as unconscious or disorienting anxiety or 'ambivalences, adjustment, and problems of environmental and cultural assimilation' as described by Akhtar (1999) and Grinberg & Grinberg (1989) are applicable to many Choson Dynasty exile artists. Kim Jeong, Lee Geun and Kim Chonghui left many pieces of writing and artwork that reflect the arguments made by many Western studies on exile. For example, Kim Chonghui's letters and poems reveal his mental and physical pains through verbal and visual language. His writings suggest that, in contrast to commonly held views in Korean exile literature, Kim was far from having an emotionally positive outlook; rather, he accepted the fact that he had no choice but to endure his circumstances and to persevere.

In his letters Kim Chonghui showed he was afflicted with a peculiarly high number of illnesses during exile, presumably owing to the island's bizarre climate and unhygienic state of his place of residence, which was made of earth and straw and riddled with snakes and insects. His complaints reflected his suffering, refusal to accept the circumstances and the fact that mentally, he was still living in the past.

This could be interpreted as a belief that, as a Confucian and a sage, he had a responsibility to endure, but the inner conflict between this conviction and the human emotions that tormented him caused dilemma.

Kim also felt a severe sense of guilt that he could not fulfill his duties as the head of his family. Exile did not permit his attendance at family events such as ancestral rites, nor could he see his wife and family. He was especially worried for his wife who had been ill since before his exile, and suffered from torment more severe than that of his punishment upon hearing of her death almost three years into his exile.

Kim Chonghui also criticised the attitudes of some of those people he thought of as friends. In a letter to his pupil Lee Sangjock, he wrote that his acquaintances, with whom he had developed close relationships during his political heyday, had turned on him after he was exiled and never came to visit.

Kim Jeong also suffered from emotional turmoil as a result of his exile punishment. He expressed a deep sense of guilt about failing to serve his king as a loyal servant and being unable to tend to his family, especially to his mother who had been widowed when he was young. He expressed strong despair through his last poem, *Imjuelsa*, that he could not fulfill his duties as a son and was fated to die before his mother.

Kim Jeong was executed by poisoning at the young age of 36 before he could realise his dreams for making a righteous society. His exile poems have suggested that exile led him to lose all meaning in life and he found it disappointing that the knowledge he had painstakingly accumulated was ultimately useless. He thought he had dedicated himself during years of Choson's political turmoil to leading the country's politics and society in the right direction. The 16th and 17th centuries were a period in which the time-honoured Neo-Confucian conventional ideology was under attack from his own country's newly rising powers advocating new political pursuits. Countless factional conflicts took place. Kim Jeong's passion and efforts to lead society in the direction he considered righteous were thwarted by his exile. However, there is little evidence to suggest that he suffered from the illnesses spread throughout Cheju Island, with which many other exiles on the island were afflicted.

Lee Geun was 15 years old—a very young age compared to most other exiles on the island—when he and his family were banished to Cheju Island for his father's crime. They spent nine years in exile, but they were fortunate in the respect that they were

permitted to serve time in each other's company and presumably suffered from less psychological trauma as a result. However, his royal lineage meant he was not yet worldly-wise; in his writings he admitted he was not at all accustomed to local traditions, blind faiths such as almost religious reverence for snakes, the environmental conditions in which people lived together with insects, and unpalatable and inferior food.

Lee could not avoid falling ill due to the island's unusual climate. He suffered from various illnesses, including a contagious disease that almost took his life. The most painful incident, however, was the loss of his younger sister to contagious disease, which gave him a terrible shock. Such occurrences led him to forget his reason for living, and consequently he spent his days in drunken self-reproach, in a similar manner to Kim Jeong.

In this thesis, the case of the scholar artists of Cheju Island has been examined in light of Said's concept of the possibilities of a positive perspective on exile (reviewed in Chapter 1). Said argues that no matter how dire the circumstances for an exile, a positive perspective with which he views his situation may lead to a more positive outcome. This thesis has found that in the case of the artists of interest in this study, the passing of time simply led to resignation and a reluctant acceptance of their circumstances, as outlined below.

In Kim Chonghui's case, though exile brought successful endurance and a positive outcome by exerting a favourable influence on his artistic development, his perspective on his exile could not be described as positive. For example, in his first few years on Cheju Island Kim Chonghui tended to vent his complaints and grievances through letters. He was especially sensitive about food, showing a level of obsession in letters to his wife about the food he had regularly eaten as a free man. He often asked her to send various foods through the post, and complained when they arrived spoilt during the lengthy delivery process or when they did not suit his palate. He was also very demanding about clothing. His requests to his wife for seasonal clothing show an initial refusal to accept deprivation (the refusal to give up the privileges one once enjoyed appears to be a common phenomenon in exiles). However many of his letters ended with the admission, 'these trivial matters must be

endured; there is no other way.’ After about three years in exile he became more accepting of reality and redirected his attention to his studies and art practice.

In Kim Jeong’s case, however, largely owing to the brevity of his time in exile and his pessimistic and dispirited attitude, the artist failed to adapt to life in exile and spent his days in drunkenness and inactivity. As a scholar-official and artist, he despaired that he had lost the means to put the knowledge he had accumulated to good use and stopped reading, instead spending his days drinking and passing time. He apparently decided the philosophical and religious knowledge he had attained was no longer relevant in the world he lived in and was disheartened. Though he left behind various pieces of poetry and *Cheju Pungtorock*, his personal life can be described as one that was sacrificed by exile.

Upon realising Cheju Island residents had been in educational poverty, denied cultural influences and had fallen behind other regional areas, Kim Chonghui and Kim Jeong strived in various ways to provide assistance; for example, in Kim Chonghui’s case, by teaching the children in the region to read.

Lee Geun’s views were relatively and unexpectedly patriotic. He believed that exile, though a painful experience, was an important federal law. He found it difficult to adjust to the unfamiliar culture of Cheju Island communities and suffered from various illnesses during exile, but he was ultimately supportive of the exile punishment system. Perhaps partly due to the fact he was exiled together with his whole family and spent each day in their company, he held less negative views of the system, even describing it as one essential to Choson society. However, he experienced the perils of exile at a young age; this is significant as exilic experience may scar one for life and result in various mental problems, as Hollander (1998, 203) suggests. His written account of his exilic experiences describes the ways in which the memories of exile haunted him post-exile.

Nochlin (1996) noted that although exiles suffered from their punishment and often lost or were set back in their careers, many were successful in bringing meaningful changes to their new environments, to the people and society around them.

However, Suleiman (1998) questioned whether the experience of exile could in fact become a 'spur to creativity.' From a pessimistic perspective, exile might bring chaos to an individual's life. This thesis suggests that in some circumstances there is a danger in focusing solely on the artistic achievements of exiles, as respectable as they may be, and in suggesting that exile for an artist could act as an opportunity for artistic rebirth. The numerous exile artists who were, despite their many talents, denied the opportunity to let their abilities flourish during exile must not be overlooked. The circumstances that inevitably led to their artistic failure must be given similar priority.

This research finding of exiles' creativity indicates that the time and space of segregation offered by exile could be a time for introspection. It is important to understand, though, that a creative environment was not offered all artists but differed in accordance with the various circumstances faced by each exile. Kim Chonghui effectively utilised his time in exile, bringing about a positive outcome through creative development. Conversely, Kim Jeong and Lee Geun were less successful in integrating their creativity into their time in incarceration and ultimately met less positive outcomes.

It was evident that, for Kim Chonghui at least, practicing the three perfections of calligraphy, painting and poetry was a method of discovering and refining oneself. It appears Kim redirected the pain of solitude, isolation and sequestration into artistic creativity. He devoted himself to paintings and literary and calligraphic works as a coping strategy within the desolation of imprisonment, awakening his artistic motivation and practice in the new environment. The result of analysing letters and poems shows that Kim Chonghui began keenly pursuing creative activities on Cheju Island three years after the death of his wife. He may have realised that he could no longer afford to place all blame on his misfortunes and remain inactive. He began pursuing study and artistic creation, asking Lee Sangjok to collect and send numerous books from China, and using the materials in his endeavours. As a result, he created works of art that would leave his mark on history, such as *Sehando* (Fig. 24) and *Chusa style* calligraphy. He also painted orchids, narcissus and a cat in the famous painting *Mojildo* (Fig. 32), and through such creative practice provably strived to forget the pain and loneliness of exile.

Kim's *Sehando* discussed in Chapter 6 involved a use of iconography that may have been reflected the inner world of the artist. He attempted to express himself through the image of a house and pine trees, as well as through the beauty of empty spacing. He left blank the spaces between the images, and this scene, reminiscent of a person standing alone in a desolate field, could be interpreted as an expression of his loneliness. The pine trees, house and the space in between were used as primary subject matters in literary paintings of the Choson Dynasty. The conventional meanings carried by these objects have played the role of iconographic expressions of theme and concept throughout this period. Kim attached a separate piece of paper to *Sehando* on which he wrote a letter for Lee Sangjok expressing gratitude for his unchanging support and consideration. Borrowing from the words of Chinese saints he also criticised society which had turned hostile and cold-hearted. This may have been a deliberate attempt to gain public attention and to let his disappointment be known to the social circles that had abandoned him.

The period of completion of the cat painting *Mojildo* (Fig. 32) still remains under speculation and demands further research, but Kim's intention to deliver a message through the cat's expression appears irrefutable. Seemingly influenced by Bada Shanren's calligraphic style, Kim chose to use an unusual painting style instead of the meticulous and detailed approach taken by most other Choson artists. Though the strokes appear rough and cursory, each carries meaning. Kim lamented that narcissus were carelessly dispersed all over the island with no-one to care for them, and, feeling that he could relate to their abandonment, produced a woodcut painting and many poems about the flowers. As is suggested in *Sehando*, he may have placed great importance on expressing one's inner world within paintings.

The research findings also suggested that even during times of illness he felt obliged to fulfill the requests from acquaintances to produce artwork; in many cases, he made these as gifts. Although his motivation for creation was largely for the purposes of his own artistic development during exile, he was also often made to comply somewhat unwillingly with others' requests for his art. He often ended his letters with the complaint that he was too physically worn to hold a brush but still gave in to requests as he could not turn them down. This was the case when his son Sangwoo

sent, together with several pieces of paper, a request for an orchid painting and also when he painted an orchid painting for Oh Kyu Won.

As his philosophical thoughts indicated, the reasons for Kim's successful endurance of the hardships of exile lie in his emphasis of the philosophy and spirit inherent in his art, that only endless practice can lead to a certain form. He strived to attach his commitment to introspection to the religious ideas inherent in his art philosophy. As he tried to develop his morality by embracing all that occurred to him like a Taoist, his practice of creativity became a means for self-control and for forgetting the harsh reality he faced. He strived to embed his spirit and character in his orchid paintings, and through this concentrated effort he endured each difficult day, as he described in letters addressed to his brothers.

The philosophy of 'the three perfections' Kim pursued is manifest in most of his paintings. This may have been the result of his belief that only sufficient practice, combined with the proper mindset of an artist, could produce a 'true' orchid painting. Accordingly, he is said to have practiced until a thousand brushes and ten ink-stones were worn down to stumps (*Chusa Research* 2004). His belief led him to frequently criticise the work of other artists but it is also one of the reasons he is respected to this day.

During exile Kim produced paintings embodying his inner world using 'the three perfections' art theory. His study and efforts to advance ancient Chinese classical documents gave rise to the 'Chusa lettering,' his own calligraphy style. He not only succeeded in producing art through his study and meditative practice but may have developed an ability to cultivate his mind, and this may have been the driving force of his survival through the perilous circumstances he faced. The illnesses and mental strife resulting from a life in exile may have drained him, but nonetheless his writings and artwork attested to his endurance and strong will with which he devoted himself to creativity and study despite the lack of hope for his release.

This research has also identified that Kim regarded the materials for learning and artistic creation, such as books and painting tools, as almost as important as food, clothing and shelter—the bare necessities of life. Material and psychological support

from many of his acquaintances may have played a crucial role in the birth of his creations. His will to learn was stronger than ever during exile, and he was able to create his own style of calligraphy and leave behind numerous works of art. With passion and tenacity for learning, combined with the help of those around him, he attained artistic achievement. Kim's practice of art during exile served as a source of motivation to endure his difficult circumstances.

Kim wished to follow in the footsteps of many Chinese scholars, who were sources of motivation for his academic endeavours and aided his development. He absorbed himself in the study of Chinese philosophy and ideas. His desire to take after Chinese scholars intensified, motivating him to read numerous Chinese books. After absorbing as much as he could he longed to propagate his knowledge in Korea. It is likely Kim studied numerous literary materials documenting the lives of Chinese exiles and their artistic achievements during imprisonment. Such influences greatly motivated Kim to engross himself in creative activities. Su Shi was arguably the most influential Chinese scholar in Kim's life. Though he had lived and died more than a hundred years before Kim, Su Shi was one of the greatest mental and philosophical pillars in Kim's life. As Kim himself asserted, the two scholars' lives shared many similarities, including the countless hardships that plagued their lives and the achievements they secured despite such grievances. Other Chinese scholars Kim admired included Wong Fenggang and Ru Won who Kim met during a visit to China at the age of 24. They became a source of great emotional support as Kim's mentors.

For Kim Chonghui, exile was the decisive motivation for a change in perspective with which he viewed politics and the world. It led him to develop a more religious mindset and a clearer perspective on society and human relationships. In 1851, two years after his release, he was exiled again to Bukcheong. When he was released again two years afterwards, he abandoned all interest in politics and instead immersed himself in religion and art until his death in 1856.

Whilst this research confirms that Kim Jeong composed numerous pieces of poetry during his exile, it is not obvious if he ever produced any paintings during this period. He was an artist skilled in 'the three perfections' but this research finds that he failed



to develop a creative interaction with his time in exile, perhaps largely as a result of his pessimistic attitude. It is likely he considered creative activity during exile as an unaffordable extravagance considering his circumstances. However he produced many poems that were reminiscent of a painting and carried iconological motifs. Before his exile, he had been especially fond of painting birds. Many of his bird paintings carry a trace of the lonely life he lived during periods of detached service away from his mother. In his paintings he expressed his loneliness through the imagery of a lone bird in the middle of a forest.

Lee Geun, too, was an artist skilled in ‘the three perfections’, however, the findings of this research suggested that he may not have seen his time in exile as an opportunity for creativity. Lee Geun was only able to put his artistic talents to action after he was released from exile. He produced *Cheju Pungtogi* and *Kyuchangyugo* which have formed an important part of Korea’s exile history; however as an artist, the period in exile was almost void of any other artistic activity. After eight years in exile, his father was acquitted of his crime posthumously and the family was freed. Lee Geun re-entered the political scene and produced more bird paintings.

These findings lead to the conclusion that a positive outcome such as that achieved by Kim Chonghui requires creative zeal, a strong will to overcome unfavourable circumstances and the good fortune of receiving assistance from kind-hearted acquaintances.

The exile artists’ particular sense of achievement can be defined in a realm beyond their lives in exile. Exile punishment imposed psychological and physical distress on the exiles discussed in this thesis, and furthermore it led to their separation from loved ones and irreversible damage to their careers and futures as artists. Many exiles died during exile while some fortunate individuals were freed. Ultimately they left behind material works of creativity, and though these achievements were important, from their personal perspectives their ‘particular sense of achievement’ may simply have been to endure and survive through each difficult day until they were ultimately freed from imprisonment. For Kim Chonghui and Lee Geun, the fact they were eventually freed may be the very ‘sense of achievement.’

The three artists' exilic experiences formed a turning point in their lives that changed their perspectives of the world. In some cases exiles were eventually released, as were Kim Chonghui and Lee Geun; but many others, including Kim Jeong, met their deaths at the place of exile.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from this research is that Kim Chonghui had lived a life of relative abundance—of books, necessities, local students, servants, large property and good clothes—quite at odds with the suggestion presented in some literature that he was even poorer than the Cheju Islanders.

Some scholars have suggested that the circumstances gave exiles an opportunity not only for studying and creating art, but also for freedom from political ideologies that had become deeply enrooted inside. However, the findings of this research suggest that none of the three artists became free of the political ideologies that had been embedded in them. They felt gratitude towards the king, as well as feelings that they had failed him, even at the end of their exile or death.

They did not blame or criticise the king or the government that had banished them—at least not in writing. Choson exiles were heavily influenced by Confucianism and hence abstained from writing strong words expressing resistance or resentment of the government, instead writing words of fidelity for the king. This may be largely due to the hope they may one day be freed; if the king were somehow to become aware of any of their writings expressing defiance their remaining lives and political careers would be at peril, and they may have chosen to shield themselves instead. These exiles would understandably have harboured great contempt and bitterness towards the opposition factions that had driven them to exile and the government that had aided the process, however instead of expressing their emotions they may have strived to suppress them. This is evident in many letters and poetry of exile scholars which, instead of expressing resistance, contain messages of concern for the wellbeing of the king who had abandoned them.

In Kim Chonghui's case, the artist wished for all letters he wrote his family to be burned after reading. This is likely to be because of the possibility for his words to be misinterpreted or considered suspicious by others. This could blemish his exilic life

and add more problems to his punishment. In his letters Kim often wrote of his concern for the king and the nation. It appears he was very wary about expressing any hostility towards the opposition faction that had precipitated his exile punishment out of fear of further retribution.

Kim Chonghui, who had great interest in China and read extensively about the country, may have learned from accounts of China's intellectual exiles that insolent words could bring enormous consequences. Alfreda Murck (2002), discussed in Chapter 1, analysed the poems and paintings of China's exiled scholar artists and investigated how they voiced their resistance through 'poetic allusion.' She found that many Chinese scholars were driven to even more difficult circumstances, or even death, by a single painting or a single phrase in one of their poems. Su Shi, who Kim revered almost religiously, suffered from cruel circumstances in exile that eventually ended in death as a consequence of exploring his spite towards politicians and the government through poems and paintings. Kim Chonghui, on the other hand, may have chosen to take a different path by remaining silent. He did express his anger toward the world in letters to his friend Kwon Donin, but abstained from using phrases that could be potentially problematic. Instead of expressing the desire for retaliation, it appears Kim strived to suppress his frustration by immersing himself instead in religious practice and development of his artistic senses.

Though there are many records of other exiles' relationships with Cheju Island *kisaeng*, such evidence is lacking for the three artists examined in this thesis and this needs further analysis. As discussed, many Cheju Island exiles lived with *kisaeng* largely to have them take care of housework and keep them company, but such relationships have not been recorded in detail for these three artists. Lee Geun's poem written as he left the island hints at a farewell with a *kisaeng*, but evidence beyond this has been lacking. Similarly, the *kisaeng* Kim Keumhong is said to have written calligraphy on an eight-fold folding screen under Kim Chonghui's influence but this, too, is merely speculation and needs further evidence to prove its validity.

The findings from this research make several contributions to the current literature. First, it suggests the three exile artists skilfully expressed their psychological, mental

and environmental experiences during exile through various outlets: Kim Chonghui through letters, poems and paintings; Kim Jeong and Lee Geun through poetry and journals. For example, Kim Chonghui's complaints and discontent expressed in the letters to his family and friends were demonstrative of the most basic of human natures. His temporary abandonment of pride and his solemn image as an individual of high social status demonstrated that he, too, was simply human before he was a scholar and politician. The research did not confirm whether paintings exist that were painted by Kim Jeung or Lee Geun on Cheju Island.

The findings of iconological and iconographical analysis carried out in this thesis shed light on the historical, social and philosophical context of exile and contribute towards the understanding of exile culture and art. Artistic symbols have been identified and classified using the method of iconographical and iconological analysis, and this aids in the understanding of exile artists' psychological states. The methods of iconological and iconographical interpretation used for this research may also be applied to the further research of other exiled artists in Korean regions other than Cheju Island.

Thirdly, the current findings add substantially to our understanding of Lee Geun's exile experiences. Kim Chonghui and Kim Jeong wrote many letters to their families on the mainland, and these have been preserved as important historical documents, however in Lee Geun's case he had no need to write letters, as his whole family was exiled together. Consequently there is very little historical documentation of his exile other than *Cheju Pungtogi*, signifying a critical hindrance to profound research. His *Kyuchangyugoh* has been analysed in more depth in this research.

Fourthly, the present research confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence that suggests that to form a more profound understanding of Kim Chonghui's art, first an understanding of Chinese scholar artists' deeds, work, and life is needed. Kim's love for China appears to have been a form of motivation for his days in exile which formed the root of his art and philosophy. Such ceaseless interest and study of China was one of the few pleasures he enjoyed during nine years in exile, and although he may have bothered his family and close friends in the process, such persistence undoubtedly contributed to his later artistic success.

Finally, although some previous studies have examined the conditions of exile, this research was the first to approach the subject of Korean exile artists and the conditions they were subjected to while integrating a Western approach. It presented a literature review of Western exile studies (Chapter 1), applying the findings from these studies to the context of exile in the Choson Dynasty and presented new approaches, in the form of research questions, through which to tackle the subject of Korea's exile artists, thereby highlighting what was lacking in the existing research and making a significant contribution to knowledge.

The Western exilic analysis concepts that this research reviewed assists in our understanding of various conditions of exile in the West: especially psychologically. This research has used the Western exilic concepts to analyse some Korean exile situations in ways that had not been done in Korea. Much of Western exile literature has focused on the realistic everyday experiences of exiles through various writings including biographies or personal accounts. These provide a window into the real lives of these historical figures. Though Western exiles' experiences occurred in a different environment and in different circumstances, they are fundamentally similar to those of Choson exiles in that they, too, were taken by force from their roots and the land they were born and raised in; ousted from their social positions; and parted from their social networks and families. Said (2000b) has asserted that culture, race and era by no means change the fact exiles faced shared emotions of alienation and abandonment. In this regards, the research findings have suggested that Korean scholar artists have had similar conditions and experiences. It means that the Western concepts provided understandings of the commonalities of the exile culture between the West and East, that the exilic experiences of individuals have shared similar accounts regardless of race, culture, or whether it is ancient or modern. This gives an indication of diversity in the directions on research in exile and art, which Korean researchers so far have ignored.

The evidence from this research suggests that studies conducted to date on the topic of Korean exile has focused mainly on art and, especially, literature of exile artists and largely neglected to focus on their personal lives and experiences in exile. The

approach taken by most Korean researchers has been to conduct literary analysis of exiles' writings. The actual circumstances and conditions the artists faced, such as the culture and environment of their places of exile, have been largely ignored.

As has been demonstrated in Western research, the topic of exiles should not remain constrained to the country in which they occurred but be explored with an interdisciplinary approach to shed new light on broader perspectives. Western literature on exile has covered extensive study fields and includes the lives of others associated with the persons that are the focus of a study. Hence, research on Choson and contemporary exile should not stop at taking a cultural approach or investigating the types of the punishment but rather take a multifaceted approach.

Today, it appears that South Korea employs the services of numerous foreign workers, and the numbers are set to continue increasing, as cited from Song (2009) in Chapter 1. These foreigners who come from different cultures and backgrounds might, in some respects, be viewed as the modern voluntary exile. Their general standard of living, of course, is far superior to that of Choson exiles, however they too may undergo exilic experiences in their new environment. The knowledge imparted to us by history should be applied to today's new culture and phenomena to make improvements. This is the reason trends in Western exile literature must be closely observed in the study of Choson exiles, thus comparing the contexts and viewpoints of Korean exile with those of the West from an ontological perspective. Future research opportunities in this area include more extensive personal and biographical investigations of Choson exile artists' lives and work. Thus there is a need for Korean researchers to aim to develop a broader perspective, such as that taken in Western research, to understand the conditions of Choson exiles from a more personal standpoint rather than a political one.

Understanding the life of a contemporary artist in exile also requires understanding a wide variety of contextual issues which cannot assume that the position and understandings of the exiled artist are similar to the norms of either the society that they have left, or the society in which they are exiled. Insights and knowledge emerge from researching the differences, and the dynamic changes in these differences, between the position, feelings and understandings of the exiled artist and

the norms of both the society that the exiled person has left, and the one to which they are displaced. This appears to require an investigation from biographical, sociological, legal, socio-historical, ecological, educational, religious and geographic dimensions as well as taking into account other issues such as the lives of other individuals who are associated with the exile.

The insights from this research have resulted in a more human understanding of the scholar-artist exiles examined. In the main this has given a much better picture of their day-to-day lives, their personal weaknesses and a delicate external understanding of their individual trajectories of personal development. In some cases, particularly in that of Kim Chonghui, this differs considerably from the rather rarified presentation of his life presented in the public literature, including that of school education.

There are numerous elements of these three scholar artists' exilic experience that have not been covered within the limits of this thesis. For example Kim Chonghui's writings introduced here are but a portion of the whole array that exist, and the paintings analysed are only those that were conclusively judged upon genuine evidence to have been painted on Cheju Island. The other paintings whose origin has been disputed have been excluded; a more in-depth investigation of these other paintings has been left to another time. There are many writings by Kim Jeong and Lee Geun, written in Chinese characters, awaiting translation into Korean. Expert translations of such texts are needed in order for researchers to be able to delve deeper into the lives and art of such historical artists.

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered. The candidate has discovered during the course of the field research that the act of collecting material in the investigation of Korean research is largely restricted to nationals. The researcher discovered that much access is barred from foreigners and this is a cause for concern. In addition, much of the historically significant materials of Cheju Island have been destroyed by fire during numerous invasions and rebellions, and this posed significant problems in the research on the island's exiles. Many of the historical documents that were accessed to in this research had been preserved in their original

form; that is, in older Chinese scripts, the dominant language of the Choson Dynasty, and as translations into Korean undertaken with variable quality. Realistically, there is a limitation in resources and a larger need than usual to assemble a bigger picture from multiple scattered sources. There are also a large number of resources lack focus on the personal experiences of Kim Chonghui and other scholar artists—a trend that has developed throughout the centuries in Korea.

There have been suggestions that some paintings hitherto believed to be Kim Chonghui's work are in fact the work of other artists, largely due to the fact that Choson artists commonly copied his and other ancient masters' painting styles. This ambiguity indicates the need for further investigation because it may have serious implications for understandings that have been based on Kim Chonghui's artwork.

The bounds of this research have been restricted to Cheju Island, but the total number of exilic destinations of the Choson period amounted to 408. Many other politicians and scholar artists were dispersed to these destinations, and much of their exilic experiences and creativity remain to be identified and analysed. As existing research has focused mainly on the artistic achievements of these individuals, it is crucial that future investigations give more thorough consideration to their inner, outer, environmental and cultural experiences and to the realities that, in the course of history, have been obscured and forgotten.

Although this research did not wholly cover exilic artists' conditions of exile on Cheju Island in the Choson Dynasty, it is hoped that it will shed new light on the forgotten personal lives of exile artists and their art practice and make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge of Korean history. Historically, exile is almost symbolic of the Choson Dynasty in that it was a hurdle to be cleared by such a large number of individuals at the time. Although some may consider it a tumultuous moment in Korean history, it is the candidate's opinion that such historical events need special attention and analysis for the benefit and progress of the country. It is hoped that such research would contribute to the development of a more sensitive perspective towards the circumstances of foreigners within Korea.

The biggest challenge while conducting this research was the difficulty in



interpreting traditional Chinese, a language very distinct and different to English and Korean. A similarly daunting challenge was to seek experts for aid and counsel throughout the research. The candidate would like to express deep gratitude to the scholars of the Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics, who gave kind advice and support. Many words of thanks also go to my friend Fong Yeng Soon and her husband Teng-kee Tan, whose artistic background and fluency in Chinese was of enormous help to the interpretation of Chinese texts and art in this research.

A notable limitation encountered in the research process was that the university libraries that the candidate visited allowed only very limited access to library services, such as borrowing and article viewing privileges. Though the library's need to safeguard their information is understandable, the restrictions imposed on external researchers could pose a significant barrier to the expansion of Korean studies beyond national borders. Considering the opportunities that digital technology affords us, the candidate suggests that provided a thorough identification and authentication process is implemented, less restrictive exchange of information between institutions would greatly assist researchers in any country to undertake Korean studies.

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