

# The Yeonam Group's Anthologies of Korean Literature Written in Classical Chinese and Adherence to the Chinese Civilization in the Mid-18th and Early 19th Centuries\*

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## Abstract

*This paper examines how the Yeonam group, led by Bak Ji-won (1737–1805), collected and compiled Korean literature written in classical Chinese during the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. The Yeonam group attempted to prove how well Korean intellectuals had adopted and developed Chinese culture. Korean history, culture, and literature rapidly garnered the attention of Silhak (Practical Learning) intellectuals during this era. Previous studies, which tend to reflect the perspective of modern nationalism, have understood this academic trend as an early form of Korean nationalism. However, the Yeonam group held the opinion that Korean literature written in classical Chinese served as an indicator of the writer's degree of embodying Chinese culture, which was understood by the Yeonam group as the epitome of cultural advancement. For this reason, the Yeonam group explored and compiled a series of Korean literary works written in classical Chinese, the ideal language according to the group. This paper demonstrates that the Yeonam group's interest in Korean literature written in classical Chinese stemmed from the idea that Joseon was a sophisticated dynasty endowed with Chinese civilization.*

**Keywords:** Yeonam group, Korean literature written in classical Chinese, awareness of *dongmun*, adherence to the Chinese civilization, Chinese civilization, modern nationalism

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## Introduction

During the mid-18th and early 19th centuries, Silhak 實學 (Practical Learning) intellectuals of Joseon 朝鮮 (1392–1910) displayed an unprecedented interest in the history, culture, and literature of their own dynasty as well as of the earlier Korean kingdoms. Many scholars have interpreted this phenomenon as evidence of the emergence of a Korean national identity, which would grow into the ideology of nationalism.<sup>1</sup> This nationalism was driven by a philosophical understanding of separating the self from the other and the internal from the external (Jeong 1983, 386).

In the era before nationalism, Chinese culture and civilization were a unifying force among intellectuals not only in China but also in neighboring countries. Korean historical studies based on a nationalist narrative, such as those advanced by scholars like Jeong In-bo 鄭寅普 (1893–1950), were driven by a desire to view Korea as separate and distinct from China. For instance, Joseon-style poetry written in classical Chinese by intellectuals such as Yi Deok-mu 李德懋 (1741–1793), Yi Ok 李鈺 (1760–1812), and Jeong Yak-yong 丁若鏞 (1762–1836) has been understood only in terms of highlighting the uniqueness of Joseon in comparison with China (D. Kim 2003, 60–74).

However, as just mentioned, before the emergence of nationalism, premodern Chinese civilization (*zhonghua wenming* 中華文明) was not limited merely to China but was embraced by the intellectual elite of neighboring countries. In this paper, premodern Chinese civilization refers to those Confucian social and governmental institutions which originated in China but were admired and emulated by the elites of neighboring countries. In addition to these institutions, it refers to a shared aesthetic admiration for an archaizing literary or classical Chinese.

Premodern Chinese civilization through its cultural and political institutions expressed universal characteristics that existed beyond ethnicity and region. Taking their cue from the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), intellectuals of premodern East Asia praised and revered states

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1. For an introduction to studies on the perspective of modern nationalism, as well as critical interpretations of such studies, see Sung-eul Cho (2004, 45–185) and Huh (2006, 318–348).

and figures that typified “Chinese civilization” regardless of their ethnicity or location. In this regard, they treated a Chinese person as a barbarian if he acted like one and a barbarian like a Chinese if he acted like one.<sup>2</sup>

Considering these characteristics of Chinese civilization during the premodern era, it is difficult to say that it was a separate civilization, alien to Joseon. In other words, it is undesirable to examine Chinese civilization in premodern East Asia only in terms of ethnicity and locale. Thus, a new research perspective, which understands historical realities in the context of their time, is required to investigate historical realities that have been obscured by studies employing the discourse of modern nationalism.

In this paper, I focus on the late Joseon period’s Silhak intellectuals and their unprecedented interest in Korean literature written in classical Chinese. Such literature refers to the works of Korean writers that were celebrated at the time as classics and embraced the topics of Confucianism as well as history and the genres of belles-lettres and poetry. Above all, this paper emphasizes recent research trends, which have mostly shown that the long-standing awareness of *dongmun* 同文 (literally “same characters” or “the sharing of classical Chinese as a literary language”) among the intellectuals of China, Korea, and Japan was strengthened during the mid-18th and early 19th centuries.<sup>3</sup>

The term *dongmun* originated from the passage, “Now, all over the kingdom . . . all writing is done with the same characters” in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean).<sup>4</sup> The term is made up of two Chinese characters: *dong* 同 meaning “same” and *mun* 文 (wen in Chinese) meaning writing. However, in literary Chinese, *mun* can also refer to culture; so, by extension, this awareness of possessing the same literary language can also imply an awareness of possessing the same culture. Thereafter, *dongmun* was widely used to draw attention to the characteristics of Chinese civilization contained within the cultural sphere of those who wrote in classical Chinese. This can be referred to as the Sino-sphere of East Asia (S. S. Cho

2. See Han Yu, “Yuan dao 原道” (An Inquiry into the Way), in *Changli xiansheng wenji, gwon* 11.

3. See Takahashi (2009), S. S. Cho (2011), and Jung (2011).

4. “今天下. . . 書同文” (*Zhongyong*, ch. 28).

2011, 81). In this regard, proficiency in classical Chinese was closely related to the political and diplomatic issues that emerged in premodern East Asia. Furthermore, this linguistic ability was perceived by intellectuals as a standard that separated the civilized from the uncivilized.<sup>5</sup> At the time, the region surrounding China was very much centered culturally on classical Chinese thought and literature.

That said, in highlighting Joseon intellectuals' evaluation of their own cultural achievements, I approach these issues from the perspective of intellectuals closely associated with the Yeonam group, who were regarded as the main advocates of Silhak during the late Joseon period. The Yeonam group was led by Bak Ji-won 朴趾源 (1737–1805), and its core members were Hong Dae-yong 洪大容 (1731–1783), Bak Je-ga 朴齊家 (1750–1805), Yi Deok-mu, Yu Deuk-gong 柳得恭 (1748–1807), and Seo Yu-gu 徐有榘 (1764–1845) (Oh 2013, 59). The name of the group comes from the pen name of Bak Ji-won, Yeonam.<sup>6</sup> It is called a “group” rather than a “school” because it was an intellectual community of friends formed around Bak Ji-won.<sup>7</sup> Membership in the group was broad and included people who deeply respected Bak Ji-won, such as the 19th century writers Seo Yu-gu and Hong Gil-ju 洪吉周 (1786–1841).<sup>8</sup> Studies have portrayed the Yeonam

5. Lee Jong-mook (2011, 38–39) described such phenomena using classical Chinese poetry as an example.

6. Although it seems as if Bak Ji-won played an outstanding role in forming the Yeonam group, in fact, Hong Dae-yong, Bak Ji-won's senior, also played a leading role. Therefore, it has been reasonably argued that the group should be known as the Damyeon group (a name formed from the first syllable of each of their pen names: Hong Dae-yong's, Damheon and Bak Ji-won's, Yeonam. For more on this, see Hee-byoung Park (2013, 209). Currently there is no academic consensus on this matter. Thus, in this paper, I have tried to apply the term Yeonam group since it is widely recognized by scholars and emphasizes the role of Bak Ji-won.

7. For more information on the Yeonam group's members, see B. Yu (1995, 79–230) and Oh (2013, 49–70).

8. Seo Yu-gu and Hong Gil-ju greatly respected Bak Ji-won. For more on this, see Hong Gil-ju, “Suyeonpil(sok) ha” (Miscellaneous Essays, Part 2), in *Hanghae byeongham, gwon* 9; and “Dok yeonamjip” (After reading *Yeonamjip*), in *Pyorong eulcheom, gwon* 5. Yu Bong-hak categorizes Seo Yu-gu as a member of the Yeonam group. For more on this, see Yu (1995, 187–230).

group as being markedly advanced in thought and insight because it advocated Bukhak 北學 (Northern Learning), which actively called for learning from the economic and cultural advancements of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912) (Huh 2006, 318–346).

My selection of the Yeonam group was motivated not only by its Northern Learning philosophy but also by the fact that the majority of its members had visited Yanjing 燕京 as envoys. Furthermore, among contemporary groups in Joseon, the Yeonam group engaged in the most in-depth exchanges with Qing intellectuals. As their members had met frequently with Qing intellectuals in Yanjing, they were the best qualified to ponder Joseon's cultural identity in light of the era's *transnational* literary tradition common to Joseon and Qing. Although examination of Joseon's cultural identity through analysis of this group's works is not without limitations, it promises to be fruitful.

### The Yeonam Group's Perceptions of the Shortcomings of Korean Literature in Classical Chinese

During the years 1773–1781, under the Qianlong Emperor's (r. 1735–1795) reign, the Qing court collected a broad selection of literature while compiling the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Books of the Four Storehouses). The court asked its Joseon counterpart to provide books that had been “scattered and lost” or were rare. As a result, many literary works from Joseon were introduced to Qing.<sup>9</sup> Qing intellectuals, such as Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), were involved in this compilation and paid special attention to the Chinese literature that had been preserved in Joseon Korea and Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868) but could no longer be found in Qing China. In particular, Ruan Yuan sought to repatriate Chinese literature that was no longer extant in China from these two countries via the Joseon royal envoys to Yanjing and the Japanese merchants who came to Qing China to engage in trade (Fujitsuka 1975, 107–111).

9. Yu Deuk-gong, “Gi Hyoram daejongbaek” (The Great Master Ji Xiaolan), in *Yeolha gihaeng siju*.

The Chinese literature that was collected from Joseon Korea and Tokugawa Japan created an opportunity for Qing intellectuals to once again assess the cultural competencies of the surrounding kingdoms. For instance, Ruan Yuan regarded the *Itsuzon sosho* 佚存叢書 (Collectanea of Surviving Books) as a treasure (Fujitsuka 1975, 109–110). The work collected Chinese classics which were preserved in Tokugawa Japan but, by the time of its compilation between 1799 and 1810, were no longer extant in Qing China. The collectanea were compiled by Hayashi Jussai 林述齋 (1768–1841), a noted Neo-Confucian scholar of Tokugawa Japan. Hayashi Jussai boasted that the absence of dynastic change in Japan, along with a Confucian culture that edified Japan's social and political structures, had made it possible for Chinese classics, long absent from their country of origin, to survive.<sup>10</sup>

Hayashi's view implies that Japan was a sophisticated dynasty endowed with a Chinese civilization that had long regarded the loyalty of the emperor's subjects as a fundamental virtue. This was the most significant reason for the absence of dynastic change. Hayashi appears to have believed that Japan had preserved the Chinese civilization embedded in these works in its original condition and then retransmitted to China (Ōba 2002). As can be surmised from the *Itsuzon sosho*, these literary classics from outside China became a means for the literati of neighboring countries to argue that their own levels of cultural refinement were as advanced as those of China.

The case of the *Itsuzon sosho* demonstrates that the Japanese claim of having preserved Chinese civilization was based on the survival of Chinese classics in the archipelago. Given this indisputable evidence of valuing Chinese writings, the compliments paid by prestigious Chinese intellectuals regarding the literature written by Joseon or Japanese intellectuals in the past and present—and the inclusion of such works in the individual collections of esteemed Chinese intellectuals, official histories, or in the *Siku quanshu*—were seen as additional evidence of the cultural development of Korea and Japan and the fertile growth of Chinese civilization in

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10. Hayashi, "Preface," in *Itsuzon sosho*.

these countries.

The following anecdotes demonstrate the validity of the above deductions. The reverence for Chinese civilization can be seen in the story of Ogyu Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), a Japanese intellectual from the Tokugawa period, who is said to have moved his residence to Shibaura in Shinagawa (currently the eastern region of Minato-ku, Tokyo), so as to be closer to China, where Confucius was born. The high regard that Chinese scholars had for some Joseon and Tokugawa intellectuals is demonstrated by Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709), a great Confucian scholar of the early Qing who visited Nagasaki in 1686. During his stay, Zhu read Kaibara Ekken's 貝原益軒 (1630–1714) *Kinshiroku biko* 近思錄備考 (Notes on *Reflections on Things at Hand*, 1668) and returned to China with the book. Japanese Confucian scholars regarded this event as a badge of great honor (Fujitsuka 1975, 6). These scholars took this incident as evidence of the recognition of their high level of Chinese civilization by a prestigious Chinese scholar.

Joseon intellectuals, too, gave their writings to envoys visiting China, asking them to bring back assessments or complimentary comments from Qing intellectuals.<sup>11</sup> The text below, written by Yi Deok-mu, is a very good illustration of the situation at the time. It describes Yi's joy at having his poems evaluated by eminent Chinese writers.

When Yu Geum 柳琴 (1741–1788) went to Yanjing as an envoy last winter with a compilation of writings by Joseon writers which he named *Hangaek geonyeonjip* 韓客巾衍集 (The Collected Classical Poetry of Yi Deok-mu, Bak Je-ga, Yu Deuk-gong, and Yi Seo-gu), just the thought of the distinguished Chinese writers that he would meet and the reviews or prefaces that he would receive from them about the poetry made my heart flutter beyond words. Upon his return to Joseon, he boasted about meeting with well-known Chinese writers and showed us the *Hangaek geonyeonjip*. We were deeply impressed to find that there were indeed glittering [clearly written] red letters [commentary by the Chinese writers] on *Hangaek geonyeonjip*. . . . We exchanged looks of excitement and

11. Hong Gil-ju, "Suyeonapil sang" (Miscellaneous Essays, Part 1), in *Hanghae byeongham, gwon* 5.

were unable to remain calm, wondering how people like us, born in a humble country, could receive such comments from prominent Chinese writers.<sup>12</sup>

This incident illuminates the Yeonam group's broad interest in classical Chinese literature written by Koreans during the Goguryeo 高句麗 (37 BC–AD 668), Baekje 百濟 (18 BC–AD 660), Silla 新羅 (57 BC–AD 935), Goryeo 高麗 (918–1392), and Joseon eras. In fact, members of the Yeonam group wondered how widely classical Chinese literature written by Koreans was read among Qing intellectuals. For example, Yi Deok-mu wanted to know whether books other than the *Goryeosa* 高麗史 (History of Goryeo, published in 1451) and the *Dongui bogam* 東醫寶鑑 (Treasury of Oriental Medicine, published in 1613) had been published in China. Yi inquired whether the Joseon scholar Choe Jeon's 崔澱 (1567–1588) *Yangpojip* 陽浦集 (Collected Works of Choe Jeon, published in 1621), quoted in the *Peiwen-zhai shuhua pu* 佩文齋書畫譜 (Painting and Calligraphy of the Peiwen Study, published in 1708), had been distributed among the literati and was still read in China.<sup>13</sup>

The *Peiwen-zhai shuhua pu* was a collection of documents pertaining to Chinese calligraphy and paintings compiled at the behest of the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722). The inclusion in it of a quotation from the *Yangpojip*, a collection compiled by a Joseon intellectual, would have been a matter of great pride for the Joseon people. Yi Deok-mu wrote in detail about the manner in which Choe Jeon's *Yangpojip* became widely known to Ming and Qing literati. He took great satisfaction in this work, which he saw as enhancing Joseon's prestige.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this publishing success, the Yeonam group members were disappointed by the small quantity of Korean literature written in classical

12. Yi Deok-mu, "Yi Uchon" (A Letter Written to [Li Yucun]), in *Cheongjanggwon jeonseo, gwon* 19.

13. Yi Deok-mu, "Ban churu Jeong-gyun" (Written Record of a Conversation with Pan Tingyun), in *Cheongjanggwon jeonseo, gwon* 19.

14. Yi Deok-mu, "Choe Yangpo" (Yangpo Choe Jeon), in *Cheongjanggwon jeonseo, gwon* 35.

Chinese published in China. Yu Deuk-gong lamented that such literature was not widely known in Qing territory. He then added that these Korean writings were being used as wallpaper and pharmacy bags. Even when they remained intact, he said, they were regarded as literary works for so-called “lower class people,” such as Chinese women and Japanese and Ryukyuan intellectuals.<sup>15</sup>

Yu’s complaints derived from his belief that although Joseon was a small dynasty, its intellectuals possessed the skill to produce literature equivalent to that of China’s intellectuals. His conviction was rooted in the traditional notion that Joseon was a minor China, situated next to the core civilization. For this reason, he was perplexed that Korean literature written in classical Chinese was not treated in a manner befitting its status. However, despite his hopes and expectations, Yu frankly accepted the serious shortcomings of Korean literature. In his preface to Han Chi-yun’s *Haedong yeoksa* 海東譯史 (The History of Korea), he pointed out that since people of the earlier kingdoms did not keep historical records, the need of “forgotten incidents” and “curious anecdotes” to gain a better understanding of history had to be obtained from Chinese literature.<sup>16</sup>

Other group members voiced thoughts consistent with those of Yu Deuk-gong. For example, Yi Deok-mu lamented that Korean literature had shortcomings, claiming: “Our Joseon did not have old books, and the compilation of historical books only started during the Goryeo period.”<sup>17</sup> This example saliently demonstrates the sense of inadequacy among mid-18th and early 19th century Joseon scholars with regard to Korean literature in classical Chinese.

As former emissaries to Qing who followed its scholarly trends, the Yeonam group compared classical Chinese literature written by Koreans to that composed by scholars in China. Specifically, they suggested that in terms of

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15. Yu Deuk-gong, “Dongin jeseo” (Koreans’ Classical Chinese Literature), in *Goundang pilgi*, gwon 4.

16. Han Chi-yun, “Haedong yeoksa seo” (Yu Deuk-gong’s Preface to *Haedong yeoksa*), in *Haedong yeoksa*.

17. Yi Deok-mu, “Yeongcheo japgo” (Collected Essays of Yi Deok-mu), in *Cheongjangggwan jeonseo*, gwon 5.

quality, the former was one or two generations behind the latter. Yi Deok-mu and Hong Gil-ju pointed out that Joseon's literati were constantly emulating styles that were no longer fashionable or popular in China.<sup>18</sup>

The Yeonam group's awareness of the status and quality of Korean literature was connected to its efforts to highlight outstanding Korean literary works and authors. While admitting its deficiencies, these intellectuals took much pride in their civilization. They made active efforts to present high-quality Korean literature written in classical Chinese as evidence that theirs was a civilized dynasty that had received the blessings of Chinese civilization.

### The Yeonam Group's Searches for the First Korean Literary Work in Classical Chinese

The search for Choe Chi-won's 崔致遠 (857–?) *Gyewon pilgyeong* 桂苑筆耕 (Plowing the Cassia Grove with a Writing Brush, published in 1834) is a salient example of the Yeonam group's efforts to refocus on Korean literature written in classical Chinese. Choe Chi-won was a Silla native who studied in Tang China (618–907), where he became the first prolific Korean writer. Choe compiled his poetry and prose in a collection entitled *Gyewon pilgyeong* in 886. While a small number of these manuscripts and printed editions were passed down to Goryeo and Joseon, by the late 18th century only a few incomplete versions remained, the result of successive Japanese invasions (1592–1598) and the fact that only a few copies were ever printed in Korea (Dang 2001, 49–52). This is reason that intellectuals from this period knew only the title of the collection and a few items from its contents.

Bak Ji-won's search for the *Gyewon pilgyeong* was motivated by his desire to include it in the *Samhan chongseo* 三韓叢書 (Anthology of Three

18. Yi Deok-mu, "Goun non yuseok" (Choe Chi-won's Discussion of Confucianism and Buddhism), in *Cheongjangwan jeonseo, gwon* 68; and Hong Gil-ju, "Dongmun soseon songnok seo" (Preface to the Sequel of a Small Collection of Eastern Writing), in *Hanghae byeongham, gwon* 2.

Han), which he began compiling in 1784, four years after he returned from China (Young-jin Kim 2003, 66). He took extracts from 178 literary and political records associated with the cultural and political relationships among Korea, China, and Japan.<sup>19</sup> Before this project, he had written about lamenting the disappearance of the *Gyewon pilgyeong* in the chapter, “Guoe imun” 口外異聞 (Eccentric Stories from Beyond the Border), of his China travelogue, *Yeolha ilgi* 熱河日記 (Jehol Diary, written in 1780–1783). This chapter dealt with the sixty texts he collected in Jehol, a region of north-eastern China, which demonstrated the cultural and diplomatic relationship between China and Joseon.

“Guoe imun” includes the following accounts: the story in which the Qing scholar Zhu Kuntian 朱昆田 (1652–1699) uses an anecdote from the *Goryeosa* to correct certain inaccurate historical descriptions of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) made in Chinese texts;<sup>20</sup> the inclusion of Seo Gyeong-deok’s *Hwadamjip* 花潭集 in the catalog of the *Siku quanshu*;<sup>21</sup> and the story of *Dongui bogam*, compiled by the Joseon royal physician Heo Jun 許浚 (1539–1615) and published in China in 1763.<sup>22</sup> These books, along with the *Gyewon pilgyeong*, were well known in China. In other words, they provided evidence to support the argument that Korean literature was valuable even within China—or, one could say, within the center of Chinese civilization itself.

The *Gyewon pilgyeong* was also cataloged in the *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 (Bibliographical Treatise) of the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New History of the Tang Dynasty, compiled in 1060).<sup>23</sup> This indicates the former’s historical and literary significance because only the most noteworthy literary works of the era were cataloged in the *Yiwenzhi*. However, the work could no longer be found in China (Dang 2001, 52). Its rediscovery in Joseon would attract the attention of Qing intellectuals and demonstrate the advanced culture of

19. Bak Jong-chaе, *Gwajeongnok* (Biography of Bak Ji-won), *gwon* 4.

20. Bak Ji-won, “Jeung goryeosa” (Proven with *Goryeosa*), in *Yeonamjip*, *gwon* 14.

21. Bak Ji-won, “Seo hwadamjip” (Collected Works of Seo Gyeong-deok), in *Yeonamjip*, *gwon* 14.

22. Bak Ji-won, “Dongui bogam,” in *Yeonamjip*, *gwon* 14.

23. Quyang Xiu, “Yiwenzhi,” in *Xin Tangshu*, *juan* 60.

Korea from the Silla period onward.

The historical and cultural value of the *Gyewon pilgyeong* is clearly demonstrated in Hong Seok-ju's 洪奭周 (1774–1842) assessment of Choe Chi-won's writings: "The production of great writers in Korea and the inheritance of great works started with Choe Chi-won, who can also be thanked for the high reputation our writers now enjoy throughout the world."<sup>24</sup> However, the *Gyewon pilgyeong* was not discovered during Bak Ji-won's lifetime; it only reappeared during the early 19th century, when it was found by Seo Yu-gu, the ardent successor of Bak Ji-won. Bak Ji-won, speaking to Seo Yu-gu, bemoaned that a 900-year-old masterpiece (the *Gyewon pilgyeong*) of Silla literature had not been passed down to posterity.<sup>25</sup>

Having learned that Hong Seok-ju possessed a copy of the *Gyewon pilgyeong*, which had been passed down through seven generations of his ancestors starting with Hong Ju-won 洪柱元 (1606–1672), Seo Yu-gu paid Hong a visit in 1832 and persuaded him to allow this historical work to be published.<sup>26</sup> Thereafter, in 1834, Seo printed a hundred copies of the work and introduced it into China, where the book attracted great interest from Chinese literati (Hyun-kyu Park 2002, 74, 84–85).

Positive evaluations of Choe Chi-won's work also poured out from the members of the Yeonam group during the late 18th to early 19th centuries. Seo Yu-gu saw the *Gyewon pilgyeong* as the foundation of classical Chinese literature written by Korean literati.<sup>27</sup> Yi Deok-mu also introduced stories related to Choe Chi-won,<sup>28</sup> particularly presenting the latter as historical proof of Korea's possession of Chinese civilization.

24. Hong Seok-ju, "Gyewon pilgyeong huseo" (Preface to the *Gyewon pilgyeong*), in *Yeoncheon seonsaeng munjip*, gwon 19.

25. Seo Yu-gu, "Yeo yeoncheon hongsangseo ron gyewon pilgyeong seo" (A Letter Written to Hong Seok-ju Discussing *Gyewon Pilgyeong*), in *Geumhwa jibijip*, gwon 3.

26. Seo Yu-gu, "Yeo yeoncheon hongsangseo ron gyewon pilgyeong seo." in *Geumhwa jibijip*, gwon 3.

27. Seo Yu-gu, "Gyoin gyewon pilgyeongjip seo" (Preface to the *Gyewon pilgyeong*), in *Geumhwa jibijip*, gwon 3.

28. Yi Deok-mu, "Choe goun hwasang" (Portrait of Choe Chi-won) and "Goun ron yuseok" (Choe Chi-won's Discussion of Confucianism and Buddhism), in *Cheongjangwan jeonseo*, gwon 68.

Our Joseon is the place to which the sage Gija 箕子 (*Jizi* in Chinese, ?–194 BC) fled from China. It is only 1,000 *li* (1 *li*=approximately 3.92 km) from Liaodong [modern Liaodong Province in Northeastern China]. Joseon leads the way among the four barbarians in terms of institutions, rites and music, and possesses an advanced civilization. A look at the biographies of the outer barbarians in Chinese historical texts reveals that Joseon is regarded as the best, followed by Vietnam and then Ryukyu. This signifies that they considered the strength of a country as being based on its degree of civilization rather than physical power. Choe Chi-won, Kim I-eo 金夷魚 [dates unknown], Kim Ga-gi 金可紀 (?–859), and Choe Seung-u 崔承祐 [dates unknown] went on to serve the imperial court of Tang, and their fame continues up to the present day.<sup>29</sup>

For the Yeonam group members, who sought to promote the development of Chinese civilization in Joseon society, Choe Chi-won's *Gyewon pilgyeong* was held in special regard as it was the first literary work in Korea to clearly demonstrate its Chinese cultural credentials.<sup>30</sup> Seo Yu-gu wrote, "I thought that while our writing style was originally three to five hundred years behind that of China, it has finally progressed to a level similar to that of China because of Choe Chi-won."<sup>31</sup> The publication of *Gyewon pilgyeong* was one of the most successful projects of the Yeonam group's compiling and publishing activities (which will be discussed in greater detail later).

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29. Yi Deok-mu, "Yeo Yi Nakseo seo" (A Letter Written to Nakseo Yi Seo-gu), in *Ganbon ajeong yugo, gwon* 6.

30. The admiration for Gija in late Joseon by intellectuals of both the Soron (Young Doctrine) and the Namin (Southerners) factions also stemmed from a belief that Korea had possessed Chinese civilization starting from the era of Gija. For more on this, see Sung-san Cho (2009, 59–66). It can be understood in the same context as that which moved the Yeonam group intellectuals to shed new light on Choe Chi-won.

31. Seo Yu-gu, "Yeo yeoncheon hongsangseo ron gyewon pilgyeong seo," in *Geumhwa jibijip, gwon* 3.

## The Yeonam Group's Anthologizing Activities

Bak Ji-won's special interest in Korean literature written in classical Chinese, as evidenced by the search for and later publication of the *Gyewon pilgyeong*, paved the way for further efforts to locate and compile Korean literature written in classical Chinese. Because Bak Ji-won intended to include the *Gyewon pilgyeong* in his compilation *Samhan chongseo*, he was disappointed that he could not find a copy of the former. His disappointment appeared to fuel his desire to discover other Korean literature in classical Chinese for inclusion in the *Samhan chongseo*.<sup>32</sup>

While compiling the *Samhan chongseo*, Bak wanted to include brilliant Korean figures such as Choe Chi-won, who was already well known to Chinese literati. He did this, I believe, because he wanted to show how Korea not only maintained those cultural and political features learned from China but the heights to which Korean authors had taken them.

This desire to show Korean cultural advancement is more evident in the plans for another compilation known as the *Sohwa chongseo* 小華叢書 (Collectanea of Small China). This work was begun in 1791 by members of the Yeonam group (Young-jin Kim 2003, 66–67). The group, led by Bak Ji-won, Yi Deok-mu, Seo Yu-gu, and others, made plans to compile Korea's most prestigious writings on the study of Chinese classics, history, and culture (Jung 2007, 49). The *Sohwa chongseo* was modeled after the Ming Dynasty *Hanwei congshu* 漢魏叢書, a collectanea of writings of the Han (202 BC–AD 220) and Wei (220–265) periods published in 1590.

The term *Sohwa*, meaning “small China,” was used to denote Joseon, because certain intellectuals regarded Joseon as a lesser, but highly refined, dynasty that had developed Chinese culture to a high level (Jung-Mi Lee 2010, 312–315). The contents of this anthology are different from those of the *Samhan chongseo*, although it shared the same guiding principle: to show Korea's cultural superiority as demonstrated through classical Chinese. Seo Hyeong-su 徐滢修 (1749–1824), the uncle of Seo Yu-gu, chief editor of the *Sohwa chongseo*, clearly spelled out the goals behind the compila-

32. Bak Jong-chae, *Gwajeongnok*, gwon 4.

tion in a letter to Seong Dae-jung 成大中 (1732–1809), a member of the Yeonam group.

The literary skills and knowledge of the Confucian classics possessed by our predecessors were sometimes of a level that we cannot hope to aspire to. However, their writing style was rustic and their sphere of knowledge was quite limited. What's more, they did not know the rules and methods of writing or editing prose, a shame that continues to this day. A look at our predecessors' books would doubtless leave specialists snickering over their poor quality. However, the treasured writers from Korea should be cherished by its denizens. In addition, it would be no exaggeration to state that the works of these elite writers of Korea can be compared favorably to those of such Qing figures as Zhang Chao 張潮 (1650–?). We can be proud to boast of several writers from this small state on the edge of the sea who can be regarded as world treasures.<sup>33</sup>

Seo Hyeong-su suggested that the writing styles of most previous Korean literati were rather simple and unrefined. However, he added that the mere presence of a few writers from Korea who could “be regarded as world treasures” was a significant achievement. Unfortunately, because of personal problems faced by the Yeonam group, particularly the death of family members and the ensuing long periods of mourning prescribed by Confucianism, the *Sohwa chongseo* was never completed (Young-jin Kim 2003, 66). Only the titles and the tables of contents for 17 classics, 26 histories, and 41 collected works of individual authors remain in the *Oju yeonmun jangjeon sango* 五洲衍文長箋散稿 (Selections of Oju Yi Gyu-gyeong's Fine Writings and Long Letters, composed in the 19th century but not published until 1959), which was written by Yi Deok-mu's grandson, Yi Gyu-gyeong 李圭景 (1788–1863).<sup>34</sup> The *Samhan chongseo* was also never completed for the same reasons as the *Sohwa chongseo*.<sup>35</sup>

33. Seo Hyeong-su, “Dap seongbiseo” (A Letter Written to Seong Dae-jung), in *Myeonggo jeonjip, gwon* 5.

34. Yi Gyu-gyeong, “Sohwa chongseo byeonjeung seol,” (Investigating the *Sohwa chongseo*) in *Oju yeonmun jangjeon sango, gwon* 18.

35. Bak Jong-chae, *Gwajeongnok, gwon* 4.

Meanwhile, along with the *Samhan chongseo* and the *Sohwa chongseo*, other collections of classical Chinese texts by Korean literati were compiled in the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. While the *Samhan chongseo* and *Sohwa chongseo* mainly focused on topics such as diplomacy, culture, and history, other collections of classical Chinese texts by Korean literati tended more to literature. All of them had a common aim to demonstrate Korea's cultural advancement. Therefore, in this paper, despite their differences, I have tried to treat them as a single category based on their intended goal.

From the late 17th to the mid-18th centuries, the practice of collecting Korean works written in classical Chinese fell out of favor. While such assemblages were printed occasionally during the 14th, 15th, and 17th centuries, they did not compare to the unprecedented eight collections penned by writers of the Eastern Kingdom (*dongguk* 東國, another name for Korea) during the mid-18th to early 19th centuries. Thus, the emergence of these eight collections over the period of a century can be regarded as an important cultural phenomenon that was never replicated during the rest of the Joseon period (C. Kim 1998, 253–262).

The starting point was the *Haedong siseon* 海東詩選 (Selection of Classical Chinese Poetry of Korea, compiled in 1767) edited by Min Baek-sun 閔百順 (1711–1774), a friend of Hong Dae-yong's father, at the request of Hong Dae-yong upon his return from Qing China in 1766. This fulfilled a request made by the Qing intellectual Pan Tingyun 潘庭筠 [dates unknown] whom Hong had met in Yanjing. Pan wanted Hong to publish an anthology of classical Chinese poetry written by Joseon literati (S. Kim 2002, 327–334). Min Baek-sun explained Hong Dae-yong's intentions for compiling the *Haedong siseon*:

Although *shi* [a genre of classical Chinese poetry] is not what the people of the Eastern Kingdom [Korea] are truly good at, some Chinese literati have collected Korean poetry, which shows that they do not consider Koreans barbarians. However, since books cannot be exchanged freely between the two areas, the poetry the Chinese have collected is not admirable from the standpoint of Korean writers. If

these anthologies cause Chinese literati to consider Korean poetry as less sophisticated, it is to our discredit. Pan Tingyun frequently asked for this [an anthology of the best Korean *shi*], and you [Hong Dae-yong] are sincerely trying to fulfill it. How can I [Min Baek-sun] not help but publish a new anthology?<sup>36</sup>

After the Qing conquest, private relationships between Han Chinese literati and Joseon envoys were blocked by the Qing government. Eventually, these relations carefully, gradually, and unofficially continued among the members of the Yeonam group, beginning from Hong Dae-yong (Han and Han 2013, 23–92).

This closer relationship between China and Joseon literati was hidden behind the context of compiling anthologies of Korean poetry and prose. The Yeonam group wanted to show the Chinese literati the extent of Korean cultural sophistication. Beginning then, the intellectuals of the Yeonam group actively set about compiling anthologies of Korean poetry and prose. This is why many anthologies appeared somewhat suddenly among the works of the Yeonam group members.

While Yu Deuk-gong's *Samhan sigi* 三韓詩紀 (Commentary on the Classical Chinese Poetry of Three Han, compiled in 1774) appeared during the late 18th century, the early 19th century witnessed the production of Hong Gil-ju's *Haedong jemyeongga munseon* 海東諸名家文選 (Selection of Classical Chinese Prose of the Eastern Kingdom's Great Masters), presumably compiled in the 1810s, and *Daedong munjun* 大東文雋 (Refined Classical Chinese Prose of the Great Eastern Kingdom), probably compiled in 1810; Yi Jeong-gwan's 李正觀 (1792–1854) *Dongmun soseon songnok* 東文小選續錄 (Sequel to a Small Collection of Eastern Writing), likely compiled in the 1830s; Seo Yu-bi's 徐有榘 (1784–?) *Dongmunnyu* 東文類 (Classified Compilation of Classical Chinese Prose of the Eastern Kingdom), probably compiled in the 1830s, and *Dongmun palgaseon* 東文八家選 (A Selection of Classical Chinese Prose by Eight Great Masters of the Eastern Kingdom),

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36. Hong Dae-yong, "Haedong siseon bal" (Epilogue to the *Haedong siseon*), in *Damheonseo, gwon* 3.

most likely compiled in 1840; and Nam Gong-cheol's 南公轍 (1760–1840) *Sagunja muncho* 四君子文鈔 (Selection of the Prose of the Four Gentlemen), presumably compiled in 1801–1815.

Most of these collections were by authors associated with Bak Ji-won and Hong Gil-ju. Yu Deuk-gong was a member of the Yeonam group. For his part, Yi Jeong-gwan was Hong Seok-ju's disciple and the nephew of Bak Ji-won's wife.<sup>37</sup> Seo Yu-bi was the youngest brother of Seo Yu-gu and participated in the compilation of the *Sohwa chongseo*.<sup>38</sup> Hong Gil-ju wrote the preface to Yi Jeong-gwan's *Dongmun soseon songnok* and Seo Yu-bi's *Dongmunnyu*,<sup>39</sup> which indicates the close friendship between Hong Gil-ju and these authors. Along with Bak Ji-won, Nam Gong-cheol was directly involved in the *munche banjeong* 文體反正 (literally, “restoration of literary style”) policy during the reign of King Jeongjo (r. 1776–1800). During this process, the two established a warm relationship that saw them exchange letters.<sup>40</sup>

A precise investigation of the writers involved in these collections is rendered impossible by the fact that Hong Gil-ju's *Haedong jemyeongga munseon* and *Daedong munjun*, Yi Jeong-gwan's *Dongmun soseon songnok*, Seo Yu-bi's *Dongmunnyu*, and Nam Gong-cheol's *Sagunja muncho* are no longer extant. However, Hong Gil-ju's preface to Seo Yu-bi's *Dongmunnyu* claimed that it amassed the work of 19 authors, the two oldest being Nam Yu-yong 南有容 (1698–1773) and Hwang Gyeong-won 黃景源 (1709–1787). Thus, it can be surmised that Seo Yu-bi focused on the works of relatively recent writers.<sup>41</sup>

The preface to both the *Daedong munjun* and the *Sagunja muncho* stated that these books focused on the works of writers from the Joseon

37. Hong Seok-ju was the eldest brother of Hong Gil-ju.

38. Yi Gyu-gyeong, “Sohwa chongseo byeonjeung seol,” in *Oju yeonmun jangjeon sango*, gwon 18.

39. Hong Gil-ju, “Dongmunnyu seo” (Preface to the *Dongmunnyu*), in *Hanghae byeongham*, gwon 2.

40. Bak Jong-chaee, *Gwajeongnok*, gwon 2.

41. Hong Gil-ju, “Dongmun soseon songnok seo,” (Preface to the *Dongmun soseon songnok*), in *Hanghae byeongham*, gwon 2.

period.<sup>42</sup> Seo Yu-bi's *Dongmun palgaseon*, which is still extant, also includes the works of writers from the Joseon period. Yu Deuk-gong's *Samhan sigi* was rather exceptional because it included poems from the era of Gojoseon 古朝鮮 (?–108 BC), the first Korean kingdom, to the Silla period (Yun Jo Kim 2004, 277–284). The majority of men who selected writings in classical Chinese seem to have concluded that works equivalent in quality to those produced in China began to emerge in Korea only during the late Goryeo and Joseon periods (Yun 2000, 225–226).

Below are excerpts from the prefaces to the *Dongmunnyu* and *Dongmun soseon songnok*, both written by Hong Gil-ju. My focus on Hong Gil-ju comes from the fact that he inherited the Yeonam group's pride in Korean literature written in classical Chinese and the determination to collect it. Along with the compilation of the *Haedong jemyeongga munseon* and *Daedong munjun*, Hong wrote the prefaces to Yi Jeong-gwan's *Dongmun soseon songnok* and Seo Yu-bi's *Dongmunnyu*. Thus, he was involved in the compilation of four of the eight collections of this period, which indicates that he was the central figure of the anthologizing trend that emerged during the early 19th century.

- (1) Seo Yu-bi showed me his collection in 20 fascicles. Although his collection was very simple, it included all the great writings that could be regarded as the treasures of our kingdom. . . . How deplorable that there is no one in China with whom to enjoy reading these works.<sup>43</sup>
- (2) The writers of the Eastern Kingdom only reached the level of their outstanding counterparts in China some 100 years ago. . . . Yi Jeong-gwan selected 19 writers and 142 poems and essays written by Eastern Kingdom [Korean] authors who with much work had reached the level of the great Chinese literati over the past 100 years. . . . I have not heard of anybody in China, since the era of Fang Bao, becoming so great a master of classical Chinese writings that

42. Nam Gong-cheol, "Sagunja muncho seo" (Preface to the *Sagunja muncho*), in *Geumneung-jip, gwon* 11.

43. Hong Gil-ju, "Dongmunnyu seo," in *Hanghae byeongham, gwon* 2.

they even attracted the eager attention of foreign literati. That being the case, I am somewhat concerned that this book will not be cherished by the Chinese literati. If Yi Jeong-gwan does not meet any literati endowed with affection for classical Chinese writings while in China, then he should not even attempt to read this book to anybody.<sup>44</sup>

His sense of pride is interesting in that although his words apparently echo those of Seo Geo-jeong 徐居正 (1420–1488) in the preface to the *Dongmunseon* 東文選 (Anthology of Korean Literature, published in 1478), the historical and cultural contexts of the two prefaces are rather different. The latter asserted that the cultural accomplishments of Joseon and Chinese writers were commensurate. Seo Geo-jeong argued:

Each era has its own literary genre and writing style that can be regarded as representative of that period. . . . The writings of our Eastern Kingdom are not the writings of the Song and Yuan dynasties. They are the writings of the Eastern Kingdom, not the writings of the Han and Tang dynasties. For this reason, they should stand shoulder to shoulder.<sup>45</sup>

While Seo Geo-jeong believed that Korea was equal to China in terms of literature, his view was rather subjective because it was not based on any generally accepted standard of evaluation.

During the 19th century, Hong Gil-ju provided a much more objective appreciation than Seo Geo-jeong. Here, “objective appreciation” means using standards that were generally shared and accepted for judging literary refinement; more concretely, it refers to a style of writing classical Chinese in an especially demanding manner. Hong Gil-ju highlighted one body of work as a representative of the most desirable literary style: works by the Qing literatus Fang Bao 方苞 (1668–1749), the leading member of the Tongcheng 桐城 school. This school of writers advocated Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) Neo-Confucianism and emphasized the use of the ancient-style prose found in the Confucian Classics (Huters 1986, 68–96).

44. Hong Gil-ju, “Dongmun soseon songnok seo,” in *Hanghae byeongham*, gwon 2.

45. Seo Geo-jeong, “Dongmunseon seo” (Preface to the *Dongmunseon*), in *Sagajip*, gwon 4.

Given that Hong referred to Fang Bao's classical Chinese work as the standard for judging literary refinement, he lamented the fact that in the early 19th century, practically no one in China enjoyed reading the classical Chinese works of Joseon literati although he viewed them as being comparable in quality to the work of Fang Bao. Hong also set the rule that the early 19th-century Joseon literature should not be shown to those who did not have a deep understanding of classical Chinese; this rule applied without exception, even to Qing intellectuals. Hong appeared to think that the Joseon scholars of the early 19th century could write classical Chinese of a much higher quality than contemporary Chinese literati of his time. Consequently, this rule emphasized the dignity of Joseon's classical Chinese literature. Hong Gil-ju advocated an objective appreciation of classical Chinese writing style that could be shared with Qing literati, and in this regard, his position differed from Seo Geo-jeong's subjective one.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that, rather than emerging as part of the formation of a modern national identity, the Yeonam group's interest in Korean literature written in classical Chinese stemmed from the development of an awareness of *dongmun* in the region encompassing Qing China, Joseon Korea, and Tokugawa Japan in the premodern period. In this region and its territories, the Yeonam group attempted to demonstrate that Joseon was a sophisticated dynasty imbued with the refinements of Chinese civilization. This effort was driven by the unprecedented collection, compilation, and critique of Korean literature written in classical Chinese. The Yeonam group viewed this type of endeavor as one following the standards set by classical Chinese literature and civilization.

The Yeonam group viewed classical Chinese literature and civilization

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46. While advocating this, Hong Gil-ju did not overlook those works which had a distinctive Joseon style so long as they held their own against his chosen standard. See Jung (2007, 152-153).

as an objective standard against which they could evaluate a country's level of culture. Moreover, Hong Gil-ju considered the style of Fang Bao's classical Chinese work to be the exemplar for judging literary refinement. This standard set by Hong Gil-ju shows that his adherence to the Chinese civilization was not simply an expression of emulating Chinese civilization as a whole, but rather a selection of specific features of that civilization. Thus, he was able to criticize the classical Chinese literature produced by Chinese literati during the late Qing Dynasty by comparing it to the literature produced during the early 18th century by Joseon literati.

Two facts are revealed in this paper: first, Chinese civilization provided an objective standard against which cultural development could be measured. Therefore, the cultural status of Joseon was considered comparable to that of China because of its adherence to the norms of Chinese civilization. Second, it was possible for Joseon scholars to base their identity on the exemplar of Chinese civilization while retaining pride in their own origins. Premodern Chinese civilization, which did not clearly separate the self from the other, or "China" from "Joseon," was significantly different from modern nationalism, which makes such a differentiation. Thus, this study helps correct the existing research perspective, which tends to incorrectly approach history through the lens of nationalism.

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