

Yu Sorang chŏn

Introduced and translated by CHO SOOKJA

Elegy on a Virtuous Mind: An Introduction of the Seventeenth-Century Chŏn'gi Tale

The anonymously written “Yu Sorang chŏn” 劉少娘傳 [The Tale of a Young Maiden of the Yu Family] describes the short life and near-marriage of a beautiful young woman, Yu Kyesŏn 劉桂仙. On the verge of becoming the wife of the noble Song Hyoyŏng 宋孝英, she falls under the cruel shadow of death. While her wedding is being arranged, her grandmother and father pass away, delaying the wedding. Just before the rescheduled wedding can be finalized, her future husband, Hyoyŏng, also dies. Although her betrothed's death forestalls the completion of the wedding, Kyesŏn chooses to consider herself Hyoyŏng's wife. She conducts his funeral rites before moving to his family home, where she continues to mourn and take care of Hyoyŏng's mother. Her deep sorrow and penchant for overworking erode her health. Soon she too meets her death and is buried next to Hyoyŏng. The virtue of her death is officially recognized. In the end the couple returns, reunited as ghosts, to thank and bid farewell to her family.

The tale focuses on Kyesŏn's struggle to embody virtue during a series of unbearable tragedies. Kyesŏn battles the sorrow of the misfortunes heaven has sent her using the best remedy available to her; a solemn adherence to funeral rites and gender norms. Kyesŏn's virtuous character manifests itself in her refusal to compromise her moral principles in favor of an easy and comfortable way of life. Her utmost concern is the fulfillment of her duty as a daughter, a wife, and a daughter-in-law. She maximizes her sacrifice until she dies of illness. Nonetheless, the tale assures us that her sacrifice does not go unrewarded. The ending offers comfort to readers, particularly those who sympathize with Kyesŏn or follow her example. It shows how the marriage of Kyesŏn and Hyoyŏng, unrealized in this life, flourishes in the

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Little is known about the tale's textual history and origin. This translation uses the only extant manuscript version, from the collection *Sindokchae sut'aekpon chôn'gijip* [A Collection of *Chôn'gi* Tales Selected by Kim Chip (1574–1656)].¹ Because this collection has become widely known only recently, there has heretofore been little research on it, let alone a study of this particular tale.² Information about the tale's background can only be extrapolated from the alleged author and from the collection itself.

The collection includes eight *chôn'gi* (tales of wonder) tales. The style of this one is loosely based on the biographical formats such as biographical notes (*haengjang*) and biographies of virtuous women (*yŏllyŏ chôn*), most of which end with a posthumous recognition of a person's honorable conduct in life. These tales, collected during the life of their compiler and collator, Kim Chip (1574–1656), must have been written and put in circulation around the seventeenth century.³ While we have no information regarding the selection criteria for the included texts or their readership, the collection clearly provides a sampler of popular tales circulated among the literati during Kim Chip's lifetime.⁴ Therefore it reveals the interests and literary taste of the literati of that time. Combining tales of Korean and Chinese origin, the collection also invites a comparative discussion of the scope of the period's reading and writing culture.

Given that the tale is set in the southern part of China during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), some might argue that this tale was most likely written by a Chinese author and then hand-copied or rewritten by a Korean. Similar stories, though not identical, have been found in Chinese historical and literary accounts.⁵ In particular, tales of chaste young widows or girls engaged to be married—called “faithful fiancées”—were prevalent to the point of being

¹ *Sindokchae sut'aekpon chôn'gijip* 慎獨齋手澤本傳奇集 (92 leaves) was first introduced by Chŏng Pyŏng'uk in 1955. Its entire texts were made fully available in both original form and translation by his son, Chŏng Haksŏng; see Chŏng Haksŏng's *Yŏkchu 17 segi hanmun sosŏlchŏp* [Translation and Annotations of the Anthology of Seventeenth Century Novels] (Seoul: Samgyŏng, 2000), 15–32 (the original text); 27–47 (translation). Chŏng's translation provides annotations which this translation builds upon while also including updates drawn from additional research. I thank Prof Chŏng Haksŏng for his invaluable guidance and help on this project.

² Chŏng Haksŏng's research on the tale and the collection is by far the most comprehensive; see his book *Kojŏn sosŏl ū yangsik kwa pip'an chŏngsin* [Forms of Classical Fiction and the Critical Mind] (Seoul: Wŏrin, 2010), 77–155.

³ Some scholars such as Yi Pokkyu date the tales differently, which pushes the timeline to a later period. While further research is needed to date the collection conclusively, I have followed Chŏng Haksŏng in considering it to be a product of the seventeenth century.

⁴ The collection includes both Chinese and Korean tales. To date, except for the two tales, “Wang Sippung kiu ki” 王十朋奇遇記 [The Story of a Fortuitous Encounter of Wang Sibung] and “Wang Kyŏngnyong chôn” 王慶龍傳 [The Tale of Wang Kyŏngnyong], which turned out to be Korean rewritings of the original Chinese tales, the stories, including the “Yu Sorang chôn,” are considered to be of Korean origin. Further research on these tales may change this view.

⁵ A typical narrative of this kind recounts events which promote suicidal acts in women which are eventually honored by the state. Each virtue enacted by these women represents Confucian normative conduct in different gender, class, and social relationships. Characters in the narrative often serve simply as emblems of these virtues, confronting no contrary voices. For an early example of these narratives, see Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representation of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998); see also Anne Behnke Kinney, trans. and ed., *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü zhuan of Liu Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

propaganda during the Ming and Qing periods (1368–1910), a point which strengthens the likelihood that the tale was based on or influenced by Chinese records of women like Kyesŏn.⁶

However, there is little evidence to support any direct influence by a specific Chinese text. Most scholars agree that the tale was probably composed by a Korean author because of the absence of a clearly parallel tale found in China,⁷ the inaccuracies in its geographical setting, and the discrepancies in lexicon and appellation.⁸ The Chinese setting and period, which was very common in late Chosŏn fictional literature, is in fact not so much evidence of Chinese origin as it is a token of the tale's place in a developing vocabulary of genre in Korean fiction at that time. Furthermore, based on the increased circulation among seventeenth-century Korean literati of classical and vernacular tales of both Chinese and Korean origin,⁹ it is logical to assume that the tale, regardless of its national origin, mirrors the reality of Chosŏn, as perceived and reconstructed figuratively by Korean literati at the time.

The tale, which dwells in the borders between biography and fiction, dramatizes the cultural gravity granted to filial piety and chastity without sacrificing literary sensibility. It interweaves scattered facts which might otherwise belong to a biography suitable for circulation among relatives and friends, and turns them into a perennial fictional narrative suited to a wider readership. While the biographical tone presents a model of a virtuous woman with a most tragic life, its fictional form and literary devices, as is often the case in *chŏn'gi* tales, allow room for contextualizing the story in a style more personal and appealing than straight biography.

The tale speaks to the concerns of those who have experienced unexpected loss. The unusually dire situation of Kyesŏn, a woman who devotes the glory of her youth to funerals and mourning, embodies a form of loss so extreme that, in bereavement, anyone can find sympathy and comfort in reading her story. The tale's Chinese backdrop, descriptions of long journeys, and ghostly manifestations provide a stage for the imaginative development of the themes of separation, suffering, and longing. The characters are parted by distance and death, evoking the otherworldly for the Korean readership of that era. The emphasis on distance, along with the difficulty of mobility, illuminates Kyesŏn's struggle with human limitations, but highlights the way that her resolve to fulfill her duties eventually annihilates both physical distance and the distance between life and death.

Kyesŏn, with her determination to obey moral imperatives, is the key to developing

⁶ See Fangqin Du and Susan Mann, "Competing Claims on Womanly Virtue in Late Imperial China," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, eds. Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 221.

⁷ Chŏng Haksŏng reports the possibility that raw materials for this tale were drawn from both Chinese and Korean sources; see Chŏng, *ibid.*, 136–53. Yet, as he noted, there is no evidence proving the direct influence of one tale on the other. It would be safe, in fact, to assume that the author was well aware of similar narratives of virtuous women in reality and in texts.

⁸ For these two claims, see O Hwa (Wu Hua), "Yu Sorang chŏn ūi kukchŏk munje e taehan koch'al" [A Study of the Issues with the Nationality of Yu Sorang chŏn], *Hanminjok ōmunhak* 67 (2014): 221–50.

⁹ For more information on the increased circulation of these tales during the seventeenth century, see Yun Sesun, "17 segi kanhaengbon sŏsaryu ūi chonjae yangsang e taehayŏ" [A Study on Seventeenth-Century Published Narratives and Their Different Modes of Existence], *Minjok munhaksŏ yŏn'gu* 38 (2008): 132–59.

the didactic theme of the tale. Her personal sense of duty holds her to a higher standard than most people. She takes on the responsibility of being a wife after Hyoyōng's death and dedicates the rest of her life to serving her mother-in-law even though, having never actually married, she is not socially obliged to do so. These qualities in Kyesōn clearly categorize her as a virtuous woman (*yōllyō* 烈女) in Korean culture. Her eventual death from excessive mourning also typifies the cultish degree of chastity encouraged among young widows in Late Chosōn society.¹⁰ Official rewards were given to the families of widows who chose to remain chaste, either by suicide or by spending their lives serving parents-in-law.¹¹

The development of Kyesōn's character illustrates the ways and the extent to which the abusive practice of female virtue operated in the minds of women themselves. Her sacrifice is presented as a voluntary and authentic act resulting from her harmonized view of life and the world; her faith in karmic relationships is rooted in Buddhism, and her determination to achieve righteousness toward heaven and people is drawn from Confucianism (Mencius).¹² Together they constitute a coherent, logical model of an appropriate moral life for women. Kyesōn rationalizes her misfortunes by attributing them to her karma from a previous life and accepts her tragedy in a socially honorable manner.

Still, a sense of guilt pervades Kyesōn's choices. Doing good deeds in accordance with the highest moral standard is presented as her best solution. These deeds are not merely socially honorable but also religiously advisable, since they will benefit her future incarnations. With this forward-looking view of life built upon the complementary interaction between the Buddhist world view and Confucian ethics, there seems to be little difference between Kyesōn's life as a widow at Hyoyōng's home and her death in the midst of fulfilling her duties. In this way, her early death is preferable to a prolonged life, since a prolonged life means prolonged suffering, laden with feelings of guilt. Her dark view of herself as a sinner is detrimental to her health, but is nonetheless a step toward individual salvation and eventual happiness.

While the tale focuses on Kyesōn's virtuous conduct and her unfortunate death, it doesn't shy away from representing the dissonant voices of other characters. It makes the reader aware of how each character expresses their own point of view on everyday ethics. Kyesōn's mother, brother, and nanny all initially oppose her decision to take on wifely duties to Hyoyōng, as they are more concerned with her health and worldly happiness than with her becoming an exemplary woman. Their anti-normative response to her virtuous intent

¹⁰ See Martina Deuchler, "Propagating Female Virtues in Chosōn Korea," in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, 160. Women's conducts of extraordinary morality were rewarded by the state throughout the Chosōn period and, in time, were emulated by women from all classes. During the late Chosōn, after the consecutive invasions by the Japanese and Manchu in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, chastity proven by death became central to the discourse of female virtue.

¹¹ This type of woman, a young, virgin widow, who survives to serve her husband's family rather than committing suicide, continued to appear in the literature and arts of the twentieth century, such as the film *Yōllyōmun* (*Bound by Chastity*, 1962; dir. Sin Sangok). The conflict between duty, familial obligation, and personal desire has continued to be a central issue in Korean women's lives.

¹² Kyesōn mentions "three delights of the superior man" (*kuinja sammak*), with particular emphasis on the idea that one should have no shame before heaven or people. See note 40 in the translation that follows.

acknowledges the oppressive and sacrificial aspects of the life Kyesŏn chooses. Kyesŏn's interiority, as revealed in her letters to her mother and sister, subtly supports this resistance.¹³ Though Kyesŏn is outwardly firm about her decision to leave home to hold a funeral for Hyoyŏng, she can't entirely subdue her emotional distress when she thinks about her own mother and siblings. The author may be making veiled reference to the problems engendered by the practice of virtues during seventeenth-century Chosŏn, intending either to question or reaffirm their true meaning.¹⁴

With its focus on virtue, the tale makes little effort to entertain readers with romantic extravagance in prose or verse describing the love between Kyesŏn and her husband. Instead, it emphasizes the relations between the two families, rather than the relationship between the couple. It thus affirms the institution of arranged marriage and the authority of fathers as heads of family. The process of arranging a marriage is presented as a relationship of mutual respect and caring between the two families. The difficult situations faced by each family, such as delays to the wedding or the sudden death of Hyoyŏng, only strengthen the close bonds between them. The pressure of blindly obeying behavioral norms is mitigated by the authority of ethical and compassionate people whose choices vindicate the power of humanity. It is that power of humanity in the face of these tragedies which returns the couple, in ghost form, to express their gratitude to Kyesŏn's family.

Today the tale speaks to our concepts of gender, virtue, marriage, and funeral culture as they were understood in seventeenth-century Korea. It also furthers our inquiry into the reading and writing practice of the period. Kyesŏn's tale exists in our collective memory of the lives and deaths of virtuous women, advancing our investigation into their legacy in our own lives. I hope this English translation will draw further scholarly attention to this tale, about which so much remains to be explored.

¹³ A series of letters between the characters are the important basis for the tale. This storytelling format, which is rarely seen in narratives of virtuous women, evokes contested communicative space, illustrating the process by which Kyesŏn and other characters dictate their sacrifices in their own terms and willingly accept the bitterness that results. Such use of letters in the tale echoes a wide practice of letter writing in late Chosŏn Korea and its significant role in building "vibrant socio-textual communities"; see Jahyun Kim Haboush, ed., *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁴ The discourse on virtuous women was rapidly promulgated and strictly enforced via a variety of legal and social pressures during the seventeenth century in the process of rebuilding the Confucian society after the devastating Japanese and Manchu Invasions (1592–1598; 1627 and 1636, respectively). For further information, see Kang Myŏngwan, *Yŏllyŏ ūi t'ansaeng: Kabujangje wa Chosŏn yŏsŏng ūi chanbokhan yŏksa* [Birth of the Virtuous Women: Patriarchy and the Brutal History of Chosŏn Women] (Paju: Tolbegae, 2009), esp. 471–520. There emerged many records of honorable deaths of young widows similar to that of Kyesŏn; see Yi Hyesun, "Yŏllyŏ sang ūi chŏnt'ong kwa pyŏnmo: Samgang haengsilto esŏ Chosŏn hugi yŏllyŏ chŏn kkaji" [The Tradition and Transformation of Virtuous Women: From the *Samgang Haengsilto* to the late Chosŏn *Yŏllyŏ chŏn*], *Chindan hakpo* 85 (1998): 163–83; esp. 176.

The Translation of “Yu Sorang chŏn” (The Tale of a Young Maiden of the Yu Family)

There was a young maiden [of the Yu 劉 family] whose name was Kyesŏn 桂仙.¹⁵ Her style name was Chin’gyŏng 眞卿 and she was the second oldest daughter of the late *Ch’amjŏng* Wi 焯.¹⁶ Her family originated in the southern part of the country, and she grew up in Wŏlgye [in Chŏlgang].¹⁷ Naturally endowed with a lovely and charming figure, she was incredibly beautiful. By the age of fourteen, she had mastered a variety of books. Her parents particularly loved and cherished her.

When *Ch’amjŏng* was still alive, *P’ojŏngsa*¹⁸ Song Ch’ang 宋彰 proposed a marriage between the Yu family and his son Hyoyŏng 孝英. Hyoyŏng was a bright and noble scholar, renowned in the Kwangdong area.¹⁹ *Ch’amjŏng*, eager to have a man of virtue like Hyoyŏng as his son-in-law, agreed to the marriage and conducted the ceremony of “Receiving the Betrothal Gifts” from the bridegroom’s house.²⁰ The wedding date was set for the fifteenth day of the third lunar month of the same year. However, the day before the wedding, *Ch’amjŏng*’s stepmother passed away. *Ch’amjŏng* took his entire household and went to the south. The Song family heard little from the Yu family for the distance between Kwangdong and Chŏlgang was over two thousand *li*. A year passed without any word and the wedding was postponed indefinitely.

During the mourning period, *Ch’amjŏng*’s health quickly deteriorated. He eventually died in a hut built near his stepmother’s grave. His funeral had not yet been held when *P’ojŏngsa* Song Ch’ang, unaware of his passing, wrote a letter urging him to uphold his promise to take Hyoyŏng as a son-in-law. A servant delivered the message, which read:

¹⁵ Though the tale is set in Ming China, the Korean reading is applied to names and places in the original text. In the notes, however, I use Korean, Chinese, or both, for names and places whenever they could be identified.

¹⁶ *Ch’amjŏng* 參政 (C. *canzheng*): an official title which can be translated as administrative vice commissioner of a province or state councilor.

¹⁷ It is very difficult to identify Chinese names and places in this story as most of them are imaginary Chinese places, which do not necessarily have traceable derivations. Still, there are many places called Wŏlgye 越溪 (C. Yuexi) in China, but the one near Ninghai, Zhejiang 浙江 (K. Chŏlgang) seems to be the most likely one in the story’s context; Kyesŏn’s family is said to live in Chŏlgang. Wŏlgye, literally meaning a stream of the Yue 越 region, is also associated with a beauty called Xi Shi 西施 (K. Sŏ Si) who washed clothes at Yue Stream before she was selected to be a palace lady. Her story is recounted in a poem titled “Xi Shi yong” 西施詠 [Ode to Xi Shi] written by Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (ca. 699–761): “In the morning she was a girl of Yue Stream; in the evening she became a concubine at the Court of the Wu state.” 朝爲越溪女，暮作吳宮妃。

¹⁸ *P’ojŏngsa* 布政使 (C. *buzhengshi*): Head of the Provincial Administration Commission during Ming China (1368–1644).

¹⁹ Kwangdong 廣東: Guangdong 广东 Province, China.

²⁰ “Receiving the Betrothal Gifts” is an essential part of the traditional wedding known as Six Ceremonies (六禮). In China, the Six Ceremonies usually consist of 1) asking for the name; 2) receiving the betrothal gifts; 3) setting a date for the wedding; 4) fetching the bride; 5) pouring libations in front of a pair of wild geese; 6) [the wife’s] undertaking worship at the [husband’s] ancestral shrine. See David Solomon, Ping-Cheng Lo, and Ruiping Fan, eds., *Ritual and the Moral Life: Reclaiming the Tradition* (New York: Springer, 2012), 100–101. There are slight differences in the titles and procedures of Six Ceremonies over time and between China and Korea, though the basic components remain the same. For more information of the Korean wedding ceremony, see Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1992), 251–57.

“*P’ojŏngsa* Song at Kwangdong *P’ojŏngsa*²¹ respectfully writes to *Ch’amjŏng* Yu, a filial son in mourning. As the sun sets on the western mountain, you suffer the sorrow of losing your parent. How are you enduring your mind’s disarray which grows greater day by day with unquenchable longing for your parent? How do you cope with the immeasurable sorrow brought on by being unable to rejoin your father? I wish I could rush to console you, but my feet are bound, tied to a trivial position far away at the edge of the sky. All I can do is to worry and weep, facing the southern sky [where you are].

My son has grown older but still he has no wife. In the fall, I hope you will be able to keep the promise you made before. Indeed, it would be splendid if you could put the wedding back on course. I am very old and my days in this world are numbered. I wish only to see my son married before my death. Because my eyes are ailing, I am unable to write at greater length. I wish you well and please pardon my lack of decorum.

In the tenth year of *kyŏng’ae*,²² on a certain day of the ninth lunar month, Song wrote the above, bowing repeatedly.”

A servant of the Song family packed up the letter and made the trip to Chŏlgang. By the time he arrived, *Ch’amjŏng* had already been dead for over two months. The letter was instead delivered to *Ch’amjŏng*’s son, Sung 崧. He placed the letter before his father’s soul seat²³ and had Ch’oe Sin 崔信, who studied under the family, read it aloud. When Ch’oe Sin finished, Sung took the letter and left the room, wailing. Kneeling before his mother, he showed her the letter. He said, “This is a letter from *P’ojŏngsa* of Gwangdong, regarding my little sister’s wedding. He sent one of his servants to personally deliver it to my father.”

His mother spoke in tears,

“Alas! I never imagined that one day your father would no longer be here with us to read *P’ojŏngsa*’s letter. When we have not piled even a handful of earth over his grave, how could we think properly about a wedding? Yet, we cannot return the servant who traveled over a thousand *li* with nothing. It would be best if we could at least write a reply, thanking *P’ojŏngsa* Song for sending the letter. After meeting *P’ojŏngsa*’s son, your father often imagined having an enjoyable conversation with his son-in-law, sitting by his desk at his leisure. Unfortunately, he has passed away before that dream could be realized. Yet, how could I betray what your father planned for the wedding? What worries me is your sister has lost her father too early in life. She is in great distress, overcome with sorrow and grief, and I fear she might dissipate suddenly like morning dew before the time of mourning is over. At the same time, Mr. Song [Hyoyŏng], as a son of *P’ojŏngsa*, must be pressed to have a child. I doubt he would be willing to wait for

²¹ *P’ojŏngsa* 布政司 (C. Buzhengsi): The Provincial Administration Commission of Ming China.

²² The year of *kyŏng’ae* 景泰 (C. *jingtai*) seems to refer to the reign of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 1450–57) of Ming China, during which this story is set.

²³ “Soul seat” is a translation of *yŏngjwa* 靈座, referring to a location where a spirit tablet for the dead is placed.

us to reschedule the wedding. Write a good letter based on my thoughts. Then hand it respectfully to the servant to carry back.”

On his knees, Sung received his mother’s instructions and stepped outside the hut built next to his father’s grave. He cut a piece of paper and wrote a reply, which read,

“Yu Sung of Chōlgang, in mourning, presents a letter to *P’ojōngsa* Song at Gwangdong P’ojōngsa with a deep bow. I am he who deserved death much earlier because of my countless sins and bad karma, unacceptable to heaven and earth. My prolonged survival negatively affected my father, causing his sudden passing on the tenth day of the last month. Left helpless and forlorn, I am not able to complete the funeral ceremony, and can only wail miserably, crying out to the sky and beating the earth. Today when I received your letter, opened it, and read it on my knees, I was plunged into the labyrinth of my feelings, alternating between grief and melancholy. I placed the letter in front of the coffin to express our gratitude to you for writing from afar. Then, I asked my mother about the wedding. She said that she, although not clever, would never break the promise made by *Ch’amjōng*, who valued it more than gold. However, she is gravely concerned that her young, stubborn daughter will not be able to fulfill the promise because she is seriously ill from mourning since the passing of her father. I feel similar concerns about her. Since my father passed, she has mourned by sleeping on straw with a pillow of soil. Ceaseless lamenting and deep sorrow have sapped her health so that we can’t expect her to thrive.²⁴ We worry whether she can even endure the three year mourning period.²⁵ We are filled with regret that my father died before he could fulfill his plan to have your son as a son-in-law. We can’t predict how you will respond to our situation. I must stop writing here, as I choke back tears at my own message. We would be most fortunate if you could reach a satisfactory decision.

On a certain day of a certain month in a certain year, Yu Sung of Chōlgang in mourning presents this letter with a deep bow.”

After sealing the letter, he gave it to the servant from the Song family, having given him wine and cake and some money for his journey back home.

²⁴ This sentence and the next two sentences have many missing characters in the original text. I translate them based on the available characters and context.

²⁵ According to the Confucian manual for everyday ritual, particularly Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) *Family Rituals* (家禮), one should keep a three year mourning period after the funeral for one’s parents. During this mourning period, one should live in a grass hut built next to the grave and take care of it. Wine and meat, let alone sexual intercourse, are prohibited. The three year period reflects the notion that the constant care which parents give their infants for the first three years should be repaid at their deaths. This three-year mourning has a long history in Korea and was widely practiced among the upper class (*yangban*) in Chosōn Korea as a normative filial act encouraged by state law. For more information on the practice of the Confucian funeral rites, see Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 179–202; see also Milan Hejtmanek, “The Familiar Dead,” in *Death, Mourning, and the Afterlife in Korea*, ed. Charlotte Horlyck and Michael J. Pettid (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), 155–67.

Meanwhile, *P'ojŏngsa* Song Ch'ang had been demoted. He was reassigned as the Prefect²⁶ of Namnyŏng²⁷ several days before his servant, bearing the reply letter [from Yu Sung] returned. By coincidence, the route to his new post passed through Chŏlgang, so *P'ojŏngsa* sent a servant to notify Sung that he hoped to stop and spend the night.

Sung instructed his servants to clean the guesthouse and waited outside the gate for *Namnyŏng's* [*P'ojŏngsa*] arrival. *Namnyŏng* hurried his horse and, when he reached the bridge, dismounted to clasp Sung's hands. [Seeing what had happened,] he immediately lamented. He then offered a message of condolence and comfort for Sung in his lonely bereavement. With sacrificial food and an address he had prepared, he presented a memorial service before the soul seat. His memorial address read:

“Once we parted by taking different paths, south and east. Now, we are separated from each other forever between life and death. Already, vegetation covers your grave. Under the glimmer of the waning crescent moon over the rafters, your face shimmers.²⁸ How endless my longing for you; once gone, it is difficult to come back! How sorrowful it is that you have gone to the Nine Plains,²⁹ the place from which one can never return. This person [I, Song Ch'ang] is at my old friend's [your] home, after heading south to Chŏlgang and passing Kŭmnŭng,³⁰ on my way to my new post assigned as an official reprimand [by the Emperor]. Deep remorse floods me that I cannot find my friend at his own home! Tears gushing from my eyes turn into a galaxy of water as if I heard a flute song played at sunset while we were passing Sanyang.³¹ My only consolation is that your daughter is faultless and my son didn't die, so we can set another time for their wedding. Everything will be all right if we choose a wedding date. Do you, your noble soul, know of this? I have no other wish.”

Having completed the memorial service, he entered the guestroom and called his son, Hyoyŏng, to request a talk with Sung. He said to Sung, “This old man has been banished to the middle of the southern region,³² with no expectation of returning to the northern palaces

²⁶ Prefect (*zhifu* 知府; K. *chibu*): refers to the highest administrator of a territorial unit, which is prefecture 府 in this text.

²⁷ Namnyŏng 南寧 (C. Nanning): This seems to refer to a city in present-day Guangxi 广西 Province, bordering Vietnam. This remote area is often thought of as a place of exile.

²⁸ The original text of this passage (屋梁殘月, 眉目依依) is reminiscent of the famous couplet in Tang poet Du Fu's 杜甫 (712–70) poem titled “Meng Li Bai” 夢李白 [Dreaming of Li Bai], which read: “In the glimmer of the waning moon that fills the rafters, I see your face.” 落月滿屋梁, 猶疑照顏色.

²⁹ Nine Plains (K. Kuwŏn 九原): refers to the place deep down in the underworld, where the souls of the dead reside. It is also known as “Nine Springs” (K. Kuch'ŏn 九泉) or “Yellow Spring” (K. Hwangch'ŏn 黃泉).

³⁰ Kŭmnŭng 金陵 (C. Jinling) is literally “Gold Hill,” an old name for present-day Nanjing 南京, China.

³¹ This passage recalls a story of deep friendship associated with poet Shang Xiu 常秀 (ca. 227–72; K. Sang Su) of the Jin 晉 dynasty (265–420). Shang Xiu, when he passed by Shanyang 山陽 (K. Sanyang), heard a flute song played by a nearby neighbor, which reminded him of dead friends like Ji Kang 嵇康 (232–62; K. Hye Kang) and Lü An 呂安 (d. 262; K. Yŏ An). Upon this, he composed a prose-poem called “Si Jiu fu” 思舊賦 (Rhapsody on Recalling Old Friends).

³² The original text says “Namjung” 南中 (C. Nanzhong) which I translate here as a part of the southern land. It

in my lifetime. Once I arrive at my new post, I plan to send my son back to care for my ill wife. I would be more than happy if we could then select an auspicious time and bring about the union of the two families this fall at the latest.”

Sung arose from his seat and kneeled before *Namnyōng*. He said, “Recently my sister suffers less from her illness. Day by day she regains her health. Her recovery must be a sign that heaven extended her life so that she could be married to your noble family. Nothing could be more fortunate and I agree with your suggestion.”

Sung immediately told his mother about *Namnyōng*’s suggestion. She replied, “Your father’s wish is finally fulfilled. I can now die in peace with my eyes closed,”³³ and instructed Sung to thank *Namnyōng* on her behalf. The following morning, *Namnyōng* bade them farewell and departed. Soon, he formally notified them in writing of the wedding date, with the ceremony of “Fetching the Bride” on the first day of the ninth lunar month of that year.³⁴ However, late in the seventh lunar month, Hyoyōng contracted a disease while returning from *Namnyōng*. He died on the road in the prefecture of Kūmnūng.

Coincidentally, Sung had been invited to visit Kūmnūng and had been staying in the house of a friend of his father for weeks. When he heard of the death of Hyoyōng, Sung hurried to view the body and attend to the preparation of the corpse for the funeral. He took the lead in providing a temporary grave on Yōgyang Mountain.³⁵ In low spirits, Sung returned home and told his mother what had happened in Kūmnūng. Upon hearing of the sudden death of Hyoyōng she cried aloud and collapsed to the ground.

Ch’amjōng’s daughter, Kyesōn, was in the rear of the house when she heard the news. In grief, she unbound her hair, pounded her bosom, stomped her feet and wailed loudly as if she had lost her husband. Sung urged her to stop, “Little sister, what you are doing is not proper. Why are you overreacting? You are not formally married to him in accordance with the rite of “Fetching the Bride.” You haven’t yet developed a special bond with him as husband and wife. Are you mourning like this just because we received betrothal gifts?”

Kyesōn said, “People call you a learned scholar. I have always aspired to emulate a superior man [*kunja* 君子] by learning propriety. To my chagrin, however, you are now speaking of moral depravity. I read in the historical records and also heard from people of older generations that one must never break a promise once it is spoken, so it makes no difference whether or not “Fetching the Bride” was performed [as the wedding was already set]. It is said, ‘a chaste woman does not serve two husbands.’ If you try to marry me off to another household, then you are heartless and cruel. I swear that my mind is already set and

could also simply be the name of a place.

³³ The expression “I can now die in peace with my eyes closed” is a Korean idiom expressing that a person feels she can die with no regrets because her wish is already fulfilled.

³⁴ The original text has *ch’inyōn* 親延 (possibly meaning “performing wedding”), but I believe it is a mistake, intending *ch’inyōng* 親迎 which means “Fetching the bride,” one of the Six Ceremonies constituting the wedding ceremony. “Fetching the bride” is the highlight of the wedding ceremony during which the bride and groom meet for the first time and announce their union in public. See note 20.

³⁵ Yōgyang Mountain 曆陽山 (C. Liyangshan 历阳山): The location of Yōgyang Mountain remains unclear. There is Yōgyang Mountain in Anhui 安徽 Province, China.

I will meet my death before I will be swayed.”

She then brought a scissor and cut off the two braided buns of her hair, making a vow to herself. She went to her mother and said, “My husband passed away because of my ill-fated life. I will take leave of you and go to his grave. I will take the coffin to his hometown so that his restless soul will not become a lonely ghost in a foreign land.”

Her mother held Kyesŏn’s hands. She was speechless. Tears flowed from her eyes in torrents. Finally she replied, “Alas, my little daughter, how are you going to live? Having heard what you said, how can I stop you from following your sincere wish?” She then told Sung, “It caused me grief that I could not change your sister’s mind. However, because she is a woman, she should not travel over one hundred *li* to hasten [to her husband’s] home for the funeral. I think you should first talk with *Namnyŏng* about the necessary materials for the funeral and take the coffin to his hometown. It would not be a bad idea for Kyesŏn to join you on the day of the burial.”

Kyesŏn spoke out, “I don’t dare go against your command, but my husband had no siblings, his father is far away and his mother is all alone, so I should take charge as the only able member of the family. What will people think of me if I don’t take care of my family? I beg you to allow me to go with my brother to Kŭmnŭng and take the coffin of my husband to his hometown so that I can lay him to rest in the family burial ground. If I can do that, I will have no regrets even in my death.”

Moved by Kyesŏn’s piteous heart and praiseworthy thoughts, her mother gave her permission. She then called Kyesŏn’s nanny, Aegyŏng 愛瓊, and her maids, Ongmae 玉梅 and Haedang 海棠, and tearfully instructed them, “How unfortunate Kyesŏn is! My heart is broken since Mr. Song [Hyoyŏng] passed away unexpectedly. Kyesŏn wishes to go to Kŭmnŭng and hold a proper funeral for him. I cannot stop her when I feel such pity for her sentiment. Pack your things, accompany Kyesŏn to Kŭmnŭng and escort her back.”

Aegyŏng stepped forth and prostrated herself on her knees saying, “My Lady, My Lady, I am afraid that you are about to ruin her life. It is unfortunate that Mr. Song died, but there must be another suitor among his clan. Given that the blue bird brought no news and the red thread is not tied [by the old man under the moon],³⁶ she is not formally married. You don’t want your young daughter to sleep in a lonely room for the rest of her life, do you? I am merely an old servant who does not know much but I feel compelled to oppose your action today.”

Before Kyesŏn’s mother could respond, both Ongmae and Haedang also kneeled and said, “We concur with Aegyŏng. We are ignorant, so we could not discuss the matter. However, deep in our hearts we feel that our young lady’s trip is improper. How could there be a bond of husband and wife when no wedding vow was ever made? We lie prone and implore you. Please subdue her obstinacy and persuade her not to commit this rash act. This is our desperate wish.”

³⁶ In folk culture, a blue bird (青鳥) is known as the messenger of happy news, here implying a wedding. “A red thread is not tied” means that a wedding is not determined yet. According to legend, marriages are in the charge of the old man under the moon (Wŏrha noin 月下老人), who ties red threads together randomly, each thread representing a person.

Sung also said to his mother, “Our servants may be ignorant, but sometimes they speak the truth. I urge you to reconsider your decision.”

Kyesŏn stepped forth and intervened, “I may be young, but I have made a mature decision. It is unthinkable for me to have two husbands. A learned person would not say what you suggested, my brother. An old saying goes, ‘A righteous man loves others with virtue.’ To that end, people should treat even strangers with affection, and siblings must tend each other with utmost care and love. I lie prostrate and implore you. I desperately hope that you are not swayed by other people’s opinions and will allow me to carry out my wish.”

Caressing Kyesŏn’s back, her mother said, “I find Kyesŏn’s words righteous and I won’t reconsider my decision. Sung, prepare promptly for the trip to Kŭmnŭng and go with Kyesŏn.”

Sung acknowledged his mother’s command and retreated. Along with Aegyŏng and the other maids, he prepared for travel. When they were ready to depart, Kyesŏn bowed to her mother and bade her farewell, “I have been undutiful to you as a daughter. All these years I don’t recall even one time where I served you good food. Now I am about to leave you and will be unable to check on you every morning and evening for a long time. I have neglected my filial duty and caused you too much trouble. My failure in filial duty is the worst of sins! After I accompany the body of my husband to bury him in his hometown, I would like to devote the rest of my life to you. However, as my old mother-in-law has no other child except my husband, I am obliged to support her. Circumstances prevent me from performing both duties, and it frustrates me deeply.”

Her mother said, “You have already decided to become a member of the Song family and they have no other child except you, so I think you should take care of your mother-in-law. I am sure your sister and Sung will understand and not object to your supporting her.”

Kyesŏn wiped tears off her face and bade farewell to her mother. She held the hands of her older sister, Maesŏn 梅仙, and said in tears, “I am a sinner who cannot be forgiven under the sky and above the land. I am ashamed that I am unable to support my own mother and do not dare raise my head to face anyone. I implore you to take good care of our mother...”

Kyesŏn covered her mouth with her hand to hold back a surge of emotion and could not continue. She could only repeat, ‘take care’ and shed many tears as she bade farewell.

Accompanied by Sung, Aegyŏng, and the other maids, Kyesŏn traveled to Kŭmnŭng. She brought her husband’s body to his hometown and buried him in a lot on the left side of the Song family’s burial mounds. She wore garments of hemp and did her best to follow the tradition of mourning by living in a hut built beside the grave for the next three years. However, she also could not ignore Hyoyŏng’s mother. Holding back her emotions, she brought the spirit tablet of her husband to the house of the Song family³⁷ and served her mother-in-law as if she were her own mother. She always showed a tender smile and spoke softly to hide her sadness when she was with her mother-in-law, though when she was all alone in her room, she put her head under the pillow and wept bitterly. Still in mourning, she

³⁷ This line explains a rite of *panbon* 返魂 (literally, “soul-returning”), meaning enshrining the spirit tablet back at home after the burial.

grew haggard and her body thinned like a dried tree branch. Days passed but her emaciated body only grew thinner. It had been only few months since the funeral when she became too sick to rise. There seemed no hope of her recovery.

Hyoyŏng's mother, Lady Yang, personally brought medicine to Kyesŏn and, sobbing, begged her to take it. Kyesŏn showed brief improvement, but a short time later she suffered insomnia and loss of appetite which lasted for many weeks. Time passed and the end of the period of mourning drew near, but Kyesŏn's condition became steadily worse.

One day, Lady Yang, barely able to hold back her tears, said, "Old and unfortunate I am, I lost my only child. Having a daughter-in-law consoles me much but you have suffered greatly from mourning and I am now stricken with worry and grief. If misfortune befalls you, who can I rely on? I have also heard that your mother is especially fond of you. I don't have many days left to live[, so don't worry about me.] But please worry about your own mother!"

Kyesŏn struggled to raise her feeble body, bowed, and said on her knees, "It is all due to your grace that I am able to cling to my shattered life for so long. Despite my sorry fate in losing my husband too soon, I can breathe and lift my face between the sky and the earth with no shame. I have lived on in hope of serving you well, preparing delicious foods in the kitchen. At least then I would not completely fail my husband in the underworld. Please do not worry. Heeding your words, I hope I may strive to preserve my worthless life in any way I can."

However, Kyesŏn's illness was already dire. Even the skill of legendary physicians such as Yu Pu and P'yŏn Chak³⁸ could not have cured her. One day, Kyesŏn summoned her servant Haedang to cut a large piece of white silk, and wrote a letter to her mother. Then, on another piece, she wrote a letter to her sister Maesŏn. The letters read,

"Your unfilial daughter Kyesŏn respectfully writes to her mother. Your daughter, Kyesŏn, fated to misfortune throughout all three lives,³⁹ lost a husband in early life and left you, my mother, far away. Far beyond the clouds is my home, a thousand *li* away. I shed bloody tears after living in a foreign land for three years. While your grace and virtue in raising me are as big as the sky, my sin in not taking care of you is as heavy and unfathomable as counting my hairs one by one. Looking up [toward heaven], I'm unfilial, and below [toward people], I am ashamed.⁴⁰ Every night, I gaze toward

³⁸ Yu Pu 俞附 (C. Yu Fu) is a physician during the reign of Huang Di 黃帝 (Yellow Emperor, r. ca. 2698–2598 BCE). P'yŏn Chak 扁鵲 (C. Bian Que, ca. 5th–4th C. BCE) is a legendary physician during the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE) in ancient China. They frequently appear together in literature as symbols of the best Chinese medical doctors. The earliest known record of these two is in the *Historical Records* (史記) by the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE); see "Bian Que Cang gong lie zhuan" 扁鵲倉公列傳 (K. P'yŏn Chak Ch'ang gong yŏlchŏn) in vol. 105.

³⁹ Three Lives (*samsaeng* 三生): refers to one's past, present, and future lives which, according to Buddhism, operate based on the laws of cause and effect.

⁴⁰ This passage seems to be drawn from Mencius's 孟子 (372–289 BCE) teaching of "three delights of the superior man" (*keunja sammak* 君子三樂) seen in the Chapter 13 of "Jinsim sang" 盡心上, which read: "That, when looking up, he has no occasion for shame before Heaven, and, below, he has no occasion to blush before men; this is a second delight." 仰不愧於天, 俯不作於人, 二樂也. The translation is from James Legge; <https://cctx.org/>

where you are, but it is too far to reach. When there was an evening rain on sparse grasses, I envied several times the filial birds's crying.⁴¹ Yuk Chök's story of keeping yellow tangerines at his breast to give to his mother touched my heart to no avail.⁴² I subdued my own sorrow to take care of my old, gray-haired mother-in-law at home. How wretched my life was, yet I acted frivolously like a young child in a rainbow-striped garment to amuse her.⁴³

Unfortunately, I became ill and withered like firewood. Barely eating and with an uneasy mind, my face turned pale and my body thin. Like the morning dew, I have nothing to do but to wait for the day of my death. Unable to promise that I will care for you again, I don't know how to repay your infinite virtue and grace. Yet, it is fortunate that Sister Maesön and Brother Sung attend you closely. My only wish is that you may live in peace with no dark thoughts about me. I bid farewell to you from this moment. On a certain day of a certain month in a certain year, unfilial daughter Kyesön presents these words with respect.”

“Your sister, Kyesön, presents a letter to her sister with a deep bow. Alas, since our parting, three years have passed, during which we have lived a thousand *li* apart. The *Book of Poetry* has it that “When a girl goes away [from her home], she is separated from her parents and siblings.”⁴⁴ Isn't it truly so? With clouded mountains in the far distance, there was no way to send my words to you. Amidst the fast flow of time, how long can one life last? The sun is already approaching sunset,⁴⁵ but I am abandoning the filial duty which the children of crows do to their mother.⁴⁶ I climbed a steep cliff, but could reach no further. Contemplating a spray of dogwood, I thought about my siblings missing their distant sister.⁴⁷ Listening to the cries of geese makes me envy their returning home. With her sorry fate, your sister has committed a sin bigger than the sky

dictionary.pl?if=en&id=1811.

⁴¹ Filial birds seem to refer to crows. See note 46 below.

⁴² Yuk Chök 陸績 (C. Lu Ji, 188–219): a scholar and official of the Wu 吳 state (222–80) during the Three Kingdoms Period. He was known for his filial piety.

⁴³ This passage refers to a story of Noraeja 老萊子 (Lao Laizi) of the Chu 楚 state during the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 771–476 BCE). Noraeja is known for his filial acts, particularly for dressing up and acting like a child to amuse his parents when he himself was seventy.

⁴⁴ The cited passage of the *Book of Poetry* (詩經) is seen in “Di Dong” 蜩螗 [The Rainbow] of “Yong Feng” 鄘風 [Odes of Yong] in “Guo Feng” 國風 [Airs from the States], which is as follows: “女子所行，遠父母兄弟。” The translation is from James Legge; <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/di-dong>.

⁴⁵ In literature, “setting sun” often represents aging parents, implying that not much time is left for children to serve their parents.

⁴⁶ Crows (慈烏) are often cited as icons of filial children. They take care of their mothers once they are grown up. The passage describes Kyesön's regret that her situation prevents her from serving her own mother as the crows do.

⁴⁷ The passage refers directly to Wang Wei's poem “Jiu yue jiu ri yi Shandong xiongdì” 九月九日憶山東兄弟 [Thinking of my brothers in Shandong on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month], and the entire poem is as follows: “Living as a forlorn stranger in a foreign land/ My longing for my family members doubles at every festival/ I know, from a distance, my brothers climb up high as we used to do/ All wearing a branch of dogwood, except just one.” 獨在異鄉爲異客，每逢佳節倍思親。遙知兄弟登高處，遍插茱萸少一人。

and earth. Above, I left my mother and below I lost my husband. Even so, for a long time I have preserved what life remains to me. Heaven's punishment was severe, and my illness worsened day by day. Now, I can no longer anticipate having once more with my siblings the delight that Chŏn Chin's brothers found under the thorn tree.⁴⁸ Instead, I can only look forward, wishing for the promise of our gathering together forever in the underworld. My mother's health is all I am concerned for. My brother and sister, I hope you can take good care of her and stay nearby. With this letter, I report my departure into death. Facing this letter, I have wailed, choking down sobs which prevent me from writing in further detail.

On a certain day of a certain month in a certain year, from your younger sister Kyesŏn with a deep bow.”

She sealed the letters in separate envelopes and gave them to Aegyŏng. “My illness has advanced too far, I cannot hope to recover from it. Please deliver these letters to my mother and brother and sister.” Finishing, she lay down facing the wall. Her breath was very weak and quickly fading. Ongmae and Haedang ran and informed Lady Yang.

Shocked, Lady Yang hurried to see Kyesŏn. She called to her but there was no response. Kyesŏn had already slipped away and there was nothing Lady Yang could do. Lady Yang instructed a servant to notify the Yu family of Kyesŏn's death.

When the sad news reached her, Kyesŏn's mother was grief-stricken. She pounded her bosom, wailing, “Now, my youngest daughter is also dead! How can I live without her?” She wept, and her sorrow was indescribable.

Later she summoned Sung and said, “Your sister was perhaps the most virtuous lady of all. Even I, an old woman, cannot approach her goodness. Why did heaven take away our Kyesŏn so quickly? I wish I could bury her with my own hands, but I fear my old, ailing body would prevent me. Please hurry and take care of her funeral.”

Obedient to his mother's order, Sung left immediately and traveled day and night. Having arrived, he purchased the necessary supplies, arranged a funeral service in accordance with tradition, and buried Kyesŏn's body to the left of Hyoyŏng's grave. After the funeral, Sung decided to stay and sleep in a nearby house.

During the third watch of the night,⁴⁹ a crescent moon rose and an autumn wind blew around the hut. Sung sighed deeply and, facing into the wind, broke into tears. Exhausted from his long journey and the mournful funeral service, Sung soon dozed off, leaning against

⁴⁸ This sentence alludes to “the delight under the thorn tree” (荊樹之樂), meaning a harmonious relationship between siblings. According to legend, Chŏn Chin 田真 (C. Tian Zhen) and his two brothers lived during the Eastern Han period (25–220). They divided all their property equally except for one thorn tree. Finally, they decided to chop the tree into three equal pieces. However, the next morning when they were about to cut the tree, they saw that it had begun to wither and die. Surprised, the brothers realized that splitting the property equally among siblings is not a good idea because they all spring from the same root. So they decided not to divide any property including the tree. Soon afterward, the thorn tree revived and its flowers bloomed fully.

⁴⁹ “Third Watch” (*samgyŏng* 三更) refers to midnight, precisely 11pm–1am. In the traditional Chinese clock system (also effective in Korea), the night time is divided into five two-hour watches between 7pm and 5am. The first watch is 7–9pm, and the fifth watch is 3–5am.

a window. As he drowsed, he heard a murmur of voices. Soon, a woman in light makeup and mourning dress slowly approached from the distance. Following behind her was a man wearing a hat and mourning attire.

Sung stood up in shock and wonder, and looked at them carefully, recognizing Kyesŏn and Hyoyŏng standing on the stone front steps. Having quickly made his clothes neat and tidy, Sung walked outside to greet them, and welcomed the couple to the courtyard, forgetting, for the moment, that they were dead. He asked Hyoyŏng, “How have you been, Ŭngsi 應時? I have been so sad after parting with my sister a while ago. It makes me so happy to see you tonight.”

Ŭngsi was Hyoyŏng’s style name. Hyoyŏng greeted him in return, saying, “I must have confused you. Even to a wise man, it is surprising to see a person who passed away meet a living person in the world. But don’t be alarmed. I am here with your sister to thank you for your kindness.”

Sung finally realized that Hyoyŏng was a ghost. Straightening his lapel, he said, “You needn’t say such words. Yes, there is distinction between life and death. But, I doubt there is any difference between the worlds of the living and the dead, especially when it comes to close family.” Hyoyŏng said, “In Kŭmnŭng, I almost became a restless soul roaming the vale, but to my relief and gratitude, you collected my bones. After your sister passed away you looked after my old mother. I’m very much indebted to you for your kindness, but I don’t know how to return it. I must find a way to repay you someday.”

Sung said, “We are like brothers. I did what a brother would do. There is no need to thank or repay me. Besides, I did very little for you so I don’t deserve all your praise. I would rather recall the saying, “Brothers greatly sympathize with one another at difficult times of death and burial” and “Brothers spare no effort to help during a crisis.”⁵⁰ So you are mistaken about me. I never expected your gratitude.”

Sung then took Hyoyŏng’s hands and led him into the room, asking Kyesŏn to follow. When they were all seated, Sung told his sister, “Your nanny is here. So are Ongmae and Haedang. Would you like to see them?”

She sadly said, “It would be nice to see their familiar faces but I am afraid that doing so would sadden me too much. However, since they are right here, I should see them. Please call them so that we can have a wonderful night together.”

Sung immediately summoned the three. Aegyŏng and the other two appeared and saw Kyesŏn standing in the room. They embraced her and wept, finally asking, “We thought you were dead. Where have you been? We have lived in such low spirits in the long time since we lost you.”

⁵⁰ The reference traces back to the poem on brothers’ love, titled “Chang Di” 棠棣 included in Xiaoya 小雅 [Minor odes] of the *Book of Poetry*. The related original texts and translations are as follows: “On the dreaded occasions of death and burial/ It is brothers who greatly sympathize./ When fugitives are collected on the heights and low grounds,/ They are brothers who will seek one another out./ There is the wagtail on the level height;/ When brothers are in urgent difficulties,/ Friends, though they may be good,/ Will [only] heave long sighs.” 死喪之威，兄弟孔懷。原隰裒矣，兄弟求矣。脊今在原，兄弟急難。每有良朋，況也永歎。 Translation from James Legge; <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/chang-di>.

Kyesŏn shed tears and straightened the lapels of her clothes before she finally spoke, “Hapless I was, how could I exist other than being dead? I came here with my husband to see my brother. Hearing that you were all here, I wanted to see the old familiar faces, so I asked my brother to summon you.”

Sung turned to Haedang and asked, “Bring out wine and fruits. We are mysteriously reunited. Perhaps this is an opportunity to unburden ourselves.”

Haedang hurried to bring out three bottles of Tongjŏngch’un⁵¹ wine and one hundred mandarin oranges to furnish the table. Exchanging cups, they all enjoyed the wine and became drunk. As the bottles finally ran dry, the eastern sky gradually brightened. The cocks began to crow and dawn came. Hyoyŏng turned to Kyesŏn and spoke, “We have a long way to travel. We should leave now.” Kyesŏn wiped tears from her face and bade farewell, disappearing suddenly along with her husband.

In the morning, Sung hurried his feet back toward home. When he presented Kyesŏn’s letter to his mother, he told her about how he had met Hyoyŏng and Kyesŏn.

After reading the letter, his mother tearfully said, “The underworld is far away and we won’t see her again. It is some relief to know that, although buried in a foreign land, she was laid to rest in peace beside her husband. However it still hurts me that I was not by her deathbed or at her funeral. I will have to live with that regret until my own death.”

Prefect of Chŏlgang Ma Chin 馬震 recorded the story of Kyesŏn and reported it to the court. Soon after, a royal edict arrived, ordering her grave to be honored with an official commendation and granting her the posthumous title of *Chŏngnyŏl Pnin* 靖烈夫人 (A Lady of Peace and Virtue).

⁵¹ Tongjŏngch’un 洞庭春 refers to a traditional wine also known in China as “Dongting chun se” 洞庭春色 [Dongting spring wines]. The wine appears in Song literati Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037–1101) poems with the same title and was said to have been made by the prince of Anding 安定 from mandarin oranges. The wine was very popular during Chosŏn Korea, where a different recipe emerged.

