

# Examining the *Alba* Literary Style in Korean Classical Poetry Based on a Comparative Analysis with Chinese Literature

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## Abstract

*This study analyzes the elements of the alba, a Western literary style, in Korean classical poetry and the tradition of the alba within the history of Korean literature. Alba appear commonly in the literature of various cultures, but the contrast of their expressions in Chinese and Korean literature is particularly revealing. Here, a comparative analysis of Korean and Chinese examples highlights the unique characteristics of Korean classical poetry, with its ample cultural heritage. The archetypal expression of alba in Chinese classical poetry first appeared in folk songs; alba were then incorporated in the literature written by Neo-Confucian literati (sadaebu), and they eventually disappeared from the Chinese tradition. However, analysis demonstrates that the conventions and implementation of alba are more clearly explored in Korean than in Chinese classical literature. Therefore, it will be important in future research to extend this approach to a comparative analysis between Korean and Western classical literature to rediscover the universality and individuality of Korean classical poetry.*

**Keywords:** *alba*, Korean classical poetry, Chinese literature, eroticism

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## Introduction

This study analyzes the elements of the *alba* style of Korean classical poetry and its tradition in the history of Korean literature. The term *alba* derives from the Latin term *albus*, meaning white light. *Alba* also means “dawn” in the French provincial dialect and indicates a group of works in Western literature that revolve around the subject of morning departure. These works are deemed to comprise an independent genre in Western scholarship, just as similar subject matter is found in the Korean and Chinese works examined herein. In his book, *The Medieval Erotic Alba: Structure as Meaning*, Jonathan Saville discusses the basic plot of the *alba*:

Two lovers, a knight and a highborn lady who is not the knight's wife, are lying in a bed in the lady's chamber, enjoying a night of ecstatic love-making. *Suddenly their joy is interrupted: the dawn, announced by the song of birds or by the voice of the castle watchman resounding from the ramparts, has come to put an end to the night of love.* The lovers, particularly the lady, protest. They berate the watchman, they curse the sun, they deny that day is really at hand. But in the end they must give way. With grief and tears at the separation, and with promises that they will soon meet again, they part; the knight goes off into the outer world; the lady remains behind, in anguish and longing (Saville 1972).<sup>1</sup>

This general plot appeared in southern France and was widely disseminated throughout all of Europe in the mid-twelfth century. Arthur T. Hatto (1965) has compiled *alba* from different parts of the world in his collective work, *EOS: An Enquiry into the Theme of Lovers' Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry*. In his translation of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes), Arthur Waley (1937) offers excellent examples of *alba* alongside nine pieces of Chinese poetry that range from selections from the *Shijing* to twentieth-century folk songs. In a similar vein, Kyojo Kawai (2005) has explored the pedigree of Chinese *alba*.

Subjects similar to those of the *alba* are also explored in Korean classi-

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1. The italics is my emphasis.

cal poetry. In this article, I will explore the convention of the *alba* in Korean classical poetry using the comparative method. As Saville (1972) explains, the birdsong that signifies the early morning is essential in confirming the presence of the *alba* style. As an obstacle to the lovers in *alba*, birdsong is a key component that represents the intensity of love and the despair resulting from separation. Therefore, I will focus on this obstacle, which simultaneously takes the role of emotional catalyst and characterizes the sadness of morning departure, both of which are fundamental characteristics of *alba*.

The universality of desire accounts for the popularity of this genre in classical poetry: the frustration of forbidden love and the separation that is its consequence evoke a strong feeling of sadness. Recognition of temporal and social limitations deepens the despair of the characters, and yet, concurrently, it spurs their desire to persist and to overcome the obstacles to their union. The perception of life and death is fundamentally continuous; as Frank Kermode said, “Men, like poets, rush ‘into the midst,’ *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. The end they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations” (Kermode 2000). Although they are well aware of death, which is inevitable, people always try to deny it in their basic conscious thoughts; hence, despair culminates when one is reminded of one’s limitations and bounds. Emotion reaches its peak particularly when despair is evoked by frustrated love; this saturated pathos is then poured into songs and writings. Therefore, the genre of *alba* was created in the early stages of human history. Regardless of its geographical bounds, its motifs have acquired a universal quality as they have been repeated in literature.

Features similar to those of *alba* are found in Chinese and Korean literature, although only a few of these works are still extant. This article will focus on the similarities and distinguishing characteristics found between Korean classical poetry and Chinese examples of *alba*.<sup>2</sup>

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2. This article is based on Kawai’s discussion of Chinese *alba*; hence, it is limited in its approach and analysis of Chinese examples. The Korean examples of *alba* and their comparative analysis are the focus of this article.

## The Quintessence of *Alba* in Chinese and Korean Classical Poetry

According to research by Kawai, a representative example found by Waley in the *Shijing* is as follows:

Woman says, it is time for the rooster to sing 女曰鷄鳴  
 Man says, it is merely dawn 士曰昧旦  
 Please get up and see if it is still night 子興視夜  
 The morning star is shining 明星有爛  
 Flying and leaping 將翱將翔  
 Catch the ducks and geese 弋鳧與雁

(“Nuyue jiming 女曰鷄鳴,” stanza 1)

Kawai distinguishes this piece from typical *alba* as describing fear in the morning; resentment and sorrow based on separation are not overtly expressed. According to his analysis, the following piece from the Six Dynasties period (220–589) represents the essence of *alba*, whereas the pieces in the *Shijing* lack the basic features of *alba*.

Thrash the crying rooster 打殺長鳴雞  
 Scare off the crow 彈去烏白鳥  
 May the night continue, may the morning never come 願得連冥不復曙  
 And may only one day of the year see the dawn 一年都一曉

(*Duqige* 讀曲歌 [Songs Read Aloud] 55)

As one of the 89 pieces in *Duqige*, written during the Wei kingdom (220–265), this poem is deemed to exemplify the *alba* style. The hyperbolic wish that the night would continue and the morning only come once a year mirrors the author’s earnest desire to preserve the lovers’ tryst.

This type of rhetoric is also found in “Shang ye 上邪” (By the Heavens Above),<sup>3</sup> a folk song of the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220); it displays

3. A similar rhetoric is also found in *Jeongseokka*, a *goryeo gayo* (Goryeo song). The narrator sets a hypothetical condition in an attempt to deny the lovers’ separation. It represents a universal notion in the folk song that is also shared by *alba* in medieval literature.

logic typical of that found in early Korean literature, in which emotional separation is postponed or denied by unrealistic hypotheses. By depicting the fundamental rejection of reality, this folk song shares the same logic as *alba*. The Korean model of *alba* is found in the folk songs from the time of the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392).

Place a mat on the ice, even if you and I freeze to death  
 Place a mat on the ice, even if you and I freeze to death  
 May this night we caress each other never end

(“Manjeonchun byeolsa 滿殿春別詞,” stanza 1)

In this first stanza of “Manjeonchun byeolsa,” carried in *Akjang gasa* 樂章歌詞, the author overtly states his rejection of the morning when the two lovers must leave each other. Bataille (2009) defines eroticism as “assenting to life up to the point of death.” In other words, people love each other so much that they may overcome the discontinuity of ephemeral human life. In this view, the lover is regarded as the only hero who can transcend the limits of human beings; he or she is acclaimed in this way until taken by death. The love expressed in “Manjeonchun byeolsa” represents a strong desire for continuity and a simultaneous fear of isolation, to the extent that the protagonist embraces death. This example from the Goryeo period embodies the essence of *alba* in that the temporal confinement of night escalates the emotional intensity, and in that it depicts both physical desire and its frustration. A different version of the same song, written in Chinese characters by a Korean author, shows the nature of *alba* even more explicitly (J. Lee 2002).

On the frozen ice of October 十月層冰上  
 We embrace each other on the freezing bamboo mat 寒凝竹葉栖  
 Even should I die with you now 與君寧凍死  
 May the rooster never cry 遮莫五更鷄

(Kim Su-on 金守溫, “Surakbusa 述樂府辭”)

When Kim Su-on (1410–1481) translated the first stanza of “Manjeonchun byeolsa” into Korean in the mid-fifteenth century, he added the key

notion of the rooster motif, in the phrase in which the protagonist wishes that the rooster would not cry in the morning and thus impose separation on the lovers. The poem should be considered a representative of *alba* in Korean classical poetry because it describes the recognition of transient happiness and the moment in which joy turns into sorrow, as suggested in Saville's (1972) definition of the *alba*. It is significant that the same *alba* style is found in Korean classical poetry as in Western and Chinese literature. As Saville (1972) points out, the significance of the *alba* style is that "[it] merely indicates that these poems have enough in common, in their structure, in their ideas, and in their relation to medieval culture in general, for it to be productive to treat them as a single genre" (Frentzel 1996). Hence, the *alba* style, as found in Korean classical poetry, displays sentiments that Saville (1972) described as universal in literature and culture.

## The History of *Alba* in Korean Classical poetry

### *Applications and Variations of Alba Motifs in Poems and Songs*

In Chinese classical poetry, the structure and subjects of *alba* devolved into mere mannerisms; as a result, the implication of their meaning contracted. Chinese writers often extended the application of "morning separation" to the subject of sorrow experienced by ladies, and expressed strong resentment towards romantic obstacles. "As in Western *alba*, the bird appears hostile towards the lovers. Chinese *alba* are divided into two types: that which expresses the lovers' wish to kill the bird that interferes with their affair and the other that describes hatred towards the bird that starts singing in the middle of the night" (Kawai 2005).

The motif of morning separation in Chinese classical poetry often appears in poems in which the speakers, who are wives, sing of the sorrow of separation from their husbands. As seen in the work of Han Wo 韓偓 (844–914?), a poet of the late Tang dynasty (618–907), *yanshi* 艷詩 (*yeomsi* in Korean), a genre of romantic poetry that was popular at that

time, embraced the motifs of the *alba*.<sup>4</sup>

Promised in the tulip bed last year 往年會約鬱金牀  
 You crept into my chamber in the middle of the night 半夜潛身入洞房  
 The golden bracelet fell unnoticed 懷裏不知金鈿落  
 Now I inhale the fragrance from the embroidery 暗中唯覺繡鞋香  
 The sorrow of separation breaks my heart 此時欲別魂俱斷  
 Seeing you again my eyes will light with madness 自後相逢眼更狂  
 Joy disappears, leaving only despair 光景旋消惆愴在  
 Only misery remains in my life 一生贏得是淒涼

(Han Wo, “Wugeng 五更”)

As suggested in its title translated as “Dawn,” the sorrow of the protagonist when her lover has to leave at dawn is illustrated in this piece. The motifs of *alba* are represented in the joy of the one-night stand and its “sudden” disappearance. Kawai (2005) points out this same aesthetic of shared experiences in a private space in a number of Chinese works. The legacy of this type of poetry, exclusive of that of poetry dealing with public spaces, which passed down through oral literature, was later inherited by Chinese literati. Analyzing “Wuyeti 烏夜啼,” written in the Six Dynasties period (220-589), Kawai also elucidates the motif of the “bad bird” that starts to caw in the middle of the night; this became a convention in songs of the period (Kawai 2005). The following piece, published in volume 47 of *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (The Poetry Collection of the Music Bureau), clearly illustrates Kawai’s observation.

Pitiful crow 可憐烏白鳥  
 Signaling the break of dawn 強言知天曙  
 Why do you start crying in the middle of night 無故三更啼  
 And let him leave in the dark 歡子冒闇去

(Anonymously, “Wuyeti 烏夜啼”)

4. *Xianglianti* (*hyangyeomche* 香奩體 in Korean) is a form of poetry invented by Han Wo and is distinctive in that it rhapsodizes about beautiful women. Romantic poems are also related to *xianglianti* in that they talk about cosmetics, women’s beauty, and love. In Korea, this type of poetry was written extensively between the reign of King Yeonsangun (r. 1494–1506) and the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592. The works of Im Jae 林悌 (1549–1587) exemplify this style.

The title “Wuyeti,” translated as “Midnight Song of the Crow,” suggests the time of night when the crow who, like the rooster, signifies the morning, cries well before the coming of the morning. The crow in this poem embodies the *alba* motif of the disturbance of the lovers’ affair. Since this song was included in the *Yuefu shiji*, the piece is assumed to have been created and shared by commoners. Compared to the *yanshi* style discussed previously, this piece likely enjoyed the broader appreciation of different classes.

As in the Chinese cases, Korean poetry also uses *alba* motifs in conventional ways. In Korean classical poetry, these motifs are integrated in a variety of genres. Examples of this are found in poems of the Goryeo period and in songs and poems inserted in the fictional biographies written around the fifteenth century, in the early Joseon dynasty (1392–1910).

The lamp lays its light on our faces at dawn 五更燈影照殘粧  
 My guts are torn apart at the farewell 欲語別離先斷腸  
 Entering the empty garden beneath the waning moon 落月半庭推戶出  
 Apricot blossoms hover about my clothes 杏花踈影滿衣裳  
 (Jeong Po 鄭誦, “Je yangju gaeksa byeok 題梁州客舍壁”)

My love is putting on his clothes 索索郎被衣  
 The rooster never stops, heedless of my curses 鷄鳴嗔不休  
 Caressing my belly before he leaves 去時摩儂腹  
 He asks if a baby is there 暗問懷子不  
 (No Geung 盧兢, “Jayagok 子夜曲”)

The first piece, included in volume 21 of *Dongmunseon* 東文選, was written for his lover by Jeong Po (1309–1345), a poet from the late Goryeo dynasty who was banished to the city of Ulsan in 1342. The sadness he feels when leaving his lover in the morning is compared to the pain of tearing out his guts. The phrase “apricot blossoms hover about my clothing” implies the desperation of his lover in trying to delay his departure by holding onto his clothing. An *alba* motif is employed in this piece: the morning is the time of separation and, paradoxically, is also the catalyst of the lovers’ frustrated desire. Because the *yanshi* poetry was the genre of

the nobility, the social class and educational level of the speaker would have been comparable to that seen in the protagonists of Chinese *yanshi* poetry.

The second piece, published in volume 6 of *Daedong siseon* 大東詩選, is a folk song created by No Geung (1738–1790) in the late Joseon dynasty. “Jayagok,” translated as “Song of Midnight,” derived from the forms of ancient songs but boldly illustrates erotic scenes. The author describes her lover’s departure after their nighttime affair. The rooster, which represents the sorrow of the protagonist, is the key component of the song. The phrase that says the protagonist is cursing the rooster implies the conventionalized usage of a derivative of an *alba* motif. This example is similar to those observed in Chinese poetry examples and is closely related to *sijo* 時調, the traditional three-verse Korean poems of the late Joseon dynasty. It is worth noting that derivations based on *alba* motifs in Korean classical poetry are found in *hansi* 漢詩 (verses written in Chinese characters) and songs from the early time of the Joseon dynasty.

I was wishing to see my love in my dreams. Why do those leaves swirling in the wind and bugs crying in the bush wake me from my dreams?

(Heo Nanseolheon 許蘭雪軒, “Gyuwonga 闍怨歌”)

Wandering up and down, I was put to sleep; in sincerity, I saw my love in my dreams. His lovely face became old. Tears, bursting forth, hold my tongue. So many words to say, not so long before the frivolous rooster wakes me from my dreams.

(Jeong Cheol 鄭澈, “Sok miingok 續美人曲”)

The first is part of the song “Gyuwonga” by Heo Nanseolheon (1563–1589), which is published in the *Gogeu gagok* 古今歌曲 (Ancient Songs). It describes the protagonist’s sincere wish to meet her missing love in her dreams. However, she experiences despair caused by the “leaves swirling in the wind and bugs crying in the bush” that disturb her sleep. It is assumed that the song is being sung in the early morning. The components of the song are derived from *alba* motifs in that nature plays the role of obstacle. Jeong Cheol (1536–1593) captured more apparent *alba* motifs in his poem

“Sok miingok,” included in the *Songgang gasa* 松江歌辭 (Anthology of Poetry by Songgang Jeong Cheol), in the form of the emotions the narrator experiences when she tries to talk to her lover in her dreams, and the rooster who wakes her up at this climactic moment, scattering her dreams just before she can open her mouth. She used the adjective “frivolous” to describe the rooster and her deep resentment towards him.

The rooster as an obstacle of love is a typical derivation from *alba* motifs and is consistently found in the songs of the Goryeo period, in *hansi* 漢詩 poetry, and in songs written in medieval Korean. It is also common in examples of *alba* from Western literature and in Korean works, such as the two discussed above, that the narrators are female. According to Kawai, the *Yingying chuan* 鶯鶯傳 (The Story of Yingying), the fictional biography written by Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), also describes the separation of lovers in the morning. In this story, Yingying sneaks into the room of Zhang Sheng, a young scholar; the two spend the night together. The next morning is described as follows:

The temple bell was ringing and broke the dawn. Hong Niang urged her to go home. Yingying was crying and begging but Hong Niang dragged her out.<sup>5</sup>

The maid, Hong Niang, is an intermediary between the lovers and also a chaperone who rushes Yingying back home. This protective role also plays an essential part in Western *alba* literature. “Chwiyu bubyekjeong gi 醉遊浮碧亭記” from *Geumo sinhwa* (New Stories from Mt. Geumo), the Korean fictional biography written by Kim Si-seup 金時習 (1435–1493), even more overtly illustrates *alba* motifs.

The love of cloud and rain shared in the tower is only a dream 雲雨陽臺  
一夢間

When can I see the bracelet again 何年重見玉簫環

Even the heartless river 江波縱是無情物

Cries for this separations on its banks 嗚咽哀鳴下別灣

(Kim Si-seup, “Chwiyu bubyekjeong gi”)

5. “有頃，寺鐘鳴，天將曉。紅娘促去，崔氏嬌啼宛轉，紅娘又捧之而去。”

After singing this poem, Hong Saeng quietly looks around. The temple bell from the mountain valley suddenly starts ringing and the rooster is crying in the nearby town.<sup>6</sup> Hong Saeng, the protagonist of the story, is left behind by his lover in the morning. The sorrow is heightened because at night they shared the “love of cloud and rain,” which is an idiom suggesting sexual union, and their reunion is not guaranteed, as evidenced by the phrase “when can I see the bracelet again,” with the bracelet symbolic of one’s exclusive and eternal love. The temple bell and the rooster suggest that the lovers are separated in the early morning. The piece contains conventional *alba* motifs including the temporal backdrop of dawn and the crowing of a rooster. In Korean classical literature, *alba* motifs have been absorbed in a variety of ways, as seen in the poems and prose in this work of fiction.

The motifs and philosophies of *alba* hold universal appeal to medieval Chinese and Koreans as a means to express their feelings through classical poetry. However, unlike in Chinese literature, the features indicative of *alba* in Korean literature can be traced back as far as the *sijo* style, created and appreciated during the late Joseon dynasty.

#### *Continuation and Variation of Alba Motifs and Sijo Style from the Late Joseon Dynasty*

After the Tang dynasty in China, when the scholar-nobility class came to dominate literature, the components of *alba* started to disappear from the mainstream: the love between two young lovers was only described in limited examples at that time. Chinese classical literature seems to be structured based on the Confucian ideology that ruled Chinese society. Although the Confucian ideology emphasized austerity, modesty, and restraint, desire in literature always existed despite the mainstream censorship. When it occasionally surfaced, works revealed the existence of this hidden subculture. Waley (1937) could find only one example of the *alba*

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6. “吟詠四盼，山寺鐘鳴，水村鷄唱” (Kim Si-seup, “Chwiyu bubyekjeong gi,” in *Geumo sin-hwa*).

written after the period of the Tang dynasty. Kawai (2005) agrees with him, assuming that after the Tang period *alba* became sequestered from the main literary culture.

Literature that expressed *alba* motifs could not appear overtly nor be referred to in documentation in Korea. Confucianism, firmly established in the Joseon period, forced all literature with erotic content to be censored. However, it is significant that unlike in China, where *alba* almost completely disappeared, *alba* themes were consistently recurrent in *sijo*-style poetry and in the prose of Korean classical literature. In other words, this literary trend of including *alba* themes was not completely suppressed by Confucian ideology in Korea, and was continuously pursued, as attested by the works of Korean classical poetry from that period. The subculture of expressing carnal desire persisted, outside Confucian control; evidence of this can be seen in the following three anonymous *sijo* pieces:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) May the rooster not crow the night I see my love  
Without your crow we don't know the morning is coming  
My heart is sunk by your crow at midnight
- (2) May the rooster not crow, give your cloth to mid-day  
May the morning not come I beg of the rooster  
The heartless dawn is breaking in the east
- (3) May the rooster not crow, don't boast of your early rise  
It is not Lord Mengchang trapped in Qin  
My lover has come, why not stay quiet today

These *sijo* pieces show conventional features of *alba*. They share the phrase "May the rooster not cry," and the wish that the night when the lovers see each other will continue forever. It is notable that the same phrase about the rooster is common among the pieces. Other sections of these poems, centered around this common phrase, show the variation

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7. Pieces of *sijo* and *saseol sijo* that can be defined as examples of *alba* are found in various collections, including *Gosijo daejeon* (Anthology of Ancient Korean *Sijo* Works).

that proves that the features of *alba* extended into a variety of works in the *sijo* style. The narrators in these works beg the rooster to be quiet, unlike the narrators of other poems, who blame or hate the rooster and the morning. This feature, which differs from those found in Chinese poems and songs, seems to have been established as the *alba* was passed down as a literary convention. The association between the rooster and the morning—that if the rooster does not cry, the morning will not come—was formed in Korean literature at this time; hence, it became more common to pray that a rooster would not crow than to blame it for bringing the dawn.

The conflict between the love in the inner world and the separation in the outer world, represented by night versus morning, described by Saville (1972) as a key feature of the *alba* style, is found equally in the three *sijo* examples above. Although its exact expression varies, it is common among these works that the morning, signified by the rooster, means separation and the cessation of love. “This is clear to us in the anguish we feel when we are violating the taboo, especially at that moment when our feelings hang in the balance, when the taboo still holds good and yet we are yielding to the impulsion it forbids” (Bataille 2009). Regardless of whether the taboo in these works is the affair or an ideology, what is significant is the positive attitude towards love and desire; the lovers attempt to harness their subconscious minds by believing that morning will not come unless the rooster crows and they may continue their union. These trends are found in the following *saseol sijo* 辭說時調—a looser and more narrative version of *sijo*—pieces.

(4) I have no enemy but dogs and roosters

You cry cock-a-doodle-doo, wake up my love sleeping in my arms,  
and send him away, you bark woof woof and growl at the door  
and scare off my love

I have to get rid of you before June and July

(5) Roosters and dogs are to be beaten to death among all the animals

You cry cock-a-doodle-doo, wake up my love sleeping in my arms  
and send him away, you bark woof woof and growl at the door

and scare off my love  
I will tie up and drive away the merchant who comes to sell roosters  
and dogs<sup>8</sup>

These two pieces set up the rooster and dog as obstacles to love and overtly express hatred towards these animals. It is noteworthy that, as further variations of *alba* in Korean classical poetry, these two works depict the protagonist's emotions about the rooster and the dog in detail. The expression of the protagonist is highly explicit, as seen in the repeated word "enemy" and the phrase "roosters and dogs are to be beaten to death." Even strong threats are found in the final phrases saying, "I have to get rid of you before June and July" and "I will tie up and drive away the merchant who comes to sell roosters and dogs." The audience could identify more strongly with the narrators through these implications and direct expressions, and even feel psychological relief or observe a sense of humor on the part of the author as "the psychological distance and the acceptance" between the narrators and audience evoke laughter (H. Kim 1999).

The middle sections of the two pieces are almost identical. Not only do the middle segments explicitly describe the lover sleeping in the narrator's arms at night, but they also recreate the sounds of a rooster and a dog. Unlike these two works, other works derived from *alba* often metaphorically describe love and merely imply that the sound of a rooster is an obstacle. Therefore, these two examples confirm that the *alba* was altered and expanded to create the unique features of *saseol sijo* as it was passed on. The more specific motifs of *saseol sijo* are believed to appeal to a wider range of audiences, as will the universality of *alba* themes in Western and Eastern literature. Although the first piece discussed in this paragraph is included only in *Cheongyo* 清謠 (Songs of the Qing), a collection of songs, the second piece is included in 12 collections in varied forms and has been widely appreciated. In *saseol sijo*, sexual desire is expressed in a variety of ways, one of which dovetails with *alba* motifs. Therefore, the narrator's sexual desire, as mirrored in these works, in turn reflects

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8. Works with a similar structure but different word selections are found in a collection of 14 songs, *Yeokdae sijo jeonseo* (Compendium of *Sijo* Works) (Shim 1972, 484).

the desire to break away from social regulations.<sup>9</sup>

The *saseol sijo* represents a quintessence of *alba* by its detailed description and explicit expression. It is notable that the features of *alba* have been altered, applied, and inherited throughout a variety of literary genres, including *goryeo gayo* 高麗歌謠 (native Korean lyrics of the Goryeo period), *sijo*, *hansi*, and *saseol sijo*, throughout the history of Korean classical poetry. In terms of their overt illustration of desire, *goryeo gayo* and *saseol sijo* share an apparent similarity.

Unlike in China, literature in Korea was created and appreciated in a dual-language context since the time of the Joseon dynasty. The literati employed Chinese characters, the then most popular written language in East Asia, whereas the common people appreciated literature narrated or transcribed in Korean. The *siga* 詩歌 (poetry and songs), among the genres of Korean poetry, was first and foremost created to be sung, unlike prose; works of *siga* were recorded in anthologies. Most subgenres of traditional *siga* that were developed during the late Joseon dynasty, such as *sijo*, *saseol sijo*, *gasa* 歌辭 (a form of verse composed in tetrameter with an indefinite number of lines), and *minyo* 民謠 (a genre of oral poetry rooted in the everyday life of the common people) were spread amongst the lower and upper classes. Therefore, cultural tendencies at the time account for the constant appearance of *alba* in *sijo*, *saseol sijo*, *gasa*, and *minyo*. As these types of literature were created and appreciated by the dual-language culture of Korea, perceptions of and rhetoric about commoners were reflected continuously in the works.

It is interesting that in “Sukcheon nanbongga 肅川難逢歌,” included in *Akbu* 樂府, the narrator sings, “my love lives in the fortress I live out of the fortress / when I climb up the fortress the rooster is crying / enemy enemy it is my enemy the rooster and dog are my enemy.” As a folk song about love that was passed down in various areas of Korea, “Sukcheon nanbongga” confirms that *alba* were also embraced by the lower class. Whereas

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9. Lee Hyung-dae (2000) divided the sexual desire in *saseol sijo* into three types: closed desire within the system, fluid desire, and the desire to escape from rules. I examine the second type in this analysis.

*alba* are found in literature written by the Neo-Confucian literati of the early Joseon dynasty, the songs of lower-class protagonists in the Goryeo period and later in the Joseon period display elements of *alba*. Literary history and oral literature clearly attest to the popularity of the *alba* style in Korean classical poetry.

In contrast to Chinese literature, in which *alba* disappeared after the Tang period, Korean classical poetry embodies the continuation and variation of the *alba* style. Comparing Chinese literature and Korean classical poetry, the ample heritage of the latter is clearly apparent.

## Conclusion

As noted in previous studies, the *alba* literary style is commonly found in a variety of literary cultures worldwide, including throughout the history of Korean classical poetry. The archetypal *alba* in Chinese classical poems first appeared in folk songs and eventually disappeared after being incorporated into the literature of Neo-Confucian literati. A similar cycle is found in the history of Korean classical literature; however, *alba* are also found in the literature of the late Joseon dynasty. The cultural desire to escape from the confinement of Confucian ideology inspired the use of *alba* motifs in the *sijo* style of poetry.

As is well known, Chinese Confucianism dominated the political and social realm during the Joseon period. Hence, literati who were familiar with Chinese characters primarily created literature that was bound by this ideology. However, ordinary people expressed their desire to sing songs in Korean, written in Hangeul (Korean alphabet); this resulted in such genres as *sijo*, *saseol sijo*, and *gasa*. Distributed through transcription, these works often mirror a dynamic view of the world and a lively sense of beauty shared by the Korean people. The *alba* style, in which romance and desire are overtly expressed, surfaced through literature from the Joseon period written in Hangeul because of this cultural tendency. The lineage of *alba* in the Korean classic *sigae* form attests to the literary universality of *alba* and confirms the unique culture of Korea's Joseon era. Because Han-

geul was invented during the early Joseon period in the fifteenth century, *sga* literature, created in this native language and alphabet and appreciated by an expanded range of readers, became an honest representation of the sentiments of ordinary people.

It is noteworthy that descriptions of love are also observed in *goryeo gayo* and *saseol sijo*, in which genres the *alba* style appeared in the literature of the highly educated class during the early Joseon period and then later in the songs of the lower class. The explicit characteristics of *alba* in such expressions are very detailed and direct. In these literary genres, the structure and motifs of *alba*, in which the desire to break away from the system and ideology of Confucianism was represented, were ceaselessly altered and evolved. *Saseol sijo*, in which sexual desire was reflected on diverse levels, were more compatible with *alba* than any other genre, and *saseol sijo* acquired a broad range of audiences because they were included in a variety of collections of songs.

A comparative analysis of Korean and Chinese examples brings the unique characteristics of Korean classical poetry, with its ample cultural heritage, into sharp focus. The conventions and implementations of the *alba*, a distinctive genre in Western literature, are more clearly explored in Korean classical poetry than in Chinese works. Therefore, it will be a rewarding endeavor to conduct a comparative analysis of Korean and Western classical literature in order to rediscover the universality and individuality of Korean classical poetry.

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