



THE FISHERMAN'S CALENDAR

YUN SONDO

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YUN SŎNDO (1587-1671)

Yun Sŏndo was born in Seoul. His family home was in Haenam, Chŏlla Province. He is regarded by most Korean commentators as the greatest of the shijo poets; he was also an accomplished hanshi poet. A chinsa, the basic university degree qualification, at the age of twenty-six, he did not serve under the tyrant Kwanghaegun. He regularly refused insignificant posts, preferring to return to Haenam and the neighbouring islands where he liked to construct dykes, manage land development projects, engage in military training etc. For a poet-official who never attained the highest ranks in the government, he had a remarkably turbulent political career. In 1616, he presented a memorial to the king remonstrating against corruption in the court, for which he was exiled to Kyŏnwŏn, where he spent the next thirteen years and is said to have written his earliest poems. He was recalled in 1623 when Injo succeeded to the throne. In 1628, he was appointed personal tutor to the two young princes, Pongnim and Inp'yŏng. He got into trouble again during the Manchu Invasion of 1636 for failing to attend on the king. He was exiled to Yŏngdŏk but soon released. Over the next number of years, he wrote a series of memorials to the king that kept getting him into trouble. The final embroilment occurred over the length of the mourning period that was adjudged appropriate for Hyojong's mother. Again, his opponents carried the day and the poet was banished to Samsu where he remained until his release in 1668.

ŬBU SASHI SA (THE FISHERMAN'S CALENDAR) (shijo)

Ŭbu sashi sa, a cycle of forty shijo describing the four seasons in one of Yun Sŏndo's favourite retreats, is universally regarded as the acme of shijo composition.

The fisherman is a time-honoured symbol of the wise man who lives simply in nature. There is a solid tradition of poems treating this theme both in China and Korea.

Yun Sōndo was inspired to write his poem when reworking the earlier "Ōbu ka" (Fisherman's Song) by Yi Hyōnbo (in which Yi T'oegye collaborated), which in turn was a reworking into nine verses of an anonymous poem from Koryō.

Ōbu sashi sa is by far the most ambitious series of shijo in the canon. Throughout the poem, the reader, while experiencing at first hand the day-to-day life of the fisherman through the four seasons, a life Yun Sondo knew intimately from his experiences on Pogil Island, constantly feels the tension between the concepts of retreat in nature and public service in the court and the effort of a Confucian gentleman to work out his own confusion.

Ōbu sashi sa shows some differences in syllable count from the regular shijo pattern. In addition, it features two refrains that are not found in shijo. The first refrain varies in a regular pattern through the verses; it describes various tasks on the boat, pushing off, raising sail, lowering sail, rowing etc. The second refrain is onomatopoeic: chighukch'ong, chigukch'ong, representing the winding of the anchor chain, and ōsawa, a chant to the rhythm of the oars.

Spring

1. (*shijo* 1352)

Mist lifts on the stream in front,
sunlight illumines the mountain behind.

Push away, push away!

The night tide is almost out; soon the morning tide will be coming in.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Flowers

in profusion adorn the river village; distant hues are best.

2. (*shijo* 369)

The day is hot;
fish jump in the water.

Weigh anchor, weigh anchor!

Seagulls in twos and threes fly back and forth.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

My fishing pole

is ready; did I put the *makkōlli* jar on board?

3. (*shijo* 679)

An east wind springs up;
waves get up a lovely swell.

Hoist the sail, hoist the sail!

I leave East Lake behind, move on through to West Lake.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa

The mountain
in front passes by, giving way to the mountain behind.

4. (*shijo* 1571)

Is that the cuckoo singing?

Is that the willow grove greening?

Row the boat, row the boat!

A few fisher houses glimmer in and out of the haze.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Shoaling fish
flash in a clear deep pool.

5. (*shijo* 144)

The reference here is to the song that concludes The Fisherman, ascribed to the Chinese poet, Qu Yuan (ca.300 B.C.)

Gentle sunlight bathes the water;
the waves are like oil.

Row the boat, row the boat!
Should I cast the net; my fishing pole might be better?
Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!
The song of the fisherman
stirs my heart; I forget all about the fish.

6. (*shijo* 1136)

The offices referred to here are prime minister, minister of the right, and minister of the left.

The evening sun slants in the sky;
enough, it's time to go home.
Lower the sail, lower the sail!
Willows and flowers are new at every bend.
Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!
Shall I look
with envy on the three highest offices in the land
or think of the affairs of men?

7. (*shijo* 866)

There are echoes here of a famous Chinese poem, Chuan zi he shang shi, describing a fisherman who has no luck fishing but settles for a boat-load of moonlight:

The night is quiet, the water cold,

the fish will not bite.

I load my empty boat with moonlight
and come on home.

I long to walk on fragrant grasses,
to pick orchids and gromwells, too.

Heave to, heave to!

What have I loaded in my tiny leaf-like boat?

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

On the way out,

I was alone; on the way back, I have the moon.

8. (*shijo* 2169)

The Peach Paradise refers to the utopia discovered by the fisherman in the "Preface to the Peach Blossom Spring" by Tao Yuanming (365-427). The fisherman announces his discovery on his return to the world, but he is unable to find the Peach Paradise again.

Tipsy, I stretch out;

what if I drift through the fast water?

Tie up, tie up!

Petals drift by in the water; the Peach Paradise must be near.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

How well hidden

from the red dust of the world of men!

9. (*shijo* 348)

I hang up my fishing line,
look at the moon through the rush-awning window.

Drop anchor, drop anchor!
Has night fallen already? The cuckoo's call is limpid on the air.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Excitement
unabated, I forget where I'm going.

10. (*shijo* 439)

Will there be no tomorrow;
how long till the spring night sets? Beach the boat, beach the boat!
My fishing pole is my walking stick as I head for the brushwood gate.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Days like this
are a fisherman's life.

Summer

1. (*shijo* 233)

Protracted rain comes to an end;
the stream begins to clear.

Push away, push away!

I put my fishing pole on my shoulder; excitement grips me deep.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Who painted
these layered mountain peaks in the mist tinted river?

2. (*shijo* 1469)

Wrap my rice in lotus leaves;
don't bother preparing side dishes.

Weigh anchor, weigh anchor!

I have my bamboo rain-hat on; what did I do with my sedge rain-cape?

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

White gull,
so very impassive, are you following me or am I following you?

3. (*shijo* 709)

Wind rises in the pond weed;
it's cool at the rush-awning window.

Hoist the sail, hoist the sail!
Are summer winds steady? Let the boat drift where it will.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!
North bank,
south river; it's all the same to me.

4. (*shijo* 814)

The muddy water reference is to the song that concludes "The Fisherman", ascribed to Qu Yuan:

When the Canglang's waters are clear,
I can wash my hat strings in them;
when the Canglang's waters are muddy,
I can wash my feet in them.

The admonition is to seek official preferment when times are good, and to retire gracefully when times are bad. The middle section refers to Fu Cha of Wu who was so angry at the suicide of his servant Wu Yuan that he had the body put in a sack and thrown into the Wu river. The final section refers to Qu Yuan again. A minister in the kingdom of Chu, he was banished for objecting to official policy. Distressed, he committed suicide. The idea here is that the poet might catch Qu Yuan's soul in a fish. The poem is a meditation on loyalty.

So what if I wash my feet

in muddy water?

Row the boat, row the boat!

I would go to the river Wu; how sad the stormy waves of a thousand years.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

I would go

to the river Chu, but I might catch a fish with a human soul.

5. (*shijo* 724)

The inference here is that one should give the best fishing place to an old man just as the people of Lei gave Emperor Shun the best place in ancient times.

In the thick shade of the willow grove,

a mossy spot catches my eye.

Row the boat, row the boat!

When I reach the bridge, I'll assign no blame in the fishermen's wrangling.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

If I meet

the crane-haired old man, I'll follow the example of Lei Lake.

6. (*shijo* 316)

Excitement grips me deep;

I had no idea day was fading fast.

Lower the sail, lower the sail!

Beating time on the mast, I sing boat songs.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Who knows

the old world graces embedded in these songs?

7. (*shijo* 1135)

The first section appears to be a loose translation of a poem by the Tang poet Li Shangyin (812-858).

The evening sun is grand,

but twilight is close at hand.

Heave to, heave to!

The path that winds across the cliff slopes down beneath the pines.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

The song of the oriole

studs the green grove.

8. (*shijo* 771)

The mosquitoes are small minded men who seek only personal gain, while the blowflies are even more despicable types who ruin a man by slander. The final comment would seem to be tongue in cheek while the poet battles with the various insects that trouble him. Sang Hongyang of Han was a wily economics expert who made a large personal fortune while working for his country.

I'll spread my nets on the sand,
lie down under the rush-awning and rest.

Tie up, tie up!

The mosquitoes are a pest; are the blowflies any better?

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

My only fear

is that the wily rogue of Han, Sang Hongyang, may be listening in.

9. (shijo 860)

The middle section quotes a phrase from the Tang poet Wei Yingwu (737-ca.792): crossing - fields - crosswise - boat. However, the sense of the phrase seems to be a boat tied to the ferry landing strangely defying the current by sitting crosswise in the water. The final section also incorporates a phrase from the same Wei Yingwu poem: river - edge - hidden - plant/grass.

Who can tell how wind and waves will change
in the course of the night?

Drop anchor, drop anchor!

Who was it said the boat tied at the ferry cuts across the current?

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

The hidden

plants by the river's edge are truly lovely.

10. (shijo 1544)

I look up at my snail-shell hut;
white clouds are all around.

Beach the boat, beach the boat!

I climb the stony path, bulrush fan sideways in my hand.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

You ask

if a fisherman's life is leisurely; well, this is what I do.

Autumn

1. (*shijo* 799)

How unspoiled the life of the fisherman,
away from the outside world!

Push away, push away!

Laugh not at an old fisherman; he's part of every painting.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

Seasonal pleasures
are all fine; but the autumn river is best of all.

2. (*shijo* 1226)

Autumn comes to the river village;
the fish grow fat.

Weigh anchor, weigh anchor!

Leisurely hours spent on broad waters.

Chigukch'ong, chigukch'ong, ōsawa!

I look back
on the world of men: the farther off the better.

3. (*shijo* 894)

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