

Representation Strategy and Subject Formation in *Hanjungnok*

YOO Jin Wol and LEE Hwa Hyung

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine how Lady Hyegyeng made use of a writing strategy in order to represent herself in her autobiography, Hanjungnok 閑中錄 (A Record of Sorrowful Days), as well as created her subject through it. Lady Hyegyeng employed her chosen strategies of seeking an approach compromising with men as well as choosing the morality of justice and rights in order to be accepted into the androcentric society to a certain extent. On the one hand, she adhered to her view, using representation strategy by referring to the trouble between her husband, Sado, the crown prince of the Joseon dynasty, and her father-in-law, King Yeongjo, as an unavoidable lunacy; on the other hand, she pursued political power by writing to resist suppressed reality. Therefore, it can be argued that Hanjungnok was written to achieve two purposes: intimation of the tragic event, the Incident of the Imo Year (1762), and acquirement of political authority. To this end, she utilized unified representation strategies combining femininity and masculinity. This article will demonstrate why a woman suppressed by traditional society denied the imposed silence and sought to write her autobiography.

Keywords: Lady Hyegyeng, *Hanjungnok*, autobiography, subject, representation strategy

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Introduction

Hanjungnok 閔中錄 (A Record of Sorrowful Days) was written by Lady Hyegyong, the wife of the Crown Prince Sado, between 1795 and 1806. This book is usually recognized as representative of court literature, along with *Gyechuk ilgi* 癸丑日記 (Diary of the Year Gyechuk) and *Inhyeon wanghujeon* 仁顯王后傳 (The Story of Queen Inhyeon), and one of the few works written by women in the Joseon period. Thus, *Hanjungnok* contains very unique elements as court literature and female literature, similar to the other two literary works indicated. Yet despite these similarities, *Hanjungnok* has distinctive features. Although no one knows who wrote *Gyechuk ilgi* or *Inhyeon wanghujeon*, the author of *Hanjungnok* was already well known when it was first published. *Hanjungnok* was written for the obvious purpose of capturing her personal experiences as well as public life at court. The writer's comprehensive view, which resulted in each chapter being a different genre, and her vivid description of the era enhance the value of this work. Since *Hanjungnok* incorporates traits of various genres, such as essay, autobiography, and political criticism, it is difficult to categorize it into a specific genre. Consequently, any study of it requires a creative approach.

From a historical perspective, given the fact that it is filled with details about royal life and etiquette to which common people are rarely privy, *Hanjungnok* possesses unparalleled literary as well as historical values. Lady Hyegyong effectively described her seventy years of turbulent court life after being chosen to be the crown princess at the age of ten. As a living witness to the reigns of three kings—Yeongjo, Jeongjo, and Sunjo—and as a woman writer, she provided in-depth explanations of the tension between Yeongjo and Crown Prince Sado through detailed psychological descriptions. *Hanjungnok* also includes a meticulously analyzed political situation of the time as well as a detailed explanation about the tragic accident referred to as the Incident of the Imo Year (1762), in which Yeongjo starved his son, Crown Prince Sado, to death by putting him into a rice bin for eight days. This incident was a real story that incorporated a dramatic

structure of tragic soap operas and, nowadays, many people read and accept it as a very interesting novel. Although political struggles between fathers and sons in courts have occurred repeatedly throughout human history, the Incident of the Imo Year is still considered a rare case in terms of its story structure and tragic ending.

Sometimes, women's writing is not developed based on a logical structure, but rather tends to be carried out via various flexible undertones that have plural meanings, colloquial languages, repeated and verbatim styles, and open-ended stories. Thus, women's narratives are presented through personal literature (e.g., a letter or diary) or by a set of unwritten stories (e.g., folktales, hard-luck stories, or daily affairs). Such writing styles can be regarded as a sort of strategy for surviving in the androcentric society, such as Joseon.

Previous studies of *Hanjungnok* have been conducted in various ways with considerable outcomes (Lee 2011, 253-254). Using a different approach from previous studies, the current study was carried out by focusing on its dramatic characteristic, story structure, and *dramatis personae*. By focusing on the accident, Incident of the Imo Year, *Hanjungnok* uses a more dramatic structure than any well-made fiction. Each character has a unique individuality that contributes to formulate the structure in many ways. In *Hanjungnok*, Crown Prince Sado was described as a tragic sacrificial victim while his father, Yeongjo, was a king suffering from psychological anxiety due to his inferiority complex about his mother's humble origin. Lady Hye-yeong herself was compared to Lady Seonhui, mother of Crown Prince Sado;¹ the former came from a noble family and was a political and strategic mother trying to protect her son whereas the latter, without any political assets, was a feeble individual who could not help her son, the prince. Lady Hye-yeong's son, Jeongjo, was described as a positive existence, finally achieving the principle of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis paradigm caused by the contradictory circumstances and characters.

1. She was the biological mother of Crown Prince Sado, but her official status was one of Yeongjo's concubines.

The study of *Hanjungnok* must begin by first deciding upon the text to use, for more than 20 versions have been passed down without an original one. Hence, the priority is to decide upon a text among those available and determine its genre, and many studies have been conducted on this issue thus far. Here, this current study adopts the study of Jung Byung Sul (2007), which compares and summarizes various previous versions, and will embrace his view on each volume's writing year and genre characteristic.

Hanjungnok consists of six volumes, with each volume having been completed during different periods—namely, 1795, 1802, 1805, and 1806. Lady Hyegyong sometimes had diverse views on even the same events according to the different political situations surrounding her, which explains why each volume was written for a different purpose.² Consequently, each volume is recognized as a different genre: essay (Chung 1988), novel (Lee and Baek 1981), and fiction (Y. Kim 1987). Likewise, one of the primary aims of this study is to identify *Hanjungnok's* genre; however, the different characteristics of each volume make it difficult to classify the work by a single genre. The first volume (1795) seems to be easily categorized as an autobiographical essay. The next two volumes (1802 and 1805), despite being filled with autobiographical elements related to the objective facts of Crown Prince Sado, are relatively complicated to be classified into only one genre. Whereas Lady Hyegyong's reconstructed narrative helps analyze the psychology of King Yeongjo and Crown Prince Sado, her personal feelings are strongly reflected in the narrative over the feud between father and son, resulting in fictional attributes. The last three volumes (1802 and 1806) are reminiscence essays that incorporate political contents for the purpose of repairing the reputation of her family. The study of *Hanjungnok*, therefore, has been largely conduct-

2. The two chapters written in 1802 and 1805 provided information on the Incident of the Imo Year to the new king, Sunjo. They have characteristics of both an autobiography and a novel. Another chapter in 1802 can be categorized as a political criticism or a memoir because the aim of it was to resist the political oppression of her family. Her supplementary writing for it was also conducted in 1806 (Jung 2010, 458).

ed based on genre analysis, with focuses on such aspects as the psychoanalytical approach, comparative studies, and political implications.

Yet *Hanjungnok* can be categorized as an autobiography since the author's life reminiscence is the main theme throughout the volumes. In particular, the main theme—reminiscing about her husband, Crown Prince Sado—allows it to be included in the genre of autobiography. For those women who lived in a traditional androcentric society, writing an autobiography played a key role in improving their status as well as constructing a subject. However, autobiography writing tends to recreate the author as a fictional “I” in the literature's social, historical, and linguistic context, creating discordance between the “I” in the real world and the “I” represented in the literature (Choi 2007, 183). In this sense, this article examines *Hanjungnok* in terms of forming women's subject and representing the self.

Writing an autobiography is basically grounded on a fantasy that the author can represent reality without distorting it (Choi 2007, 183-185). In other words, it is a fantasy to expect that a perfectly matched subject in the autobiography with the “I” in reality can be described. However, the primary factor dominating memory is in fact not an experience or an accident itself, but an imprinted feeling about what happened when something occurred. Such an imprinted effect reinterprets memory. The self in an autobiography is a self who is not only structured by sociopolitical ideology, but is also influenced by historical context around him or her at the time of writing. In this regard, the “I” in an autobiography is a product restructured by a dominant ideology in society. Regardless of what he/she really intends to do, the writer alters the “I” in the process of representation and, in turn, forms a new “I,” who is a bit different from the actual self. Thus, the narrator “I” in an autobiography is a very fictional subject in a linguistic context.

The current research considers autobiography to be a genre written by memories transformed under the influence of social, cultural, and historical ideology. The narrator “I” also refers to a more or less changed subject from the “I” in the real world. Indeed, even in acade-

mia, there seems to be no consensus as to why Lady Hyegyeong wrote *Hanjungnok*, which has resulted in questionable credibility of this book as a historical source. This problem also stems from the nature of an autobiography. Therefore, this article will determine the strategy Lady Hyegyeong chose in order to represent the “I” in her writing as well as examine what sort of subject she desired to construct through this representing strategy. As such, this study will help in understanding the meaning and nature of *Hanjungnok* in relation to how the female author, by expressing her own voice, tried to resist the traditional sociopolitical ideology forcing women into silence.

Meanings in Women’s Writing

Women’s writings were uncommon in the Joseon society dominated by Confucian norms. Writing is a unique work of expressing *intellectus* and *affectus* related to a specific issue. However, women were not allowed to write because society did not regard them as intellectual subjects. Only males were able to be independent subjects in the matters of preparing guidance for life and putting it into practice. In contrast, females were rarely considered as subjects because their social roles, wills, and even lives were strongly subordinate to men according to the patriarchal Confucian norms. Lady Hyegyeong wrote *Hanjungnok* under these circumstances. Since being chosen as the crown princess at the age of ten, her life at the royal court had all the makings of a tragedy: her first son, Uiso, died at a young age; she witnessed her husband’s horrendous death in a rice bin; her second son, Jeongjo, who was her only mainstay, was legally adopted by Crown Prince Hyojang, who died long before Sado’s death. The position of the crown princess in the premodern era, in which a king had absolute power, could have guaranteed her a rosy future if her husband had become king. Although a queen was the highest position a woman could reach at that time, Lady Hyegyeong lived with the status of crown princess until she died at the age of 71.

In fact, *Hanjungnok* deals with common human issues, such as

family problems, political struggles, and natural human desires. Because this work is filled with *dramatis personae*, incorporating unique individuality as well as dramatic elements, it has been dramatized in various forms, including theatre, film, soap opera, and musical.³ Margaret Drabble, an English writer, confessed in the prologue to her novel, *The Red Queen* (2004), that it was inspired by *Hanjungnok*'s English version, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong* (1996). She writes movingly and with much respect towards Lady Hyegyong after having read the book:

What struck me most forcibly about the memoirs, when I first read them, was the sense of the clarity of the individual self, speaking clearly and directly and personally, across space, time and culture. This seemed even stranger to me than the sensational nature of the events described, and made me ask myself questions about our modern (and postmodern) doubts about universalism and essentialism (Drabble 2004, xi).

Drabble is surprised by the female narrative's power and its literary value, highlighting a Korean woman's issues as still having strong relevance to a modern English woman. The exploration of common human themes such as family problems, power struggles, and natural human desires in *Hanjungnok* reflects Lady Hyegyong's vicissitudinary life and high literary worth, leading Drabble to note *Hanjungnok*'s modernity "across space, time and culture." As a result, *Hanjungnok* is a rich repository of cultural contents with regards to its numerous elements to be adapted into various genres.

In particular, Lady Hyegyong tried to access an area in which women were not allowed. Writing about her 60 years of private life at

3. In 1956, *Sado Seja* (literally, Crown Prince Sado) was made into a film, and writers Oh Tae-Seok and Baek Ha-Ryong adapted it for the theatre as *Buja yuchin* 父子有親 (meaning "Intimacy should exist between father and son") in 1987 and *Hanjungnok* in 2011, respectively. A variety of soap opera versions have been produced on various television channels as well, with Shin Bong-Seung's "*Hanjungnok*" (1988-1989) being the most famous. Many historical dramas, such as "*Isan*" (2007-2008) have also dealt partly with *Hanjungnok*.

the royal court went against the general trend in that women's silence was considered one of their foremost virtues. In addition, writing led her to establish her subject. Women's writing was a way to gratify their desires against their marginal existence in the androcentric society. Furthermore, the genre of autobiography provided Lady Hye-gyeong with a crucial political power. Taking gender into account, despite her royal status, writing an autobiography serves as a strong political meaning in terms of a method of testimony (Anderson 2001, 104). It enabled her to stand up to social suppressions. The book also materialized her long aspirations of regaining the impaired reputation of her family. *Hanjungnok* played a major role in rehabilitating her family's honor, with a strong assertion that the Hongs were an innocent political party that was not involved in Crown Prince Sado's death. This book also helped to elevate the official royal status of Lady Hyegyong to that of Queen Gyeongui in the late nineteenth century. Finally, this book has important historical literary meanings, being a rare written example by a woman in the Joseon period; as such, it has not only artistic significance, but also abundant social, cultural, and historical elements for research.

For women, writing is a way of expressing their ideas and feelings that enable them to stand up against oppressive reality, which tends to force women into silence. It, thus, makes them feel like independent subjects. By recording her fluctuating lifetime, Lady Hyegyong could clarify her life's meanings.

Representation Strategies

Autobiography is a recollection of one's life recorded by that person, but it is not possible to include only facts in it. Regardless of the individual's intentions, all events and accidents—namely, facts—that occurred around the author are inevitably altered when he or she puts them into writing. The course of representation is influenced not by the fact itself, but by the personal feeling and impression over it. A fact can be transformed into fiction in this course. Furthermore,

over time, a fact is more strongly embellished by emotional transition and the writer's circumstance. Given this, an autobiography's value as a historical source is suspect. Yet, *Hanjungnok* was not only a recording of Lady Hyegyeong's memories, but it also referred to various other texts, from official documents to personal letters.⁴ She could not write about the still sensitive political events of her time by exclusively relying on her memory and without referencing other texts. These other texts, which were usually written by men, also influenced Lady Hyegyeong's writing style in a way of adding masculine elements into *Hanjungnok*.

Lady Hyegyeong employed several representation strategies in *Hanjungnok*. First, she sought a way of compromising with men; though being a member of the royal family, she was still a woman repressed in an androcentric society. She intentionally revealed the motivation of her writing so that it could be embraced by society to some extent. At the beginning of the book, she clearly states that she began to write at the request of a man:

My oldest nephew, Suyŏng, regretted this and repeatedly urged me, "We have none of Your Ladyship's writings in our house. If Your Ladyship could write something for us, then we would treasure and transmit it to the family" (Lady Hyegyeong [1795-1806] 1996, 49).

As a result, *Hanjungnok* contains both feminine and masculine writing styles in a jumbled manner. Lady Hyegyeong did not rely exclusively on her memory; she followed an exact timeline by referring to other documents, which offered the autobiography a logical narrative

4. *Joseon wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty) and *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記 (Diary of the Royal Secretariat) are well known as the official national archives in the Joseon period. *Ilseongnok* 日省錄 (Records of Daily Reflections) is also considered to be important as official records of the king's personal affairs. The dynasty's government organizations also left many archives, such as *Bibyeonsa deungnok* 備邊司謄錄 (Records of the Border Defense Council), *Jeongaeksa ilgi* 典客司日記 (The Diary of Foreign Affairs), and *Uigeumbu deungnok* 義禁府謄錄 (Records of the State Tribunal). In addition, many intellectuals published their personal written works (Park, Lee, and Choi 2009, 25).

based on a masculine writing style. The timeline of the main events and accidents in *Hanjungnok* is perfectly matched with the official historical records. Meanwhile, it includes emotional, subjective, personal, and defensive narratives—namely, a feminine writing style. She benevolently describes her family, from her father to even distant relatives, as having highly respected personalities. Although she warmly describes her servants as well, she did not conceal her hostility and anger against opposing groups who engaged in her family's downfall. For example, although she did not use their official titles, she described them in a belittling manner. The use of both masculine and feminine writing styles is reflected in the then-current social circumstance in which women were suppressed, irrespective of rank. In other words, it shows her marginal position as a woman.

Furthermore, Lady Hyegyeong followed in her writing the principle of the morality of justice and rights adhered to in the masculine society. Carol Gilligan (1979, 442) argues that two types of morality influence men's and women's decision making in different ways: the morality of justice and rights and the morality of caring and responsibility. The development of males' moral conception is based on the former, as men consider individual rights and rules as the most valuable factor in morality. This focuses more on separate and autonomous individuals than relations and relationships. On the other hand, the development of women's morality is based on a caring nature and compassionate relationships. The two stories in the Bible—Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac and the Judgment of Solomon—help illustrate the nature of each morality. Abraham tried to sacrifice his son because of his absolute faith; the real mother in Solomon's court chose a way to save her child by abandoning the truth. For the mother, the baby is the one providing the primary standard of value.

Yeongjo deemed his son, Crown Prince Sado, to be inappropriate as the future king of Joseon due to his psychological problem. The king's concern was not his personal relationships based on love and pity, but whether his successor could govern the kingdom made up of complicated political units. However, the decisive moment in the prince's death began with Na Gyeong-eon's report listing ten of the

crown prince's misdeeds in 1672. In light of Na Gyeong-eon's lower social status—*jungin* 中人, the petite bourgeoisie of the Joseon period—his report could have been ignored at court. Nevertheless, the report instigated by the Noron 老論 (Old Doctrine) faction, which was the ruling party having an oppositional political stance against the prince, played a vital role in interrogating him. Given the fact that a trifling report led to the direct interrogation of the crown prince without any consideration of his psychologically complex circumstances, clearly, Crown Prince Sado endured a vulnerable and isolated political status at court.

In *Hanjungnok*, Crown Prince Sado is presented as a protagonist as well as a tragic sacrificial victim. He suffered the torment of his bad relations with his father, Yeongjo, during his short twenty-seven years of life. Taking into account what he had really done, he received an extraordinarily heavy punishment from the king—the death penalty. His tragic destiny is similar to that of the mythical Greek king, Oedipus. Like Oedipus, Crown Prince Sado tried to free himself from his cursed destiny. Only after embracing punishment—poking his eyes out—was Oedipus eventually freed from his destiny. Like Oedipus, Crown Prince Sado wandered through the difficulties around him and, eventually, expiated himself with death. His death in a small rice bin seems to be similar to Oedipus' journey as a blind man. Oedipus' sin against heaven parallels that of Crown Prince Sado's inability to satisfy his father's expectation; and they both took extreme measures to resolve their relationship with their fathers.

The protagonist in a tragedy tends to sacrifice him- or herself in order to release curses or remove evils, but this behavior enables him or her to live on in spite of the physical death. In terms of the theater's religious element, the tragic protagonist can be a typical scapegoat. Crown Prince Sado's death, despite his positive aspects such as political capability, personal magnetism, and the will to live, was caused by the sole reason that he was not good enough to be the future king in his father's view. Thus, his downfall not only enables us to feel sympathy for his tragic destiny compared to what he had really done, but also sounds an alarm in that we could commit the

same errors as he did; we can identify ourselves with him as well as feel catharsis from his tragic story.

Against this backdrop, Lady Hyegyong's obedience to her father-in-law's decision should be criticized in that her real purpose must not have been to save the crown prince, but to follow her family's political stance. However, her decision was strategic. Her rational choice to abandon marital fidelity is closer to the morality of justice and rights, which can be recognized as a masculine characteristic according to Gilligan's definition. It is also evident in Lady Hyegyong's writing.

However, the fundamental reason behind Lady Hyegyong's masculine characteristic stemmed from her public life. What she wanted was not the ordinary life of a woman as a daughter, wife, and mother; rather, she looked forward to living a public life as a crown princess and the future king's mother. As she valued public life, she chose the masculine morality. This tendency continued until she began to write, which is why Lady Hyegyong is still regarded as cold-hearted, especially by those expecting her to have feminine values and the morality of caring and responsibility.

Furthermore, the aim of Lady Hyegyong's writing was to pursue political power through the truth. Her endeavor to illuminate the course of the Incident of the Imo Year can be considered a resistance against the political persecution of her family, the Hongs, which led her to take a political position on the issue. It also provided a new political impact on the current discourse, which blamed the Hongs for the crown prince's death (Ramazanoglu 1997, 38). As the following passages capture, Lady Hyegyong considered herself to be the only one who knew what happened and insisted on the power of authority over the truth:

If one understands this basic principle, it is not too difficult to be just to all concerned (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 243).

If I do not record events as they occurred, there is no way in which he will come to know of them sufficiently (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 198).

If he were, someday, to realize the sadness of my life and the unjustness of my family's plight, and if he were to appease my thirty years of accumulated bitterness, my departed soul would be able to meet with the late King in the netherworld; mother and son would console each other on our great good fortune in having a virtuous son and a godly grandson who has fulfilled our lifelong desire (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 198).

Her higher status at the royal court allowed her to claim authority over the truth. In fact, few official records of the Incident of the Imo Year exist. Most records on this issue were erased, even in the *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 承政院日記 (Diary of the Royal Secretariat), an official diary of the king's daily affairs written during the Joseon period (Park, Lee, and Choi 2009, 289). In this sense, *Hanjungnok* reinforced its authority as a historical source.

Yet such authority needed approval from the androcentric society. Lady Hyegyong hoped Sunjo could comprehend the meaning of *Hanjungnok*—namely, restoring the impaired reputation of her family. The book's authority could only be granted by His Majesty Sunjo. Without men's approval, her book might have been considered simply as an old woman's grumbling. This shows Lady Hyegyong's contradictory social status: an elder in the royal court, but still a woman with marginal existence.

Finally, Lady Hyegyong psychologically analyzed the bitter conflict between Yeongjo and Sado.

It is true that, in the early days, His Late Majesty was not as loving of his son as he could have been, but in the end, he was left with no choice but to do as he did. As for Prince Sado, though his extraordinarily generous and benevolent nature was admirable, he became hopelessly ill, and because the nation hung in the balance, he suffered that terrible end (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 242).

When he was not suffering from illness, he was benevolent, filial, clearheaded, and mature; indeed, he left nothing to be desired. As soon as that illness got hold of him, however, he was utterly trans-

formed, so different in fact that one could hardly believe that he was the same person (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 265).

In that month, Prince Sado began to kill (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 282).

It is just so grievous that, since His Majesty did not grasp his son's illness, he attributed all to unfiliality (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 326).

The Incident of the Imo Year might be considered a wretched incident in that it is difficult to find past examples of such a punishment even among severe power struggles in royal courts. However, Lady Hyegyong maintained an analytical and objective writing style in her description, although she included some sympathy and pity about the incident. Like a psychologist, she analyzed their suppressed and complex lunacy. The fact that she was able to observe them since the age of ten further helps establish the book's trustworthiness. Although Lady Hyegyong was the only one who understood the father and the son, she did not have the ability to mend their relationship. Thus, her response to the struggle was to accept it as an inevitable fact of life. Regardless of who they were, everyone engaged in the incident had a weakened and impotent existence.

Lunacy tends to appear from a human being's weakness, and it may appear in a variety of forms, like ambition or fantasy. As it is somewhat difficult to achieve our ambitions in everyday life, most people develop simple fantasies. But if people cannot separate their ambitions from fantasy, it tends to result in lunacy. Yeongjo's lunacy led him not to accept his son, who wished for his father's warm love, and ultimately drove him to put his son to death. Crown Prince Sado was also a victim as he had continuously suffered persecution from his father. His lunacy resulted from his despair triggered by his father's rage. However, peace is ironically another aspect of lunacy. Since peace is already inherent in lunacy, once the lunacy intensifies to the point of collapse, it naturally turns into peace (Foucault 1999, 56). After the Incident of the Imo Year, the political situation was stabilized. Sado's son replaced Sado and became the new crown prince,

and Yeongjo accepted the new successor gladly.

Lady Hyegyeong stated that the accident only triggered the course of lunacy. She hoped *Hanjungnok* would play a crucial role in remedying the wrong political discourse over the issue. By emphasizing lunacy as the essence of tragedy, she showed a strong resolve not to distort the truth and, therefore, the aim of her writing was to prevent its political abuse.

Subject Formation

In 1744, at the age of ten, Lady Hyegyeong went to the royal court as the crown princess, but her status never changed until her death in 1815. She died as a crown princess, although she technically could have reached the highest position of *naemyeongbu* 內命婦 (“court ladies with official ranks”). Even her official title in the Hongs’ genealogical record is simply “the second daughter.” Given that having an exclusive name makes a discourse (Butler 2003, 230), her title confirms Lady Hyegyeong’s pathetic status.

Three subjects refer to Lady Hyegyeong in *Hanjungnok*: the existential self in the history, the narrator, and the “I” reformed through her writing. An author who writes an autobiography always tries to regard the narrator in the same light as the existential self in the text, but it is extraordinarily difficult to do so, in fact. In an autobiography, the pronoun “I” does not refer to the existential self, but a signifier for convenience sake in the linguistic context. In other words, the signifier “I” only defines the subject as having limited characteristics in a specific context of the autobiography (Choi 2007, 187).

An autobiography contains an author’s personal purpose to acquire any meaningful outcome through the way in which the self is represented in the text. A subject represented in an autobiography is a metaphorical one from the existential self; the same is true of the world represented. The story in an autobiography, albeit based on the truth, is a story metaphorically reconstructed; thus, it is somewhat far from the truth (Choi 2007, 188-189). Moreover, when a woman is the

subject, it has another aspect, and there can be dual metaphors. Whereas males are usually simple and unified subjects in narratives, females are outsiders even in their own stories. Reflecting their marginal, segmented existence in society, women have not only been nonindependent subjects, but also subordinate ones in phallogentric languages. Nevertheless, Lady Hyegyong tried to overcome these limitations.

As an elder at the royal court, Lady Hyegyong tried to write down the historical accident in a fair manner to acquire the authority of truth as well as to position herself in the political discourse. She was well aware of what had happened at the palace as she had spent 71 years living there. Her status—daughter-in-law of Yeongjo, mother of Jeongjo, and grandmother of Sunjo—enabled her to be closely familiar with royal family secrets. When she started writing *Hanjungnok*, she was already the eldest among the royal family, which enabled her to openly criticize everyone's faults, including even Yeongjo's temperamental characteristic and the eccentricities of her late husband, Crown Prince Sado.

However, the strength of the book also stems from her referencing other various sources. Although Lady Hyegyong knew much more about royal affairs than others, *Hanjungnok* was not written based only on her memories. This vested her book with a great historical value. The historical creditability of the book offered her the political authority that an elder could possess. Females, who had been discriminated against both socially and politically, could not carve out a destiny as independent subjects. In this regard, her effort towards an existence with political power in the real world through her writing warrants further attention.

In addition, Lady Hyegyong wanted to be a practical subject accepting the then-prevalent ideology, Confucianism, which emphasizes four norms: royalty (*chung* 忠), filial duty (*hyo* 孝), virtuousness (*yeol* 烈), and benevolence (*ja* 慈). In the following passage, she laments that she could not fulfill these norms:

Then I lost my son. Soon afterwards, I let my guiltless brother meet

that cruel end. Thus I have become one who failed in loyalty [to my husband], affection [to my son], filial piety [to my father], and sisterhood [to my brother]. With what face can I remain in this world for even one more days? (Lady Hyegyyeong [1795-1806] 1996, 199)

Although she blamed herself because she could not be an ideal woman conforming to the Confucian norms, her words in the following quote show that she did all she could to follow the four norms:

The illness [of Prince Sado] reached such a point that the safety of His Late Majesty's person and the dynasty hung in the balance. Though immensely grieved and pained, His Majesty had no choice but to resort to that act (Lady Hyegyyeong [1795-1806] 1996, 335).

Just like Louis XIV of France, who used to say, “L'état, c'est moi” (I am the state), Joseon kings identified themselves with their kingdom. Therefore, it was Lady Hyegyyeong's royalty that caused her to follow Yeongjo's will by abandoning her husband. Moreover, the aim of two chapters in *Hanjungnok*—namely, *Euphyeollok* 泣血錄 (Records of Tears of Blood) and *Byeongin churok* 丙寅追錄 (Reminiscent Records of the Byeongin Year)—was to repair the reputation of her family, the Hongs, through her writing, which was forbidden for women at that time. This attests to her filial duty (*hyo* 孝). After being chosen as the crown princess, her family—who once lived in wealth and honor—ultimately met with disaster in the course of political struggles. She believed that her last assignment was to recover the Hongs' honor. Her virtuousness (*yeol* 烈) toward her husband is also well described in *Hanjungnok*. She had never been consumed with jealousy. Although she described her insensitivity towards the concubines and their children in *Hanjungnok*, which stemmed from her pride of being the only crown princess selected and having a much cleverer son than theirs, she, as a woman in a polygamous society, also accepted other royal concubines of the crown prince. Such tolerance was one of the virtues women were required to have at that time. Lady Hyegyyeong's virtuousness can also be seen in her efforts to maintain the honor of

Crown Prince Sado. She stressed the cause of his execution as being due not to his personality, but to his mental disease. After his death, she was reluctant to talk about it publicly and was mindful of upholding Sado's dignity.

As for Prince Sado, when he was his true self, he was deeply concerned lest he commit misconduct. Frustratingly, illness deprived him of Heaven's endowment; he did not know what he was doing. It was lamentable that he fell victim to that illness, but there is a saying that even a sage cannot escape illness. Under the circumstances, he cannot be charged with misconduct in the slightest degree (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 335).

Lastly, she fulfilled the norm of benevolence (*ja* 慈) through her son. After Lady Hyegyong heard her son had been officially appointed to take the place of the previous Crown Prince Hyojang, she had to suffer through the ordeal. Her father-in-law, Yeongjo, killed her husband and then made the decision to take her son away from her. She even thought about death, but kept control of her anger as she was determined to protect her son.

Without me, he would be even lonelier and more isolated. As the situation became more precarious, it grew ever more vitally important that I protect him. Having resolved not to kill myself, I consoled the Grand Heir (Lady Hyegyong [1795-1806] 1996, 333).

Given that women's life in the Joseon period relied on their male family members (i.e., father, husband, and son), she was a marginal person who could not insist on her own opinions. As a biological mother, all she could do was fulfill her benevolence toward her son.

By enthusiastically accepting and acting on the Confucian norms women needed to follow, Lady Hyegyong demonstrated an ideal model of a female in the Joseon period. What she followed was not the personal relationships (i.e., daughter, wife, mother), but the public life matched with her status as the crown princess. This enabled her to be a subject with dignity. Nonetheless, it was difficult for a

woman to be an independent subject in such circumstances strongly influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism discriminates against females as well as imposes vertical relationships in human society. In this sense, her representation strategy in her writing was conducted in the manner of keeping to Confucian values in order to be accepted in an androcentric society.

Finally, Lady Hyegyong's writing provided an opportunity for her to engage in introspection, which in turn helped form a strong woman subject. A woman's subject is only created in the course of awakening the self, who has unconditionally accepted the patriarchal social system, and resisting the system in its critical perception (S. Kim 2005, 96). The term "subject" usually means a male subject, but we can find various forms of a female subject in postmodern philosophy that accepts diversity. The subject is not an immovable concept with a monotone characteristic, but one containing plural meanings. Lady Hyegyong tried to illuminate the truth not only by criticizing selfish and indiscreet people around her, but also by maintaining a well-balanced view from the combined outcomes of referencing objective records and her lifetime experiences. Such a critical introspection made it possible for her to create a brave female figure who had lived in turbulent times. In other words, she succeeded in forming a desirable human character with a mature subject. The subject she ultimately represented was a woman, who overcame hardship and had political authority in the male-dominated field.

Conclusion

This article has examined how Lady Hyegyong made use of strategies in writing *Hanjungnok* as well as what sort of subject she hoped to create through it. Women lived a marginal existence and found it difficult to be an independent subject in the Joseon period, where Confucianism and patriarchy dominated. Thus, Lady Hyegyong sought a compromising approach with men and an appropriate principle—the morality of justice and rights, which men usually follow—in order to

be embraced in the androcentric society.

Two main purposes motivated Lady Hyegyeong in writing *Hanjungnok*. First, she sought to restore the impaired reputation of her family, the Honges. She sustained her psychological perspective regarding the struggle between her husband, Crown Prince Sado, and father-in-law, Yeongjo, as an avoidable affair triggered by lunacy. Thus, through her writing, she tried to show that her family was innocent in the Incident of the Imo Year. Second, what she desired from her writing was to acquire political power. Considering the social circumstances in which she lived, her gender was an obstacle in becoming an independent subject. Telling the truth from an elder's perspective finally enabled her to succeed in constructing a solid political arena in a masculine society.

Even though she could not escape a traditional woman's figure, Lady Hyegyeong's representation strategies enabled her to create an independent and strong subject by embracing the dominant masculine factors. As a result, she has attracted readers' attention beyond the temporal and spatial limitations; this is the primary reason why she is still accepted not only as a brave woman who overcame turbulent times, but also as a great author and artist.

Given that all relevant references to Crown Prince Sado were eliminated in the official archives during King Yeongjo's era, *Hanjungnok* and Jeongjo's "Hyeollyungwon jimun 顯隆園誌文" (Inscription at the Hyeollyungwon)—the inscription, carved in stone, at the monument of Crown Prince Sado—are the only existing pieces of work containing Sado's story. Thus, the importance of *Hanjungnok* as a historical archive cannot be overestimated. Despite various generic classifications of *Hanjungnok* in previous research, this study has referred to it as an autobiography to offer a new perspective for understanding *Hanjungnok*. A point to be duly considered in this stance is that, given that the "I" represented in an autobiography is a product restructured by a dominant ideology in society, the described subject cannot be wholly the same as the "I" in the real world.

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