

Negotiating Conventions: *Geumwon and Her Nineteenth-Century Travel Record*

Jungwon Kim*

Abstract

This paper examines the *Hodongseorak gi* (Travel Record of Hodongseorak 湖東西洛記), a rare nineteenth-century travelogue recorded by a Joseon woman, Geumwon (1817-?). Written in classical Chinese, she tells of visiting scenic places on the east coast of the Korean Peninsula, including the famous Mount Geumgang 金剛山 (“Diamond Mountain”), that were travel destinations for many of her male literary predecessors and contemporaries. Laced with autobiographical descriptions of her early and later years, Geumwon’s record is neither a mere list of places she visited nor a text dominated by women’s sentiments. In taking on the role of a traveler, Geumwon weaves together the self and the world of a resourceful young nineteenth-century Joseon woman, not only writing about her trips but also reflecting on her wishes and inner thoughts. Considering Geumwon both as a traveler and thinker, this paper illuminates how she presents herself as “a noble person” (*gunja* 君子; C. *junzi*) through writing about her journey, and how her travel record serves as a textual space where she succeeds in creating a multidimensional literary intersection of culture, history, and space, rediscovering her identity in a larger world.

Keywords: travelogue, travel record, women’s writing, nineteenth-century Korea, noble person

*Jungwon Kim is King Sejong Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University, U.S.A. E-mail: jk3638@columbia.edu

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In a society that expected women to be invisible in the public sphere, traveling was a gendered undertaking during the long Joseon 朝鮮 dynasty (1392-1910). The mere handful of existing travel records authored by women testifies to this, whereas many travelogues brushed by male literati are available to modern readers. It is thus quite rare to encounter an account such as the *Hodongseorak gi* 湖東西洛記 (Travel Record of Hodongseorak, hereafter the *Travelogue*)¹ examined in this paper, the only known extant travel record written in literary Chinese by a Joseon woman. The author, Geumwon 錦園 (1817-?),² tells of visiting scenic places on the east coast of the Korean Peninsula, including the famous Mount Geumgang 金剛山 (“Diamond Mountain”), as also recounted by many of her male literati predecessors.³ Yet her *Travelogue* is more than a typical record of travel experiences, in that it contains descriptions of Geumwon’s early and later years as she recollects past travels and her life path. In taking on the role of a traveler, Geumwon weaves together the self and the world of a resourceful young nineteenth-century Joseon woman, not only writing about her trips but also reflecting on her wishes and inner thoughts.

Although several scholars have examined Geumwon’s writings, scholarly attention to Geumwon’s record has been limited to its unique position as a female’s text in relation to male travelogues.⁴ Such a focus may be fair, given that only a few women’s travelogues—all in *Hangeul* 한글 (Korean script)—have become available to date,⁵ and that Geumwon

¹ A full literal translation of the *Hodongseorak gi* is “A record of [visiting] the four prefectures of the *Ho* region, Gwandong (Eastern Gate), Gwanseo (Western Gate), and the capital, Nogyang.” The italicized syllables in these place names indicate those used in the title. Because of its lengthiness, I refer to the *Hodongseorak gi* herein simply as “the *Travelogue*.” Please see the last part of the translation section for Geumwon’s explanation of titling her work.

² Although some scholars assume that Geumwon’s family name was Kim, there is no way to confirm this because she appears only as “Geumwon” in existing accounts and sources.

³ I used a photo-print copy of *Hodongseorak gi* included in Heo (1988).

⁴ Some representative studies on the *Travelogue* include: Choe (2013), Kim (2020), Bak (2004), Son (2004), and Yi (2007, 281-360).

⁵ Works well known to modern readers are: *Buyeo nojeong gi* 부여노정기 (Travel Record of Buyeo) by Madam Yi of Yeonan 연안이씨 (1737-1815); *Geumhaeng ilgi* 금행일기 (Travel Diary of the Gongju Magistrate’s Office) by Madam Song of Eunjin 은진송씨 (1803-60); *Gwanbuk*

chose literary Chinese, the linguistic tool dominated by male literati in Joseon Korea, with which to inscribe her experiences. It may be also true that Geumwon's work is a record of an idiosyncratic journey by one brave young woman of the late Joseon, although we have no way of knowing how many other Joseon women crossed borders, slept on the road, and recorded their travels. Geumwon's account thus emerges as a unique literary space in which she reshapes or re-creates her perception of herself through the medium of travel writing. While it is impossible to discuss in a limited space all the revelations about the world that Geumwon discovers in the *Travelogue*, this paper delves into how she constructs her identity as a Joseon woman, traveler, and thinker, and especially how she presents herself as "a noble person" (*gunja* 君子; C. *junzi*) by making this textual context an unlimited site of her own imagination.

I. Inscribing Journey: The *Travelogue*

Geumwon covers three different periods of travel in her *Travelogue*. The first and longest part describes her childhood, upbringing, and her exciting trip, as a fourteen-year-old dressed as a boy, to the renowned Mount Geumgang and other scenic spots along the way. Before reaching Mount Geumgang, she traveled to other famous places, such as Uirim Lake 義林池 (Righteous Forest Lake) in Jecheon 堤川 and Danyang 丹陽. Recounting her first trip in amazing detail, Geumwon explains that the reason for entitling her account "Travel Record of Hodongseorak" is that "this excursion began from the four prefectures of the Ho 湖 (Lake) region.⁶ Through Gwandong's 關東 (Eastern Gate)⁷ Mount Geumgang and eight sightseeing visits, I arrived

당 (n.d.); and *Seoyurok* 서유록 (Travelogue of Seoul) by Madam Kim of Gangneung 강릉김씨 (1862-1941). All of these works were recorded in Korean script, and the first two were written in the literary form of the *gasa* genre. For general introductions and translations of *Gwanbuk yuram ilgi* and *Seoyurok*, see Kim (2019).

⁶ The Ho region is another name of Chungcheong-do Province; The four prefectures refer to Jecheon, Cheongpung, Danyang, and Yeongchun.

⁷ Gwandong is another name of Gangwon-do Province.

in Nagyang 洛陽⁸ and finally reached Gwanseo 關西 (Western Gate)⁹ bay district. Then I returned to Nagyang” (Geumwon 1988, 484). Arriving at Mount Geumgang, she took both the inner and outer mountain courses, which had been a popular sightseeing route in the past.¹⁰ Her journey continued to the eight scenic places of the Gangwon region and Mount Seorak (雪嶽山). Only after exploring Hanyang and its suburbs was Geumwon’s desire to see the world fulfilled and her extensive trip brought to an end.

The second part of the *Travelogue* focuses on Geumwon’s travel to the northwestern provinces after her marriage. Using the metaphor of the “marriage destiny of a small star” (小星), borrowed from the *Book of Songs* (Sigyeong 詩經; C. *Shijing*), Geumwon notes her marital union with the scholar-official Kim Deok-hui 金德喜 (1800-53) as his concubine.¹¹ The exact venue and date of the marriage are not stated, though the tone of the *Travelogue* implies that it took place in 1830, the same year she completed her first trip.¹² In 1845, when she was 29, Geumwon seized the opportunity to travel by sedan chair ahead of Kim Deok-hui when he took her with him to his newly appointed post in Uiju (義州), Pyeongan-do Province. Within a year, however, in 1846, a royal secret inspector (*amhaeng eosa* 暗行御史), Bak Yeong-bo 朴永輔 (1808-?), had accused Kim Deok-hui of misconduct and forced him to relinquish his post (*Heonjong sillok*, 13:13A [1846/8/21]). Though details of this incident are vague, Kim Deok-hui and Geumwon seem to have left Uiju shortly after the accusation. Despite her relatively short

⁸ Nagyang is another name of Hanyang, the capital of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910); Located within present-day Seoul.

⁹ Gwanseo is another name of Pyeongan-do Province.

¹⁰ The most famous courses for sightseeing Mount Geumgang are two outer mountain courses (*oegeumgang* 外金剛), the inner mountain course (*naegeumgang* 內金剛), and the sea mountain course (*haegeumgang* 海金剛). The inner mountain course cannot be taken today due to the division between South and North Korea.

¹¹ The original song reads: “Twinkle those small stars, / Three or five in the east, / Shrinking, through the dark we walk / While it is still night in the palace. / Truly, the fates are not equal.” Waley (1996, 53). Kim Deok-hui, whose family originated in Gyeongju, passed the civil examination in 1835.

¹² Relying on the *Travelogue* as an accurate source, Yi Neung-hwa notes that Geumwon’s marriage took place the same year (1830) that she returned from her trip (1990, 299-300). Other existing studies do likewise, taking what is written in the *Travelogue* as fact.

residence in Uiju, Geumwon writes vividly about her observations and experiences in this new locale of the northwestern region, offering rich historical and cultural details of the area, such as customs in trading with Chinese on the border, a splendid welcoming ceremony for a new official, and local female entertainers' unique performances.

After the departure from Uiju, Geumwon settled in Hanyang (Seoul), and the third part of the *Travelogue* sketches the vibrant life in that capital city. It focuses on Geumwon's poetry meetings at the Samhojeong Pavilion (三湖亭) in the Yongsan (龍山) area,¹³ and on the unrivaled pleasure she derived from them.¹⁴ There she became more prolific than ever, exchanging poems with fellow writers, all of whom, she writes, were concubines of *yangban* just as she herself was.¹⁵ Along with their male literati husbands, these women writers all contributed postscripts to Geumwon's *Travelogue*, offering a rare glimpse of their insights into the work of another woman.

Geumwon concludes her *Travelogue* by explaining why she took up her ink brush to combine memories of her travels and literary activities in a single written text. Although she admits that her account contains "only ten of a thousand and one of a hundred" of the things she saw and experienced, she writes that she still wished to record them as her literary property—and especially wanted the verses she composed during her travels not to be scattered or disappear (Geumwon 1988, 483). She completed her manuscript in late spring of the *gyeongsul* year (1850), about 20 years after her first venture into outer world in 1830. It is not known whether the *Travelogue* was written over the course of several years or all at one time, though Geumwon does note that she wanted to appreciate writing the *Travelogue* at her leisure.

How, then, was the *Travelogue* passed on and able to become

¹³ The exact location of the pavilion is not clear, but there is a monument erected by the City of Seoul in Yongsan-gu, Seoul, marking the presumed site of Samho Pavilion. It seems that the Chinese characters of Samho Pavilion on the marker were misspelled as 三好亭.

¹⁴ Kim (1977) has named this gathering the "Samhojeong sidan" (Samhojeong Poetry Association), viewing it as the very first women's poetry association in Korean literary history.

¹⁵ These women poets were Uncho, Gyeongsan, Jukseo, and Geumwon's sister Gyeongchun. See the translation section for further information about them.

available to modern readers? The fact that Geumwon's poetry circle all read her account and provided their thoughts on her writings confirms her wish to have people know about her work. Moreover, by choosing to write in literary Chinese, Geumwon clearly sought an audience not limited to her friends but also including educated literary men. At the end of the *Travelogue*, she expresses her wish for posterity to know her works and name, writing that "all the past affairs I have experienced are but a dream. If I had not recorded them to pass on [to people in the future], who would know that today's Geumwon ever lived?" (Geumwon 1988, 483).¹⁶

Posthumous publications of the writings of male literati were undertaken by their descendants (often in collaboration with disciples and fellow scholars of the deceased) in Joseon society, and we know that some families admired their female members' literary skills and treasured their works, compiling and publishing them posthumously, as Philip J. Ivanhoe and Hwa Yeong Wang illustrate in the cases of Im Yunjidang (1721-91) and Gang Jeongildang (1772-1832).¹⁷ Because Geumwon was a concubine who outlived her husband, Kim Deok-hui, it is questionable whether Kim's family took on this role. In fact, Geumwon's trace after Kim's death remains obscure, and nothing is known as to how the *Travelogue* was compiled and eventually saw the light. It is possible that the *Travelogue* was hand-copied by members of Geumwon's poetry circle, happened to be read beyond the circle, and became widely known.

As early as 1917 and 1918, the Canadian Presbyterian missionary James Scarth Gale (1863-1937) introduced Geumwon's *Travelogue* in English in the magazine *Cheongchun* (Youth), in three installments (Rutt 1974, 44).¹⁸ The scholar Yi Neung-hwa (1869-1943) included a

¹⁶ Geumwon's concern is also echoed in her sister's postscript, titled "Jeong" (訂). The scholar Yi Hye-sun glosses *jeong* as "to fairly discuss or correct" and views it as a nascent form of women's literary criticism in the field of premodern Korean literature, where literary treatises and analyses by women scarcely exist. See Yi (2000).

¹⁷ A complete translation and study of the life and philosophy of Im Yunjidang and Gang Jeongildang can be found in Ivanhoe and Wang (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Rutt notes that Gale's translation has many imperfections and some omissions, so he substantially revised and rewrote Gale's translation. See also Rutt (1993).

considerable portion of Geumwon's *Travelogue* in his *Joseon yeosok go* 朝鮮女俗考 (Accounts of Joseon Women's Customs), first published in 1927 (Yi 1990, 150-52).¹⁹ Also in 1927, the German priest Norbert Weber, who had visited the Mount Geumgang for ten days in 1926, published his travel record, which mentions Geumwon's travels (Weber 1999). Today, two copies of the *Travelogue* exist and are preserved in different locations—Yonsei University Library and Ewha Womans University Library. These copies feature notable distinctions, starting with the titles and some of the contents. While the Ewha version of the travel record carries the title *Horakhongjo* 湖洛鴻爪 (Footprints of the Wildgoose) in *Geumwon jip* 錦園集 (Collected Works of Geumwon), the Yonsei version is entitled *Hodongseorak gi*, the title given by Geumwon herself at the end of the *Travelogue*.²⁰ Moreover, the opening part of the Ewha version is much shorter than the Yonsei version, and this copy ends without postscripts by members of her poetry circle. Given the English title and content of Gale's English translation, the manuscript he possessed must have been the Ewha version. Though ambiguity remains about the original manuscript Geumwon wrote, the existence of these different versions suggests that her *Travelogue* was known to and read by people much as she hoped it would be, thereby ensuring her being remembered by later generations as a woman literatus.

II. Geumwon, a Female Noble Person

Geumwon's *Travelogue* has a certain autobiographical aspect, in that it includes descriptions of her early and later years, even though it does not provide details apart from basic information about her hometown, upbringing, and marital status as the concubine of a *yangban* scholar. In the opening the *Travelogue*, Geumwon presents herself as

¹⁹ Yi notes that Geumwon's manuscript was owned by Kim Won-geun, a teacher of Chinese at Jeongsin Girls' High School in Seoul.

²⁰ As indicated in footnote 5 above, I used a photo-print copy of the Yonsei version of *Hodongseorak gi* included in Heo (1988).

a girl who, unusually, received a rigorous literary education rather than a conventional domestic one—thanks to her parents, who took pity on her because of her ill health when young. Teaching women the Classics and literary Chinese, even in an elite *yangban* family, was not common during the Joseon dynasty, so it is reasonable to assume that her family was sufficiently wealthy to educate a daughter. Her level of erudition and this brief remark about her childhood education have confused scholars about her social status,²¹ but it is generally accepted that Geumwon was a well-known *gisaeng* 妓生 (female entertainer), at least before she married. Her fame as a *gisaeng* poet is evidenced by Yi Neung-hwa, who introduced selections of Geumwon's poems in his *Joseon hae-eohwasa* 조선해어화사 (History of Joseon Female Entertainers) (Yi 1992).²²

Nowhere in her own writing, however, does Geumwon mention that she was ever a *gisaeng*. No voice or trace of being a *gisaeng* is found in the *Travelogue*. Throughout her account, she appears to consciously avoid any remarks about her experience as a *gisaeng*, although she does lament at the beginning of the *Travelogue* that she “was born into a humble family [without noble status]” (Geumwon 1988, 428-29). In describing a group of *gisaeng* performing a splendid military dance in Uiju, for example, Geumwon remains objective and does not expose emotional attachment or reflect on the performance as a former *gisaeng* (477). She also does not include her poems written as a *gisaeng* before her marriage in the *Travelogue*, even though she was eager to preserve her literary works in one place. Geumwon may have never considered herself a mere *gisaeng* until she returned, still only fourteen years old, from her first journey, which had suddenly enabled her to

²¹ For example, Son (2004) argues that Geumwon was either an illegitimate daughter (*seonyeo* 庶女) of a *yangban* family or the daughter of a wealthy *jungin* 中人 family (the hereditary social status usually composed of professional technicians and local clerks). Such an assumption, however, seems to stem from the fact that Geumwon later became a *yangban's* concubine.

²² Yi also recognizes Geumwon in the section on “Concubines of *Yangban* Who Wrote Poetry and Prose” in his *Joseon yeosokgo* ([1927]1990, 146). The works of several male literati, such as Yi Hwi-jeong 李輝正 (1760-1850), Hong Han-chu 洪翰周 (1789-1868), Seo Yu-yeong 徐有英 (1801-14), and Yi Yu-won 李裕元 (1814-88), hint that Geumwon was a female entertainer known by the name Geumaeng 錦鶯. See Kim (2020, 22-24).

realize that “it is not an ordinary thing for a girl to travel disguised as a boy” (468-69).

While choosing to remain silent about her years as a female entertainer in her *Travelogue*, Geumwon endeavors to present herself instead as “a noble person.” Unlike the petty person, the noble person “knows where to stop,” she writes; accordingly, she ends her initial journey by reconciling her marginalized position with her own self-fulfillment. Refusing to compromise her identity as a *gisaeng* with the spirit of a noble person, she continues to treat herself a noble person of fine feelings and remains inquisitive about everything. Just as male literati considered travel to be an essential part of fulfilling the ideological project of cultural refinement, so Geumwon strove to participate in elite literary culture by inscribing her travel experiences in a language that would coincide with the cultural and historical mapping of Korean space. Her choice to record her journeys in literary Chinese rather than in Korean vernacular, the customary linguistic medium for women of that time, shows that Geumwon did not hesitate to set herself apart by displaying her intellectual fervor and literary skills.

Like travelogues by male literati, therefore, Geumwon’s account reflects a sophisticated level of familiarity with history, literature, and philosophy. How she trained herself in these fields and with whom she studied are unknown, though she states that she was “versed in most of the Classics and historical literature” and that her “thoughts were devoted to the writings of the past and present” (429). Geumwon’s knowledge of the Confucian Classics is impressive, and she effortlessly refers to Chinese figures, people, tales, and places when describing and comparing spaces of her country. Linking them to Chinese models, Geumwon often concludes that “ours are superior to the Chinese,” or sighs that “I wish they [those Chinese who acclaimed their stupendous scenic places in their writings] could come and see this place!” In passing Bulji Rock 佛指巖 on Mount Geumgang, for instance, she is confident that if Li Bai 李白 (701-62) had seen it, he would never have dared say that Mount Lu 廬山 has better scenery than that (444). Looking around Mount Geumgang, Geumwon also

claims, “I have never seen the mountains and rivers in China. But [I have heard that] there are even Chinese who wish to be born in Goryeo [Korea] and visit Mount Geumgang. [I believe] there is nothing [to compare] to this grand spectacle [of Mount Geumgang], though having visited all over the world” (449). Geumwon’s pride in her country’s landscape is echoed in the opening of the *Travelogue*, in which she writes that “it is fortunate that I was born as a human being and not as a beast; I was lucky to be born in my civilized state in the East (Joseon) and not in a barbarian territory” (428-29). This illustrates not only her admiration for the country’s scenery, but her recognition of Joseon as the last bastion of Confucian civilization, the idea that became pervasive among Joseon people after the defeat of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) by the Manchus in 1644 (Haboush 2003, 416-17).

In addition to remarkably vivid portrayals of what she saw and experienced on the road, Geumwon’s *Travelogue* includes twenty-six poems composed whenever her sentiments about a scene ran high. Although she casually notes that she “sometimes composed and recited [poetry] about flowers and the moon,” it appears that Geumwon was keenly attuned to the Way of poetry composition. For Geumwon, poetry cannot be artificial but is created only when “Heaven secretly inspires the writer” (天機). Without elaboration, therefore, poetry should come from one’s heart as a result of “disciplining one’s own nature” (陶寫性情) (Geumwon 1988, 482). The question of how to compose verse had occupied scholarly debates from ancient times. Geumwon seems to follow the theory of natural, spontaneous inspiration encapsulated by the Joseon Neo-Confucian scholar Yi I 李珥 (1537-84), who articulated “poetry as reflection of human nature, [which] thus cannot be composed dexterously or artificially” (詩本性情 非矯僞而成) (Yi, n.d., 44: 271a).

Clearly, Geumwon was aware of her readers and critics, and sensitive to her relationship with them. Her motivation for writing the *Travelogue* went beyond the simple wish to jot down her thoughts, emotions, and encounters during her travels, encompassing her deeper desire to be heard and remembered not as an ordinary traveler but

as a woman *litteratus* and a noble person. Textualizing her private experiences into a form of literature, Geumwon's travel account is neither a mere list of the places she visited nor a text dominated by "women's sentiments." Instead, she gives mundane spaces historical and cultural authority through her extensive knowledge of the Classics, literature, and philosophy, becoming a cultural participant in the nineteenth-century Joseon literary production and intellectual sphere (Fong 2001, 135).

III. *Hodongseorak gi* (Travelogue of Hodongseorak) by Geumwon

How great the rivers and mountains of this world!²³ How long the sun and moon have endured through past and present! How widely diverse are human affairs in their comings and goings! How extensively varied are living things in their colors and figures! Mountains were once one, but became scattered into hundreds and thousands of dissimilar shapes and forms in the end; water was initially extensively dispersed, but gathered at a single point with myriad different waves and currents. As for similitude and dissimilitude in the outlandish forms and eccentric conditions of birds, fish, animals, and plants, this is none other than the force of nature.

Human nature has obtained the essence of *yin-yang* and the Five Phases from the ten thousand things.²⁴ Yet men and women are not the same; there are those who are superior and inferior in their capacity; the depth of knowledge has greatness and smallness; everything has distinctions, whether it is about longevity or untimely death, nobility or baseness, poverty or wealth. The loftiness of [Emperors] Yao 堯 and

²³ The section headings below do not exist in the original text but have been added by the translator.

²⁴ The original text reads “稟得二五之精靈.” The character “二” refers to yin and yang; “五” refers to the Five Phases. In the Neo-Confucian view, the universe is circumscribed by the dual principle of *yin-yang* and the Five Phases—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

Shun 舜,²⁵ and Confucius and Mencius lacking peace [in their hearts],²⁶ were not appreciated during their time. Yan Yuan's 顏淵²⁷ early death and Dao Zhi's 盜跖²⁸ longevity had a difference in their allotted life spans. The hands of fortune and misfortune were not the same for Ji 稷 and Qi 契²⁹ becoming ministers, Yi 伊 and Lü 呂³⁰ remaining lowly assistants, Ningzi 甯子³¹ being ignorant, and Jizi 箕子³² being insane.

Thus, those who grasped their opportunities in time became devoted lords, benefitting the people and having their names inscribed in bamboo books for prosperity. [Yet there were] those who cherished gems in their bosoms and groped for valuables, who rotted away together with the plants and trees, for they failed to recognize their fate. Some were known for their writings; some were renowned

²⁵ Yao and Shun are two ancient emperors during the golden age of Chinese history who are praised in the *Analects* and *Mencius*. For example, see *Mencius* 3A.1, "Mencius spoke about human nature being good, constantly commending Yao and Shun." See Mencius (2009, 49). Their names appear as metaphors for sagacious and bright rulers in the classical literature and history of China and Korea.

²⁶ The original text here suggests the hasty state of Confucius and Mencius, indicating they hustled around the world to teach the Way. This expression is found in a writing by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72), a scholar in Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) China.

²⁷ Yan Yuan (521-490 BCE) is known as one of the ten prominent disciples of Confucius during the end of Spring and Autumn period (776-476 BCE). A beloved disciple of Confucius, he died young.

²⁸ Dao Zhi 盜跖 was the most notorious robber during the Spring and Autumn period. His name became a metaphor for an evil person.

²⁹ Ji 稷 and Qi 契 (n.d.) refer to two illustrious subjects of Emperor Sun—Houji 后稷 and Qi 契—who were later worshipped as gods of agriculture. See Waley (1996). Ji and Qi were also considered progenitors/high ancestors of the Zhou and Shang kings, respectively (Ssu-ma 1994, 41).

³⁰ Yi 伊 and Lü 呂 refer to Yi Yin 伊尹 and Lü Shang 呂尚, two eminent ministers of the Yin 殷 and Zhou 周 states.

³¹ Ningzi meaning Ning Yu 甯俞, also known as Ning Wuzi 甯武子, was a lord of the Wei 衛 state during the Spring and Autumn period. According to the *Analects*, Confucius commented on his service to the state as follows: "The Master said, 'In the case of Ning Wuzi, when the Way prevailed in the state, he was wise. When the Way did not prevail in the state, he was stupid. His wisdom can be equaled, but not his stupidity'" (*Analects* 5.21 in Confucius 2007, 39).

³² The uncle of the Yin state's brutal ruler, Zhou 紂, made Jizi 箕子 a servant due to Jizi's severe criticism of Zhou's cruel policies. By pretending to be crazy, Jizi survived. After the Yin state perished, Chinese history records that Jizi went to Korea and founded the Jizi (K. Gija) Joseon state (Ssu-ma 2006, 269).

for their righteous and heroic actions. Some of those who were lofty in their will favored being among the mountains and rivers; some who withdrew themselves from worldly affairs took pleasure in composing poems and being drunk; and many who did not realize their will [in the world] suffered from sunken spirits and anxiety, feeling an urge to reveal their inner selves through words.

Even so, eyes that have not seen the greatness of mountains and rivers, and hearts that have not experienced the multitude of affairs, would not be able to perceive changes and reach their principles due to their narrow outlook and limited knowledge. Therefore, those who are benevolent [naturally] favor the mountains, and those who are wise, the water.³³ [Then] men are valued because of their ability to travel in any direction according to their whim, whereas women's feet never venture outside the inner gate and can only linger on discussions of proper drink and food. In the olden days, the mothers of Emperors Wen 文 and Wu 武³⁴ and of Confucius and Mencius all were virtuous and also gave birth to sagacious sons, so their names became known in the world. Since then, the glory of these praiseworthy women has not ceased, but they are few in number. Is it possible that there was absolutely no one who shone among women? Staying in the recesses of the inner chambers without sharpening their skills or knowledge, they are only to be utterly forgotten. How can one not grieve at this?!

Geumwon Introduces Herself

I am from Bongnae Mountain 蓬萊山 in the Gwandong 關東 region and call myself Geumwon. Because I was often ill when young, my parents took pity on me and did not force me to learn women's work but taught me to write. Day by day, I made new discoveries; in a few years, I was versed in most of the Classics and historical literature, and my thoughts were devoted to the writings of the past and present. With

³³ "The Master said, "The wise delight in water; the humane delight in mountains" (Confucius 2007, 45, 6.23).

³⁴ Wen and Wu were the sagacious rulers of the Zhou state in ancient China.

inspiration, I sometimes composed and recited [poetry] about flowers and the moon. Deliberating deeply about my life, it is fortunate that I was born as a human being and not as a beast; I was lucky to be born in my civilized state in the East (Joseon) and not in a barbarian territory. [Yet] it is unfortunate that I was not born a man but as a woman; it was unlucky that I was not born in a wealthy and noble family but in a humble one.

However, Heaven has already endowed me with a benevolent and wise nature, and the ability to hear and see, so how can I not enjoy the mountains and rivers and observe and listen broadly? Heaven has already bestowed brightness upon me, so how can I not achieve [something worthwhile] in a civilized state? Is it [only] right that I, being a mere woman, stay within the closed gates and abide by the old rules?³⁵ Is it right that, having already been born into a humble family, I dwell in my destiny, die, and vanish without a trace? There is no tortoise of Zhanyin 詹尹, so it is hard to imitate Qu 屈's fortune-telling.³⁶ Then Zhanyin says, "A plan ends, but wisdom is everlasting"; let one's will be performed oneself. Then I decided. [Though] I was not yet of marriageable age, traveling widely to scenic resorts of mountains and rivers, if I pretended I was Zeng Dian 曾點 bathing in the Yi 沂 River and enjoyed the breeze among the rain-altars,³⁷ I would then return after writing some verse that captured the moment, and the sages should [thereby] also partake in this.

³⁵ The original text reads this as "經法," the immutable rules outlined in the Classics.

³⁶ Zhanyin refers to Zheng Zhanyin 鄭詹尹, the minister in charge of prophesy who used the lines on a tortoise shell for divination in the Chinese Chu state during the Warring States period (403-221 BCE). Qu is the Chu state scholar-official Qu Yuan 屈原 (340-278 BCE), who visited Zhanyin to ask about the direction of his political path and life. See *Chuci jizhu* 楚辭集註 (2001, 111-13). For an English translation, see Hawkes (1985, 203-06).

³⁷ Zeng Dian was one of the disciples of Confucius. Yi is the name of a river southeast of Shandong in China. The original text has "舞雩," referring to an ancient sacrifice for rain in time of drought. This refers to a passage in the *Analects* in which Zeng Dian expresses his desire to lead a group of young men to bathe in the Yi River and return chanting together (*Analects* 11.26 in Confucius 2007, 77).

Geumwon Sets Out on Her Travels

My mind was already made up, but I was delayed several times due to my parents. After what seemed like an eternity, they agreed. Then, I lifted up my soul to its natural greatness, like a hawk coming out of its cage and shooting straight up into the sky, or like a good horse taking off its bridle and saddle and setting off to run a thousand *ri*.³⁸ That very day, I changed into male attire, packed my baggage, and set out in the direction of the Four Prefectures.³⁹ It was spring of the third month in *gyeongin* year (1830), and I was just fourteen years old.⁴⁰ I plaited my hair like a boy and sat inside a sedan chair that was draped with blue silk with its front open. [Then] I made my way to the Uirim Lake 義林池 in Jecheon 堤川 [region].⁴¹ Charming flowers were about to bloom, and fragrant plants were opening like mist, with green leaves beginning to wake. Blue mountains enclosed [me] in all four directions like embroidered curtains. I already felt refreshed, as if all the dust in my inner organs was washed off.

Visit to Uirim Lake

I indeed arrived at Uirim Lake, which looked to be about 10 *ri* in width. The green water was pure and clear, like spreading delicate silk of the Chinese Shu 蜀 state. Watershields lived on the water—some sank and some floated—; myriad catkins hung from the willow trees—some swam in water and some dragged themselves in soil. A pair of orioles were flying between branches, flittering their plumage like silk dresses and chirping their clever tongues. A kingfisher startled me as it shot to the sky. Turning back with a smile, I laughed and said, “According

³⁸ A *ri* is a measure of length reckoned between 430.08 and 453.60 meters.

³⁹ These are the four prefectures in Chungcheong-do Province, referring to Jecheon, Cheongpung, Danyang, and Yeongchun.

⁴⁰ The year of *gyeongin* was 1830, the 30th reign year of King Sunjo (r. 1800–34).

⁴¹ Uirim Lake is a historic reservoir that, legend has it, was built by a musician, Ureuk, in the sixth century of Silla (57 BCE–935 CE). The original name was Rim 林 (Forest) Lake, but it has been called Uirim 義林 (Righteous Forest) Lake since 992.

to a proverb, ‘You, kingfisher! Do not fly and leave me. Am I not your friend?’ Now, I also want to say that!”

Suddenly, I heard the dim singing of a fisher’s song between willow trees. In the distance, I saw an old man on mossy steps, wearing a blue straw hat and a green rain cape, sitting with a fishing rod in his hands. He was catching a golden-scaled fish, flashing from the midst of vast waves. I rented a boat and went to look for where the singing came from. The breeze was still and the water was peaceful, like sitting in a gaily decorated pleasure boat. Limpid waves formed what looked like a square pond or a precious mirror, dotted with caltrops, lotuses, and other aquatic plants. Water birds emerged from the place between heavenly light and shadowy clouds—surely it was a scene from a painting!

I proceeded and disembarked at a fishing jetty, then threw a copper coin⁴² for a white fish. Cutting and tasting it, I am afraid that even the four-gilled fish in the Pine River⁴³ cannot be superior to this. Once again, I searched the borders of the pond to collect watershield plants. An old woman from a grass hut welcomed me and taught me how to prepare them, by poaching them in hot water for a moment, then serving them with *omija* soup.⁴⁴ The taste was extremely fresh and subtle. I did not know whether the memory that Zhang Jiying 張季鷹 longed for was in fact like this taste or not, but I had a refreshing feeling in my throat.⁴⁵

The lake is known for its incomparable scenic beauty. In the spring, a sea of peach blossoms looks like sailing in a boat in Heaven; in sum-

⁴² The original text reads “青蚨,” which means a legendary blue insect, but here refers to coins. This term comes from the *Hoenamja* 淮南子 (C. *Huainanzi*, Master of Huainan), a work from the early Han dynasty by the imperial kinsman Liu An 劉安 (179–22 BCE). For a complete translation of this work, see An (2010).

⁴³ Four-gilled fish (松江四鯉) is another name for perch, which were known to abound in Chinese rivers during the Song dynasty.

⁴⁴ *Omija* 五味子 is a kind of wild fruit traditionally used for making a Korean beverage with five different flavors—sourness, sweetness, bitterness, spiciness, and saltiness.

⁴⁵ Zhang Jiying (aka Zhang Han 張翰) was a scholar-official of the Western Jin 晉 (266–420 CE) state. An anecdote tells that longing for the watershield plants (蓴菜) of his hometown, Zhang resigned his office and headed home (*Jinshu* 晉書 [History of the Jin] 1980, 2384).

mer, pure lotus flowers seem to float over the gate of coldness;⁴⁶ in autumn, it is like scooping the moon out of an icy pond; in winter, it is like spreading out snow on a jade mirror. If a hermit-scholar were to see [this], [he would view it] as the Hao 濠 River where Zhuangzi 莊子 [once] strolled along; if beautiful people were to arrive here, they would compare it to the famous lake named after Xizi 西子.⁴⁷ For the scenery of this (Uirim) lake, a whole year's stay could not exhaust appreciation of it all. I lingered around [the lake], yet could not leave. . . .

Two Caves

Heading toward Yongchun 永春, I looked for two caves, Geumhwa 金華 and Namhwa 南華. Morning fog had not yet cleared off. Upon arriving at a river, I beckoned a boat and glided on, leaving the boat ashore at the entrance of a stone cave. Entering the cave with a torch, I saw a large stone lying horizontally with a large ring inside it [holding] some water, which was as deep and clean as a pond. Stones of various shapes were standing like iron drumsticks. They are called “bell rocks” because, when struck, they generate a magnificent sound like a bell.

[In fact,] there was a stone bell by the mouth of Lake Pengli. Li Daoyuan 酈道元 conjectured that when water and the stone smacked against each other, the sound resembled that of a huge bell.⁴⁸ Li Bo 李渤 found two stones by a pool's side, then struck them together and listened.⁴⁹ The sound of the one at the southern side was muffled and deep, while the tone of the one at the northern side was clear and

⁴⁶ A gate of coldness (寒門) refers to a legendary cold area in Northern China. Geumwon must have taken this term from “遠絕垠乎寒門” (Till, at the world's other end, we came to the Gate of Coldness), in the “Yuan you” 遠遊 (Far-Off Journey) section of the *Chuci* (Songs of Chu 楚辭). See Hawkes (1985, 202).

⁴⁷ The Hao River refers to the well-known conversation between Zhuangzi 莊子 and Huizi 惠子 about the joys of fishing, which took place along the banks of the Hao River. See Zhuangzi (2003, 111). Xizi refers to Xi Shi 西施 (?-?) of the Yue 越 state, who was known for her exceptional beauty.

⁴⁸ Li Daoyuan (470?-527) was a geographer who compiled the *Shuijingzhu* 水經注 (Commentaries on the Water Classic) during the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386-534).

⁴⁹ Li Bo (772-831), a scholar-official of the Tang dynasty (618-907), wrote “Bian Shi zhong shan ji” 辨石鐘山記 (On the Record of Stone-Bell Mountain).

carried far. Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 recorded this phenomenon to discuss [both opinions], and thought Li Yuan 酈元 to be right, yet laughed at Li Bo's foolishness.⁵⁰ In the past, I was initially skeptical about these stories. Having witnessed this stone today, it indeed sounded like a bell! I realized, for the first time, that the judgment on Li Bo did not deceive. It is regretful that Su Dongpo would not be able to see this stone here. On the stone cliff, there were many stalactites hanging down. Reaching out and grabbing one, it melted like spring snow exposed to the sun and immediately disappeared. Both caves exhibited the same spectacle, which was enough to make the scene strange. . . .

Geumgang Mountain (Diamond Mountain)

Having exhaustively looked around the famous places in four districts, I headed toward the Geumgang Mountain 金剛山. When I went on and climbed the Danbal Ridge 斷髮嶺, I saw twelve thousand peaks of the Geumgang Mountain, which were like jade pieces erected on a heap of snow. The piles of snowdrifts on the Western Mountain 西山 could not exceed this scene. As for the Western Mountain, it is the most famous mountain in Yanjing 燕京. Gazing on layers of cliffs and waves of mountain peaks behind the Wanshou Mountain 萬壽山, they look like a mysterious scene. The snow waves on the mountain peaks are even more remarkable, thus the piles of snowdrifts on the Western Mountain became one of the Yanjing's eight scenes.

The strata of cliffs and unending peaks of the Geumgang Mountain pierced the clouds, and the snow color on every peak was stunning throughout the four seasons. Those who rave about famous and beautiful places usually call them fairylands or painting-like scenery. I do not know what such a fairyland would be like, but if this is taken as a painting-like scene, even the most talented painter cannot do it justice! Spring was deep in the mountain roads, covered with thriving

⁵⁰ Li Yuan indicates to Li Daoyuan. Geumwon here refers to "Shi zhong shan ji" 石鐘山記 (Record of Stone-Bell Mountain), written by Su Dongpo (1037-1101, or Su Shi 蘇軾), a poet and writer of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). For an English translation of this piece, see Strassberg (1994, 188-91).

green leaves and wiry red flowers. Singing cuckoos cried frequently, as if saying “forgotten to return home,”⁵¹ only burdening the lonely heart of a traveller.

Marriage Journey

After having travelled around the capital and countryside, I looked at myself wearing a boy’s hat and dress and felt pathetic all of sudden. I said to my heart that “a girl disguising herself as a boy is not an ordinary thing; how much more so for the endlessness of human emotion. A noble person knows where to stop;⁵² thus, he controls himself and does not cross [the lines of] basic propriety. A petty person, on the other hand, passes over the human emotion and immediately proceeds; thus, once he drifts off, he forgets to return. Now the great scenes [I have seen] have almost rewarded my old wishes, therefore, I can stop here. Isn’t it also possible to return to my old duty and follow the affairs of women?” Taking off the boy’s clothes and wearing the previous ones, I was not yet a married woman.

Zijin 子晉’s panpipes could summon a mysterious crane,⁵³ and Chang Qing 長卿’s harp could invite an auspicious phoenix.⁵⁴ With a Gyudang scholar, Kim 奎堂金學士,⁵⁵ I finally made the small star’s karma,⁵⁶ then several years and months passed while I stayed as his

⁵¹ The original text writes “不如歸。” This expression comes from the story that King Du Yu 杜宇 of the Chu 蜀 was reincarnated as a cuckoo whose cry sounded like the words “forgotten to return home.”

⁵² The original texts reads “君子知足而能止,” which is a classical allusion of “知止 (knows where to stop)” used in several Chinese Classics. See Lao Zi (2008, 93) and Confucius (1971, 356).

⁵³ The original text writes “子真,” but Geumwon would have meant 子晉, the name of a prince of Chu during the reign of King Ling 靈王 of Chu (r. 540-529 BCE). According to the *Lie xian zhuan* (*Biographies of Immortals* 列仙傳), he was expelled for his direct admonition of the king and became a Taoist hermit (Penny 2008, 653-54).

⁵⁴ Chang Qing was another name of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BCE), a poet, writer, and musician of the Western Han dynasty. It seems that Geumwon is alluding to Sima Xiangru’s famous marriage story in which he fell in love with a young widow, Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君.

⁵⁵ The exact meaning of “Gyudang” 奎堂 is not clear here, but it seems to refer to Kim’s scholarly vocation.

⁵⁶ The text reads “小星之緣.” “Small star” indicates a “secondary wife,” which originally comes from the *Shijing*. See note 14 above.

wife. One day, he was blessed by the king and was assigned to be a county magistrate of Yongman 龍灣.⁵⁷ It was the early spring of the *eulmi* year (1845). Heading toward his post, I went alone before him by a sedan chair decorated with four jade curtains hanging down in front. We crossed over Mohwa Hill 慕華峴. Arriving at Songgyeong 松京, the glow of Mount Songak 松岳山 in the setting sun and the dusk clouds across Wol Terrace 月臺 looked sorrowful and melancholy.⁵⁸ As for the trace of Seonjuk Bridge 善竹橋, there had always been an obvious blood spot, [visible] enough to make later loyal subjects shed tears through the ages.⁵⁹

Passing Cheongseok Gate 靑石關, the valley continued for 10 *li*. The mountain configuration was very steep, truly a spiky place endowed by Heaven. When the Qing general arrived here in the *byeongja* year (1636), he was really reluctant to force his front-line army to advance. If we had had several hundreds of soldiers to resist them at that time, the Qing army would not have dared to cross here. It is natural that our (Joseon) people are regretful when reaching this place! Going by Chongsu Rock 葱秀巖, I heard that there was a great [carved] character left there by Zhu Zifan 朱之蕃,⁶⁰ yet, sitting inside the sedan chair, I could not look around extensively. Riding by Hwangju 黃州, I distantly saw the Wolpa Pavilion 月波樓 standing in the mist at a boundless stream. It was almost like passing through a painting.

Poetry Gatherings at the Samho Pavilion

With the end of the magistrate's tenure, we packed and returned to Seoul. [My husband's] relatives and clansmen welcomed us with joy,

⁵⁷ Yongman was another name of Uiju.

⁵⁸ Songgyeong, another name of Gaeseong, was the capital of the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392). Wol Terrace refers to Full Moon Terrace (滿月臺), the site of the Goryeo dynasty's main palace.

⁵⁹ Seonjuk Bridge is known as the spot where Jeong Mong-ju (1338-92), a loyal subject of the Goryeo, was killed by four assassins wielding iron clubs sent by Yi Bang-won, who later became the third king of the Joseon dynasty. It is said that a trace of Jeong's blood still remains on the bridge.

⁶⁰ Zhu Zifan (?-1624) was a Ming Chinese scholar-official who came to Korea in 1606 as an envoy (*Seonjo sillok* 196:13B [1606/1/23]).

and we gave [them] gifts of Chinese silk as an expression of our familial affection. My husband turned down an illustrious position and retired to a pavilion at the riverside, where I eventually followed him by taking a small wagon. That was indeed the Samho Pavilion 三湖亭 at Yongsan 龍山.

... Sometimes when I composed and sang poetry, four people joined and exchanged poems. One was Uncho 雲楚 (?-?) from Seongcheon 成川, a concubine of the Secretarial officer Kim Yeoncheon 淵泉.⁶¹ She was extraordinarily talented and renowned for her poetic ability. Some even travelled a distance to visit her and sometimes stayed for several days. Then, there was Gyeongsan 瓊山 (?-?) from Munhwa 文化, who was a concubine of the Secretarial officer Yi Hwasan 花史⁶² and who was erudite, well informed, and skillful in composing poetry. Because she lived nearby, we frequently met [for the singing of poetry]. Third was Jukseo 竹西 (?-1851) from my hometown, a concubine of the Governor Seo Songho 松湖.⁶³ She was wise, quick to learn: hearing one [thing], she would know the next ten things.⁶⁴ Her writing style emulated that of Han and Su,⁶⁵ unusual and classical.⁶⁶ The last was my sister, Gyeongchun 鏡春 (?-?), a concubine of Governor Hong Juchon 酒泉.⁶⁷ She was bright and decorous, and widely read in the Classics and history. She was second to none in composing poetry and prose. Following each other and enjoying [composing and singing] together,

⁶¹ Yeoncheon is a pen name of Kim I-yang 金履陽 (1755-1845).

⁶² Hwasan is a pen name of Yi Jeong-sin 李鼎臣 (1792-1858).

⁶³ Songho is a pen name of Seo Gi-bo 徐箕輔 (?-?). For details about these men, see Bak (2007).

⁶⁴ This alludes to a reference to Yan Hui 顏回 in the *Analects*. See the *Analects* 5.9 in Confucius (2007, 37).

⁶⁵ "Han and Su" refer to the two famous Chinese poets Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), also known as Su Dong-po 蘇東坡.

⁶⁶ Since Jukseo was from Wonju, the same hometown as Geumwon, many of the poems in her poetry collection are addressed to Geumwon. Uncho was a female entertainer famous for her poetry even before she became a concubine of the *yangban* scholar Kim I-yang (or Kim Yeoncheon in this text), though Geumwon does not mention this at all. Not much is known about Gyeongsan and Gyeongchun, but Uncho and Jukseo's poetry collections have been translated into Korean. For a detailed study on this group, see Kim (2004).

⁶⁷ It is unclear who Hong Juchon was, but a recent study suggests the possibility of Hong Chae-bong 洪在鳳 (?-?) who served as a county magistrate of Yongchun 永春 in Chungcheong-do Province between 1848 and 1851. See Yi (2017, 107-8).

rolls of silk-like papers covered the wooden table, and entire shelves were filled with pearl-like poetry scrolls. . . .

So, the five of us became congenial friends, enjoying this beautiful place with blooming flowers, singing birds, clouds and mists, winds and rains, snow and shine: there was not a single day that was not delightful. We played the lute together, taking genuine pleasure in listening to music. In the midst of laughing and talking to one another, when Heaven secretly inspired us, we composed verses; some clear, some dignified, some strong, some old-fashioned, some vigorous and some righteous. Even though I have no idea which is superior or inferior, one thing [I do know] is that we each disciplined our own nature and [yet also] lived in leisure.

. . . Now, as I recollect half of my life, [I realize that] I travelled extensively to beautiful places to see rare and scenic views, leaving my footprints on the mountains and rivers—something hard [even] for men to achieve. My heart is satisfied, and my wishes are fulfilled. Alas, the world is [still] wide! [Traveling] a little country can hardly match [seeing] the entire world. Time has passed through long years, and a drifting life of a hundred years is not sufficient to fully enjoy [the world]. Nevertheless, seeing a corner of the world could be like seeing all mountains and rivers; viewing a hundred years could be like viewing what all time is like. Then, as for the questions of how big or small the world is and how long and short the time is, who can adequately discuss [such matters]? However, all the past affairs I have experienced are but a dream. If I do not record them to pass on [to people in the future], who would know that today's Geumwon ever lived?

. . . Alas, reckoning time by a day, one day is a dream; reckoning time by a year, one year is a dream; reckoning a hundred years, a thousand years from the past to present, all are a dream. I am also one in a dream, recording the affairs I had in my dream. Isn't it all a dream within a dream?! Laughing it off finally, I take up a brush and write down [the joys of] travel. Those recorded are only ten of a thousand and one of a hundred. As for the poems I composed, I am afraid they will all be scattered or disappear, so I record them [here] as [my literary] property and appreciate them at my leisure. This excursion began from

the four prefectures of the Ho. Through Gwandong's Mount Geumgang and eight sightseeing visits, I arrived in Nanyang (Hanyang, the capital) and finally reached the Gwanseo bay district. Then I returned to Nanyang. Thus, I entitle [this account] a record of Hodongseorak.

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