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Panel: Rethinking Women's Place in Fictional and Practical Writings of Late Chosŏn

**The portrayal of women in Yi Ok's works compared to the portrayal of women in the *Samgang haengsil-to* (三綱行實圖, "Illustrated guide to the Three Relations")**

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Introduction

Yi Ok (1760–1815) is often categorized as an individualistic writer who wrote for art's and beauty's sake. This paper questions this view by focusing on the way Yi Ok portrayed women in his works. On the surface Yi Ok might seem to be a *l'art pour l'art* writer, but a closer analysis reveals that his works are strewn with subtle, but harsh criticism of the Neo-Confucian doctrine.

Yi Ok was one of the most prominent victims of the "rectification of literature" 文體反正 movement initiated by King Chŏngjo during the last decade of his reign. While other literati, such as Pak Chiwŏn, also had to face criticism for their unorthodox literary styles but were eventually merely asked by the king to write letters of apology, Yi Ok was punished most severely and was even sentenced to military service. What was the reason for Chŏngjo's extraordinary punishment of Yi Ok? Should Yi Ok's alleged tendency toward *l'art pour l'art* not rather have been a reason to spare him?

The "devoted women" 烈女 and "filial daughters" 孝子 in the *Samgang haengsil-to* best represent the ideal image of women in the Confucian society Chosŏn rulers dreamed of and, thus, lend themselves as objects of comparison to the portrayal of women in Yi Ok's works. Did Yi Ok also reduce women to their roles as wives and daughters who unconditionally sacrifice themselves for the sake of others? Or were the women in his works allowed to act beyond the three fundamental human relations (*samgang*) that sustained Confucian society?

From the time of Chosŏn's establishment in 1392, literature was supposed to serve as a vehicle for the Confucian Way 文以載道. Thus, literature was not regarded as an art liberated from social commitments (*l'art pour l'art*) but was instead expected to be dedicated to the advocacy of the Confucian ideology. Facing the immense popularity of Chinese fiction and prose vignettes in Chosŏn in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Chŏngjo felt obliged to reassert the traditional literary view and promulgated the "rectification of literature." He condemned casual writings from Ming and Qing China and promoted instead an ancient style of prose represented by the pre-Qin and Han and by the Confucian classic prose. Why Yi Ok, of all literati, became one of the main targets of Chŏngjo's literary campaign might also have had political reasons. However, it is undeniable that Yi Ok's literary style deviated from the literary norm set by Chŏngjo.

In the first part of this paper, I will introduce the terminological and theoretical foundation on which the paper is based. By comparing the Confucian ideas in which literature was regarded as a vehicle for the Confucian Way with the concepts of *littérature engagée* and *l'art pour*

*l'art*, I explore the degree to which these concepts—with totally different spatiotemporal roots—might be correlated. In the second part, I focus on Yi Ok's *Paegun-p'il* 白雲筆 ("Idle writings at Paegun House") and *Yŏn'gyŏng* 煙經 ("All about tobacco") and discuss under which premises Yi Ok's works may be categorized as *l'art pour l'art*. These works obviously do not conform to the literary norm set by Chŏngjo. But does the nonconformity with Chŏngjo's literary campaign mean that Yi Ok refused any engagement at all and that his works were purposeless? In the third part, I will demonstrate how Yi Ok obviously parodies Confucian literary conventions. For this purpose, I compare the portrayal of women in Yi Ok's works to that of "filial daughters" and "devoted women" in the *Samgang haengsil-to* (三綱行實圖, "Illustrated Guide to the Three Relations," 1434) and elaborate on its subversive power.

### 1. Literature as *l'art pour l'art* and as a vehicle for the Confucian *dao* 文以載道

*L'art pour l'art*, or "art for art's sake," is a slogan that refers to art that is self-sufficient and liberated from any moral, social, political, or religious commitments. It is associated with the aesthetic movement, which began in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to prevailing utilitarian social philosophies and to what was perceived as the ugliness and philistinism of the industrial age. While it can be used in a positive way to emphasize the intrinsic value of art that is "complete in itself" and does not need any justification, it can also convey a pejorative meaning when art is devalued as meaningless or playful. The connotation of *l'art pour l'art* thus changes according to context and perspective.

The idea of *l'art pour l'art* is usually attributed to Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) who elaborated on its meaning in the preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834).

Rien de ce qui est beau n'est indispensable à la vie. – On supprimerait les fleurs, le monde n'en souffrirait pas matériellement; qui voudrait cependant qu'il n'y eût plus de fleurs? Je renoncerais plutôt aux pommes de terre qu'aux roses, et je crois qu'il n'y a qu'un utilitaire au monde capable d'arracher une plate-bande de tulipes pour y planter des choux... Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid, car c'est l'expression de quelque besoin, et ceux de l'homme sont ignobles et dégoûtants, comme sa pauvre et infirme nature. (Gautier 1835)  
 [Nothing that is beautiful is indispensable to life. If you did away with flowers, the world would not suffer in any material way. And yet who would wish there not to be flowers? I could do without potatoes more easily than roses and I think there is only one utilitarian in the world capable of tearing out a bed of tulips to plant cabbages.... The only things that are really beautiful are those which have no use; everything that is useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some need, and the needs of men are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor and infirm nature.](Gautier 2005, 23)

The main target of Gautier's preface is a utilitarian understanding of art and beauty. He stresses that art and beauty are their own justification. They need no other (Duncker 2005). According to him, it is exactly the uselessness of beauty and art that makes them so attractive. The first written occurrence of the phrase *l'art pour l'art* can be found in Benjamin Constant's diary from 1804. Constant left France in 1803 in exile after he had incurred the disfavor of Napoleon and settled in Weimar, where he studied the aesthetics of Kant, Schiller, and Schelling (Burwick 2001, 18). He summarizes a discussion of Kantian aesthetics he heard in Germany in the following way.

*L'art pour l'art*, sans but, car tous but denature l'art. Mais l'art atteint au but qu'il n'a pas. (Constant 1804, February 10) [Art for art's sake, with no purpose, for any purpose perverts art. But art achieves a purpose which is not its own.]

Constant claims that art does achieve a purpose, even though art is not intentionally created in order to achieve this purpose. In other words, art is not a means to convey any purpose, although it is not purposeless, which is reminiscent of Kant's *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck* (purposiveness without purpose). It is clear that the phrase *l'art pour l'art* was highly influenced by Kant's aesthetic theory. However, John Wilcox concluded in his paper on the beginning of *l'art pour l'art* that from the beginning of the phrase's introduction, all essentially Kantian thought had been lost (Wilcox 1953, 377) due to misinterpretation.

In contrast to the anti-utilitarian views on literature presented above, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) claims in *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder, Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt* (Twilight of the idols, or how to philosophize with a hammer) that *l'art pour l'art* does not exist.

*L'art pour l'art*. - Der Kampf gegen den Zweck in der Kunst ist immer der Kampf gegen die moralisirende Tendenz in der Kunst, gegen ihre Unterordnung unter die Moral. *L'art pour l'art* heisst: "der Teufel hole die Moral!" - Aber selbst noch diese Feindschaft verräth die Übergewalt des Vorurtheils. Wenn man den Zweck des Moralpredigens und Menschen-Verbesserns von der Kunst ausgeschlossen hat, so folgt daraus noch lange nicht, dass die Kunst überhaupt zwecklos, ziellos, sinnlos, kurz *l'art pour l'art* - ein Wurm, der sich in den Schwanz beisst - ist. "Lieber gar keinen Zweck als einen moralischen Zweck!" - so redet die blosse Leidenschaft. Ein Psycholog fragt dagegen: was thut alle Kunst? lobt sie nicht? verherrlicht sie nicht? wählt sie nicht aus? zieht sie nicht hervor? Mit dem Allen stärkt oder schwächt sie gewisse Werthschätzungen... Die Kunst ist das grosse Stimulans zum Leben: wie könnte man sie als zwecklos, als ziellos, als *l'art pour l'art* verstehn? (Nietzsche 2005) [*L'art pour l'art*. — The struggle against *purpose* in art is always a struggle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against the subordination of art to morality. *L'art pour l'art* means: 'the devil take morality!' — But this very hostility betrays that moral prejudice is still dominant. When one has excluded from art the purpose of moral preaching and human improvement it by no means follows that art is completely purposeless, goalless, meaningless, in short *l'art pour l'art* — a snake biting its own tail. 'Rather no purpose at all than a moral purpose!' — thus speaks mere passion. A psychologist asks on the other hand: what does all art do? does it not praise? does it not glorify? does it not select? does it not highlight? By doing all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations... Art is the great stimulus to life: how could it be thought purposeless, aimless, *l'art pour l'art*?] (Nietzsche 2003, 92-93)

Nietzsche argues that—since art cannot but take a stand—starting from the selection of its form and content, art is never just art for its own sake but always conveys meaning and thus, can never be called purposeless. The idea of *l'art pour l'art* might become clearer if we compare it to a concept that is often used as a counterpoint to *l'art pour l'art*, namely *littérature engagée*.

The term *littérature engagée*, or literature of commitment, was coined by Jean Paul Sartre in 1945, right after the end of the Second World War. In his seminal essay *Qu'est-ce que la*

*littérature*? (What is literature?), Sartre proclaims the artist's serious responsibility to society. He claims that only literature, as the art of signs, can serve as a medium for engagement in contrast to painting or music, as arts of form. He further distinguishes between poetry and prose. While poetry uses words as things, prose belongs to the "realm of signs" (Sartre 1997, 16) and therefore uses words as instruments. According to Sartre, modern poetry relies on the failure of the instrumental use of language as a reaction to the all-encompassing utilitarianism of the victorious bourgeoisie and thus, makes language inaccessible to utilitarian purposes. In contrast to poetry, prose is always utilitarian (Sartre 1997, 23), since it uses signs as instruments to convey meaning (Sartre 1997, 229).

To sum up, *l'art pour l'art* usually refers to art that is self-sufficient and liberated from any commitments, while *littérature engagée* regards art—especially prose—as an instrument to solve contemporary social and political questions. Although art that is created for its own sake can have a purpose, *l'art pour l'art* artists do not consciously engage in willed action. The intention behind a work of art might be able to serve as criterion for distinguishing *l'art pour l'art* from *littérature engagée*. However, in many cases it seems to be difficult to draw a clear line between the two concepts.

## 1.2 Literature as a vehicle for the Confucian *dao* 文以載道

A utilitarian understanding of the function of literature can also be found in texts by Confucian thinkers. The Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), for example, coined the phrase "literature as a platform that embeds the Way" 文所以載道 in *Tong shu* 通書, *Wenzi* 文辭, 28.

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|----------------------|---|
| 文，所以載道也。             | Literature is made for embedding the Way.   |
| 輪轅飾而人弗庸，徒飾也，況虛車乎？    | If a cart is decorated but nobody uses it, the decoration is useless, not to mention an empty cart.   |
| 文辭，藝也。道德，實也。         | Literary utterances depend on skills; morality has to be practiced.   |
| 篤其實，而藝者書之，美則愛，愛則傳焉。  | When somebody who practices morality and, on top of this, also has refined writing skills and writes about the Way, the writing will be treasured if it is beautiful. And if it is treasured, it will be handed down. |
| 賢者得以學而至之，是為教。        | If wise people learn and master this, it becomes a teaching.  |
| 故曰，言之無文，行之不遠。        | That is the reason why it is said: "If words are not literary, they will not be influential."   |
| 然不賢者，雖父兄臨之，師保勉之，不學也， | But unwise people won't study, even if their parents ask them or their teacher forces them.   |
| 強之不從也。               | Force will not cause them to follow.  |
| 不知務道德，而第以文辭為能者。      | They don't know why they should care about morality but merely regard literary utterances as ability.   |
| 藝焉而已。                | What they know are skills, nothing more.  |
| 噫！弊也久矣。              | Ah, this evil has already existed for a long  |

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|  | time! |
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In *Zhuzi yulei*, Zhu Xi's disciple Cheng Duanmeng (1143–1191) comments on this section.

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| 「文所以載道」，一章之大意。            | “Literature is the platform to embed the Way” is the core idea of this section.  |
| 「輪轅飾而人弗庸，徒飾也」，言有載道之文而人弗用也 | “If a cart is decorated but nobody uses it, the decoration is useless” refers to literature that embeds the Way, but is not used by anybody. |
| 「況虛車乎？」此不載道之文也。           | “Not to speak of an empty cart” refers to literature that does not embed the Way.  |
| 自「篤其實」至「行而不遠」，是輪轅飾而人庸之者也。 | “When somebody practices morality . . . they will not be influential” refers to decorated carts that are used by people.                     |
| 自「不賢者」至「強之不從也」，是弗庸者也。     | “But unwise people . . . [f]orce will not cause them to follow” refers to decoration that is not used.                                       |

Zhou Dunyi clarifies that a cart with no people in it is as useless as literature that does not embed the Way. Yet, literature has to be beautiful to be treasured and thus, influential. Therefore, literary skills are important, but only for the sake of transmitting the Way. (Chaedogwan 載道觀 *Minjok munhak taebaek kwa sajön*). He regards literature as an instrument to convey the “truths” of the Confucian orthodoxy. Literature is important as long as it embeds the Way (which is, of course, the Confucian Way).

The Chosŏn government adopted this understanding of literature from the time of its establishment in 1392. Chŏng Tojŏn (1342–1398), one of the most influential politicians at that time, wrote in a preface to the *Toŭn munjip* [Collected works of Yi Sungin (1347–1392)]<sup>1</sup>,

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| 日月星辰，天之文也。 | The sun, the moon, and the stars are the phenomena 文 of the sky. |
| 山川草木，地之文也。 | Mountains, rivers, and plants are the phenomena of the earth.    |
| 詩書禮樂，人之文也。 | Poetry, prose, rituals, and music are the phenomena of human     |

<sup>1</sup> Peter Lee's chapter on literary trends of early Chosŏn in *A History of Korean Literature* and Youme Kim's chapter on Yi Ok and King Chŏngjo's literary policy in her dissertation “The Life and Works of Yi Ok” were very helpful for this section. However, Chŏng Tojŏn's elaborations on literature do not stem from his preface to the *Mogŭn munjip* (Collected Works of Yi Saek), as Lee and Kim claim, but from his preface to the *Toŭn jip* (Collected Works of Yi Sungin). Yi Sungin. *Toŭn jip*, *Toŭn jip sŏ* [Chŏng Tojŏn] 陶隱集序 [鄭道傳] (DBKC), 522 sang.

[http://db.itkc.or.kr/index.jsp?bizName=MM&url=/itkcdb/text/nodeViewIframe.jsp?bizName=MM&seojiId=kc\\_mm\\_a034&gunchaId=as002&muncheId=01&finId=002&NodeId=&setid=1934273&Pos=1&TotalCount=10&searchUrl=ok](http://db.itkc.or.kr/index.jsp?bizName=MM&url=/itkcdb/text/nodeViewIframe.jsp?bizName=MM&seojiId=kc_mm_a034&gunchaId=as002&muncheId=01&finId=002&NodeId=&setid=1934273&Pos=1&TotalCount=10&searchUrl=ok) [accessed August 2, 2016].

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|            | beings.   |
| 然天以氣，      | The phenomena of the sky are made of <i>ki</i> 氣，                                   |
| 地以形，       | and the phenomena of the earth are made of material entities 形，                     |
| 而人則以道。     | but the phenomena of human beings are made of the Way 道。                            |
| 故曰文者，載道之器。 | That is why [human] phenomena are said to be the platform that embeds the Way.      |
| 言人文也，      | When it comes to human phenomena,   |
| 得其道，       | if the Way is attained,   |
| 詩書禮樂之教，    | the teachings of poetry, prose, rituals, and music                                  |
| 明於天下。      | will be realized in the whole world.  |
| 順三光之行，     | This will smooth the motion of sun, moon, and stars                                 |
| 理萬物之宜，     | and ensure the order of all things on earth.  |
| 文之盛至此極矣。   | When the flourishing of human phenomena reaches this point, they are unsurpassable. |

According to Chǒng Tojǒn’s preface, literature is incredibly influential. The motion of the sun, moon, and stars and the order of all things on earth depend on the way literature, rituals, and music are created. As long as literature embeds the Confucian Way, the whole world—including the universe—will be in order. But one can imagine what happens if literature does not care about the Way. It won’t be long before Armageddon begins! And it is exactly this understanding of literature to which Chǒngjo wanted to return with the “rectification of literature” 文體反正 movement.

Can literature that embeds the Confucian Way be called *littérature engagée*, or literature of commitment? I think yes, because it is committed to Confucian ideology. However, Sartre asks artists to fulfill their responsibility to society and to engage in current problems but does not restrict this engagement to one single ideology, while Zhou Dunyi and Chǒng Tojǒn promote literature as the mouthpiece of the Confucian ideology. According to them, as long as literature functions as an ideological mouthpiece of Confucianism, all the problems in the universe would be solved. From this perspective, artists do not need the freedom to decide what kind of ideas might lend themselves to solve problems. However, what happens if somebody does not embed the Confucian Way in his works and intentionally writes without commitment? And what happens if somebody intentionally chooses *l’art pour l’art* to break out of the forced commitment?

Let’s now look at Yi Ok’s works to see whether he embeds the Confucian Way in them.

## 2. Yi Ok’s *Paegun-p’il* 白雲筆 (“Idle writings at Paegun House”) and *Yǒn’gyǒng* 煙經 (“All about tobacco”)

In the preface of *Paegun-p’il* 白雲筆 the narrator provides the following reasons for writing:

Why did I call this text *Paegun-p’il*? It is because I wrote it at Paegun-sa [House of the White Clouds]. Why did I write something at Paegun-sa? I had no choice but to

write. Why do I say that I had no choice but to write?

Paegun is a remote place, and the summer is especially boring. Because it is so remote, there are no people. And because it is so boring, there is nothing to do. Since there is nothing to do and nobody around, how can I spend my boring time at this remote place? I would like to go outside and walk around, but there is not only no place to go to, but I am also afraid that the hot sun will burn my shoulders, so I don't dare to go out. I would like to sleep, but a wind that shakes the curtain blows from far away, and the scent of grass can be smelled from nearby. In the worst case, my mouth might become crooked; if I am lucky, I might catch malaria. That is why I am so afraid that I don't dare to lie down. I would like to read a text aloud, but after a few lines my tongue gets dry and my throat hurts so much that I cannot force myself to read. I would like to read a book, but after a few pages I cover my face with the book and cannot help but sleep. I would like to play board games, but we don't have any sets at home, and I also don't really like those games, so I cannot do that.

What can I do to enjoy these days at this house? I have no choice but to use my hand instead of my tongue and talk with Official Ink and Mister Brush in the realm where words are forgotten. But what should I talk about?

I would like to talk about the sky, but people will surely think that I study astrology. And people who study astrology are supposed to suffer from disaster. I cannot do that. I would like to talk about the earth, but people will surely think that I know about geomancy. And people who know about geomancy are ordered around by others. So, neither can I do that. I would like to talk about other people, but somebody who talks about others will become the target of others' talk. So, I cannot do that. I would like to talk about ghosts, but people will surely blame me for talking nonsense, so I cannot do that. I would like to talk about *sōngni* 性理 (human nature and natural laws), but I have never heard about that. I would like to talk about literature, but literature is nothing that can be evaluated. I would like to talk about Buddha, Laozi, or magical practices, but I have not learned it, and it is also not what I really wish to talk about. Concerning the relations at the court, the mistakes of officials outside the capital, the careers of officials, wealth and profit, women and food and drinking, we already have Fan Chong's "Seven Taboos," and I started to use it as my motto long ago. So, I can neither talk about these things.

Then, what can I talk and write about? I have to talk about the situation. It would be fine not to talk at all. But if I talk, I have to talk about birds, fish, animals, insects, flowers, grain, fruits, vegetables, trees, and plants. That is the reason why *Paegun-p'il* appeared due to unavoidable circumstances and why I had no choice but to write about these things. In this sense, people cannot not talk and also cannot talk. Ah, let's close my mouth!

The owner of Paegun-sa wrote this in front of Paegun-sa at the beginning of the fifth month of 1803 (Yi 2009, 3: 53-55; Yi 2009, 5: 325-326).

At first glance, it seems that his writing has no purpose at all. Yi Ok explicitly emphasizes several times that he only writes to kill time. He would prefer to be sleeping, walking around, reading, or playing games. But since the circumstances do not allow him to do so, he has no

choice but to write. He lists all the things he would like to write about, including the sky, the earth, other people, and ghosts, only to list the reasons that hinder him from writing about these things. And then he explicitly says that he liked to write about *sǒngni* 性理 (human nature and natural laws), which refers to the core idea of Neo-Confucianism (also called 性理學). But does he really intend to write about it after all and embed the Way in his literature? No, he explains that he cannot write about *sǒngni* 性理 because he had never heard about it! From the perspective of an orthodox Confucian scholar, this feigned ignorance of the core idea of Neo-Confucianism must have seemed to border on treason. It shows how Yi Ok tries to break out of the ideological frame of his times. He does not say that he is against Neo-Confucianism or criticize it; what he does goes beyond this kind of ordinary criticism. He just totally ignores the ideological frame and claims that he has never heard of it. He does not try to rebel against the ideological system, he just pretends it does not exist.

I think this preface can be read as an introduction to a work of *l'art pour l'art*, but the emphasis on the purposelessness is so exaggerated that it actually seems to invite the reader to find a purpose. *Paegun-p'il* consists of 164 relatively short essays on birds, fish, animals, insects, flowers, grain, fruits, vegetables, trees, and plants. Most of them are descriptions mixed with humor and references to other stories. Let's take a look at one example.

The domestic animals that are closest to human beings are cats. If you feed them with fish and let them sleep on a blanket, their kindness is extreme. The only way in which cats can repay this favor is stopping thieves. Sometimes there are cats that are too lazy to catch mice but brave enough to chase chickens. These are the hopeless examples among cats.

I have heard that a golden cat had been kept in the palace during King Sukchong's reign. When the king died, the cat refused to eat and cried for several days only to die in front of the palace where the coffin was kept. Thereafter, the cat was buried at the entrance to Sukchong's tomb. At that time, people created the Song of the Golden Cat and compared the cat to the Peach Blossom Dog of the Song dynasty. It is clear that it is all caused by the fact that royal virtue reaches everything. Still, this cat was extraordinary. Ah, really astonishing! (Yi 2009, 3: 156; Yi 2009, 5: 349-350)

*Yǒn'gyǒng* 煙經 consists of four parts that describe how tobacco is cultivated, the origin and characteristics of tobacco, tools that are related to tobacco, and the effects of smoking. In the last section, for example, there is a list of circumstances in which smoking can be recommended—for example, in the snow, in the rain, under flowers, at a river bank, in a boat, in the toilet, or when reading. (Yi 2009, 3: 439-440; Yi 2009, 5: 425) The explanations and lists do not seem to have a serious purpose, let alone any relation to the Confucian Way. But Yi Ok not only ignores literary conventions, in some places he directly mocks Neo-Confucian sayings. For example, at the beginning of the fourth section of *Yǒn'gyǒng*, he says:

When Zhu Xi once discussed the natural laws 理 of things, he said, "Vases have their own laws as lanterns have their own laws." What is meant by laws here is nothing but to say that you have to do it this way and not that way, or it is good to do it this way and bad to do it that way. Accordingly, smoking is an idle and useless activity. But compared to that vase or those lanterns, it might be regarded as more urgent. How, then, can there be no natural law concerning smoking? (Yi 2009, 3: 438; Yi 2009, 5: 424-425)

Thus, it is not only the exaggerated purposelessness in his works that opposes the Confucian understanding of literature, the humor with which he parodies Zhu Xi's saying has a subversive function. This kind of mockery can also be found in Yi Ok's biographical fiction.

### 3. Comparison of the portrayal of one woman in Yi Ok's biographical fiction 傳 to that of one "filial daughter" (*hyoja* 孝子) in the *Samgang haengsil-to* (三綱行實圖, "Illustrated Guide to the Three Relations," 1434)

The *Samgang haengsil-to* is a collection of stories that demonstrate the moral quality of filial sons, loyal subjects, and devoted women whose actions best represent the ethical nature of the three fundamental human relations in Confucianism (Oh 2013, 2). In the following section, I will use one example of a story about a filial daughter as a foil to one of Yi Ok's pieces of biographical fiction. Yi Ok wrote 25 pieces of biographical fiction, eight of which are about women.

The story "Yu ssi hyo ko" 劉氏孝姑 (Lady Liu is filial to her mother-in-law) tells of a daughter-in-law whose mother-in-law falls ill. When she mixes her own blood into the medicine, her mother-in-law recovers. Two years later, however, her mother-in-law falls ill again and nothing seems to help her until Lady Liu cuts flesh from her own leg and mixes it into the rice soup for her ill mother-in-law, who recovers but dies one month later (Kim 2010, 58-59). Interestingly, we find a very similar story among Yi Ok's biographical fiction, namely the "Story of a Living Devoted Woman" (Saeng yŏlno chŏn 生烈女傳). In this story, Lady Chŏng cuts flesh from her leg not to heal her parents-in-law, but to help her husband to recover. Up to this point, both stories share a similar development. But then the narrator in Yi Ok's piece adds that he had heard that

Lady Chŏng's home was extremely poor, and her father-in-law was always in a state of drunken frenzy. All the neighbors frowned because he cracked a pot or broke a jar every day. The devoted women, however, served him with placid looks and a gentle voice . . . Lady Chŏng's effort to serve her father-in-law is indeed more difficult than slicing her own flesh. (Yi 2009, 2: 307-308; Yi 2009, 5: 239-240; Kim 2013, 200-201)

Biography was a tool for encouraging Confucian morality (Kim 2013, 168). Yi Ok seems to play with this custom in the example above. The first part of the story stresses the exemplary behavior of a wife toward her husband. But when the reader learns about the bad behavior of Lady Chŏng's father-in-law, one begins to doubt whether her filial behavior is still appropriate. And the narrator's commentary that Lady Chŏng's effort to serve her father-in-law is more difficult than cutting her own flesh undermines the idea of unconditional filial piety even more.

More examples to follow during the presentation.

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