

Joseon Dynasty Portraits of Meritorious Subjects: Styles and Social Function

Cho Sunmie

Cho Sunmie (Jo, Seon-mi) is a professor in the Department of Fine Art at Sungkyunkwan University. Her publications include *Hwaga-wa jahwasang* (Painters and Self-portraits) (1995) and *Hanguk-ui chosanghwa* (Portrait Paintings in Korea) (1983).

Abstract

The title gongsin, or “meritorious subjects,” was bestowed by the king to those who performed distinguished services for their state. The king usually ordered the painting of the gongsin portraits, and these paintings were a great honor not only for the subjects themselves but also for their families and descendants.

The earliest record of gongsin in Korea dates to 940 when King Taejo of the Goryeo dynasty ordered the construction of a shrine to honor the subjects who had participated in the founding of the new dynasty. However, none of these portraits remain today.

In the Joseon dynasty, as many as 28 titles were granted to commend “meritorious subjects.” This was accompanied by a massive boom in portrait painting. The gongsin portraits from the Joseon dynasty share several characteristics: they are all full-length seated portraits; the sitters wear an official robe (dallyeong), a black silk

hat (osamo) and an embroidered insignia on the breast of the official robe indicating their official rank; they wear leather shoes and their feet are placed on a footstool. From the nineteenth century, scholar-officials also had their portraits painted “gongsin style,” and this style was quite popular up until the end of the dynasty.

Keywords:

The Origin of the Portraits of Meritorious Subjects

The study of portraits has notable weight and significance in the field of painting from the Joseon dynasty. After Confucianism was adopted as the main ideology of the Joseon dynasty, a great number of portraits were painted out of the motivation to worship ancestors and to respect learned and virtuous Confucian scholars. Thanks to the fact that later generations and Confucian literati revered and maintained the portraits, a large number of portraits still exist. In addition, because of the high standards in evaluating the portraits - they were considered successful only if they were as close as 70 percent to their sitters - portrait painters poured their utmost artistic skill into their art. As a result, the portraits of the Joseon dynasty are noteworthy both in quantity and quality.

The Joseon portraits can be classified according to the social status of their subjects: royal portraits, portraits of meritorious subjects (*gongsin*), portraits of scholar-officials (*sadaebu*), portraits of women, and portraits of Buddhist monks. The creation and enshrinement of the royal portraits had two symbolic meanings: to worship the ancestors of the royal descendants and to maintain the eternal prosperity of the dynasty.

Portraits of meritorious subjects (hereafter referred to as *gongsin* portraits) were created to acknowledge subjects who performed distinguished services for their state during particularly troubled times. Portraits of elderly officials were also painted to praise ministers of state who reached the age of sixty or seventy in recognition of their contributions to their country. These works were painted when they were admitted into the Giroso, an office established in order to honor elderly officials. This was considered the greatest honor that could have been bestowed upon them. Scholar-officials had portraits painted in order to commemorate the deceased or perform ancestral rites in the family shrine. As for female portraits, very few paintings remain, especially from the mid-Joseon period on. This lack can be traced to the strict Confucian ethical values that forbade, for example, men and women over seven years of age to sit together. And since there were few female painters at the time, it is natural that few portraits of women were painted. Portraits of venerable monks were enshrined and kept in the Josadang shrine within the temple. However, the frequent offering of incense and prayer of monks damaged the paintings, and they required additional coloring or creation of reproductions.

This paper will focus on the *gongsin* portraits within the larger context of the Joseon dynasty portraits. The roots of the *gongsin* portraits run considerably deep. According to Chinese documents, eleven portraits of state ministers were drawn and hung in the Qilin Pavilion in 51 B.C. during the early Han dynasty; and in 59 B.C. twenty-eight portraits of officials and generals who participated in national restoration were hung in the Cloud Terrace of the Southern Palace at Luoyang. Later, during the Tang period (643), Emperor Taizong commissioned painter Yan Liben to paint twenty-four portraits of meritorious subjects, which became the famous *Portrait of Meritorious*

Subjects in Lingyan Pavilion.¹ Lingyan Pavilion was the name of the most glorious and celebrated pavilion that stood inside the palace in Changan. Thereafter, the name “Lingyan Pavilion” was used to refer to *gongsin* by renowned Chinese literary figures such as Bai Juyi (772-846) and Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) in their poetry. Many painters in later periods engaged in the reproduction of this famous work.

Among Korean sources there are several records of meritorious subjects from the Silla kingdom, but it is unclear whether or not they were granted the *gongsin* title and painted as such.² In fact, the first record of such portraits remains from the Goryeo dynasty. According to the *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo), in the 23rd year of King Taejo's reign, Sinheungsa temple was repaired and installed with the Gongsindang (Hall of Meritorious Subjects). The Hall's east and west walls were decorated with images of meritorious subjects who contributed to the unification of the Later Three Kingdoms.³ Mireuksa temple also built the Gongsindang dedicated to meritorious subjects who took part in the founding of the dynasty (*gaeguk gongsin*). As explained in the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (A Revised Edition of the Expanded Survey of the Geography of Korea), there was the Gongsindang at the south end of Bongjinsa temple in Mt. Midusan and a portrait of King Taejo was enshrined in the center, surrounded by portraits of thirty-seven meritorious officials and twelve generals. This document attests to the fact that the king and his meritorious subjects were worshipped in the same space.

The Goryeo dynasty also saw an increased production of portraits of subjects who protected their country, repressed rebellions, defended their national borders, and

¹ See "Tazongji," in *Tangshu*.

² "Jikgwang-go 4," in *Jeungbo munheon bigo* (The Expanded Version of Reference Compilation of Documents on Korea), *gwon* 217.

³ "Taejo 2" (King Taejo 2), in *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo), *gwon* 2.

resisted Japanese pirates. After the mid-Goryeo period, however, the rating system of meritorious subjects underwent a significant transformation and it became popular to correct these portraits. Interestingly, the portraits we find from the Goryeo period were not only painted, but also came in the form of sculptured busts. According to the *Sejong sillok* (Annals of the King Sejong), the molded busts of the Great Three Mentors who aided King Taejo in founding the dynasty were enshrined.⁴ Unfortunately, none of those busts have remained.

In the Joseon dynasty, as many as 28 different titles (of which six were later eliminated) were used to commend meritorious subjects who had contributed to their country by aiding the dynasty in its foundation, suppressing several coup d'etats, or resisting both internal and external invaders. In some cases, the number of *gongsin* increased from three to four men to over one hundred. The king bestowed them with two documents: a royal message noting their status (title, governmental post, rights, posthumous title, land, servants, etc.) and a certificate acknowledging their *gongsin* title. The king classified the meritorious subjects into four groups in proportion with the service they provided their nation and bestowed upon them different levels of honorary titles, amount of land and number of servants; their descendants were also provided with special privileges, or *eumjik*.⁵ Portraits of meritorious subjects were painted as a reward for their deeds at the following royal decree: "Portraits [of meritorious subjects] shall decorate the pavilions; their deeds shall be recorded on monuments." In this manner, *gongsin* portraits were produced by the king's order in order to praise and

⁴ *Sejong sillok* (Annals of King Sejong), *gwon* 37, 8th lunar month, 9th year of King Sejong's reign.

⁵ *Eumjik* refers to a government post that was bestowed upon descendents or relatives of meritorious subjects due to the merits of their fathers or grandfathers during the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. They received this honor without taking state examination.

reward meritorious subjects and their descendants as well as to provide the people with instructive behavioral models. As such, they functioned as essential iconographical works for the monarchy.

This paper focuses on *gongsin* portraits from the Joseon dynasty. First, it will examine the creation of the portraits and the Chunghunbu office in charge of the affairs of meritorious subjects. Next, it will cover the transformations of styles and characteristics that occurred in each period. Lastly, the paper will discuss the social function of the portraits and their significance within the broader history of painting.

Examination of the Production and Preservation of *Gongsin* Portraits

During the Joseon dynasty, subjects who preformed meritorious acts for their nation or their king were recorded as *gongsin*, and a special office called the Chunghunbu was established to manage effectively all details concerning meritorious subjects. The name of this office was changed from the Gongsin Do-gam during King Taejo's reign to the Chunghunsa in 1434 and then to the Chunghunbu in 1466.⁶

The following record by Gwon Ram (1416-1465) captures the characteristics and significance of the Chunghunbu office:

At first, subjects who preformed meritorious deeds for the nation were awarded with gold and silk and bestowed with a title and stipend; their deeds were recorded in the

⁶ "Jikgwan-go 4," in *Jeungbo munheon bigo*, gwon 217.

Taesang office;⁷ and their services were engraved upon a great bell and bronze pot.

However, out of fear of imperfection or of not providing proper treatment, a separate office was established that would deal specifically with these issues.⁸

The above quote indicates the reason the Chunghunbu was established and reflects, though briefly, how the meritorious subjects were treated.⁹

According to a record, in the beginning of the Joseon dynasty the portraits of meritorious subjects who contributed to the founding of the dynasty were enshrined in the Jangsaengjeon (Hall of Longevity). In 1395 King Taejo ordered the construction of the Jangsaengjeon on the west side of the royal palace to hold *gongsin* portraits. In order to finance the construction, many meritorious subjects provided money and rice in accordance with their status¹⁰ and the Hall was completed by the 7th year of King Taejo's reign.¹¹ In 1411 King Taejong repaired the Jangsaengjeon and ordered the State Council to examine the existing system of enshrining royal portraits with the intention of having his father's portrait and portraits of meritorious subjects painted. According to the State Council report, the Jangsaengjeon was constructed after the Chinese model of

⁷ Taesang was an office in charge of performing royal ancestral rites and granting posthumous titles during the Joseon dynasty.

⁸ "Gyeongdo ha," *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (A Revised Edition of the Expanded Survey of the Geography of Korea), *gwon* 2.

⁹ The Chungikbu served a similar purpose as the Chunghunbu. This office was responsible for meritorious men who had performed relatively small duties for their nation. The office was established in the beginning of the dynasty but was integrated and dismissed several times by the Chunghunbu office or the Ministry of Military Affairs until it finally became a part of the Chunghunbu in 1701 (the 27th year of King Sukjong's reign). Other than this office, the Chunguiwi and the Chungchanwi were charged with descendants of meritorious subjects.

¹⁰ *Taejo sillok* (Annales of King Taejo), *gwon* 8, 7th lunar month, 4th year of King Taejo's reign.

¹¹ *Taejo sillok*, *gwon* 14, 7th lunar month.

Lingyan Pavilion, which only held portraits of meritorious subjects and did not share the space with royal portraits. Therefore, it was decided that the royal portraits and portraits of meritorious subjects could not be enshrined together, an issue which evoked great controversy among ministers. After careful consideration the Ministry of Rites submitted a report with examples from ancient China: In the Zhou dynasty, the portrait of the Duke of Zhou was painted with the Duke holding King Cheng in his arms; and royal portraits were excluded from the Cloud Terrace of the Han dynasty and the Lingyan Pavilion of the Tang dynasty, containing only the portraits of meritorious subjects. King Taejong, therefore, ordered that, if no record existed in which both royal and subject portraits were enshrined together, then the Jangsaengjeon should be destroyed and *gongsin* portraits hung alone according to the Lingyan Pavilion model. But because King Taejong found it difficult to tear down the Jangsaengjeon that his father had built, he decided to change its name to Sahungak, and keep the *gongsin* portraits there.¹²

From the above records we can conclude that kings from the early Joseon dynasty followed the model of Tang China by which royal portraits and *gongsin* portraits could not be enshrined in the same space. Although the date is not clear, the fact that *gongsin* portraits were kept in the Gigonggak pavilion built by the Chunghunbu office can be confirmed by many related documents. From the latter half of the Joseon dynasty, the “album leaf” (*hwacheopbon*) became greatly popular. The convenience and low cost of the album leaf led to the production of these small-sized albums in place of the large-sized portraits. One *gongsin* album was preserved in the Gigonggak pavilion and the other was granted to each *gongsin* family head.

¹² *Taejong sillok*, *gwon* 1, 6th lunar month, 11st year of King Taejong's reign.

Examination of the Styles of *Gongsin* Portraits

Focusing on the *gongsin* portraits of the Joseon dynasty, we will now examine how their styles developed with the changes of the times. The paintings are divided roughly into three periods: the early period (1392-1550), the middle period (1550-1680), and the late period (1680-1730). These divisions are based on two types of the characteristics of the *gongsin* portraits: first, the general style, including the angles of the face and body, the shape of chair or footstool, the inclusion of a colorful carpet or rush mat, the pose of the feet, the type of dress and garments - the official hat (*samo*) and official robe (*dallyeong*), and the insignia on the breast and back of the official robe; second, techniques of expression such as use of lines and coloring.

Interestingly, the above-mentioned chronological division is reflected not only in the *gongsin* portraits, but also in Joseon portraits in general. We will explain the common characteristics of the general style and painting techniques through concrete examples of *gongsin* portraits in each period.

Portraits of Meritorious Subjects from the Early Period

The early period corresponds to the early Joseon dynasty. It begins with King Taejo's reign, or the end of the fourteenth century, and ends with King Jungjong's reign in the mid-sixteenth century.

Portraits of meritorious subjects were painted from the beginning of the Joseon dynasty, yet few remain today (table 1). Those that do exist are mostly reproductions,

which make it more difficult to infer about the style of the original paintings. However, since even reproductions of portraits were made with a great deal of effort to follow their originals, it is still possible, to some degree, to conclude the general style of the original portraits. In addition, several portraits of people who lived after King Sejo (r. 1455-1468) still exist in the original, which greatly illuminates the painting techniques of the period.

Table 1. List of Existing *Gongsin* Portraits from the Joseon Dynasty

<i>Gongsin</i> Category	Year	Existing Portraits
<i>gaeguk gongsin</i>	1392	• Portrait of Yi Jik (reproduction in 1906)
<i>jwamyeong gongsin</i>	1402	• Portrait of Ma Cheon-mok (reproduction in the late Joseon period; additional coloring in recent days)
<i>gaeguk gongsin</i> , <i>jeongsa gongsin</i> , <i>jwamyeong gongsin</i>	1392-1402	• Portrait of Yi Cheon-u (reproduction in 1774)
<i>jwaik gongsin</i>	1455	• Portrait of Sin Suk-ju
<i>jeokgae gongsin</i>	1467	• Portraits of Jang Mal-son, O Ja-chi, and Son So
<i>jeongguk gongsin</i>	1506	• Portraits of Yi U and Yu Sun-jeong
<i>pyeongnan gongsin</i>	1590	• Portrait of Kang Sin (reproduction in the late Joseon period)
<i>Peongnan gongsin</i> , <i>gwangguk gongsin</i> , <i>jeongun gongsin</i>	1589-1590	• Portrait of Yi San-hae (reproduction in the late Joseon period)
<i>hoseong gongsin</i>	1604	• Portrait of Yi Hang-bok (reproduction in the late Joseon period) • Portraits of Yi Won-ik and Yu Geun (reproduction in 1696) • Portrait of Sin Jap, Ko Hui

<i>seonmu gongsin</i>	1604	• Portraits of Kwon Eung-ju and Kwon Hyeop
<i>cheongnan gongsin</i>	1604	• Portrait of Hong Ga-sin • Portrait of Sin Gyeong-haeng (reproduction in the late Joseon period)
<i>jeongsa gongsin</i>	1623	• Portraits of Yi Jung-no and Sin Gyeong-yu (reproduction in about 1687)
<i>jinmu gongsin</i>	1624	• Portraits of Jeong Chung-sin, Nam I-heung, and Kim Wan.
<i>bosa gongsin</i>	1680	• Portrait of Kim Seok-ju
<i>bunmu gongsin</i>	1728	• Portraits of O Myeong-hang, Yi Sam, Bak Mun-su, Jo Mun-myeong, Yi Man-yu, Jo Hyeon-myeong, and Kwon Hui-hak

Representative portraits from this early period include the Portrait of Ma Cheon-mok and the Portrait of Yi Cheon-u (figure 1), the Portrait of Sin Suk-ju (figure 2), the Portrait of Jang Mal-son (figure 3), the Portrait of O Ja-chi, and the Portrait of Son So.

The robes and hats in the portraits serve as basic factors in the analysis of the stylistic characteristics of *gongsin* portraits. Like the portraits of scholar-officials Hwang Hui and Ha Yeon, the portraits of Ma Cheon-mok and Yi Cheon-u depict a typical early Joseon period hat, the black silk hat (*osamo*), which is characterized by protruding wings that hang down slightly on both sides. However, in paintings from the period of King Seongjong (r. 1470-1494) such as the portraits of Jang Mal-son (figure 3), O Ja-chi, and Son So, the wings are much rounder and do not sag but stretch out straight to the sides. This is evidence of a transition in the type of official hat which appeared in later periods. In *gongsin* portraits from the early period we can also see the *dapho*,¹³ which was worn underneath the *dallyeong* official robe. It was worn quite

¹³ The *dapho* is a type of sleeveless undergarment worn with official and military uniforms in the Joseon dynasty. Officials wore the dress between the *dallyeong* official robe and the *cheollik* undergarment.

high at the neck, thus lending the paintings a more austere atmosphere.

The insignia plays a most important role in the official uniforms worn by the *gongsin* in their portraits. Indeed, this insignia indicates the social rank of the figure in the painting, and provides an important clue regarding the period when the portrait was painted. Insignias began to make their appearance in paintings beginning only with the portrait of Sin Suk-ju, because regulations regarding insignias were enacted during King Sejo's reign.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the woven insignias that appear in the portraits of Sin Suk-ju and meritorious subjects who contributed to the successful suppression of the Yi Si-ae rebellion in 1467 (*jeokgae gongsin*) are different from the embroidered insignias that appear after the mid-Joseon period.

The dress and hat are factors that assist in classifying the portraits' styles. They help distinguish between those portraits painted during their sitters' lifetime and those painted from memory or by dictation of a third person after they passed away. We will now explore the characteristics of the early *gongsin* portrait styles from a perspective of painting history based on an examination of the dress and ornaments that appear in the paintings.

Early *gongsin* portraits that were handed down from generation to generation were painted on three connected parts of cloth, with the face painted in the middle and the shoulders on either side. Therefore, paintings that are whole, and are not consisted

¹⁴ The first discussion regarding the insignias started in 1446 (28th year of King Sejong's reign). At the time, Prime Minister Hwang Hui was opposed to attaching insignias because they contradict the spirit of simplicity, and their usage was suspended. Later, in 1454 (2nd year of King Danjong) Yang Seong-ji suggested that the insignia be included, and they were used again.

of connected pieces of cloth (with the exception of half-length portraits or half-figures) are most likely reproductions created in later periods.

In the early portraits, sitters posed in a variety of postures (figure 4) from a pose that showed nine-tenths of the right profile to a pose that showed seven- to nine-tenths of the left profile. While many of the portraits from the Joseon period were painted with the sitters facing left, the portraits produced in the beginning of the Joseon dynasty, such as those of Yi Cheon-u and Yi Jik, were painted with their models facing right. These postures are very similar to those of the portraits of Kil Jae and Yi Saek (figure 5), and Yi Jae-hyeon, from the end of the Goryeo dynasty. This proves that painting styles do not change immediately with a dynastic change.

Early portraits share similarities with portraits from the late Goryeo dynasty, especially in poses showing eight- to nine-tenths of the left profile. Later, around the middle and end of the early period, portraits of *jeokgae gongsin* were painted in a three-quarter pose, the pose most suitable for drawing a portrait. The Portrait of Jang Mal-son (figure 3) is a prime example of the three-quarter pose. This became the standard pose in all mid-Joseon period portraits.

Besides the three-quarter pose there are other stylistic similarities that can also be observed in early *gongsin* portraits such as the shape of chair, the string tied along the chair, the undergarments (*cheollik*¹⁵ and *dapho*) peering beneath the official robe, and the leather shoes orderly posed on the footstool.

Examination of the expression techniques reveals certain characteristics shared by early *gongsin* portraits. First, a close study of the faces in the original paintings

¹⁵ *Cheollik* is a long, dress-like garment made of a connected jacket and skirt, which is folded at the waist. It is also known as *cheomni*.

shows that the faces were painted the color of yellow ocher while the outline of the face and ears, eyes, nose and mouth were painted uniformly in a darker shade. The gradation technique¹⁶ was used in the indented areas between each cheekbone and the nose down to the edges of mouth and the indented area at the corner of the eyes over the nose; yet it is almost too subtle to be noticed. Indeed, in these early portraits the faces were expressed mainly through the use of lines. The importance of lines in the early portraits is clearly revealed in the reproductions of the original paintings. For example, in the Portrait of Yi Cheon-u (figure 1) (kept in Yeonggwang-gun county) and the Portrait of Ma Cheon-mok, the figures' faces are painted in a nine-tenth pose, yet the ridge of the nose is drawn in profile. This technique was used to overcome the difficulties of drawing the nose with the exclusive use of lines long before the three-quarter pose was developed. Indeed, without a shading technique, the nose was the most difficult part of the face to draw. Therefore, when painting a nine-tenth pose, painters had no choice but to paint the lines of nose in profile in order to bring out the ridge of the nose. When painting the left profile, they painted the lines of nose on the right side; when painting the right profile, the lines of nose were painted on the left side. Also, the portraits of Ma Cheon-mok and Yi Cheon-u display the excessive extent to which the lines technique was used, a technique similar to that used to draw the folds in the garments in late Goryeo portraits such as those of Jeong Mong-ju and Yi Saek (figure 5). The use of crossing vertical and horizontal lines in the official robe that falls over both thighs creates an indentation effect of folds.

The lines technique was also the only effect that helped create folds in other

¹⁶ *Seonyeom* is a technique that expressed gradual gradation by mixing ink or color pigments with water.

clothes as well. The lines served the purpose not only of setting the figure apart from his background; they also functioned to create in the painting a symbolic abstraction. This is especially evident in the Portrait of Sin Suk-ju (figure 2). A spare number of lines are used to express the complex folds in the robe with subtle simplicity. In addition, the use of colors to accentuate the clothing folds or outline - either by using darker similar colors or complementary ones - shows the artists' deep understanding of color scheme. This fact is noticeable when comparing portraits from the early period with portraits from later periods where the folds and outline were done with simple, dark lines.

The last characteristic of the early portraits is the fact that they have no particular background, and there is nothing under the sitters' feet. Because the painters concentrated on lines as their principle technique, they made no attempt to make an imaginary space in their work.

In conclusion, the early *gongsin* portraits saw the development of both the style of painting three-quarter of the left profile and the main use of lines as the technique of expression. The lines technique was used with the purpose of not only showing the outlines of the sitters' face and clothes but also of conveying their essential characteristics. After the early period, however, the use of the lines technique became less and less frequent.

Portraits of Meritorious Subjects from the Middle Period

The middle period refers roughly to the period from King Jungjong to the first half of King Sukjong, or from the mid-sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century. This period was one of the most difficult periods in Korean history during which it suffered

both invasions from without and rebellions from within. Such adverse conditions resulted in the emergence of numerous meritorious subjects as well as outstanding Confucian scholars who, despite the hardships of their times, stood by their beliefs with greater fervency.

This period is also of central significance in the history of portrait paintings. The typical style of the Joseon dynasty *gongsin* portraits is formed in this period. During this period, a wide variety of *gongsin* portraits display a standardized style. This style did not, of course, appear suddenly in the beginning of the middle period, but appeared in a process of change and intensification of the style of the early portraits. The portraits that best show the transitional phase from the early portraits to the middle portraits are the Portrait of Yi U (figure 6) and the Portrait of Yu Sun-jeong. These portraits were probably created when the meritorious subjects who helped King Jungjong ascend the throne in 1506 were granted the title of *jeongguk gongsin*. At the time, there were about one hundred subjects who received this title and their portraits were painted, but of those only the two portraits still exist.

These portraits represent the most typical style of *gongsin* portraits. They show the characteristics appearing in the *jeokgae gongsin* portraits from the early period - sitting respectfully with crossed hands, a string of cushions tied to the chair, and the *cheollik* or *dapho* peeping through the official *dallyeong* robe. However, new features such as the colorful carpet spread under the sitters' feet, the softening of the outlines of the blue hemp robe, and the footstool drawn in perspective illustrate the particular style of the middle period portraits.

We will now examine the middle period *gongsin* portraits, focusing on representative examples of this period. First, the portraits in this period are still mostly

in connected cloth form. Official hats appear shorter than the hats worn in the early portraits. This change is apparent more in later portraits: the hats in the portraits of Yi Jung-no (figure 7), Jeong Chung-sin, and Nam I-heung, which were painted after the accession of King Injo (1623) and the Yi Gwal rebellion (1624), appear shorter than in the portraits of Kwon Eung-su, Sin Jap, and Ko Hui, which were painted in the first half of the middle period. In addition, the insignia embroidered on thin silk is attached to the *dallyeong* robe in middle period portraits. This clearly indicates the period in which they were painted. The belts in middle period portraits are drawn higher up than those of the early portraits, almost at the chest of the sitters. While the *dapho* was worn quite high at the neck in the early portraits, it was worn in a much more comfortable fashion in middle period portraits.

The most conspicuous characteristic in portraits of the middle period is the angle of the sitters' faces. Without exception, all meritorious subjects posed three-quarters of the left profile. Scholar-officials also posed the same way during this period. This angle was captured already in *jeokgae gongsin* portraits from the second half of the early period. However, in the early portraits, the face was drawn in three-quarter to the left profile, but the upper body was turned almost nine-tenths and the lower body eight-tenths. The middle period portraits, on the other hand, placed emphasis on drawing the entire body in a three-quarter pose. In other words, the shoulders were each drawn in a different width and in an exaggeratedly slanted angle, but this effect granted the portraits a feeling of repose.

Another remarkable characteristic of the portraits from the middle period is that a small piece of the *dallyeong* robe was painted protruding in a triangular shape behind the left side of the sitter. This shows that the figure was drawn in a three-quarter pose.

This feature can be seen also in the portraits of scholar-officials such as the Portrait of Heo Mok (figure 8), indicating that this technique was generally popular at the time. Moreover, the *gongsin* portraits of this period also featured the undergarments of *cheollik* and *dapho*, peeping through the left of the *dallyeong* robe. Another difference is that in the early paintings, the feet were dressed in leather shoes and were placed parallel to each other, while in portraits from the middle period they were set with the heels closer together and the toes pointing away from each other in the shape of the Chinese character “八.”

The greatest change that can be noted in the middle period compared to the previous period, however, is the background of the portraits. The background served as a kind of secure space for the sitters. In the *gongsin* paintings, this effect is created by spreading a colorful carpet under the sitters' feet. This carpet was a type of rug imported from China, and was dyed with special colors, thus drawing a great deal of attention to itself. In portraits from the middle period, the height of the colorful carpet is painted almost at the knees of the sitters. In fact, the height of the carpet is one of the criteria that distinguish between original and reproduction in paintings from the middle period. Note also that the later the painting, the lower the height of the chair. The shape or color of the carpet is similar in reproduced paintings, and the height of the chair is changed occasionally according to the period in which the paintings were reproduced.

The portraits from the middle period share a technique of expression. The face, the most important part of the portrait, is painted with a rosy color, and the outlines of the face, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears are drawn with darker, skin-colored lines. This in itself is not so different from the previous period, but the middle period paintings made new attempts in terms of color in order to express the protruding and indented parts of

the face. One of these attempts was done by applying red tone to the facial features, a technique which was based on the knowledge of bone structure that existed at the time. From a phrenological point of view, the face consists of five main points: East, West, North, South, and Center (figure 9). In middle period portraits, each central part of these five points was painted by gradation in red. This technique is reflected clearly in the portraits of Yi Deok-hyeong and Yi Jung-no (figure 10). The concept of this technique is to enhance protruding points - the forehead, cheekbones, and chin - in red tone. This approach is reverse to the modern-day approach of makeup which attempts to enhance the three-dimensional effect of the face by adding reddish-brown tones to the shadowed parts of the face.

The technique of applying red tone to the five points of the face was used uniformly in the portraits of the middle period. This effect was moderately used in the original paintings, but in reproductions it was so exaggerated that the sitters looked as if their cheeks were frostbitten or tainted with rouge. And while the inside corners of the eyes were slightly enhanced in red tone in the middle period, these parts were emphasized with a brownish-red tone in the late period.

The gradation technique of painting the face developed greatly in the middle period, yet the technique was not used to express the *matiere* and the folds in the clothing in detail. In this sense, the middle period portraits continued to follow the lines technique of the early portraits.

In conclusion, *gongsin* portraits in the middle period developed a unique style which included the use of the colorful carpet, the triangle formed by the *dallyeong* robe, and the three-quarter pose. The lines technique maintained its dominance in the portrait paintings of this period, and gradation was used merely as a supplemental technique.

Portraits of Meritorious Subjects from the Late Period

Gongsin portraits of the late period include the works that were created after the reign of King Sukjong. However, the system of granting *gongsin* titles in the Joseon dynasty ended in 1728, and only three types of meritorious subjects - *bosa gongsin*, *busa gongsin*, and *bunmu gongsin* - were drawn as a part of *gongsin* portraits in the late period. While it is certain that portraits of *busa gongsin* were painted, none remain today. We will, therefore, examine the styles and techniques of expression in the *bosa gongsin* portrait of Kim Seok-ju (figure 11), and the *bunmu gongsin* portraits of Jo Mun-myeong, Yi Man-yu (figure 12, 13) and Kwon Hui-hak.

In the late portraits, a single, wide cloth was used instead of the connected parts of cloth in the past. There is also a change in the way hats were drawn: while black silk hats (*osamo*) were drawn much shorter in the middle period, they were drawn much higher in the late period. The works painted during King Sukjong's reign portray hats that are quite high with long wings that stretch out straight to the sides. And while the *dallyeong* robe that was drawn during the King Sukjong's reign was painted dark green, its color was changed to dark blue after King Yeongjo. The outline of the *dallyeong* robe is accentuated in the late *gongsin* portraits, and the sleeves of the garment are considerably puffy, an effect caused by the sitters' crossed arms. This unnatural pose is changed into a more natural one after King Yeongjo.

In terms of posture, in the first half of the late period the sitters posed staring straight ahead. This pose was soon replaced by a more natural pose of the sitter showing eight- or nine-tenth of the left profile. The sitters were painted full-length, sitting in a

chair, but they were seated in a chair draped with tiger skin with the tiger's face staring straight forward either under or over the footstool. This characteristic can be seen in the portraits of meritorious subjects such as Kim Seok-ju, Jo Mun-myeong, Yi Man-yu, and Kwon Hui-hak, and also in the portraits of court officials such as Nam Gu-man, Sin Ik-sang and Jeon Il-sang (figure 14).

The fact that imported portraits with similar traits had already been introduced even before this new style was incorporated in late portraits such as that of Kim Seok-ju (figure 11) can be found in paintings and documents. For example, the portraits of Jeong Gon-su, Yi Gwang-jeong, and Kim Yuk, kept in the National Museum of Korea, show similar characteristics to those seen in late portraits. The Portrait of Yi Gwang-jeong (figure 15) exists today only in photocopy since the original was stolen. From the notes on the back of the painting and from its style it is clear that Yi Gwang-jeong had his portrait painted in Ming China when he went to the China as an envoy on the occasion of the investiture of King Seonjo's second wife, Queen Inmok. This portrait is painted looking straight forward and includes an insignia, and his hands are peering out of their sleeves, elements that are very different from the paintings popular in Korea at the time. This portrait is in fact more similar to portraits painted during the reign of King Sukjong, such as the portraits of Kim Seok-ju, Yi Man-won, Nam Gu-man and Sin Ik-sang.

We will explore the factors that influenced these changes during the late period. It should be noted that Korean officials who went to China as envoys had their portraits painted and came back with these paintings. In this way Chinese paintings had a great deal of influence on Korean paintings.

In the late Joseon period, the relationship between China and Korea was formed

between the courts of both countries, but depended on diplomatic missions that were dispatched to Beijing or Yenjing on a yearly basis after the founding of the Joseon dynasty. The frequency and size of the missions was considerable: after the Manchu Invasion in 1636 roughly 500 exchanges took place from 1637 to 1893. The number of people who were sent about twice or three times a year reached between 200 and 500. Envoys were dispatched more frequently during the Qing period than the Ming period. From the early eighteenth century, after the Joseon dynasty suffered political, economic, and social turbulences, its antagonistic relations with the Qing dynasty were normalized and its economic condition improved alongside a cultural renaissance. This enabled the import of culture to take place in a more active manner.

In records and literary collections of envoys who went to China there are many records of men who, out of curiosity, had their portraits painted by Chinese painters. Some of the portraits became topics of conversation among ministers at that time. For example, one record notes that when King Sukjong ordered his portrait to be painted, it was suggested that the official painter of the king, Jin Jae-hae (1691-1769), study a portrait of Kim Chang-hyeop that had been painted in China. This portrait was then brought into the palace and examined by the King and his ministers.¹⁷

The portraits of Yi Gwang-jeong (figure 15), Jeong Gon-su and Kim Yuk are also examples of portraits that were brought from China. Joseon dynasty painters were influenced greatly by these paintings and learned new styles from them. These include, for example, the frontal pose, the chair draped with tiger skin, the feet placed outwards in the shape of the Chinese character “八,” and the pose with one hand on the belt and the other hand on the knee, which was a style popular in China from the seventeenth

¹⁷ Cho (2002b).

century to the late Qing period (figure 16).

The adoption and use of these new styles would have been impossible without the introduction of new painting techniques. With the techniques that existed until then it would have been difficult to come up with new ideas such as painting the model's face from a frontal view. As we saw in the early paintings, the primary use of the lines technique made the drawing of the nose quite difficult; in frontal view portraits, the drawing of the nose or the depiction of height in a sitting pose would have been even more difficult. For this reason, the *unyeom* technique¹⁸ became indispensable in the late Joseon portraits. The change from the technique of using red tone to accentuate the five points of the face in the middle period to the *unyeom* technique in the late period came about through Chinese influence. At the time, the Zengjing technique was extremely popular in China. Zeng Jing (1564-1647) was famous portrait painter in late Ming who invented a new technique in portrait painting. His technique created its effect by painting repeatedly light ink to the wings of the nose and the cheeks. It was a technique which involved applying several layers of color to the portrait, and it contributed to creating a three-dimensional effect. This technique became so popular during the Qing period that it gave birth to the Bochen School.¹⁹

The Portrait of Nam Gu-man (figure 17), which is not a *gongsin* portrait but is drawn in that style, exemplifies the newly adopted *unyeom* technique of the period. The strong, accented facial outline that was so common in the middle period disappears, as

¹⁸ This technique allows light ink to spread like a halo to create a smooth texture effect in the painting.

¹⁹ *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (The Daily Records of Royal Secretariat of Joseon Dynasty), *chaek* 477, 4th lunar month, 39th year of King Sukjong's reign; *Yeongjo sillok* (Annals of King Yeongjo), *gwon* 2, twelve lunar month, 1st year of King Yeongjo's reign; *Yeongjo sillok*, *gwon* 88, 8th lunar month, 32nd year of King Yeonjo's reign.

do the lines accenting the ears, eyes, mouth and nose. The face is drawn with numerous brush strokes, and the *unyeom* technique makes an expression in the face possible. As a result, the repetitive strokes create a feeling of protrusion on the canvas. When comparing this work with an illustration of facial wrinkles (figure 18) it is clear that the connected parts between each bone on the face gives an impression of indentation. The painting is based on the understanding of the facial bone structure. More interestingly, however, is the fact that the subtle wrinkles of the face are captured realistically by the brush strokes.

The use of *unyeom* technique was successful not only in its precise understanding of facial wrinkles, but in presenting a more natural pose of the sitters. Late *gongsin* portraits feature a variety of poses, from a frontal pose to an eight- or nine-tenths of the left profile pose. It became no longer necessary to follow the standard three-quarter pose as in the middle period.

The *unyeom* technique was used until the end of the Joseon dynasty since it enabled painters to draw more natural poses and to express the face more realistically. The results of the development of this technique can be seen in the Portrait of Yi Chae (figure 19) from the early nineteenth century, kept in the National Museum of Korea. The countless brush strokes lend an aura of realism to the model's face so that he almost appears to be alive.

Late *gongsin* portraits, however, did not achieve this level of realism, and the *unyeom* technique was in the process of development. After the early use of this technique as seen in the Portrait of Nam Gu-man, the face is painted in brownish tones, and reddish brown lines are used to accentuate the facial outline and the nose, ears, eyes and mouth. The sunken parts of the face are painted in reddish brown tones.

Another difference between the late portraits and the early and middle portraits is the way the garment folds are painted. Late paintings managed to represent the *matiere* in the garment by first lightly accenting the folds in a color darker than that of the background of the painting, and then drawing the folds in darker, thicker lines. Also, the colorful carpet that attracted great attention in the middle paintings disappears in the late paintings, as does the rush mat. The footstool was painted with an exaggerated, conscious use of perspective technique.

As this paper has shown, even in similar *gongsin* paintings the subtle transformations in general style took place alongside periodic changes. Furthermore, when analyzing the techniques of expression it is clear that the changes of styles in the portraits are even more important in the overall history of portrait painting technique.

The Social Function of *Gongsin* Portraits and Their Significance in the History of Painting

In this section, we will examine the social function of *gongsin* portraits. Before that, the significance of the royal portraits will be briefly examined. In the Joseon dynasty the king's portrait was painted in the following process: an institution in charge of royal portrait painting was established, a royal painter was chosen, and in every stage of his painting the king and ministers visited royal tombs on auspicious days and hours. Once the portrait was completed, it was enshrined in a special structure for the performance of sacrificial rites. The royal portraits were not painted for the benefit of royal descendants and for the purpose of ancestor worship. They embodied the symbolic meaning that the

king and royal court would enjoy eternal prosperity.

Portraits of meritorious subjects produced by royal order were also enshrined in the family shrine. This was not meant only for the pride of the family. The significance of these portraits was to give due praise to men of virtue who made sacrifices for their country in times of need; to show that even common people can receive treatment similar to that of *gongsin* when they make great contributions to their country; and to strengthen the loyalty of the people to their king from generation to generation and to instill the people with the belief that their destiny is linked to the future of the dynasty.

In order to fortify and expand the social significance of the *gongsin* portraits, meritorious subjects exhibited solidarity among themselves and their families.²⁰ Moreover, the portraits were always hung in shrines to ensure everlasting respect. In this way, the portraits assured that families of meritorious subjects would continue to take pride in their ancestors. Even today, according to a recent survey, these paintings often serve as a uniting force among families who are spread out. The images reflected in the paintings were much more effective in encouraging feelings of respect and pride than ancestral tablets covered in Chinese characters.²¹

The *gongsin* portraits are significant not only in their didactic function. They are also very important in the study of portrait painting, and play a central role in the history of painting. First, it is highly likely that because the *gongsin* portraits were drawn at the order of the king, they were painted by skillful or famous painters. Therefore, the quality of the artistry of the paintings is authentic and reliable. Documents on the *gongsin* portraits reveal that the painters were mostly first-rate artists

²⁰ Sin (2003).

²¹ Cho (2002a).

of their time. The portraits that remain are both large and consistent in the high artistic skill with which they were painted.

Second, the periods in which the paintings were drawn are distinct. They have an important significance in painting history, because they provide prime material for the study of their style and for comparison with other works. The lines technique, which created simplicity and subtleness in the expression of ears, eyes, nose, and mouth, was used in the *gongsin* portraits from the early period; the gradation technique, which applies red tones to the face based on the concept of the five facial points, was used in the middle period; and a *unyeom* technique was used to express the subtle wrinkles in the face in the late period. The changes in technique of expression represent both the progression of Joseon dynasty portraits and the development of Joseon dynasty painting history in general.

Third, the *gongsin* portraits from the Joseon dynasty share several basic characteristics. The sitters are full-length seated; they wear their full, official uniform including a black silk hat (*osamo*) and an embroidered insignia indicating the official rank attached to the breast of the official *dallyeong* robe; their hands are hidden by their sleeves, and their arms are crossed; and they wear leather shoes and their feet are placed on a footstool.

This was the typical style shared by all *gongsin* portraits until the middle period. Scholar-officials were mostly painted in simple official uniforms (figure 8), without the embroidered insignia but with a belt around their *dallyeong* robe or in a Confucian scholar's costume sitting cross-legged. However, from the late Joseon period non-*gongsin* portraits also started adopting the *gongsin* portraits style, and after the nineteenth century it became quite popular for scholar-officials to have their portraits

painted “*gongsin* style,” wearing their official uniform and in a full-length seated posture. Many famous aristocrats such as Kang Se-hwang and Che Je-gong had at least two large portraits painted *gongsin* style. While the king ceased the order of *gongsin* portraits in 1728, “*gongsin*-style” portraits were broadly popular among scholar-officials up until the end of the Joseon dynasty.

In conclusion, Joseon period *gongsin* portraits have a significant place in the history of painting because they are extremely accomplished, high quality works. They also offer a standard of style which clearly indicates the period in which they were painted. Lastly, they are significant in that the unique *gongsin* style greatly influenced the portraits of scholar-officials in the late Joseon dynasty.

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GLOSSARY

Bai Juyi (Ch.) 白居易

bosa gongsin 保社功臣

bunmu gongsin 奮武功臣

busa gongsin 扶社功臣

Changan (Ch.) 長安

Chunghunbu 忠勳府

Chunghunsa 忠勳司

dallyeong 團領

eumjik 蔭職

Gigonggak 紀功閣

Giroso 耆老所

gongsin 功臣

Gongsin Dogam 功臣都鑑

Goryeosa 高麗史

Huang Tingjian (Ch.) 黃庭堅

hwacheopbon 畫帖本

Jangsaengjeon 長生殿

jeokgae gongsin 敵愾功臣

jeongguk gongsin 靖國功臣

Jeungbo munheon bigo 增補文獻備考

Josadang 祖師堂

Lingyan (Ch.) 凌煙

Luoyang (Ch.) 洛陽

osamo 烏紗帽

Qilin (Ch.) 麒麟

sadaebu 士大夫

Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam 新增東國輿地勝覽

Taejo sillok 太祖實錄

Taesang 太常

unyeom 暈染

Yan Liben (Ch.) 閻立本

Yenching (Ch.) 燕京

(Ch.: Chinese)

(사진 설명)

Fig. 1. Portrait of Yi Cheon-u. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 159 x 104cm. Private collection.

Fig. 2. Portrait of Sin Suk-ju. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 167 x 109.5cm. Private collection.

Fig. 3. Portrait of Jang Mal-son. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 171 x 107cm. Private collection.

Fig. 4. Facial Portrait from Different Angles.

Fig. 5. Portrait of Yi Saek. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 150.5 x 83cm. Private collection.

Fig. 6. Portrait of Yi U. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 166 x 110cm. Private collection.

Fig. 7. Portrait of Yi Jung-no. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 171.5 x 94cm. Gyeonggi

Provincial Museum.

Fig. 8. Portrait of Heo Mok. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 113 x 76cm. Private collection.

Fig. 9. Phrenology. 1. The Five Facial Points. 2. Bone Structure

Fig. 10. Detail of the Portrait of Yi Jung-no.

Fig. 11. Portrait of Kim Seok-ju. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 178 x 130cm. Private collection.

Fig. 12. Portrait of Yi Man-yu. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 170 x 104.5cm. Private collection.

Fig. 13. Portrait of Yi Man-yu. Album leaf. 42 x 30cm. Private collection.

Fig. 14. Portrait of Jeon Il-sang. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 142.5 x 90.2cm. Private collection.

Fig. 15. Portrait of Yi Gwang-jeong. Hanging scroll. Color on silk.

Fig. 16. Portrait of Xu Ruke by Shu Shizhen. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. Early Ming dynasty (17th century). 156.2 x 78.2cm. Nanjing Museum.

Fig. 17. Detail of the Portrait of Nam Gu-man. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. Private collection.

Fig. 18. Illustration of Facial Wrinkles.

Fig. 19. Detail of the Portrait of Yi Chae. 1807. Color on silk. National Museum of Korea.

Fig. 20. Portrait of Kim Jeong-hui by Yi Han-cheol. 1857. Hanging scroll. Color on silk. 131.5 x 67.5cm. Private collection.