



SHIJO RHYTHMS

YI I et al.

Translated by KEVIN O'ROURKE

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For Kevin

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Anonymous

Introduction

Shijo are short traditional Korean songs. They are light, personal, and very often conversational. The language is simple, direct, and devoid of elaboration or ornamentation. The shijo poet gives a first-hand account of his own personal experience of life and emotion: the rise and fall of dynasties; loyalty to the king; friendship, love and parting; the pleasures of wine; the beauty and transience of human existence; the inexorable advance of old age etc.

The first generation of twentieth century shijo scholars regarded shijo as a 3-chang (section) poem, fourteen to sixteen syllables in each chang, distributed through four distinct umbo or breath groups, the total number of syllables not being more than forty-five. The first ku of the final chang was invariably 3 syllables; the second ku of the final chang not less than 5 syllables. This was the regular or ordinary shijo, called p'yong shijo. Two variations of the basic form were postulated: the ot shijo, in which the first or the second chang might be somewhat extended; and the sasol shijo, in which all three chang might be extended. These opinions held sway for a generation. By the 1950s, however, scholars were asking questions; in particular, they were questioning the enormous number of exceptions to the ideal count as postulated in the various syllable count systems. Consequently, several new theories of the rhythmic structure of shijo were introduced. The new theories ran the gamut of prosodic possibility, but none of them provided real satisfaction. Writing in the 1970s, Kim Chehyon summarized the confusion that persisted in shijo studies:

As yet, not only has the concept and function of chang, ku and umbo not been clarified, but the three-chang structural principle has not been adequately elucidated.

Ultimately, all that can be said with certainty about the rhythm of shijo is that the

umbo or breath group is the fundamental unit and that the rhythm of all Korean writing, both prose and poetry, is 3, 4 rhythm.

The shijo originally was a song form. There were two modes of performance: the traditional kagok-ch'ang, a complex five-chang (section) sung accompaniment to which most extant shijo were originally performed; and the shijo-ch'ang, a much simpler accompaniment, which was not invented until the middle of the 19th century when shijo was already in decline, but which became totally dominant by the 1920s. This was when Ch'oe Namson introduced the 3-chang literary text that is accepted as standard today. Shijo today is primarily a literary text, a short lyric poem, read and contemplated rather than performed and heard. The 3-chang division of the shijo text is a dominant concept, so imbedded in the popular consciousness as to be virtually unassailable. Accordingly, the translations in this volume employ the 3-chang structure, but they do so in combination with a five-line English format that corresponds broadly with the five-part song structure of the kagok-ch'ang. Lines 1 and 2 in the translations are the opening chang; line 3 is the middle chang; and lines 4 and 5 are the final chang. The 5-line format is a visual device primarily. I developed the 5-line English format not just because it was warranted by the history of the shijo, but because it opens up huge possibilities in English; it is new and exciting, as the shijo itself should be to the English reader, a much superior vehicle to the traditional shijo English translation vehicle, the pretty 6-line lyric. The translations attempt to get something of the feel of the kagok back into the literary text, to approximate in English the Korean sense of hung that is at the heart of the shijo experience.

This little volume offers only the taste of shijo. It presents a selection from the work of a small number of outstanding poets, in the hope that the reader may be enticed to dig deeper into the treasure trove of traditional Korean poetry.

Yi I (1536~1584)

Yi I, better known by his pen name Yulgok, was one of Korea's greatest Confucian scholars. The Kosan series of ten poems, written in old age, when Yulgok was engrossed in study and teaching, is modeled on a series by the Chinese poet Zhu Zi, "Nine Songs of Wui Mountain".

The Nine Scenic Glories of Kosan

高山九曲潭(고산구곡담)을

살림이 몰으든지

誅茅卜居(주모복거)하니 벗님네 다 오신다

어줍어

武夷(무이)를 想象(상상)하고 學朱子(학주자)를 하리라

The nine scenic glories of Kosan

are unknown to the world of men.

From grass I've cut I weave my hut: friends all come to visit.

In imagination

I'm on Wui Mountain*, studying Zhu Zi.

* Wui Mountain: a mountain in China

一曲(일곡)은 어드미고

冠巖(관암)에 히 빛친다

平蕪(평무)에 너 거든이 遠近(원근)이 글림이로다

松間(송간)에

綠樽(녹준)을 녹코 벗 온양 보노라

First is

the sun lighting Crown Rock.

Mist lifts from verdant fields: far and near are painted scenes.

The green wine-jar

I set among the pines, and I watch the approach of friends.

二曲(이곡)은 어드미고

花岩(화암)에 春晩(춘만)커다

碧波(벽파)에 꽃츨 띄워 野舛(야외)에 보내노라

살림이

勝地(승지)를 몰온이 알게흔들 엇더리

Second is

spring coming late to Flower Rock.

I float petals down green waters, sending them to distant fields.

The world knows

nothing of this lovely place: I think I shall be beauty's herald.

三曲(삼곡)은 어드미고

翠屏(취병)에 님 퍼졌다

綠水(녹수)에 山鳥(산조)는 下上其音(하상기음) 흥는적의

盤松(반송)이

受清風(수청풍)흔이 녀름 景(경)이 업세라

Third is

green foliage spread across Kingfisher Screen.

When mountain birds sing high and low on green waters, balmy breezes
blow through stunted pines: summer disappears.

四曲(사곡)은 어드미고

松崖(송애)에 히 넘거다

潭心岩影(담심암영)은 온갖 빛치 좀껏세라

林泉(임천)이

깊도록 조흐니 흥(흥)을 계워 흐노라

Fourth is

the sun crossing Pine Cliff.

Rocks shadowed in the water reflect a myriad colors.

Woods and springs,

the deeper, the better: I cannot contain the tingle I feel.

五曲(오곡)은 어드미고

隱屏(은병)이 보기 조희

水邊精舍(수변정사)는 瀟灑(소쇄)함도 ㄴ이 업다

이 中(중)에

講學(강학)도 홀연이와 詠月吟風(영월음풍) ㅎ올이라

Fifth is

Secluded Screen: what a lovely sight!

My riverside retreat is cool and clean.

Amid all this,

I'll study and teach; I'll sing the wind, recite the moon.

六曲(육곡)은 어드미고

釣峽(조협)에 물이 넘다

나와 고기와 낚야 더욱 즐기는고

黃昏(황혼)에

낙대를 메고 帶月歸(대월귀)를 흐노라

Sixth is

the broad expanse of water at Fish Point.

Whose is the greater joy, the fish's or mine: I do not know.

In fading light,

I shoulder my fishing pole: the moon illumines the pathway home.

七曲(칠곡)은 어드미고

楓岩(풍암)에秋色(추색)이 좇타

清霜(청상)이 얹게 친이 絶壁(절벽)이 錦繡(금수)로다

寒岩(한암)에

혼자 안자서 집을 잊고 잊노라

Seventh is

autumn colors on Maple Rock.

A light frost turns the cliff to embroidered silk.

I sit alone

on the chill rock and forget all about home.

八曲(팔곡)은 어드미고

琴灘(금탄)에 돌이 붉다

玉軫金徽(옥진금휘)로 數三曲(수삼곡)을 노론말이

古調(고조)를

알리 업쓰이 혼자 즐여 흐노라

Eighth is

bright moonlight on Komun'go Creek.

I play three or four tunes on a fine jade instrument.

Who knows

these old tunes? I play for personal pleasure.

九曲은 어드미고

文山(문산)에 歲暮(세모)커다

奇巖 恠石(기암괴석)이 눈속에 못첫세라

遊人(유인)은

오지 안이하고 볼껏업다 흐드라

Ninth is

the winter sun setting on Mun Mountain.

Weird rocks and fantastic stones are buried in the snow. Sightseers do not come: they say there's nothing to see.

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