

**Poetic Criticism in the Mid-Joseon Period:
Focusing on Arguments about the Tang and Song Styles
in the 17th Century**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on mid-Joseon period poetry critics, including Heo Gyun (1569-1618), Yi Su-gwang (1563-1628) and Sin Heum (1566-1628), and their reflexive attitude, which was aimed at thoroughly reexamining the then-popular Tang style poems. These critics in the early seventeenth century were serious about not only criticizing poets and poems of the day but also finding an alternative, ideal style of poetry. Their criticism of Late-Tang style (*mandangpung*) poems, which were characterized as weak in style, naturally led them to focus on High-Tang style (*seongdangpung*) poems in their search. At the same time, they also tried to identify the positive elements in Song style poetry, including the Jiangxi and Sarim styles, which were nearly ruled out by poets in those days. The significance of those criticisms can be recognized in literary history on the grounds that the foundation of Tang-Song poetry arguments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century had already been formed in the critical discussions of the early seventeenth century.

Keywords: poetic criticism, Mid-Joseon period, Tang and Song styles, Late-Tang style, High-Tang style, Heo Gyun, Yi Su-gwang, Sin Heum

Introduction

In Korea, critical attention towards poetry became heightened during the Goryeo period (918-1392) with the compilation of *Pahanjip*, a collection of *sihwa* (Ch.: *shihua*; remarks on poetry). Thereupon, the late Goryeo and early Joseon (1392-1910) saw the production of critical writings such as *Bohanjip*, *Yeogong paeseol*, and *Dongin sihwa*. Until the sixteenth century, works that may be regarded as full-fledged *sihwa* collections, comprised of only *sihwa*, remained limited to just a few, including *Dongin sihwa* and *Cheonggang sihwa*. Then, in the early seventeenth century, four *sihwa* collections appeared, namely Heo Gyun's *Seongsu sihwa*, Yi Su-gwang's *Jibong yuseol*, Sin Heum's *Cheongchang yeondam*, and Yang Gyeong-u's *Jeho sihwa*. This is because poetry **writing** reached a high level of popularity in the late sixteenth century. As a result, poetry became the subject of many critical works written during the early seventeenth century in the form of *sihwa* collections.

Up until the sixteenth century, poets in the Joseon dynasty attempted to learn either the Tang or Song style of China. However, critics in the early seventeenth century, especially the authors of *sihwa* collections, analyzed the merits and demerits of each style while trying to identify an ideal style of poetry that could **overcome[surpass]** the weaknesses of both the Tang and Song styles.

Researchers who identified the characteristics of mid-Joseon poetry as Tang style, and who studied the creative trends and distinctive criticism of poems, **include Yi Jong-muk, Jeong Min, An Byeong-hak, Kim Jong-seo, and An Dae-hoe**. Yi Jong-muk analyzed the characteristics and limits of Tang style poems written in the early- and mid-Joseon period. He pointed out that the poems in that period, though being of high

aesthetic quality, were lacking in originality and imagination as a result of imitating Chinese poems (Yi J. 1995b, 233). He also studied the development of Tang and Song styles from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. In particular, he focused on the formation of Joseon style poetry, which was established after a period of reactionism or archaism (Yi J. 2002). Jeong Min examined the development of Tang style poetry in mid-Joseon and suggested the following three phases: the Late-Tang style formed by Baek Gwang-hun, Yi Dal and Choe Gyeong-chang; the High-Tang style formed by Kwon Pil and Yi An-nul; and the archaic style formed by Jeong Du-gyeong (Jeong 1996, 198-211). He also described the two faces of creativity and imitation in the romantic quality of poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Jeong 1999). An Byeong-hak linked the Buddhist theory of self-enlightenment to the poetic theory of the mid-Joseon period, which stressed the poetic style of the Tang dynasty (An 2000). Kim Jong-seo noted the romanticism in the Honam (southwestern) poetic circle in the mid-Joseon period that led the poetic trend of learning and writing in the Tang style in the sixteenth century. He also demonstrated that the quality of *godam* (archaism and calm) in Tang style poetry in the sixteenth century was derived from Neo-Confucian poets in the early Joseon period (Kim J. 2003a; 2003b). An Dae-hoe connected the romanticism in Tang style poetry in the seventeenth century with archaism (An D. 1999), and revealed that in the late seventeenth century a new direction for *sihwa* writing began from the recognition of negative effects in Tang style poetry learning (An D. 1995).¹

Based on this research, this paper focuses on critics in the early seventeenth century, such as Heo Gyun (1569-1618), Yi Su-gwang (1563-1628) and Sin Heum

¹ In addition, Nam Eun-gyeong and Im Jun-cheol analyzed the poems of Jeong Du-gyeong (1597-1673) and pointed out archaism as a new trend in the seventeenth century. They also emphasized the fact that Jeong Du-gyeong had created chivalrous images in order to renovate the poetry of those days (Nam 1992; 1998; 1999; Im 2003; 2004).

(1566-1628), and their reflexive attitude, which was aimed at thoroughly reexamining the then-popular Tang style poems. Critics in the early seventeenth century were serious about not only criticizing poets and poems of the day but also finding an alternative, ideal style of poetry. Criticism of Late-Tang style (*mandangpung*) poems, which were characterized as being weak in style, naturally led those critics to focus on the High-Tang style (*seongdangpung*) poems. At the same time, they also tried to identify the positive elements in Song style poetry, which was nearly ruled out by poets in those days.

The significance of this paper, therefore, lies in illuminating how the understanding of Tang and Song Chinese styles affected the formation of poetics and poetry criticism of the mid-Joseon period, by examining critical works, including *sihwa* collections, in the early seventeenth century and focusing in particular on the critical views of Heo Gyun, Yi Su-gwang and Sin Heum, all of whom produced diverse critical works.

This paper begins with the historical background of the popularity of Tang style poems in the sixteenth century. This is followed by examination of the reflexive activities of critics in regards to Tang style poetry in the early seventeenth century. After studies of the Late-Tang style, which was an object to be overcome, and the High-Tang style, which was seen as an alternative, positive elements of the Song style will be also considered. The examples of poems which Heo Gyun used in his criticism were chosen because, compared to Yi Su-gwang and Sin Heum, he criticized them more concretely and sharply. Through his criticism, the dominant poetic trends of the mid-Joseon period can be clearly grasped. Heo Gyun's comments in the critical work, *Seongsu sihwa*, and the poetry anthology, *Gukjo sisan*, offer primary evidence supporting the argument of

this paper. Finally, this paper shows how these critics influenced later critics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in developing the discussion of poetry styles.

Background for the Formation of Tang Style in the Mid-Joseon Period

In the early Joseon period, the poetic style of the Song dynasty of China dominated poetic circles, and poets actively studied the poetic world of the Jiangxi school, including Su Shi, the representative poet in the Song period. Interest in the poetic style of the Jiangxi school led poets of the early Joseon dynasty to favor certain poetic mannerisms and embellishments, which was connected with verbal techniques utilizing unusual allusions and rare sources, and eventually made poems very difficult for readers to understand (An 1988, 15; Yi J. 1995a). The poetic style of the Song dynasty often emphasized descriptive technique rather than emotional evocation (Yi J. 1995b, 216). For example, in the following poem, "Lying down with my head on the rock, [I realize that] moss sticks to my hat. Planting flowers, [I realize that] my shoes leave prints in the mud," the poet uniquely describes a slice of life of a person living deep in the mountains. The poet places more emphasis on poetic license in order to craft this unique expression than on depicting the life of a hermit in nature. For this reason, Heo Gyun called this description, "the peak of the poetic technique."

In the mid-Joseon period, however, the literati of the Sarim group² were deeply interested in poetic expressions of interiorized emotions, which could hardly be

² A group of Confucian literati that was formed against meritorious retainers during the literati purge between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The literati group pursued Neo-Confucian self-cultivation based on Zhu Xi's philosophy in Song China.

achieved by the Song style with its emphasis on formal mannerisms and rhetorical flourishes. Yi I's writing clearly demonstrates this tendency:

Language is the essence of human sound, and poetry is the essence of language. Since poetry is based on human nature, it cannot be untrue. Nature is what makes the vocal sound high or low. The three hundred poems in *Shijing* (The Book of Odes) express sincere human emotion, penetrate the principle behind things, and convey a good-natured, generous, and loyal mind, which results in righteousness; they are the basis of poetry. As the generations pass and the state of the world is thrown into turbulence, not all things expressed through poetry can be said to be based on a righteous nature, and many put much effort into pleasing the eye with sparse poetic frills.

Yi I, a representative scholar and critic of the Sarim group, emphasized the writing of poems with a lenient and pure mind, which represents the good nature of human beings as expressed in *Shijing* of ancient China, rather than poems which only dazzle the readers with gorgeous words. He thought that the “limpid-calm” (*chungdam*) and “easy-beautiful” (*hanmi*) styles should be embodied in poems through natural expressions of human nature (Yi M. 1993, 63-64). The Sarim group's poetic style was similar to the Lianluo style of Song China in that it attempted to describe interiorized aesthetics, while limiting excessive displays of emotion (Byeon 1994, 230-231).

The basis of the Sarim literati's poetics in the mid-Joseon period was the concept of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation, which was also their philosophical starting point. They criticized the poetic trend in the early Joseon period, which centered attention on mannerisms and eccentric expressions, and focused instead on the natural expression of human emotion. However, these Neo-Confucian literati-poets were also limited in their full expression of poetic emotion by focusing on the Neo-Confucian concept of moral cultivation (An 1988, 15).

The King Seonjo period (r. 1567-1608) of mid-Joseon is considered the “prime of King Seonjo’s reign,” because there was an abundant creation of poetry during this period (Kim 1994, 188). The poets of this period tried to use the poetic style of Tang China, which was generally recognized as a suitable method for overcoming the Sarim group's tendency to restrict the revealing of emotions.

Critics in the early seventeenth century definitely acknowledged that the King Seonjo period of the sixteenth century marked a turning point in the poetic trend toward the Tang style. The following description in the *Jibong yuseol*, written by Yi Su-gwang, shows clearly the poetic patterns that had changed up until the mid-Joseon period.

Most poets in our country highly appreciated Su Shi and Huang Tingjian of China, and had learned only this style [of these two poets] for two hundred years. However, in recent times Choe Gyeong-chang and Baek Gwang-hun began studying the Tang style and endeavored to create a fresh style of poetry. They were called “Choe-Baek.” Most people in those days learned this style from them, and there was an overall change in poetic trends.

This indicates that the poetic trends were changed from the Song style of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian to the Tang style by Choe Gyeong-chang and Baek Gwang-hun. The opinions of Sin Heum and Heo Gyun were also shared by Yi Su-gwang. Sin Heum remarked, “Su Dongpo³ was highly esteemed during the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, and the term ‘33 men of Dongpo’ was used to identify the officials selected at the Goryeo dynasty state examination. In recent times, however, his style has not been favored, and every poet has learned the Tang style” (Sin 1618). Heo Gyun also emphasized that No Su-sin, Hwang Jeong-uk, Choe Gyeong-chang, Baek Gwang-hun, and Yi Dal learned the Tang style, including Tu Fu’s poetry (Heo 1611).

³ Su Donpo is Su Shi's pen name.

Choe Gyeong-chang, Baek Gwang-hun, and Yi Dal made even more efforts to write poems according to the Tang style, earning them the name, “The Three Poets of the Tang style.” They tried to overcome the Jiangxi style, which mainly focused on the manipulation of words. They also tried to transcend the poetic trend of the Sarim group whose concerns were limited to self-restraint of emotional expression and moral restrictions (Yi M. 1993, 70). Their poetic activities held historic significance in that they pursued the Tang style for the purpose of overcoming the excessive use of allusion and wordplay and the over-restraint of emotional expression, and they were committed to an abundant display of emotion.

The High-Tang Style as an Alternative to the Late-Tang Style

The widespread criticism of poetry in the early seventeenth century was related to the increasing number of poems written in the Tang poetic style, which gained in popularity during King Seonjo's reign in the sixteenth century. Critical works in the early seventeenth century dealt seriously with the essential characters of the Tang and Song poetic styles. For example, Heo Gyun thought that the Tang style had a more positive influence on the poets' search for the principle of poetry than the Song style. Considering that it was important for poets to use appropriate expressions that could leave lasting impressions on readers, he stated that such expressions were better found in the Tang style than the Song style. He also pointed out that the Song style put too much stress on the manipulation of allusions and rhymes, resulting in a lack of natural expression of feelings. Thus, he argued that the quality of poems written in the Song

style was relatively low.

Critics of poetry in the early seventeenth century not only observed the Tang style that formed the mainstream poetry movement in the sixteenth century, but also participated directly in the movement by writing their own poems. Despite their overall positive assessment of Tang style poems, they did not ignore the problems raised by those poems. In short, the increasing number of poems written in the sixteenth century contributed to the boom in poetry criticism in the early seventeenth century, and this criticism in turn led to new alternatives for improvements in the writing of poetry.

Critics in the early seventeenth century appreciated the efforts made by poets in the late sixteenth century, who tried to overcome the technique-centered Jiangxi style or the suppressed expression of feelings in the Sarim style. However, at the same time, they did not hesitate to criticize those poets for imitating Tang dynasty poems and for being inclined to follow the poetic style of the late Tang.

Yi Su-gwang, for instance, criticized the Tang style, which was pursued by Choi Gyeong-chang and Baek Gwang-hun who, he claimed, did not reach the High-Tang style but stopped instead at the Late-Tang style (Yi S. 1614). Sin Heum pointed out that poets sometimes even lost their own poetic characteristics while following the Tang style and insisted that poets should establish their independent poetic world without regard to[for] the contemporary fashion (Sin 1618).

Choe Gyeong-chang's poem, "On a Monk's Scroll of Poems at Bongeunsa Temple," can be viewed as an example of Late-Tang style trends and imitations of the extant Tang poems.

*In Gwangneung in March, the hills are full of flowers;
On the way home, clear river water amidst white clouds.*

*In Bongeunsa temple seen from the back of the boat,
Listening to the Chinese cuckoo's cries, the monk closes the gate.*

Choe wrote this poem while leaving Bongeunsa temple on a day in March when the flowers were in bloom. On his way back from meeting with a monk, a hillside covered in flowers caught his eye. The “way home” mentioned in the poem is the Hangang river. White clouds were drifting above the river. In the first two lines, the poet is observing the natural setting that greets him on his way home and giving expression to the spring ambience. Then, as he looks back toward Bongeunsa temple, he sees a monk closing the gate and hears the cries of the Chinese cuckoo. The cuckoo’s cries reflect the “poet’s feeling of sadness as spring fades away” (Yi J. 1995b, 234). The phrases, “March,” “flower-covered mountain,” “clear river,” “white clouds,” and “Chinese cuckoo,” describe a flamboyant and mystical spring. But the splendor of spring is tinged with sorrow. Here, “Gwangneung” refers to Gwangjin or Gwangnaru, [located](#) on the Hangang river of Seoul. Choe changed the name “Gwangjin” or “Gwangnaru” to “Gwangneung” in order to remind readers of Guangling (Gwangneung in Korean) in China, which appears in a famous poem written by Wei Yingwu of Tang dynasty: “When March comes, Guangling is full of flowers.” The tone and content of Wei’s poem is very similar to the first line of Choe’s. Heo Gyun evaluated Choe’s poem as an example of the Late-Tang style, because despite the splendor and sorrow of the poem, it did not capture the poet’s strong spirit. Furthermore, this poem was a good imitation of the line from the aforementioned Chinese poem.

In short, although the critics of the early seventeenth century put more theoretical emphasis on Tang style poetry than on Song style, they did not highly evaluate the poetic style of the Late Tang period, which was characterized by a mood of

excessive sorrow and mere imitation of famous Chinese poems. They regarded the High-Tang style as more of an ideal model than the Late-Tang style. For this reason, when Heo Gyun appraised a well-written poem, he used such expressions as “This poem is written in the High-Tang style,” “The style of this poem is similar to the High-Tang style,” and “This poem deserves to be compared with the High-Tang style poems.”

Among the poets who wrote in the High-Tang style, Yi Ju is considered one of the best. Heo Gyun selected a couplet from one of Yi Ju’s poems, “Manghaesa Temple.”

The morning sun rises out of Balhae Sea, spilling its red rays.

White clouds rise out of Mt. Wulu, drawing their white vapor.

Heo Gyun appraised this couplet by saying that it was “very full of energy.” He believed that Yi Ju’s poetry was representative of the quality of “firmness and self-possession” (*chimchak*), which was also considered part of the High-Tang style. According to him, the couplet’s dynamic power reflects its use of *chimchak*. The term *chimchak* indicates a strong, solemn and transcendent quality. The fresh images of “morning sun” and “white clouds” are often found in Tang style poems. Moreover, expressions like “spilling its red rays” and “drawing their white vapor” add to the mysterious mood of the poem. Dynamic expressions, like “rises out of the Balhae Sea” and “rise out of Mt. Wulu,” work well together to give this couplet its power and energy. With the combination of fresh, mystical images embedded in the dynamic structure of the poem, the poem goes beyond the typical Tang style, which stops short at describing fresh images, and takes on the energetic *chimchak* style, associated with the High-Tang style.

Heo Gyun’s comment on Kim In-hu’s “On the Chwidae Pavilion” also demonstrated the characteristics of the High-Tang style that were emphasized in poetry

criticism in the mid-Joseon period.

*Where King Yang used to sing and dance,
Today, a traveler climbs up and looks down.
This feeling surpasses even the clouds,
Mourning the past.
In a far-off plain, a great wind is rising.
The bright sun hides behind mountain peaks.
The glory of days long past,
Where can it be found again?*

Regarding this poem, Heo Gyun evaluated it as being “so characteristic of *chimchak* and so full of energy that the fragile, delicate tone is completely erased.” In his *Gukjo sisan*, a compilation of poems from the early- and mid-Joseon period, he pointed out that the third couplet of this poem in particular possessed the quality of *chimchak*. As seen in Yi Ju’s poem, *chimchak* refers to a poetry style characterized by fresh, new images and dynamic energy. The first four lines, wherein the poet describes a place that was once full of glory, express transience. In the fifth and sixth lines, the poet energizes the poem by describing the wind rising from the vast plains and the bright sun hiding behind ~~mountain tops~~mountaintops. The wind symbolizes the sweeping away of past glory, and the sun, which represents that glory, has already disappeared beyond the mountains. Although there is a futile regret for past glory that is expressed in this poem, in the last two lines the poet ends with the calm realization of the rise and fall of all things. This earned the poem a positive evaluation as overcoming weakness and avoiding excessive sorrow, even while reflecting on the glory of a past era. Because of this, Heo Gyun recognized this poem, along with Yi Ju’s poetry, as one of the best poems written in the High-Tang style.

IV. Rediscovery of the Merits of Song Style Poetry

In order to escape the frailness of Tang style poetry, critics in the early seventeenth century renewed their interest in Song style while maintaining a deep concern for the High-Tang style.

Sin Heum emphasized that although poets tended to favor either Tang or Song poetry, they needed to accept the merits of both without excluding the other. According to Sin, some who practiced Tang style poetry disdained the Song style, while others who followed the Song style despised the Tang style. However, both were biased because not all Tang style poems were of high quality, and not all Song style poems were of low quality. He stressed an individual approach to each poem, emphasizing that critics should appreciate original poems regardless of whether ~~it was~~ they were written in Tang or Song style.

Yi Su-gwang also realized that it was still difficult for poets to reach the same level as famous poets of the High-Tang period, although he acknowledged that High-Tang style poems were of high quality. Pointing out that even Wang Shizhen, a famous Ming dynasty poet who pursued the High-Tang style, failed to reach the High-Tang level, he argued that it is extremely difficult for poets to achieve the High-Tang style in their poems. More importantly, according to him, the imitation of Tang style expressions or words did not mean that they had actually achieved the Tang style. He said that poets should maintain their own unique styles of writing, even while following the Tang style. In short, from Yi Su-gwang's point of view, learning the Tang or High-Tang style did not automatically mean that one could write like famous Tang style poets; what mattered

was learning how to write poetry according to a poet's unique ability and taste.

It is difficult to discuss writing ability in general terms as, much like the human face, it varies with each individual person. If [a person/people](#) learns whichever style best suits [his](#) [their](#) taste, regardless of whether it is Tang or Song style, then their writing ability will naturally develop. Poetry teachers advise their students to follow only one style, that is, either Tang or Song, according to the teacher's preference. Without considering the students' talents, teachers follow what they like. This attitude fails to help the students write poems.

This illustrates Yi's view that it is not necessary to limit the standard model of poetry to either Tang or Song, and poets can learn either Tang or Song style. Even though the High-Tang style may have been the best standard for learning poetry, it is no easy task to reach the same level as the poets of the High Tang period. If this is the case, it may be better to more strongly consider a poet's personal taste and individual ability.

Heo Gyun also recognized that Song-style poetry had its own poetic value and regarded it positively.

Somebody scolded, "You are already good at old style poetry. So, you can become famous and influence future generations. Why, then, do you still study the poetic style of the Song dynasty?" I replied, "No. No. It is difficult to say. Let me make an example regarding old style poetry. Only wine bottles and wine glasses made of jade are used in the court. For a village party, wine bottles and glasses made of clay are much more convenient. I do not get rid of Song style poetry for the same reason. I only want to follow whatever is most practical. Why do you think it does harm to the principle of poetry?"

At that time, Song style poetry was often underestimated. However, Heo did not follow this trend. Instead, he tried to understand Song style poems for their genuine value. His evaluation of Bak Eun's poetry reflects this.

Bak Eun's poetry is not orthodox. However, it does demonstrate qualities of seriousness and sturdy spirit. For poets who only study the tender and fragile Tang style, how is it possible to accomplish the virtuosity of the following couplet? "Birds sing as if it were raining in spring. Wind blows through an old tree that has no flowers blooming."

The statement, "Bak Eun's poetry is not orthodox," means that his poems were basically influenced by the poetic style of the Song dynasty. In the late sixteenth century, when Tang style poems were popular, only Tang style poems seemed to be highly appreciated. However, even in those days, Heo Gyun preferred the Song style poems of Bak Eun. He thought the "seriousness" (*eomjin*) and "sturdy spirit" (*gyeonghan*) in Bak Eun's poems were one of the advantages of the Song style. "Seriousness" indicates accurate poetic expression, and "sturdy spirit" means that the poems did not succumb to weakness.

The text illustrates Heo Gyun's idea that, in the evaluation of a poem, it is more important to consider how well the poetic style serves the motive of the poem, rather than whether Tang or Song style is used. As mentioned above, the Tang style was mainstream during the mid-Joseon period. However, Heo saw no problem with using the Song style if it helped a poet to write a better poem. Presenting Bak Eun as an example, Heo said that he overcame the qualities of "delicateness and weakness," which were often negatively associated with Late-Tang style poems written in the mid-Joseon period. This was why he thought that Bak Eun's poems were better than other poems, which were also written in the Tang style but not at a high level. Heo believed that even if poets followed the Song style, so long as they relied on their own merits and expressed strong spirit, they would still write better than other poets who claimed to follow Tang style while failing to realize the essence of that style in their poems.

The example Heo Gyun used is the second couplet in Bak Eun's poem, "Bongnyeongsa Temple." Bak Eun expressed his feelings by describing a scene in Bongnyeongsa. In the first part of the couplet, the poet hears birds singing, which predicts that it will rain. In the second part, he observes that flowers do not bloom in the old tree, through which only ~~the a~~ sorrowful wind blows. This couplet contains unique descriptions based on observations of nature. Through the couplet, readers can also grasp the poet's inner state and feelings, which were projected onto nature. If the first part of the couplet is interpreted as the poet's prediction of a future that is full of rain instead of sunshine, and the second part is interpreted as the poet feeling as helpless as ~~the an~~ old tree, then this couplet takes on a serious tone.

However, according to Heo Gyun, the beauty of this poem lies in the poet's attitude, which is not full of fear and anxiety but rather with strong spirit and a sense of freedom that goes beyond the mundane world. The last couplet of the poem clearly demonstrates Heo's view of Bak Eun's poetic world:

The affairs of this world are laughable at best.

Looking down at the world from atop a high mountain, everything seems like drifting dust.

The strong, solid mind of the poet expressed in this last couplet makes the readers feel that they have transcended the mundane world. This attitude is the "seriousness" and "sturdy spirit" that Heo Gyun pointed out. Heo evaluated Bak Eun's poetry as unorthodox because Bak had inherited the Song style or Jiangxi school, including the poet Huang Tingjian. However, Heo Gyun strongly argued that the qualities of "seriousness" and "sturdy spirit" made Bak Eun's poetry similar to the High-Tang style poems, which were completely different from the weak poems of the Late-Tang style.

Heo Gyun expressed his view that it was better to incorporate desirable elements from the Song style than to roughly follow the Tang style.

One of the motivations for sixteenth century poets to follow the Tang style was the necessity of overcoming the style of the Sarim group, which restricted the use of emotional expressions. However, these poets, who were trying to achieve a more liberal style in contrast to the Sarim group, tended towards an excess of emotional expressions due to their preference for the Late-Tang style.

As mentioned above, critics in the early seventeenth century discovered the solution to the problem of “weakness” in the Late-Tang style. They believed that the solution lay in the concept of *chimchak*, the strong and solemn quality found in the High-Tang style, and the "seriousness" (*eomjin*) and "sturdy spirit" (*gveonghan*) found in the Song style poems of Bak Eun.⁴

Furthermore, [critics reexamined](#) the Sarim style poems, which were abandoned by poets following the Tang style in the sixteenth century, [were reexamined by critics](#) in the early seventeenth century as an alternative for overcoming the excessively frail style. They emphasized the poetic qualities of "ease" (*han*), "calm" (*dam*), and "elegance" (*a*), which were embodied in poems that avoided excessive expression of frail emotions and instead portrayed the poet's emotion in a serene and elegant way. These styles of "ease, calm, and elegance" were similar in tendency to the Lianluo--style [of](#)-qualities of “impid-calm” (*chungdam*) and “easy-beautiful” (*hanmi*) to which Sarim literati such as

⁴ *Chimchak* was not the only quality that represented [the](#) High-Tang style. The High Tang [quality-style discussed](#) in this paper shows what critics like Heo Gyun in the early seventeenth century considered the [most important factor in evaluating poems](#). The High-Tang style in the criticism of the early seventeenth century does not contain all the qualities of [the](#) poems [written](#) during the High-Tang period in China. Among [the](#) poetic styles [in-created during](#) the High-Tang period, Tu Fu's style, which is defined as *chimul* by Yan Yu (Guo 1998, 68), is closer to *chimchak* in this paper than Li Bai's is. *Eomjin*, or seriousness, in this paper is also what [the](#) critics in the early seventeenth century defined as Song style, though it is sometimes observed in [the](#) High-Tang style poems.

Yi I attached importance. In this way, critics in the early seventeenth century, in order to overcome the frailness of the Late-Tang style, partly accepted again the style of self-restraint that was typical of the Sarim group, derived from the Lianluo style in the Song period.

In the poetic criticism of the mid-Joseon period, critical terms with two-syllable, compound words such as *hanwon* (ease-loftiness), *hana* (ease-elegance), and *handam* (ease-calm) were often found. Heo Gyun placed the poems of early Joseon poets, such as Kim Su-on, Kang Hui-maeng, and Kim Jong-jik, in the category of "ease, calm, and elegance." *Han* (閑) refers to a peaceful state, free from mundane desires, which is based on the mentality of a poet who feels no desire when he or she encounters objects. In the poems of this category, the tendency for poets to project their minds onto natural objects and to assimilate the objects into their [self-self-identity](#) is weakened. Instead, the tendency for poets to describe natural objects accurately without overexposing their feelings or to find the principle of life while keeping a distance from nature is strengthened.

In *Seongsu sihwa* written by Heo Gyun, Kim Su-on's poem, [which was](#) evaluated as *hanwon*, and Kang Hui-maeng's poem, [which was](#) evaluated as *hana*, express the poetic self's experience of an elegant atmosphere or of enlightenment while maintaining a relaxed mood. For example, the following couplet written by Kang Hui-maeng demonstrates how a natural object encourages the poetic self to reach enlightenment regarding life and nature:

"All day long, I sit beside the window facing south with an empty mind. ←

There is nothing to be seen in the garden except a bird learning how to fly."

— The following couplet by Kim Jong-jik is also evaluated as an example of

handam: "

A light rain falls while a Buddhist monk mends his clothes. ↵

A traveler is rowing a boat in the cold river."

In this couplet, the poet combines the words "light rain" and "cold river," which convey a clean, clear image, with the relaxed and otherworldly image of a monk repairing his clothes and a traveler rowing a boat. These images portray a calm scene that is neither everyday nor extraordinary.

In another of Kim Jong-jik's couplets, "~~A crane cries, and fresh dew drops.~~ / ~~The moon rises, and a large fish jumps up,~~" the poet employs clean and clear images such as "crane," "dew," "moon," and "fish.":

[A crane cries, and fresh dew drops.](#)

[The moon rises, and a large fish jumps up.](#)

This couplet conveys the philosophy that the principle of nature exists everywhere, as repeated in the phrases of *Shijing*: "

A crane cries in Jiugao, and its voice is heard in the field. ↵

Fish are in the pond, and sometimes in the riverside."

The philosophy contained in this couplet is profound, as is often found in Lianluo style poems. Heo Gyun comments, "This work is as good as poems written in the High-Tang style." His comment reveals that Song style poems containing philosophical ideas were thought to be alternatives for Late-Tang style poems.

V. Continuation of Arguments on the Tang and Song Styles in the Late 17th and Early 18th Century

Critics in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, such as Hong Man-jong and Kim Chang-hyeop, continued trying to find alternative models of poetry, just as critics in the early seventeenth century did, by reviewing the existing poems written in both Tang and Song styles. Hong Man-jong, who inherited those critics' contributions in the early seventeenth century, argued that the biased and reckless abandonment of either the Tang or Song style without proper reason should be abolished. According to him, the characteristics of Tang and Song styles could not be defined in just a few words: there was more variety in both styles than what was usually believed. Moreover, what determined whether a poem was well written was the poet's individual ability, not the style in which it was written.

Kim Chang-hyeop also actively discussed the Tang and Song styles of poetry. He regarded poems written during the Tang dynasty highly, because poets at that time concentrated on ~~the~~ expression of feeling and tried not to employ allusions or arguments too often. However, he warned poets not to just imitate the forms of poems written in the Tang dynasty without understanding fully the principle behind the forms. According to Kim, the reason why poems written during the Tang dynasty were highly appreciated is that, in those poems, the poets expressed themselves naturally. However, he thought, as the "retrospective" poets of the Ming dynasty only imitated the Tang dynasty style without understanding the principle, they failed to produce poems of high quality.

In addition, Kim Chang-hyeop also judged ~~that~~ Song style poems, in which poets expressed their feelings toward objects naturally, ~~were as being~~ superior to the poems of the Ming dynasty poets, who wrote simply ~~to imitate~~ in imitation of the Tang style. Although Kim constantly criticized Song style poems for containing arguments, at the same time he accepted that among Song style poems, there were many in which the

poets reflected their profound knowledge and philosophy and expressed their feelings honestly. In short, Kim Chang-hyeop refused to regard the poetic style of the Ming dynasty poets, who tried to employ extraordinary expressions and flamboyant descriptions, as being genuine examples of the Tang style. Those poems were full of artificial and therefore unnatural aspects, which were far from the essence of [the](#) Tang style.

Among the ideal categories of poetry underlined by Kim Chang-hyeop, the poetic qualities of *hana* (ease-elegance) and *yeondam* (deepness-calm) come from poets who expressed their feelings freely and naturally, without artifice or exaggeration. Those qualities are similar to *han* (ease), *dam* (calm) and *a* (elegance), which were emphasized by critics in the early seventeenth century. In other words, the early seventeenth century critics, who accepted both the Song and Tang styles and tried to construct desirable models for poems, had great influence on later critics, such as Hong Man-jong and Kim Chang-hyeop in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, in developing the discussion of ideal styles of poetry in a more profound and comprehensive way.

VI. Conclusion

The poetic works of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century were [examined as the](#) main objects of poetic criticism by [the](#) critics in the early seventeenth century. Therefore, the merits and limitations of Tang style poems in the mid-Joseon period, which resulted from criticism of the Song style and the Sarim poetic trend in early

Joseon, were analyzed. This eventually led the poetic circle of that time to provide an opportunity to suggest a new direction.

In order to achieve an optimum standard of poetry, it was necessary to eliminate the frail style of Late-Tang poetry. Therefore, critics in the early seventeenth century highly valued the High-Tang style with its quality of *chimchak* and the Song style with its qualities ~~with-of~~ seriousness and sturdy spirit. In other words, the view that the merits of the Song style should have been used to improve the Tang style newly appeared in ~~the~~ poetry criticism in the early seventeenth century. As another alternative for overcoming the Late-Tang style, which was considered too frail and delicate, the neo-Confucian poetic world related to the styles of "ease," "calm," and "elegance" with moderated emotions was again reconsidered.⁵

Finally, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, critics like Hong Man-jong and Kim Chang-hyeop discussed the limitations of Tang poetry and actively developed methods for overcoming them. This discussion could only be achieved in the self-reflective atmosphere that had already been created by critics in the early seventeenth century, when Tang poetry was prevalent. Therefore, the significance of these criticisms is recognized in literary history on the grounds that the foundation of the Tang-Song poetry argument in the eighteenth century had already been formed in the critical discussions of the early seventeenth century.

⁵ This paper focuses on the arguments of Heo Gyun, Yi Sugwang and Sin Heum, who are the authors of ~~main-the primary~~ *shihwa* collections in the early seventeenth century. However, Jang Yu (1587-1638)'s argument is also worth introducing in ~~order to~~ understanding the overall discussions of ~~in~~ the ideal poetic styles in the seventeenth century. Jang Yu basically tried to learn the beauty of the old style poetry through *Wenxuan*, which ~~had-was~~ published in Liang China (502-557). He thought that the old style poetry showed natural expression of emotion, which excluded over-manipulation of poetic words and was ~~close-similar~~ to Zhu Xi's poetics. Based on the study of ~~the~~ old style poetry, Jang Yu expanded his concern to ~~the poems-poetry~~ of the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties in China, which ~~made-allowed~~ him to build his own poetic world without being ~~bound-limited~~ by one or two poetic styles (Yi J. 2002, 486-494; Kim E. 2003, 202-210).

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Glossary

a 雅

Bohanjip 補閑集

Bongnyeongsa 福靈寺

Cheongchangyeondam 晴窓軟談

Cheonggang sihwa 清江詩話

chimchak 沈着

chimul 沈鬱

chungdam 冲澹

dam 淡

Dongin sihwa 東人詩話

eomjin 嚴縝

Guangling (Ch.) 廣陵

Gukjo sisan 國朝詩刪

Gwangjin 廣津

Gwangnaru 광나루

gyeonghan 勁悍

han 閑

hana 閑雅

handam 閑淡

hanmi 閑美

hanwon 閑遠

Huang Tingjian (Ch.) 黃庭堅

Jang Yu 張維

Jeho sihwa 霽湖詩話

Jiangxi (Ch.) 江西

Jibong yuseol 芝峰類說

Jiugao (Ch.) 九臯

Lianluo (Ch.) 濂洛

Li Bai (Ch.) 李白

Mandangpung 晚唐風

Ming (Ch.) 明

Pahanjip 破閑集

Seongdangpung 盛唐風

Seongsu sihwa 惺叟詩話

shihua (Ch.) ▶ *sihwa*

Shijing (Ch.) 詩經

sihwa 詩話

Su Dongpo (Ch.) 蘇東坡

Su Shi (Ch.) 蘇軾

Tu Fu (Ch.) 杜甫

Wang Shizhen (Ch.) 王世貞

Wei Yingwu (Ch.) 韋應物

Wenxuan (Ch.) 文選

Wulu (Mt.) (Ch.) 霧麗山

Yan Yu (Ch.) 嚴羽

Yeogong paeseol 櫟翁稗說

yeondam 淵澹

Zhu Xi (Ch.) 朱熹