

LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

THREE EARLY-MODERN *KASA*

Introduction by BRUCE FULTON

Kasa are one of the two main vernacular verse forms, along with *sijo*, surviving from the Chosŏn period. Like the shorter *sijo*, *kasa* were originally intended to be sung and can be lyrical, narrative, or didactic. The *kasa* form was perfected in the 1500s and 1600s in works such as Chŏng Ch'ŏl's "Kwandong pyŏlgok" (Song of the east coast; much of this *kasa* describes the Eight Views of Kŭmgangsan, the Diamond Mountains) and Pak Illo's "Nuhang sa" (Song of a wretched life). *Kasa* from early Chosŏn were composed primarily by the *yangban* aristocracy, who preferred the *kasa* form for its lack of restriction on length. Common themes were rural life and scenery; loyalty to the king (often expressed in the guise of a faithful wife or lover pining for an absent counterpart); and the individual in nature. In later Chosŏn more women and commoners wrote *kasa*, and the content tended to focus on changes in Chosŏn society and on relations between men and women.

Kasa were typically written in lines consisting of two groups of syllables. *Kasa* written by the aristocracy tend to exhibit a three syllable/four syllable structure, those by commoners and women (the latter termed *naebang kasa*, "songs of the inner room," or *kyubang kasa*, "songs of the boudoir") more often a four syllable/four syllable structure. *Kasa* authored by *yangban* were written in a mixture of Chinese and *han'gŭl*, while works by women and commoners were composed primarily or entirely in the native script.

Scholars have yet to reach a consensus as to a precise starting point for modern Korean literature. But most would agree that much of the transition from a traditional to a modern literature can be seen during the Kaehwagi (Enlightenment Period), extending from the late 1890s to the early 1900s. Among

Enlightenment *kasa* we see *ch'angŭi ka*, songs praising the patriotic grass-roots armies (*ŭibyŏng*, literally “righteous armies”) that rose up in defense of the homeland against foreign imperialist incursions; *Tonghak kasa*, songs extolling the teachings of the new Tonghak (Eastern Learning) religion; and *aeguk ka*, patriotic songs published in Enlightenment Period newspapers such as the *Tongnip sinmun* (The Independent) and the *Taehan maeil sinbo* (Korea daily news). These *kasa* were written by progressive intellectuals, and some of them are satirical. The appearance of these *kasa* in newspapers and magazines assured them a substantial readership. While preserving the standard four-four rhythmic pattern of traditional *kasa*, these newer *kasa* were divided into stanzas, the better to render the new thematic content.

Major changes in the *kasa* form appeared around the time of Chosŏn’s formal annexation by imperial Japan in 1910 and led to a variant form, *ch'angga*, “sung songs” (as opposed to *kasa*, “sung lyrics”). The majority of these new songs were composed by the pioneering literary figure Ch’oe Namsŏn. His *ch'angga* such as “Kyŏngbu ch’ŏlto ka” (Song of the Kyŏngsŏng-Pusan rail line) and “Segye ilchu ka” (Song of a journey around the world) feature a seven-five rhythmic pattern, bespeaking the flexibility that has always been a drawing point of the *kasa* form.

The dearth of twentieth-century scholarship on *kasa* perhaps reflects literary historian Cho Tongil’s assertion that Korean early-modern (*kŭndae*) poetry rejected (*paegyŏk*) *kasa* and remained true to the tradition of lyric poetry. But if scholar Yu Chŏngsŏn’s 2013 *Kŭndae kihaeng kasa yŏn’gu* (A study of early-modern travel *kasa*) is any indication, research on the venerable tradition is alive and well in the new millennium (of the eight pages of scholarship she cites in her bibliography, only a handful of items date from before the year 2000). One can’t help but think that the resurgence of the Korean oral tradition enlivening the wave of Korean popular culture (Hallyu) that is increasingly influential globally has led to renewed interest in the *kasa* form in all its diversity (socialist-realist *kasa* is said to survive in North Korea).

Yu’s study focuses primarily on *kihaeng kasa* from 1900 into the 1940s, illustrating how the *kasa* tradition survived amid the emergence of the new fiction (*sin sosŏl*) and new poetry (*sinch’e si*) and the adoption of the Western short-story form. These *kasa* were published in book form as well as in newspapers such as the *Maeil sinbo* (Daily news) and the *Sinhan minbo* (New Korea people’s press). The latter daily was founded by An Ch’angho in 1907 and ultimately established branches in the U.S.; *Miguk kihaeng kasa* (songs of travel in the U.S.) were published there. Subject matter included the encounter between tradition (*chŏnt’ong*) and a new civilization; excursions (*yuram*) to the seaside or the mountains (the Diamond Mountains were an especially popular destination);

travel abroad; departure from one's ancestral home for elsewhere on the peninsula or overseas; and gender issues. In structure and form they tended to be shorter, averaging between 100 and 200 lines, and more "prosy" (*sanmunch'e*).

Surviving in early-modern *kasa* are *naebang/kyubang kasa*, a tradition dating from the 1600s that offers us crucial insights into the lives of wellborn Chosŏn women. They circulated only within the family until the modern era, when they were first published, and most remain anonymous. There were two main varieties, the more numerous being *kyenyŏ ka*, songs of admonition about correct deportment for a young woman. *Chat'an ka* were songs of lament, sung, for example, by young widows. Also falling into the latter category are flower-viewing songs (*hwajŏn ka*), sung to celebrate one of the rare occasions when well-born women were allowed outside the home with their peers. The two *kasa* by Cho Aeyŏng translated here reflect this tradition of women's songs.

The three *kasa* translated here (from texts in Yu Chŏngsŏn's *Kŏndae kibaeng kasa yŏn'gu*) were composed in the 1930s. "An Outing at Haein Temple" (Haeinsa yuramga) by Chŏng Hyori (1879–1949) dates from 1934. In juxtaposing scenic wonders from China with those of Haein Temple, in South Kyŏngsang Province, this *kasa* echoes a tradition, dating at least as far back as the Koryŏ "how about that" (*kyŏnggich'e ka*) song "Hallim pyŏlgok" (Song of the scholars), of contrasting the best of native culture with Chinese counterparts. The speaker here compares the grand scale of the Chinese landscape with the smaller-scale natural surroundings of Haein Temple and concludes that the latter is "the best," suggesting that the vastness of the Chinese natural wonders tends to overshadow the magnificent detail visible in a smaller scene.

Cho Aeyŏng (1911–2000) was descended from a prominent clan that included the poet Cho Chihun, who with Pak Mogwŏl and Pak Tujin constituted the Blue Deer Group (Ch'ŏngnok p'a). "Song of Resentment" (Ulun ka, 1930) and "Song of a Newlywed" (Sinhon ka, 1932) offer a portrait of a *sin yŏsŏng* ("new woman") in the making and are presumably autobiographical, in that the author was schooled in her ancestral home of Yŏngyang, North Kyŏngsang Province, pursued further schooling in Seoul, and was jailed for her activities in the anti-Japanese student movement. "Song of Resentment" focuses on the speaker's awakening to the life possibilities for young educated women but also to the potential for student dissident activities (the Kwangju Student Movement mentioned in that song could perhaps be considered a precursor of the events of April 19, 1960, in Seoul and May 18, 1980, in Kwangju). She resents not only the imposition of neo-Confucian gender ideology but also the ill treatment of the anti-Japanese student activists. The ironically titled "Song of a Newlywed" portrays the speaker not on her anticipated educational honeymoon but left

behind among other young women who have married into her husband's family, there to contemplate what could have been.

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AN OUTING AT HAEIN TEMPLE

By CHŎNG HYORI

Translated by BRUCE and JU-CHAN FULTON

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Down the steps from | the pavilion | | |
| The pebbled path is | steep and rough, but | lush and lavish | the greening shade |
| | that's dark and bosky | day or night | |
| A long-neck crane | with white feathers | sleeping soundly | 'mid the pines |
| Swallow cloaked in | red-accent black, | returning north, | it comes and goes |
| Nightingale with | gold-flecked feathers | frollicking in | the weeping willows |
| | playing with its mate | | |
| Heron decked out | Official-like | in robes of white, | dipping into |
| | a blue river | | |
| Bobbing cuckoo | hopping, skipping | 'bout my feet | |
| Hooting owl | longs to perch | perch on an | azalea stalk |
| From everywhere | the recitation | of the poems, | exhilarating! |
| The jade sleeves and | the red silks | the wits and beauties | how they cavort |
| | oh how lively! | | |
| Boulders along | the winding ravine | they never, ever | cease to amaze |
| The layered cliff | dressed head to toe | in calligraphy | of all the masters |
| Ōma, you dear | companions all, | have ever you seen | such all as this? |
| Agyang Pavilion | is great, they say | but what if it | went sliding into |
| | vast Tongjŏng Lake? | | |
| Ponghwang Pavilion | scenic indeed, | but it's only | a pavilion, |
| | 'twixt two rivers, | overshadowed | by three peaks |
| And Tŭngwang Pavilion | say what you will | how great it is, | but just imagine |
| | what could go wrong | if overshadowed | by Three Rivers |
| | and Five Lakes | | |
| Better than these | three, best of all | is the view of | Hongyu Ravine, |
| | with beautiful peaks | and lovely waters, | with autumn moon |
| | and spring flowers, | that long, winding stream. | |

SONG OF RESENTMENT

By CHO AEYŎNG

Translated by BRUCE and JU-CHAN FULTON

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Hyŏni's father's | Japan junket | back to Chosŏn | he did go |
| Toured far and wide | mantra-cizing | develop first | develop now! |
| Kyŏngsang scholars | Confucian-like | criticized him | ostracized him |
| What better grounds | for screwing up | engagement hopes | of young Hyŏn? |
| Chances shattered | what else to do | but up to Seoul | and off to school |
| "In Seoul she'll study" | yes indeed but | actually they'll | marry her off |
| "It's all arranged"— | so said Father | "no!" said Hyŏn | "no, I will not" |
| When Father said | "No more school fees" | how could she not | resent it hard? |
| "I'll kill myself | before I go through | loveless marriage | my heart's not there" |
| She pestered Mom | but to no end | and there commenced | family discord |
| Funds saved up from | sewing, weaving | by Hyŏn's mother and | in-law sisters |
| They'd sent her off | to Seoul saying | "Use it for your | school fees money" |
| She was thankful | for this blessing | but with it gone | could not feel worse |
| The autumn night | was oh so long | she couldn't sleep | was going crazy |
| Classmates sleeping | there beside her | sleeping soundly | there in the dorm |
| But when she looked | outside the window | fretful, moody | at the heavens |
| There on Samgak | Samgak Mountain | were those torches? | three, two, then one |
| Three, two, then one | at first distinct | then all together | signal fire! said |
| <i>Tonga Daily's</i> | next day headline | Kwangju students | marched and shouted |
| The movement spread | throughout the country | "Hurray students!" | was on our lips |
| Authorities | closed schools early | "It's winter break | go home, students" |
| But country kids | could not afford | and would not leave | no they would not |
| Took a week for | authorities | to pay their way | and home they went |
| Train arrives at | Taegu Station | all entrances | are cordoned off |
| They line them up | three dozen students | and they search them | one by one |
| And among them | they discover | a lanky boy | from Chungang High |
| Oh look at that | wad of flyers | subversive stuff | he'd tucked away |
| He's kicked and punched | a bloody mess | they tie him up | they drag him off |
| Other students | they watch, intent | they grind their teeth | what can they do? |
| Among the girls | Hyŏn alone | they pick her out | they search her purse |
| She and the boys | are led off to | the police box | but there's no space |
| In that jampacked place | and so it is they're | handed over, | Taegu Police |
| Station cells are | full to bursting, | detainees spilling | into hallways. |

SONG OF A NEWLYWED (EXCERPT)

By CHO AEYÖNG

Translated by BRUCE and JU-CHAN FULTON

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|--|--|---|--|
| Hyöni's <i>oppa</i> Drafts a note to Talks with Father Come the dog days Brings her home a In three short days Crestfallen Hyön Which makes <i>Oppa</i> To which Hyöni's Well those words they And with no qualms It would be quick, And when it's time Sweet talk this was | sweet-talking boy Ehwa College or so he says of hot summer would-be husband the brother of says to <i>Oppa</i> fly off the handle father's new wife caught her fancy on Hyöni's part a lightning strike, for school to start and Hyöni fell | said he'd send her saying she is and they have plans just look at him sits him 'cross from husband-to-be: "What the heck is saying "Look, no need chimes in, "Look he's Hyöni's fancy the family said and so it happened off to Japan fell hard for it | off to Japan leaving school big plans for Hyön at <i>oppa</i> 's scheme their good parents engagement ring! going on?" to break him in" dashing, manly" they surely did let's set the date inside three weeks both bride and groom |
| "I'm off," said groom, Look after Mom But what about <i>Oppa</i> 's lies are Go-between-less Off they go to Bid farewell 'mid Hyöni's beanpole Of the Kwangju | his bag in hand, take care, my bride" "off to Japan... swallowed by man they tied the knot Kyöngsöng Station blast of whistle of a husband Student Movement, | "off to Japan, both bride and groom?" swallowed by wife faster than you awkward, heartless for journey o'er was the selfsame expelled from school | off and away hook line sinker could strike a match tear-jerking day Korea Strait bloodied victim for all his pains |
| Tedious were The good wives of Took turns asking, And now a third "What's a woman And with their banter "Where is your family, Sympathetic | the days Hyön in-law brothers, "Did you not know, Hyön good wife of an a New Woman and their jokes why don't they visit, they try to be | spent waiting for both number one 'bout your husband, in-law brother doing in they spill out their own just goes to show but Hyöni churns, | the winter break and number two you really did not know?" she comes out with this: this here family?" in-law hardships a hollow marriage" her cheeks flush red. |

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