

## Women on the Borders of the Ladies' Quarters and the Ginyeo House: The Mixed Self-Consciousness of Ginyeo in Late Joseon

Suh Ji-young

### Abstract

As both a government slave and an entertainer for the court and the upper class, the ginyeo was a liminal being who belonged neither to the cultural center nor the periphery. Besides serving the national interest with her artistic accomplishments as a yeoak (female court artist), her duties were to provide the men of the yangban (aristocratic) class with a medium of social life and sexual pleasure.

However, by the late Joseon period, the image of the chaste lady started to define the dominant representation of the ginyeo. "Virtuous ginyeo" who seemed to possess the self-consciousness of the yangban class began to appear. This chaste ginyeo has been admired as a paragon of Confucian virtue.

This new icon of the "virtuous ginyeo" not only shows that Confucian hegemony had spread to the sphere of everyday life, but also presents a sexual double standard for women of this social class. In particular, the mixed self-consciousness of "virtuous ginyeo" is a historical index of the liminality of the ginyeo maximized at the point where the formula of desire intersects the dual functioning of gender in Joseon society. Furthermore, the formation of the "virtuous ginyeo" in the late Joseon shows how female sexuality was reconstructed in the premodern social context.

**Keywords:** yeoak, liminality, sexuality, yeollyeo, romantic love, double standard, Kang Dam-un, "virtuous ginyeo," Jeon Bulgwan, Confucian ideology

Suh Ji-young (Seo, Ji-yeong) is currently a research professor at Institute of Korean Culture in Korea University. She received her Ph.D. in Modern Literature from Sogang University. Her publications include "Entertainment Customs and Female Sexuality in Colonial Korea: A Focus on Gisaeng and Café Waitresses" (2004). E-mail: sjy333@hotmail.com.

### The Ambiguity of the Ginyeo in the Joseon Period

The ginyeo in the Joseon period was a woman who fulfilled many functions in both official and unofficial spheres. Officially, she was a professional entertainer who worked as a court musician and dancer (yeoak),<sup>1</sup> while unofficially providing the men of the yangban class with private entertainment as a courtesan. She belonged to the lower strata of society as a government slave, but she had mastered the culture of the high class since she was a social construct developed and controlled in order to satisfy the cultural demands of the men of the ruling classes. These conditions of the ginyeo defined her liminal character as a peripheral woman who had limited access to the social and cultural center of the time. The oxymoronic epithets for ginyeo, such as *hae-eo-hwa* or "talking flower,"<sup>2</sup> "luxurious slave,"<sup>3</sup> and "noble head on a lowly body," suggest the nature of her particular social identity. Although she was utilized in both official and private spheres within the social system of the Joseon period, she remained the focus of criticism as one who practiced "unchaste sexuality and improper entertainment"<sup>4</sup> in official discourse such as *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty).

Research on the ginyeo must rely on discourses that "represented" her since she could not herself be the main actor in the production of discourse. However, when we call into question the fact that such discourse was mostly determined from the perspective of yangban men, we are first required to identify the web of representation (the ideology and desire of the representers) in order to examine ginyeo from all angles. Even when we focus on the few sources from

1. See "Yejeon" (Code of Rite) in *Gyeongguk daejeon* (National Code) (1986, 817). Yeoak was institutionalized in the Goryeo period. It refers to professional female singers and dancers trained by the government. *Gyeongguk daejeon* defines them as "a group of women who are in charge of singing and dancing during court ceremonies and parties."
2. Yi N. (1992, 104).
3. Kim (1966, 75).
4. Yi S. (1992, 104).

within which the voice of *ginyeo* can be directly heard, it is not easy to grasp her point of view, nor make out the contours of her desire. That is because her language and voice often conspire with the desire of the men of the *yangban* class by revealing her directivity to high-class culture, although her self-consciousness that conflicted with the society of the time can be glimpsed in fragments. In order to reveal the historicity of the *ginyeo*, it is necessary to analyze not only the material conditions surrounding the men of the *yangban* class, upon which she was dependent, but also the cultural conditions that required that she conspire with the dominant ideology for her survival as well as to gain the approval of the men in aristocratic class by imitating their language. This paper focuses in particular on the liminal position of the *ginyeo* in the late Joseon period, when she was forced to internalize the culture and language of the *yangban* men as Confucian ideology gained hegemony. In particular, while focusing on the form of love—which arose from the private relationship of the *ginyeo* with the men of the *yangban* class—as well as her fidelity, this paper tries to analyze the ways in which her self-consciousness became more and more contradictory as she became more interwoven into the dominant ideology of the late Joseon period. This is not only an exploration of the ways in which the antinomic identity of the *ginyeo* undergoes a change during the late Joseon period, but it is also a study that reveals the formula of desire in a Confucian society by tracing the application of eroticism and sexuality in the premodern society in which class, gender, and patriarchal norms intertwined.

### **The *Ginyeo* and Her Daughter on the Periphery of the Premodern Family System**

It is generally thought that Confucianism in the Joseon period required sexual abstinence. The image of *ginyeo* in various discourses during the Joseon period, as a woman who aroused the carnal desire of men of virtue, was the very model of negative womanhood. In particular, in many literary texts from the Joseon period, as well as

official documents such as *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty*, the *ginyeo* was depicted as a lewd woman or a femme fatale who caused the ruin of men. This image reflected the tactics of the *ginyeo*, who tried to use their sexuality to overturn power relationships with *yangban* men, but it can also be seen as a projection onto the *ginyeo* of the male fear of excessive sexual indulgence.<sup>5</sup> However, in fact, Confucianism did not consider human desire itself to be a sin. According to the *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean), it was excessive pleasure and the excessive manifestation of sexuality that Confucianism—which attached great importance to the middle path—was against.<sup>6</sup> Even though any private relationship between a *ginyeo* and a man of the *yangban* class was legally prohibited, it was usually tolerated as long as it did not exceed the boundaries of Confucian propriety. Behind the representation, however, it is worth paying attention to the historical meaning of the love relationship between the *ginyeo* and the men of the *yangban* class, while taking into account the life conditions of the *ginyeo* who were placed at the periphery of the family system in the Joseon period.

For the men of the *yangban* class, their relationship with *ginyeo* could be a form of romantic love, which was more than just a satisfaction of their sexual desire in the name of *pungnyu* (aesthetic enjoyment of nature) outside the family system. For the *ginyeo*, however, a relationship with a man of *yangban* class held a rather practical import. It was a way to find a material and emotional sponsor and a foothold upon which to raise her social standing if she succeeded in being accepted as a legal concubine, as well as part of her duty as a government slave. The customary private relationship offered the only way for her to change her social status as a slave of the government-operated *Ginyeo* House through the method of *daebi*

5. The constant condemnation of female sexuality in public discourse reflected the intent to control society at the time, which approved male erotic desire but cautioned against excessive sexuality that could threaten the identity of *yangban* men.

6. See Yi S. (2005, 168-186).

*jeongsok*.<sup>7</sup> Legally, a *ginyeo* was not allowed to marry or form a family of her own, but in reality, there were cases in which a *ginyeo* became a member of the family of a *yangban* as his concubine or bore the child of the man with whom she formed a private relationship while maintaining her position as a *ginyeo*.

In the latter case, the destiny of her daughter, who also had to grow up to be a *ginyeo*, shows the circumstances *ginyeo* faced as women at the periphery of the system. Except for the cases in which the *ginyeo* was emancipated by entering the family system as a concubine through *daebi jeongsok*, she was not protected by any law. This situation is reflected in a genre painting from the eighteenth or nineteenth century, depicting a daughter of a *ginyeo* who was abandoned by her father. In *Hongnu daeju* (Waiting for Liquor at the Bar) (figure 1) from *Hyewon jeonsincheop* (Album of Genre Paintings by Hye-



Fig. 1. *Hongnu daeju* (Waiting for Liquor at the Bar). Sin Yun-bok. Late 18th century.

7. *Daebi jeongsok* refers to a legitimate way to be liberated from slave status during the Joseon period. "Hyeongjeon" (Code of Punishment) in *Sokdaejeon* (Supplement to the Nation Code, 1746). In case of a female child born from between a *ginyeo* and a *yangban* man, the girl could escape the legal bondage of the lower status by having another female slave substituted for her. According to *jongmobeop* (matrilineal succession law), the daughters of *ginyeo* should become government slaves. As in *Chunhyangjeon*, however, Chunhyang is freed from *ginyeo* status through *daebi jeongsok* in contradiction to the rule of *jongmobeop* (Jo 2000, 34).



Fig. 2. *Gibangdo*. Yu Un-hong. Early 19th century.

won), a collection of paintings by Sin Yun-bok, a little girl is holding the hand of an innkeeper or a retired *ginyeo*. Also, in Yu Un-hong's *Gibangdo* (figure 2), a *ginyeo* is shown carrying a baby on her back.

Among the cases of *ginyeo* in provincial *ginyeo* houses having children, the story of Myeongseon, a *ginyeo* from Haeju, Hwangae-do province, appeared in the *Sosurok*, a collection of works by *ginyeo* from 1894. Myeongseon gave birth to a son and moved to the capital city when summoned by her child's *yangban* father. This is an historical example of a *ginyeo* who was able to enter the official family system, albeit as the mother of an illegitimate child.<sup>8</sup>

However, most of the *ginyeo* who had children but were not able to become concubines had to raise their children alone, without any legal or family protection. When a *ginyeo* gave birth to a daughter, she formed a household composed only of women. In the novel *Chunhyangjeon*, Chunhyang is the daughter of Wolmae, who belonged to the Namwon *Ginyeo* House.<sup>9</sup> Chunhyang's women-only household, consisting of her mother and herself, reflects the typical makeup of the single-parent families of retired *ginyeo* and their daughters. Kang Dam-un, a nineteenth-century *ginyeo* from Gimhae, Gyeongsang-do province, left behind a collection of her poems. In her

8. See Jung B. (2001, 151-198).

9. *Igobon Chunhyangjeon* (2001, 20-26).

poems, she described the actual condition of *ginyeo* families, including her own. Kang Dam-un was born in Pyeongan-do province and moved south to follow her mother, becoming a *ginyeo* in Gimhae. She lived with her mother until she was seventeen, when her mother passed away.<sup>10</sup> One of Kang's poems is an elegy for the deceased daughter of her fellow *ginyeo*, Chwihyang, who lived with her mother and daughter. In this elegy, there is a description of a scene in which Chwihyang's mother takes care of the little girl while Chwihyang is at work.<sup>11</sup>

Also, *Geumokchongbu*, a collection of poems by An Min-yeong (1816- ?), a distinguished poet from the nineteenth century, includes a poem about Samjeung, a retired *ginyeo* who ran an inn in front of the Haeju government office. When she was younger, she used to be loved by a local magistrate and gave birth to his daughter. However, he did not take her as his legal concubine, and she had to raise the daughter on her own.<sup>12</sup> Her daughter later grew up and followed the exact same path as Samjeung. When An met her, she was writing to her lover in illness. Seeing how Samjeung's daughter was romantically involved with a *yangban* man that she likely met at a banquet, just as her mother had done, it is evident that the *ginyeo* repeated the same fates, generation after generation.

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10. Kang Dam-un's poems appear in the collection *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, published in 2002. She was born on a military base in Pyeongan-do province, moved south to Gimhae county at the age of 8 with her mother and became a *ginyeo*. There, she met her lover, Chasan, when she was 15 years old, and lost her mother at age 17. She tells her personal history aforementioned in the poem, "Eokseok" 憶昔 (Recollecting the Past). Based on the fact that she was born on a military base and was raised by her mother, we can assume that her mother was a *ginyeo* as well.
11. "Dae chwihyang gongnyeo" in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*. Pak Young Min examined the poetic characteristics and the uneasy position of *ginyeo* in the Joseon period through analysis of *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*. See Park Y. (2003).
12. "No. 126" in *Geumokchongbu* (1855). The relation between An Min-yeong and the *ginyeo* Samjeung in *Geumokchongbu* was discussed in Shin Kyung-Sook's research (Shin 2004).

### The Antinomic Formation of the *Ginyeo's* Sexuality in the Late Joseon Period

In "Nujie" (Precepts for Women),<sup>13</sup> a section of *Nushishu* (Four Books on Women) from the Later Han period, Banzhao (48-117) writes that there are four virtues women should possess: First, not being too intelligent; second, not being too eloquent; third, not being too beautiful; and fourth, not being too dexterous.<sup>14</sup> Feminine virtue was complete when a woman who possessed these four virtues also controlled and suppressed her sexuality.<sup>15</sup> While a virtuous lady was required not to possess outstanding intelligence, nor a gift for social intercourse or even beauty, the *ginyeo* was expected to be gifted with all of these qualities.

Although they say a beauty pleases the eye/ Both autumn chrysanthemum and spring orchid have their own natures/ Wit and beauty should be combined/You shouldn't confuse the eyeball of a fish with a gem.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the importance of singing and dancing techniques as entertainers, *ginyeo* had to be able to arouse the desire of *yangban* men with her flowery accessories, enticing figure, witty eloquence, and art of social intercourse.<sup>17</sup> The arts and sexuality conveyed through the

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13. *Nushishu* (Four Books on Women), written by Wang Xiang (1662-1722) of the Qing dynasty, is a compilation of four books about appropriate female behavior. This was used as a textbook for women of noble families in the Joseon period.
14. "Nujie" in *Nushishu* (2002, 37-40).
15. "Yeobeom cheomnok" (Records on Women's Norm) in *Nushishu* (2002, 246-226). There might have been a gap between the approach to educating *yangban* women and its actual practice, but in the public sphere, the traits required of women from different classes, such as the women of noble family and *ginyeo*, were quite differently constructed.
16. 人言悅目即爲妹 秋菊春蘭藻鑑殊 不獨取才兼取色 却嫌魚目混明珠. Yi N. (1992, 176).
17. "Holding the colorful bridle on a fine horse/ Is her figure bewitching, ornamented with seven treasures?" (玲瓏玉鬚五花駒 七寶粧成艷態殊). "She turns her head hastily when she runs into a man/ And wins his heart with the smile on her face" (對人無語轉頭忙/ 淺笑輕嚙滿面粧). Yi N. (1992, 275-276).

body of *ginyeo* satisfied the erotic desires of *yangban* in a way that could not be obtained within the family system. Therefore, the *ginyeo* was required to master the language and aesthetic sense of *yangban* culture despite her actual lowest-class social standing. To achieve recognition as a *ginyeo*, she had to be talented at composing poems, painting, and/or calligraphy in addition to being beautiful and talented at singing and dancing. Moreover, she was also required to be equipped with a sense of humor, faith, and goodwill.<sup>18</sup> Famous *ginyeo* such as Hwang Jini and Maechang (1573-1610) from the early Joseon period, were a combination of artistic excellence, beauty, and sex appeal, all of which were officially forbidden to the ladies of the *yangban* class.

However, it is interesting to find that, in the late Joseon period, chastity became one of the marked traits that *ginyeo* were expected to have. Fidelity was not formerly requisite for *ginyeo*, even during the Goryeo period, though faithful *ginyeo* were always admired. Since the *ginyeo* were essentially a medium for stimulating the sexual desire of men of the *yangban* class outside the family system, she could not be expected to save herself for one specific man. However, the image of a *ginyeo* who guarded her chastity for her lover became a dominant motif in literary texts of the late Joseon period. Among these images, the ways in which *ginyeo* conducted their romantic relationships differed greatly from the *ginyeo* of previous generations. As the private possession of a *ginyeo* became increasingly more common during the late Joseon period, while producing a steady form of love relationships based on real emotional interchanges, *ginyeo* became romantic heroines boasting absolute purity.

As reflected in *Shijing* (the Book of Songs), the archetype of the ideal couple in Eastern tradition was that of a talented man with refined tastes and a “chaste and modest woman.” In the love stories of the early and middle Joseon period, these “chaste and modest women” were idealized as beautiful women of the *yangban* class

18. Yi N. (1992, 326- 349).

who were cultured and knowledgeable about classic literature.<sup>19</sup> However, in the late Joseon period, it was not the women of the *yangban* class but *ginyeo* who took the role of the “chaste and modest women.” The *ginyeo* shed their negative image as seductive and lewd women and were reborn as new women who possessed not only refined culture and talents but also the morals of the ladies of *yangban* class. The *ginyeo*'s pursuit of chastity resulted in producing a premodern form of romantic love, in which sexual passion was combined with emotional intimacy to form the foundation of a lasting relationship with a particular man of the *yangban* class. However, it is thought that when *ginyeo* was required to possess both “wit and beauty” and “chastity” simultaneously, cracks appeared in the patriarchal double standard which was asking women from different classes to possess different character traits. The reconstructed self-consciousness of the *ginyeo* at this time combined the previous *ginyeo* consciousness with that of *yangban* ladies in a way that revealed the antinomic and mixed nature of *ginyeo* identity. Some of the *ginyeo* even forgot their reason for being—that is, as an object of sexual desire enjoyed by the upper class male—by suppressing their sexuality. This point in history, when the image of the *ginyeo* was converted from that of a seductive “Eve” to a chaste “Maria” in the late Joseon period, deserves special attention from cultural historians.

### The Gap between Desire and Reality

The love and marriage of *ginyeo* Chunhyang and Yi Mong-ryong from the *yangban* class in *Chunhyangjeon*—a bestselling novel from the late Joseon period—represents the typical relationship between *ginyeo* and the men of the *yangban* class of the time. In this work,

19. Before the late Joseon dynasty, the typical heroines of romantic novels were beautiful ladies of the *yangban* class, as seen in *Geumo sinhwa* by Kim Si-seup (1435-1493) in the 15th century, *Gunmong* by Kim Man-jung (1637-1692), and *Jusaengjeon* by Kwon Pil (1569-1612) in the middle Joseon period.

Chunhyang becomes the paragon of a “virtuous *ginyeo*” at risk to her own life and especially her chastity, and has been interpreted in various ways. One interpretation is that her resistance to an unjust official to maintain her chastity represents the struggle against the degradation of the ruling class and a criticism of class conflict.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the chastity of Chunhyang was explained as the self-realization of a *ginyeo* who was trying to be a human being with self-respect and free will.<sup>21</sup> However, the previous studies that interpret Chunhyang as the soul of social justice or an independent individual with modern consciousness reflect the perspectives of interpreters who are seeking modernity through Chunhyang, neglecting the unstable condition of the *ginyeo*, who was not allowed to exist as a universal subject in premodern society. Therefore, the chastity of the *ginyeo*, however, should be more elaborately analyzed in the social context.

Though Chunhyang identified herself as a “lady of the boudoir” and tried to guard her chastity, she was still just a *ginyeo* who seduced a man of the *yangban* class at their first meeting by playing

20. *Chunhyangjeon* is a classic work in Korea that has been loved by the readers and critics since the late Joseon, resulting in hundreds of research papers. According to Jung Ha Young, who summarized previous studies on *Chunhyangjeon*, the main theme has been variously interpreted as Chunhyang’s chastity as a realization of Confucian virtues, the true love between Yi Mong-ryong and Chunhyang, Chunhyang’s resistance to the unrighteous official on behalf of the humble class. On the other hand, some papers focused on the overlapping of multilateral themes, such as Confucian chastity, the desire to raise one’s social status, desire for erotic love, and Chunhyang’s critical consciousness of social contradictions (Jung H. 1991, 77-93). This paper also tries to clarify the various thematic aspects in *Chunhyangjeon*, but reveals the *ginyeo*’s own perspective lurking behind the representation.

21. One influential perspective of the previous studies is to regard Chunhyang’s chastity as her independent choice reflecting the free will of modern individual, not the passive reception of the Confucian norm (Park H. H. 1985). However, I do not agree with the perspective that establishes *ginyeo* Chunhyang as a universal subject who keeps the self-respect with modern consciousness, neglecting the *ginyeo*’s unstable social ground and marginality, though evaluating her active agency against the obstacles. I am paying attention to the specific position of *ginyeo* and her composite image, showing the interface between positive engagement in romantic love and the strategy as the social other.

the coquette and received a written oath that he would not desert her.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the chastity she tried to protect was fundamentally different from that of the women of the noble class. Fidelity was originally a moral device for the upper class and was applied only to those women; it had a different meaning when it was applied to the *ginyeo* class. *Ginyeo*’s chastity was not an ideology but a means of survival. The maintenance of chastity was not just a discipline enforced by the men of the *yangban* class but a strategy for the *ginyeo* to overcome her social limitations by achieving love with a man of the *yangban* class.<sup>23</sup> Chunhyang was neither a voluntary subject nor a passive object. Rather, she was somewhere in between, trying to make the best of what she had acquired from the upper class culture. Chaste *ginyeo* is one construct of the complex desires of *ginyeo* who, on the one hand, conspired with the dominant ideology, and on the other, resisted authority, while finally grasping for a way to survive in the sociocultural hegemony of the *yangban* class.

In a fictional narrative like *Chunhyangjeon*, we can glimpse a sign of a crack in premodern Korean society’s formulation of desire, in which marriage was divided from sexual love by being political and class-exclusive.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the fact that a *ginyeo* was accepted as the object of a legal marriage—though only in the realm of fiction—presents another kind of desire of the time, which sought to bring the notion of erotic love and the family system together.<sup>25</sup>

22. In *Chunhyangjeon*, Chunhyang receives a *bulmanggi* (a written oath that he will not desert her) from Yi Mong-ryong on their first night together. This gesture was one convention that *ginyeo* demanded when beginning a private relationship with a man of the *yangban* class during the Joseon period.

23. Suh (2002).

24. Suh (2002, 314).

25. See Giddens (2001, 112) and Rath (1999, 158-193). Modern love, which originated in the West, can be found in the “romantic love” of 19th-century Europe, which combined sexual desire with the marriage system. In the European tradition before then, sexual love was not necessarily connected to marriage. The concept of “romantic love,” based on the moral sense of the new bourgeoisie, became the foundation of free marriages and modern monogamy. It was then disseminated throughout the world as the dominant form of love. This form of modern love

However, the narrative of Chunhyang, who overcame class difference through true love and became the lawful wife of her *yangban* lover, was only a romantic fantasy that was nearly impossible to see fulfilled in reality. Chunhyang was a fictional character who projected the desire of the people of that time, especially the men of the ruling class who wanted *ginyeo* to possess both “wit and beauty” and “chastity” simultaneously, while reflecting the desire of *ginyeo* who wanted to be part of the *yangban* family system by conspiring with the ideology of the ruling class. One is forced to ask, then, what was the actual state of love for the faithful *ginyeo* living during the late Joseon period?

According to *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un's collection of poems* describing her lifelong love for a man from the *yangban* class, soon after she fell in love with Chasan Baejeon (1843-1899) at the age of fifteen, she had to part from him. Thereafter, she spent all her time longing and waiting for him.<sup>26</sup> However, the voice in her love poems resembles that of ladies of the *yangban* class rather than that of a *ginyeo*. When her lover was leaving to fulfill his “lofty ambition” (to pass the civil service examination), she encouraged him, hiding her sadness, so he would not worry about her.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that the poem reflected her pragmatic desire as a *ginyeo* to benefit from her lover's social success. However, the fact that her love for him lasted a lifetime, despite the reality that he could visit her only intermittently, not to mention the fact that he could not save her from her lowly

appeared in Korea as the culture of the West was imported in the early 20th century. However, it is worth noting that the desire to combine love and marriage is already found in *Chunhyangjeon* of the late Joseon period.

26. Cited in the poem “Gamhoe” (Sentiment) in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip* (Collection of Kang Dam-un's Poems), 31.

27. Cited in the poem “Songsanrangbusi imgangbu byeol” 送山郎赴試 臨江賦別. *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip* 3. “Wind stirs the waves, The horse stopped at the riverbank./Do not worry if it will be a long separation/Achieve your dreams./Illness has turned me to skin and bones./ I dare not complain to you about my yearning./The scent of orchid and musk is everywhere./I wish the cinnamon tree would change color soon” (東風吹逆浪 立馬碧江憤// 莫愁成遠別 努力致青雲// 消瘦元因病 相思敢怨君// 不知蘭麝貴 要染桂枝薰). *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip* 36.

social state, suggests that her love reveals a part of *ginyeo's* self-consciousness that cannot be explained merely in terms of a pragmatic view.<sup>28</sup> The preface of her collection is filled with words of praise by many men of the *yangban* class. Their references to “bright and lucid poetic sentiment,”<sup>29</sup> “elegance marked with affection,”<sup>30</sup> and “graceful features”<sup>31</sup> must have been directed to the language of the *yangban* class that Kang Dam-un internalized. The cultural hegemony of the men of the *yangban* class operates through the language of the *ginyeo*, who aspires to the norms and aesthetics of high culture. It is depicted as her spontaneous choice, when in fact it is the result of her internalization of these norms.<sup>32</sup> However, as shown in Kang Dam-un's poems, the motives of a *ginyeo* who adopts the norms of the ladies of the *yangban* class are not perfectly homogeneous. Throughout her poems, a kind of obsessive will is shown, which is the result of the combination of her yearning for her lover, her long wait, her desire to endure for love, and her fear of losing love.

You are a tall banyan tree, and I am a pine/ Our branches will embrace each other for a hundred years/ I fear that an axe will come

28. “It has been a long time since I lost contact with him. But my love is still strong” (音書久斷情何極) From the poem, “Chuyagijangan” 秋夜寄長安, *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, 64; “I met a virtuous man when I was fifteen/ We made all the promises when we first made love/ Ill-fated is my life/ A lone goose looks back at her lover. . . . It is hard to back down on the promise/ The broken half of a mirror sticks to the other half as if waiting” (十五逢君子 結髮意纏綿// 那堪妾薄命 離鴻顧侶儔[...]) 折釵難孤約 半鏡合如期). From the poem “Eokseok” (憶昔), *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, 99.

29. “Jijaedang sogoseo” 只在堂小稿序 (Preface), in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*.

30. “Jijaedang gobal” 只在堂稿跋 (Postscript), in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*.

31. “Jijaedangsogo” 只在堂小稿 (Postscript), in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*.

32. At the same time that *yangban* men in the late Joseon had high regard for poems written by *ginyeo*, who were able to stimulate male sexual desire, they also expected *ginyeo* to write poems about staying faithful to lovers who left them, their endurance, and their aesthetic sense to express these things without being seductive (Park Y. 2003a, 337-348). Kang Dam-un's poems devoted to her lover, Chasan, are the latter type. However, this paper focuses on the double structure of *yangban* desire for *ginyeo*, and thus tries to actively read the contradictory reality of *ginyeo* and the social meaning of identity diffusion through Kang Dam-un's poems.

in search of wood / What will I do if it chops off the root of our love?

From "Giwon" (Sending a Letter off to a Far off Distance)<sup>33</sup>

Her envy and aspiration for beings that pair, symbolized by mandarin ducks, expands to other natural objects such as the banyan tree and eventually becomes a grudge. Kang Dam-un's ardent *Gyuwonga* (Song of the Balsam) reflects the pain of a *ginyeo* who has internalized the self-consciousness of the ladies from the *yangban* class and the contradictory structure of reality.<sup>34</sup> Thus, *ginyeo*'s liminality and the signs of her inner fissure, based on the discordance between her orientation toward the norms of the *yangban* class and her actual social status, are captured in her poems.

Unlike the realm of fiction, *ginyeo*—who were reborn as "chaste and modest women" by internalizing the norms of the ladies of the *yangban* class—were objects of consumption for surplus pleasure rather than potential marriage subjects. Although some *ginyeo*, such as *ginyeo* Myeongseon or Uncho,<sup>35</sup> were admitted into *yangban* families as concubines, most of their relationships with the men of the *yangban* class were impossible to sustain in reality.

Mt. Nam is overgrown with grass on "cold food day" / A woman is hurriedly hiking to the graves / There is nowhere I can lament / I shed my tears, following the other mourners.<sup>36</sup>

33. 郎作高榕妾女蘿 百年纏繞在枝柯 / 生來伯近搜林斧 割到情根奈爾何. *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, 56.

34. Phrases such as "Don't be born as a daughter of *ginyeo* / Be born as a virtuous man of a good family" (他生莫作娼家女 好向侯門做好男) reveal her direct rejection of the social existence of *ginyeo*. "Daechwi hyanggoknyeo" in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, 80. Thus, Kang Dam-un, who internalized the morals of the ladies of the *yangban* class, expresses signs of resentment and resistance to the constant exhortations to endure her fate.

35. Uncho was a great *ginyeo* poet from the Seongcheon Provincial *Ginyeo* House who also internalized the self-consciousness of *yangban* in the late Joseon. However, unlike Kang Dam-un, she became a concubine of Yeoncheon Kim I-yang (1755-1845), who was a powerful *yangban* in the early 19th century.

36. 南山寒食草離離 士女紛紛上塚時 / 儂向此中無哭處 隨人有淚一般悲. "Geumneung japsi" in *Jijaedang Kang Dam-un sijip*, 140.

The sorrow Kang Dam-un feels while watching the "cold food day" ceremony, which is conducted by other women who belong to the family structure, shows the reality of *ginyeo*, who are alienated at the periphery of the system. The falsity of her love, which cannot take true root, is in keeping with her existence, which lacks firm footing, neither on earth nor after death.

### The Rupture of the *Ginyeo*'s Consciousness and the Failure of Initiation: the Formation of the "Virtuous *Ginyeo*"

The form of love that the *ginyeo* embody, having learned the morals and aesthetics of *yangban* culture through constant association with the men of the class, reveals her double consciousness as both *ginyeo* and a lady of the nobility. In the case of *ginyeo* who adopted their paternal *yangban* lineage into their own class identities, their consciousness resulted in a confusedly mixed sense of identity that transcended their social positions. When the *ginyeo*'s consciousness completely transforms into that of a *yangban* lady, the "virtuous *ginyeo*" is born. The examples of Ki Gyeong-chun of the Yeongwol Provincial *Ginyeo* House in Gangwon-do province and Jeon Bulgwan of the Manpo Provincial *Ginyeo* House in the Gwanseo area (in northwestern Korea) are found among existing books about "virtuous *ginyeo*."<sup>37</sup> Both surrendered their chastity to the previous local government official out of love, and died for refusing to serve the needs of the new official in order to remain faithful. These *ginyeo* rejected their identity as *ginyeo* and claimed the chastity required of a lady from the *yangban* class.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth paying close attention to the fact that the process in

37. Hong (2002).

38. "Gyeongchun voluntarily guarded her chastity, knowing that a chaste woman does not serve two husbands. That is a difficult thing to do" (Hong 2002, 430). "Bulgwan's face and figure were quite beautiful, and she wouldn't even look at strange men because she was careful in her conduct" (Jeon 2002, 434).



which these two *ginyeo* were reborn as virtuous women after their deaths is primarily the product of the perspective and desire of the producers of the discourse itself. In particular, the case of Jeon Bulgwan, whose story has been transmitted through three forms of narrative—an epic, a biography, and *yadam* (unofficial version of an historical tale)—shows very well how her life and death were reconstructed according to Confucian ideology and were used for educational purposes.<sup>39</sup>

Jeon Bulgwan is Jeon *cheomsa*'s daughter. She served the former government official at the age of sixteen and stayed faithful to him thereafter. When the new official forced her to serve him, she got him drunk and escaped to Segeomjeong. There she jumped in the water and died.<sup>40</sup>

The story of Jeon Bulgwan recorded in *Ganggyebu eupji* (township annals of Ganggye) is assumed to be relatively close to historical fact. Based on this record, we can understand the characteristics of the other texts on Jeon Bulgwan written at different times by different writers. The additions and subtractions in each text and the variation on narrative styles reflect each writer's viewpoint and attitude toward Jeon Bulgwan. However, common among all the texts is the fact that Jeon Bulgwan was fathered by a man from the *yangban* class, and her paternal lineage therefore influenced the formation of her self-consciousness and was related to her death. For example, in Seong Hae-eung (1760-1830)'s epic poem, *Jeon Bulgwan haeng* (a verse on Jeon Bulgwan), she is tortured by the new official who forces her to serve him. Her maternal aunt advises her to accept the reality of being a *ginyeo* in order to survive. Thus, Jeon Bulgwan laments, "Why was I born with this bad fate/ To survive in this life, I would

39. Hwang Su-yeon (2002) analyzed the narratives related to Jeon Bulgwan and argued about her split consciousness. This paper questions the liminal state of Jeon Bulgwan's consciousness and ponders the meaning of her death.

40. *Ganggyebu eupji*, cited in Hwang (2002, 185).

live as an animal."<sup>41</sup> The fact that she believes that to fulfill her duty as a *ginyeo* means living like an animal demonstrates how her consciousness was more like that of a *yangban* than a *ginyeo*. This consciousness appears more clearly in *Jeon Bulgwan jeon* (Biography of Jeon Bulgwan) by Jeon U (1841-1922). In particular, a letter from her *jeokchinga*<sup>42</sup> was written in the voice of a *yangban*, suggesting that she die in order to preserve her chastity: "You are our own flesh and blood. If you misbehave, how can we treat you as our sister?"<sup>43</sup> This reveals that her paternal lineage had a great influence on her. Meanwhile, Jeon Bulgwan's story in the *yadam* defines her from the beginning as a member of the *yangban* class rather than as a *ginyeo*. This is clear from the title: *Jeon Bulgwan tusu bobanmaek* (Wherein Jeon Bulgwan jumped into the water to keep her *yangban* integrity).

"I am from a *yangban* family even though my father is a mere military man. Although I am a low-class woman, my root is *yangban*. I cannot disgrace my father. I would rather kill myself than stain the body my father gave me." Then, she wrote, using blood from her finger, "Jeon Bulgwan dies by jumping into the water," and jumped into the river.<sup>44</sup>

In this tale, the complicating motif, such as her love for and separation from the previous official and the tyranny of the new one, disappears. Jeon Bulgwan appears as one who refuses to serve the new official despite the fact that she is a *ginyeo*.

As the narratives proceed from an epic to a biography to *yadam*, the voice of *yangban* men intervenes more deeply in the development of the narrative; thus, it cannot be determined precisely whether Jeon Bulgwan's voice in these texts are actually her own or

41. Seong (1992, 192).

42. Although *jeokchinga* 嫡親家 means a relative of her father's lawful wife, it seems to refer in this text to Jeon Bulgwan's maternal aunt who raised her. Hwang, however, assumes that it indicates Jeon Bulgwan's paternal relative (Hwang 2002, 197).

43. Hong (2002, 435).

44. Yi and Jeong (2000, 211).

the voices of the producers of discourse. These texts reveal the desire of the producers of these narratives who negate the existence of Jeon Bulgwan as a *ginyeo*, transforming her instead into a lady of the *yangban* class in order to make her a perfect virtuous woman, concealing the internal disorder of Jeon Bulgwan, who was given no other choice.

The internal confusion of Jeon Bulgwan or her antinomic identity has not been given enough attention, either in the past, or in the present day. Her chastity and death were simply idealized by the literati of the time in order to strengthen the *yeollyeo bulgyeong ibu* (a chaste woman does not serve two men) ideology. Today, it is sometimes interpreted as her voluntary choice as a *ginyeo* who wanted to keep both her self-respect and pure love, while her desire for chastity was praised.<sup>45</sup> However, her ontological otherness has been overlooked while her death was charged with universal meanings such as chastity, faith, human dignity, love, and so on. It might be said that the glorification of the chaste *ginyeo* with universal virtues is the result of an interpretative fallacy that covers up the existential circumstances she faced, by removing the contradictory consciousness and the fragmented voices of the *ginyeo*. In *Chunhyangjeon*, the inconsistent images of Chunhyang who is both tempting and chaste are sutured and enjoyed in the space of fictional fantasy; nevertheless, the split consciousness and inscrutable death of Jeon Bulgwan remain inexplicable in history.

It might be more appropriate to read Jeon Bulgwan's death as the consequence of the identity diffusion of a *ginyeo* rather than as her tragic choice in support of Confucian morals or her noble love.<sup>46</sup>

45. Jin Jae Kyo views Jeon Bulgwan in Seong Hae-eung's *Jeon Bulgwan haeng* (A Verse on Jeon Bulgwan) as a woman prepared for death in order to preserve her noble love and human dignity. Jin argues that her death is not merely a way to guard her chastity for her lover, but is the self-awakening of a woman who wishes to live as an honorable human-being (Jin 2002, 195-197).

46. Hwang pays attention to the reality of Jeon Bulgwan's life by arguing that the reason for her death was the imbalance of her social position and her self-consciousness (Hwang 2002, 203).

She mistook her identity as that of a daughter of the *yangban* class, denying her status as a *ginyeo*. Although her name itself (Jeon Bulgwan, 全不關) implied her father's evasion of any paternal responsibility,<sup>47</sup> she found the root of her existence in a father who abandoned her. This confusion of self-identification becomes apparent when she rejects her duty as a *ginyeo* to serve the new official. Because she did not accept the duty that would guarantee her social existence, she had to make an extreme choice, which was death. Her death can be read as the failure of a *ginyeo*'s initiation, as she was unable to be admitted to a class whose culture she internalized; thus, she gave up on integrating into the society at all. This reveals, in an extreme form, the identity diffusion of a *ginyeo* and her liminality as the forever "other" woman. The "virtuous *ginyeo*" was neither a *ginyeo* nor a lady of the *yangban* class. She ironically demonstrated her liminal existence through her death.

## Conclusion

The desires of *yangban* who required *ginyeo* to simultaneously possess both the elements of sexual attraction and fidelity, along with those of the *ginyeo* who took up the cultural demands of the ruling class, resulted in numerous romantic relationships that combined erotic desire and emotional intimacy. However, these were surplus relationships whose value was not officially sanctioned within the social system or the dominant ideology of the time. Meanwhile, this form of love required the *ginyeo*, whose material and class backgrounds were inferior, to embody two contradictory languages: that of chastity and obscenity. Its consequence was a fissure in the *ginyeo*'s self-consciousness as well as that of the double operation of female sexuality in a premodern patriarchy. The birth of the "virtuous *ginyeo*" was the extreme consequence of the spread of Confucian

47. Yi and Jeong (2000, 210).

hegemony into the sphere of the everyday lives of all people in the late Joseon period, which ended up changing the topography of love that was once arranged differently depending on one's social standing.

As in the case of *Chunhyangjeon*, which shows how men's desires incorporated eroticism into the family system during the late Joseon era, the love relationship between *yangban* men and chaste *ginyeo* has been interpreted as a form of "universal love" in the discourses of the late Joseon period, disregarding the historical process that constructed it. However, this form of premodern love in the late Joseon period is merely one specific form of historical love based on the otherness of the *ginyeo* in terms of system and class within the relationships between herself and *yangban* men. Kang Dam-un's poems, filled with loneliness and remorse, contain the voice of an "other-ized" woman that could not be wholly sublimated into a universal concept of love. Moreover, the double structure of *ginyeo*'s self-consciousness and her disintegrated language produced "virtuous *ginyeo*" like Jeon Bulgwan, who refused to be integrated into society. Jeon Bulgwan is not just one exceptional *ginyeo*, but a symbolic example of *ginyeo* in the late Joseon period who spoke in mixed voices, confused by the disparity between "a noble head and a vulgar body." Behind the fact that the discourse of the period tried to utilize the existence of the "virtuous *ginyeo*," Jeon Bulgwan, as educational material for Confucian ideology, we can see the pleasure principle stratified and gendered in the late Joseon period. Finally, the formation of the "virtuous *ginyeo*" in the late Joseon indicates how female sexuality was reconstructed within the context of premodern patriarchy.

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## GLOSSARY

Chasan	此山	<i>Jeon Gwanbul tusu</i>	全關不投水
<i>Chunhyangjeon</i>	春香傳	<i>bobanmaek</i>	保班脈
<i>cheomsa</i>	僉使	<i>Jijaedang Kang Dam-un</i>	只在堂 姜澹雲
<i>daebi jeongsok</i>	代婢定屬	<i>sijip</i>	詩集
<i>Daechwihyang gongnyeo</i>	代翠香哭女	<i>jongmobeop</i>	從母法
Eokseok	憶昔	<i>Jusaengjeon</i>	周生傳
<i>gamhoe</i>	感懷	<b>Kang Dam-un</b>	姜澹雲
<i>Ganggyebu eupji</i>	江界府邑誌	<b>Maechang</b>	梅窓
<i>Geumo sinhwa</i>	金鰲神話	<b>Manpo</b>	滿浦
<i>Geumokchongbu</i>	金玉叢部	<i>Nujie</i> (Ch.)	女戒
<i>Geumneung japsi</i>	金陵雜詩	<i>Nushishu</i> (Ch.)	女四書
<i>Gibangdo</i>	妓房圖	<i>pungnyu</i>	風流
<i>ginyeo</i>	妓女	<b>Segeomjeong</b>	洗劍亭
Giwon	寄遠	<i>Shijing</i> (Ch.)	詩經
Gwanseo	關西	<i>Sokdaejeon</i>	續大典
<i>Gyuwonga</i>	閨怨歌	<b>Uncho</b>	雲楚
<i>hae-eo-hwa</i>	解語花	<i>yadam</i>	野談
<i>Hongnu daeju</i>	紅樓待酒	<b>Yangeuncheonmi</b>	揚隱闡微
<b>Hwang Jini</b>	黃眞伊	<i>yeoak</i>	女樂
<i>Hyewon jeonsincheop</i>	蕙園傳神帖	<i>yeollyeo bulgyeong ibu</i>	烈女不敬二部
<i>jeokchinga</i>	嫡親家	<i>Zhongyong</i> (Ch.)	中庸

(Ch.: Chinese; J.: Japanese)