Ch’angson gamũi-rok: A Kyubang-Sosol
(Women’s Novel)

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1. Introduction

The advent of the late 17th century saw an important change in the history of Korean novels. This change was the emergence of long-form novels in the Korean vernacular.

Both Ch’angson gamũi-rok (‘A Record of Good and Righteousness’) and Kuunmong (‘Dream of the Nine Clouds’), were written near the end of the 17th century. I believe it is no coincidence that these two novels, along with Sassi namjŏng-ki (‘The Narrative of Sa’s Southern Conquest’), came onto the Korean literary scene at the same time. Ch’angson gamũi-rok, in particular, is the most typical, classical example of the Kyubang-Sosol, or Women’s Novel 1 In spite of this, this work has been passed over or ignored in most research of Korean literature. I believe that Ch’angson gamũi-rok has been given unfair treatment in the history of Korean literature and novels. Not only was it widely read among the readers of the time and given critical acclaim by the learned, but even today it’s breadth and depth of content, refined style and tightly-knit structure are remarkable.

This paper is an elucidation of the Women’s Novel, through investigation and analysis of Ch’angson gamũi-rok. In the process, I will also deal with several problems related to the history of Korean novels in general. One is the problem concerning discernment of author and editions in both the vernacular and classical

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1 Of course, both Kuunmong and Sassi namjŏng-ki also belong to this category
Chinese, and the other concerns the choice of ancient China as a setting.

I have previously written a paper entitled “The Establishment of the 17th Century Women’s Novel and Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok”. The present article is one section taken from that paper. Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok was assigned to me in the plan for Classical Korean Novels. Regrettably, I have not made any further progress in the research or analysis of Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok since that paper was published. It is my hope that a few of the opinions I have expressed regarding this novel will become the subject of discussion among scholars in the field.

2. Problems Concerning the Writing Process

There have been several different theories put forth regarding the author of Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok, and the coexistence of both vernacular and classical Chinese editions has also been a problem. However, these matters are not limited to just a single work. The identity of the author should of course be revealed through scholarly investigation, but one must also keep in mind the more general issue of the emergence of the novelist in artistic history. The coexistence of both vernacular and classical Chinese editions, too, is not a matter concerning only Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok, but is rather a universal tendency in Women’s Novels, including novels from Kuunmong and Namjŏng-ka to Ongnumong and Ongnim-mong, and requires comprehensive research.

The use of classical Chinese or the vernacular Korean for classical Korean novels was not a fixed, absolute matter, but rather was something that could be changed periodically. The reason for such a change was none other than the readers’ demands. Thus, classical Chinese versions were made for the scholars who were well versed in this language, and versions in the vernacular were made according to the demands of women readers, to coexist with the classical Chinese ones.

Which version, then, was first demanded in the case of Women’s Novels like Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok and Kuunmong? The answer to this question is the key to discovering which version was first written, the vernacular or the Chinese.

Let us think about the specific circumstances under which these novels were written. The first record to mention Kuunmong directly is Sanggwanki by Yi Chae (1680-1746). This document states, “Among Korean folk-tale based-novels, is one Kuunmong, which was written by Sŏp’o to comfort and relieve the worries of his mother, and is now widely read among women.” Thus Kuunmong was written primarily to for the author’s mother to read, but was also popular among other
women as well. When one considers the statement by Sŏp'o's grandson Kim Ch'unt'aek that "Sŏp'o wrote many novels in the vernacular," there is no room for doubt that Kuummong was originally written in Korean.

The motivation for the writing of Ch'ungsŏn gamŭi-rok is only too similar to that of Kuummong. The following record can be found in the necrology of Cho Sŏng-ki, a contemporary of Kim Man-jung:

Madame (Cho Sŏng-ki's mother) was very learned and wise, and was so well-read that there was not a historical record or biography, old or new, with which she was unacquainted. Thus in her old age she was wont to lie in bed, stopping sleep and chasing her sorrows by listening to novels. If Uncle (Cho Sŏng-ki) heard of a book at someone else's house that he had not seen, he spared no effort to obtain it. Also, he himself made several books for her based on old tales.2

The above record was written by Cho Sŏng-ki's nephew Chŏng-wi in 1703. The names of the books Cho Sŏng-Ki wrote "based on old tales" are not given in this necrology. However, his great great grandson Cho Chae-sam in Songnam chapji wrote "The books he wrote are those known to the world as Ch'ungsŏn gamŭi-rok and Chang Sŏng sang chŏn."3 Thus one can be sure that Ch'ungsŏn gamŭi-rok was written by Cho Sŏng-ki.

Cho Sŏng-ki (1633-1689, pseudonym Sŏng-kyŏng, ancestral home Imju) is none other than the man whom Pak Chi-won (Yŏnam) lamented in Okkap-yahwa through the words of Hồasaeng saying "Cho Sŏng-ki (Cholsu) is a man worthy of being sent as an envoy even to an enemy country, but he died a poor old scholar without a government position."

Thus we can affirm that both Cho Sŏng-ki and Kim Man-jung, the two writers who have given us our representative 17th century novels, were both of the literary elite class, and possessed the highest level of academic knowledge and fame. In other words, the highest level intellectuals of the day wrote long-form novels in the vernacular Korean. At the time, long-form Korean novels extremely unusual and new in many respects. They become even more important when one considers the fact that they were written by intellectuals of the highest caliber.

As we have seen, the primary motive for Kim Man-Chung to write Kuummong, and Cho Sŏng-ki to write Ch'ungsŏn gamŭi-rok was to comfort their respective mothers. Thus novel writing was a form of filial piety. They wrote novels for their

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2. Cholsujae jip, Vol. 12, p.27, Necrology
3. Songnam Chapji, Kyego-ryu, Ch'ungsŏn-gamu-t-jo (Asea Munhwa sa) p.1018
aged mothers to read. I believe that we must not ignore this point. On the other hand, however, this point alone will not suffice to fully explain these works. These men’s mothers were part of the class of readers of the time called the Kyubang Women, or “upper class women”. It is said that the novels they wrote for their mothers were in no time being widely read among these upper class women. Also, Kim Ch’un-t’aeck mentioned why Kim Man-jung wrote novels in the vernacular. Specifically referring to Namjong-ki, he called it a work that deeply moved the human heart, and stated that the reason Kim Man-jung wrote it in the vernacular was so that women in general could read it, learn it by heart, and be moved by it. In other words, he wrote it in Korean for the purpose of ‘educating’ Korean women.

Another important point is that the novel genre itself demands constantly new material and ever longer stories. This is what the readers want. Herein lies the reason why Kuunmong, and Ch’angsön gami-rok are longer than previous novels.

What led to the creation of the classical Chinese versions, then? The long-form vernacular novel came about in response to the demands of the women of the time, and is therefore basically a women’s novel. However, the people educated in classical Chinese were also more or less interested in novels, and women’s novels, too, before long became the object of their interest.

Namjong-ki is known as the first long-form Korean novel to be translated into classical Chinese. This translation was done by Kim Ch’un-t’aeck, the grandson of the original author. Upon completing the translation, he remarked, “I have added to and deleted from the original somewhat, but my translation cannot match the colorfulfulness of the original, written in the vernacular though it was.” It seems that in the course of translation he came to realize the artistic value of the language of the original. He described his reason for translating Namjong-ki as to prevent it from being neglected. It seems to me that perhaps he might have set about the translation deliberately because the novel carries a special importance relative to the situation inside the royal palace at the time. The translation of Namjong-ki has substantial political overtones.

Now let us look at the case of the Chinese translation of Ch’angsön gami-rok

These days, lying in bed recuperating from congestion, I have set about having my daughters-in-law read vernacular novels to me. Among them is one called Won’gam-rok which is truly heart wrenching and nerve wracking in its intertwining of spite and revenge. However, it shows the law of nature that the good are rewarded and the evil
punished, and thus is quite moving and is to be recommended.

This passage is to be found at the beginning of the Chinese translation of *Ch'angson gamǔi-rok*, and it means that the translation was being undertaken because *Won'gam-rok* was so significant. From the above passage, we can see that the original title of *Ch'angson gamǔi-rok* was in fact *Won'gam-rok*. There is an extant copy of the work with the title *Won'gam-rok*, but it does not differ from *Ch'angson gamǔi-rok* in the least. Anyway, we can clearly see that the sound of chiefly women's storybooks being read aloud was so worth hearing that even men started to listen. Thus they were translated into classical Chinese, a written language used primarily by men.

The Chinese translation of *Ch'angson gamǔi-rok* is very refined in style, and quite a few detailed passages are even more refined than the original. In particular, it is simple and unrefined, yet is colorful and not vulgar, even giving a feeling of freshness. It seems to be a 'Korean style Chinese', very different from the general writing style of novels from China.

Who was it that translated *Ch'angson gamǔi-rok* into Chinese? It is impossible to know for certain. Drawing on the fact that the translator of *Nampoong-ki* has been mistakenly described as its author, one may forward the conjecture that either Kim To-su or Chŏng Tong-jun, each of whom was formerly thought to be the author of *Ch'angson gamŭi-rok*. Chŏng Tong-jun was a court official during the reign of King Chŏngjo, and was forced to commit suicide in the course of a secret struggle for power.

Kim To-su, on the other hand, was a scholar during the reign of King Yongjo, was a gifted writer, and reputedly enjoyed novels so much that he would forget to eat and sleep when he was reading one. When one considers these two men's activities and personalities, it seems more likely that Kim To-su is the translator of *Ch'angson gamŭi-rok*.

At the time, classical Chinese was still the universal written language, and enjoyed prominence, and women in general had not yet been liberated from a subservient position. Because of this, the Chinese versions of even novels like *Ch'angson gamŭi-rok* and *Kuunmong* came to be better respected and more widely distributed than their Korean counterparts. As the state of currently extant editions testifies, there are hardly any old copies left that were passed on among women and commoners. Therefore, Korean versions were sometimes actually translated from Chinese copies. It seems ridiculous, but that is how things were. Most of the vernacular editions we have of *Ch'angson gamŭi-rok*, like those of *Kuunmong*, are
in fact re-translations of Chinese editions. The relationship between Korean and Chinese versions can be shown in the following way:


3. Problems Regarding the Subject Matter

The setting of Ch’angsŏn gamū-ROKE is mid-16th century China. The story begins with a villainous retainer Œm Sung taking power over the government and ends with his fall from power, and has a grand finale in the subjugation of pirates invading the southern region. The period involved is from approximately 1550 to 1566.

The novel is centered around the rise and fall of the Hwa family, and shows the source of the problem as arising from within this family. The Hwa family is “one of the greatest families in the world”. Hwa Jin, the main character, is the second son of this family, and is a character with a flawless personality in the mold of the old Confucian sages. Compared to Hwa Jin, the eldest son, Hwa Ch’un, is hopelessly unworthy and inferior, and his mother Madame Shim, is narrow minded and dull witted. Madame Shim and Hwa Ch’un combine to bring the house nearly to ruin through a series of blunders, and even contrive a plot to kill Hwa Jin, being hateful and envious of his wisdom. Poor Hwa Jin, being constrained by the Confucianist hierarchy of elder and younger brothers, cannot resist or even utter a word in his own defense. In the end, the fate of not only Hwa Jin but of the whole Hwa family comes to the brink of ruin. Added to these internal factors, Hwa Ch’un’s favorite concubine Cho (Wolhyang), Cho’s lover Pŏmhan, and Hwa Ch’un’s evil friend Chang P’yŏng work all sorts of combined mischief to make matters even worse.

Meanwhile, the political situation in the central government of the time is not unrelated to events in the Hwa household. Most of the people close to Hwa Jin are of the Kunja (Confucian ideal) type, and are persecuted by a villainous retainer Œm Sung, and even the conspiracy surrounding Hwa Jin can be traced back to Œm Sung’s faction. There is a structural relationship between the complicated events within the Hwa family and political power. Thus in the end, just as Œm Sung is driven from power to create a political change, so does the Hwa family regain its former glory.

The overall structure is one of the fall of evil and the triumph of good, leading from crisis to stability. The events and characters in this novel are not entirely fictional, but are created in relation to historical fact. The main character Hwa Jin
does not appear to have been a real person, but his ancestor Hwa Un is told of in *Myŏngsa*. Hwa Un was a fierce and courageous general under Chu Won-jang who was captured by the enemy and died a tragic death after a terrible struggle, and his wife committed suicide thereupon, leaving behind a three-year-old child. This child, abandoned in the water for seven days, survived miraculously. This story can also be found in the novel. One may say that the ancestors of this baby make up the Hwa family, with a reputation as law-abiding, loyal and faithful citizens in the Confucianist tradition. In addition, the events regarding the rise and fall of Ŭm Sung in general coincide with historical fact, and the grand finale of fighting with pirates is also based on fact. However, this does not allow this novel to be classified in the *Yŏnŭi* category.

For instance, the above mentioned grand finale is based on the fact of the subjugation of Japanese pirate raiders in the Fujian and Guangdang areas by Yu Tae-yu and Ch’ŏk Kyegwang. However, the story outlined in the novel does not reflect the details of this subjugation, but rather is merely derived from the facts. In the fictional battle, Hwa Jin saves the day and brings victory through an ingenious plan, but this is as fictional as the character himself. The great historical strategist and hero in the wars against the Japanese pirates is Ch’ŏk Kyegwang. In the novel, Ch’ŏk appears as the general who leads the charge, but is weakened incomparably to reality.

Almost all the characters in *Ch’angxon gamŭi-rok* are from the author’s head, and likewise the plot is on the whole fictional. A historical background has been merely borrowed, and a few historical characters brought in. The technique used is different from that of the *Yŏnŭi* mold. Being merely ‘derived’ from historical fact, it cannot give the detailed and exciting drama of history itself like *Samgukchi-yŏnŭi* can. However, it has the advantage of giving the author freedom to gain a universality in a portrayal of the problems of human society, unfettered by established historical fact. Even so, by providing a historical setting and introducing real characters into the story, he was able to give a sense of realism to the fictional story.

But why is the setting for this novel so far removed from us in both place and time? This problem, too, is not limited only to *Ch’angxon gamŭi-rok*. For some strange reason, events regarding Ŭm Sung and the period when he lived are quite common in old novels. Thus use of ‘outdated’ stories from a foreign land has led to the criticisms that old novels are Sino-centric and lack realism. At any rate, this is a

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5 *Myŏngsa*, vol 289, Histories of the Loyal, Hwa Un.
question that must be dealt with as a basic element in the understanding of the history of novels. Examining the significance of the subject matter of *Ch’angson gamu-rok* will serve as an example in dealing with this issue.

First of all, the setting is significant as a universal scene of the Middle Ages.

Of course, the novel is set in a particular period in *Ming* China. It goes without saying that it is removed in time and space from *Chosön* Korea. However, if one delves into *Ming* history, one notices a striking resemblance to the history of the *Chosön* period in Korea.

After control of China changed hands from the *Yuan* to the *Ming* Dynasty, there was an important change in Korean history as well. And just as a *Ming* emperor (*Hyeje*) was ousted by his uncle (*Sŏngjo*), there was a similar incident in Korea when Sejo dethroned Tanjong. And just as Yŏnsan-gun ruled ruthlessly in Korea, so did a dictator emerge in China named Mujong. Both *Ming* and *Chosön* went through a period of chaos followed by resolution—in *Ming* during the period in which this novel is set, and in *Chosön* during the period from Chungjong to Myŏngjong.

Whereas in *Chosön* people like Nam Kon and Yun Won-hyŏng monopolized national government and thus hurt the scholar class, Ŭm Sung was appearing on the scene in China. Public alienation and the rise of Japanese pirates are even similar. In fact, Yun Won-hyŏng could easily be substituted for Ŭm Sung in the novel, with little or no change.

How should we regard this kind of phenomenon? At first it might appear that *Chosön* history is an imitation of *Ming* history, but there is no reason for this to have happened, and so we must initially ascribe it to coincidence. Coincidence, though, is generally the outward expression of inner inevitability. That is to say, the outrages of Ŭm Sung and the injustices of Yun Won-hyŏng were coincidental in that the two were not in cahoots with each other, but from the point of view that both were the direct result of failed government, there is a structural connection between them. This is all to say that *Chosön* and China at the time in question were a systematically connected single world, and were connected to each other.

In fact, when we read *Ch’angson gamu-rok*, we do not get the feeling that the events take place in a far off foreign land. The families portrayed in that novel remind us of our own pŏhyŏl, the language, thoughts and actions of the characters are like those of the *Chosön* scholarly class, Ŭm Sung could easily be replaced by Yun Won-hyŏng, and the position of Hwa Jin could be filled by a member of the *Sarim*, or Confucian scholarly class.

Second, the subject matter holds significance for the reality of the time in *Chosön*, too
It is impossible to tell precisely when *Ch'ungsön gamii-rok* was written, but it must have been completed before the author's death in 1689. Thus it is safe to say that it was written during the reign of Sukchong in the second half of the 17th century. This period was a time of much factional in-fighting within the government, and there was much instability and unrest, with power changing hands several times. The two main political groups of the time were the *Namin* (‘Southerners’) and the *Söin* (‘Westerners’). At first, the *Namin* were in power, but then the *Söin* took power in 1680, forcing the leaders of the *Namin* to commit suicide. Eight years later, however, in 1688, the *Namin* retaliated, forcing such influential *Söin* as Song Shi-yol to drink poison and taking power once again, only to lose it again in 1694. This back and forth process can only be described as a struggle for power. However, they always found some ‘moral grounds’ on which to attack their opponents. They borrowed Confucianism to rationalize their faction’s point of view, labelling themselves as the *Kunja*, or ‘Righteous’, Party, and the opposition as the *Söin*, or ‘Unenlightened’, Party, and believing subjectively that this was truly the case. In other words, they all believed the leader of the opposite party to be a sort of Ŭm Sung.

The point of contention of the time started from the debate over mourning attire that took place during the reign of Hyønjong (1660-1673). It boils down to a question of maintaining the purity of the royal line. One of the characteristics of the feudal society of Korea in the Middle Ages is the patriarchal system, and in order to rationalize and strengthen patriarchal government, it is above all necessary to distinguish between direct and indirect descendents of the throne, so as to maintain the purity of the royal line. It is here that mourning attire takes on great significance. Today it is of no practical or political significance whether mourning attire is worn for one year or three years. However, for a society trying to establish and maintain the purity of the royal line, it can become a serious issue. This is the nature of the debate over mourning attire between the *Namin* and the *Söin* during the reign of Hyønjong, and this debate led directly into a bloodthirsty power struggle. In the midst of this turmoil, an unexpected event occurred. King Sukchong liked a palace maid named Chang so much that he abused the queen (his wife) Min. Then after a while his love for Chang cooled, he reinstated Min and eventually even killed Chang. A man’s changing feelings for a woman or women are a completely personal and emotional matter. However, at the time, such changes of heart could

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lead directly to changes of power in the government. In a patriarchal society, questions of male/female love cannot be relegated to a merely personal level.

Much earlier, in the Chungiu Period, Che Hwan'gong expressed concern for maintaining the patriarchal system when making international treaties by saying “Lack of filial piety shall not be tolerated, and one must not change the heir to the throne, once he is chosen,” and also included the pledge that “Concubines may never be elevated to the position of wife.” The fact that this kind of clause was included in international agreements shows that arbitrary behavior in matters of love was considered a systematic danger. The reign of Sukchong was the time when the potential hazard inherent in the relationship between wife and concubine under the patriarchal system started to emerge.

I mentioned earlier in the explanation of the development of Women’s Novels that the Great Families, or pol yŏl, became prominent in the second half of the 17th century. During the course of these power struggles many families rose in stature or fell from prominence. The plot of Ch’angsŏn gamŭ-rok—the story of the rise and fall of a family due to internal strife and political changes—is a very believable one. These were matters that the people of the time could sympathize with as happening all around them. The idea that a band of “unenlightened” men taking power and killing or exiling one or one’s family, causing the downfall of the family, is one that seems made for a novel. Also the situation of Madame Shim exerising patriarchal authority, and the conflict between Hwa Ch’un the first son and Hwa Jin the second son boil down to the same sort of issue as the debate over mourning attire. Moreover, the voluptuous Cho coming in as a concubine, ousting the official wife Madame Lim, and exercising tyranny in her position reminds one more than a little of Chang the palace maid.

This leads us to perhaps another reason why the author of Ch’angsŏn gamŭ-rok chose China as his setting. At the time, it was impossible to say or write things too critical or demeaning about one’s own government. Even in the few old Korean novels set in Korea, references to the throne are limited to such platitudes as “In the early part of the reign of his holy and benevolent royal highness King Sukjong the Great” (Ch’unhyang-jŏn), and do not make any more detailed comments. If Ch’angsŏn gamŭ-rok had been set in the reign of any particular Chosŏn king, it would have been subject to similar restraints. In setting the novel in China, the author not only followed the convention on the time, but also allowed himself more freedom and room for expression regarding the political figures involved.
4. The Women’s Refinement Aspect of *Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok*

The unifying theme of the novel is one of punishing evil and causing the reader to admire the righteousness of a good heart. This, in fact, is basically what the Chinese characters for *Ch’angsŏn gamŭi* in the title mean. The plot is very convoluted and complex, but in the end the evil are indeed punished and the good rewarded. The characters are also designed appropriately for the purpose of bringing out this theme.

Therefore this novel is didactic in nature from start to finish. The author firmly believes that happiness in the home and peace and prosperity in the nation depend basically on the personality of human beings. But how can one arrive at absolute righteousness of the realization of good, the ‘ethicalization of humanity’? The author does not believe that this aim can be achieved by establishing ethical codes of conduct and making everybody conform to these strict molds. Rather, he believes that human beings are born with an inherent tendency to like good and dislike evil, and one must appeal to and stimulate this inherent nature. This is what the kamŭi in the title refers to.

It is often said that classical Korean novels without exception espouse “promotion of virtue and exhortation to righteousness”. It may not be accurate to claim that there is no exception to this trend, but the trend itself is definitely there *Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok* clearly falls into this category, and is representative of novels which express an ethical theme. However, it does not fit this mold exactly. This is why I would like to point out the women’s refinement nature of *Ch’angsŏn gamŭi-rok*. The following are a few points I would like to mention specifically as having didactic value for the women of the time.

1) The Distinct Personalities of the Characters

There are over 50 characters who make an appearance in the novel. Most of the people around whom the story revolves are of noble birth. However, there are also many minor characters of other social levels, including maids, servants, members of the middle class, and assassins. All of these characters can without exception be divided into two main categories: the good and the evil. The division is very clear, and the two sides are endlessly at odds with each other. The point I wish to make is that even if a character falls into the ‘good’ category, he is not necessarily type-cast into a preformed mold with no individuality. I mentioned above that the main character Hwa Jin is a traditional virtuous man in the old Confucian mold, or kunja, and the novel focuses on bringing out the nature of this character. One character
who does this is Hwa Jin's brother-in-law Yun Yö-ok. Yun Yö-ok is the same age as Hwa Jin, and the two are close friends, but have contrasting personalities. Yun Yö-ok is described by other people in the novel as "a lover of wine, women and song, and not an upright kunja". He is social and outgoing, and is far from the kunja pattern established by Hwa Jin. The place where he makes his most memorable appearance is in the seventh episode (Che 7 Hwe) of the novel.

At this point in the story, his sister (Hya Jin's wife Yun Ok-Hwa) is in danger of being given as concubine the Öm Se-bön (Öm Sung's son), due to a plot by Chang P'yöng. Yun Yö-ok deliberately disguises himself as a woman and lets himself be kidnapped and taken to the Öm estate (the brother and sister are twins and look somewhat alike). Yoon Yö-ok tricks Öm Se-bön through his good looks and smooth tongue, wins escape for the imprisoned Hwa Jin, spends the night with Öm Se-bön's sister Wohlwa, and escapes from the estate safely with her help. This is one of the most interesting parts of the novel, and the wit and wisdom of Yun Yö-ok, along with his intrepidity in being willing to enter even the dragon's lair for his friend, make it all the more so. Of course, as a man in a patriarchal society, dressing as a woman was an extreme measure taken under dire straits. The very taking of such a measure shows Yun Yö-ok to be a man of action, and very different from the attitude of the typical scholar, always careful of his behavior.7

Thus, Hwa Jin and Yun Yö-ok both fall into the 'good' category, but have distinctly different personalities. The author does not imply that Yun Yö-ok's differences from Hwa Jin make him less good or exemplary, but rather portrays him as an alternative, but acceptable type of personality.

Among the 'good' women in the novel, Hwa Jin's aunt Madame Sông, his two wives Yun Ok-hwa and Nam Ch'ae-bong, and Yun Yö-ok's fiancée Chhn Ch'ae-gyöng are the most remarkable. Madame Sông is very disciplined and upright, corresponding to elder loyal subject supporting a benevolent king in the court. The other three, younger women are of the noble and beautiful variety commonly found in classical novels. Even so, their personalities are all distinct. Chhn Ch'ae-gyöng is rather "crafty" for a noble woman, and also active and broad-minded. Yun Ok-hwa and Nam Ch'ae-bong are sworn sisters, and are close friends who marry Hwa Jin together. However, their personalities, too, show clear contrast. Eventually, this

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7 When Yö-ok dressed as a woman and entered the Hwa estate, there is a scene in which he grabs Cho's hair and slaps her face loudly after she behaves very badly in front of him. Also, when he is kidnapped and taken to the Öm estate, he is not afraid or hesitant, but even drinks with them and does such daring things as taking the hand of Wohlwa a young noble maiden.
difference in personality causes them to react differently under the same circumstances, and eventually to meet different fates.

The event in question takes place at a time when the two women are being given a hard time by their mother-in-law Madame Shim, and also being tormented by Cho. Cho, who entered the Hwa household as a concubine to Hwa Ch’ung, has driven out the legal wife, and ‘with clever tricks and a hot temper toyed with her dull-witted husband’ and controlling her husband, tried to have her way with the entire household. Cho tells Yun Ok-hwa and Nam Ch’aee-bong “You are now secondary wives, and as such have no right to wedding treasures” and demands that they give her the jewels they received from their father-in-law at the time of their wedding. To this, the smiling Yun Ok-hwa replies “Of course you are right,” and hands over the jewels readily, but Nam Ch’aee-bong pretends not to have heard. Also, when Cho speaks unkindly about Im Sojo (Hwa Ch’ung’s legal wife), Ok-hwa pretends not to have heard, but Ch’aee-bong cannot help but reprimand her:

Your speech is too insolent, relying on the good nature of the Madame. The wise men of old have said “If the iris burns, the lily laments, and if the rabbit dies the fox weeps”, but you dare to insult a noble lady?

This difference in personality is made explicit even in the novel itself. Nam Ch’aee-bong, because of her confrontational personality, is subjected to Cho’s evil trickery and is fated to a difficult existence. None of the three personalities exemplified by Chin Ch’aee-gyong, Yun Ok-hwa, and Nam Ch’aee-bong is necessarily better or more desirable than the others. They are all presented as worthy types to model oneself after. The one which an individual woman might choose to follow would depend upon her inherent personality and the circumstances under which she lives.

2) The Emergence of Women’s Self-Consciousness

An interesting trend becomes clear when one divides the characters according to generation. Most of them can be labelled as either “older” generation or “younger” generation, and the story itself focuses on the younger generation. The main characters are all young people. Not only that, but the women occupy roles as important as those of the men. One can say that the world portrayed in this novel is one of young men and women.

The main body of the story starts when Hwa Jin, Yun Yoo-ok, and the women they are to marry are all in their teens, and it ends when they grow up and make their way into the world. In other words, the process of boys and girls developing their
personalities and succeeding in society is the structure of the novel.

Here "development of personality" of course refers to growing into a person suitable to meet the demands of family and country. The most important aspect is moral character, and this is actually feudal morality. The reason that Hwa Jin's personality is set forth as the noblest is based on the reasoning that he displays perfect filial piety in the face of extreme trials, and therefore he is capable of achieving the highest level of loyalty to country. As for the women, the qualities most emphasized are those of chastity and obedience. However, the personalities do not mature as the result of the strict discipline of the parents. Each young person pursues his or her own individual path toward maturity. This is the reason that the characters all are able to have distinct personalities, and is also the reason that the young men and women were able to become the main characters of the novel.

Ch'angsŏn gamŭi-rok is primarily a didactic novel, in that "personality development" makes up the basic story line, and that the strengthening of moral character is based on individual self-determination. On the other hand, its didactic message does not overstep the bounds of feudal ethics. Thus the personalities outlined do not strike us as particularly bold or new. Even so, we can begin to see the faint outlines of an awareness of self, along with a vague desire for freedom from oppression. A few new ideas are emerging within the old boundaries.

Above I mentioned Chin Ch'ae-gyŏng as an example of woman with a distinct personality. There is one point where her father is in danger of being executed due to the plan of Cho Mun-hwa, who is in cahoots with Ôm Sung. Her mother, rushing to Seoul upon hearing the news, plans to leave her daughter behind, as she would be of little or no help.

"Now Father is in trouble. Even though I am just a little girl, how can I stay behind?".

At the time, Ch'ae-gyŏng was engaged to be married to Yun Yǒ-ok. She was guaranteed happiness, if only she would stay put. But she would not be content with a passive life, just because she was female. The reason her father was in trouble at this particular time was that Cho Mun-hwa had discovered how beautiful Ch'ae-gyŏng was and had wanted her to marry his son, but her father had refused. Cho Mun-hwa sent a messenger secretly to Ch'ae-gyŏng saying that if she would consent to the marriage, he would release her father from prison. Ch'ae-gyŏng accepted the proposition, in spite of her mother's opposition. She had a plan of her own. She delayed the marriage through one excuse or another until her father had been set free, and then disguised herself as a man and escaped. In the end, this "little girl"
not only saved her father’s life, but also defended her own value as an independent person.

The following section, in which Ch’ae-gyŏng is travelling disguised as a man, is one of the highlights of the novel, along the parallel passage relating Yun Yŏ-ok’s adventures disguised as a woman. Ch’ae-gyŏng is faced with the difficult decision of whether to go to her fiance’s (Yun Yŏ-ok’s) house, or to follow her father into exile over miles and miles of rough terrain. The conclusion she reaches is that “love is not the equal of the whole-hearted pursuit of righteousness” In other words, she chooses to give up her beloved fiance. At this time, on the White Lotus Bridge, she meets Paek Kyŏng and her sister. Ch’ae-gyŏng finds that Paek Sojŏ is beautiful and wise and would be a good match for Yun Yŏ-ok, so she boldly pretends that she is Yun Yŏ-ok.

“There are those in this world who lay down their lives for their friends, so why should I shun to find a good wife for my beloved?”

She is saying that she is willing to make any personal sacrifice for the man who loves her, just as a friend is willing even to die for a true friend. Ch’ae-Gyŏng, having made this decision, starts a conversation with Paek Kyŏng, and arranges for his sister and Yun Yŏ-ok to meet to discuss marriage. To start a conversation with a strange man is a revolutionary decision for a noble woman of the time, even if she were dressed like a man herself. And to try to find a good woman to take her place with the man she loves shows an uncommon depth of consideration and a high and pure spirit.

Women at the time were basically not allowed to go outside the home, and were unable to live their lives under the way they wanted to under their own responsibility. That is the way that were for women in general. Giving each character, including women, a distinct personality is in effect acknowledging their value as individuals. Through the thoughts and actions of Ch’ae-gyŏng, the author showed that passive acceptance and blind obedience are not necessarily the best ways for a woman to live her life.

For instance, Hwa Ch’un’s wife Lim does not follow her husband blindly, but rather judges the correctness of his behavior and advises him appropriately, ultimately staying away from him when he becomes notably evil. Hwa Ch’un and his mother Shim-ssi use this as an excuse for driving her away, but the novel itself judges her to be in the right. Sa, in Sassi namjŏng-ki, theorizes on this point saying that just as it is the loyal subject’s duty to advise the king when he senses an injustice, so it is the role of husband and wife to critique and advise each other.

Free association between men and women was impossible. Thus the meeting on
the White Lotus Bridge between Chun Ch’ae-gyöng and Pack Kyöng is only possible because Chun Ch’ae-gyöng was disguised as a man. However there is one scene in which young men and women have a good time in each other’s company. The three women Ok-hwa, Ch’ae-bong and Ch’ae-gyöng, along with Yun Yö-ok, are exchanging poems and playing go (paduk) in a quiet place on the Yun estate. Because of the relationship between these four people, their meeting like this is allowed by Confucian custom, but Yö-ok and Ch’ae-gyöng are engaged and hold romantic feelings for each other. In other words, natural encounter between a young woman and a young man in love is taking place.8

The free socialization of young men and women shown in the novel should be understood as nothing more than fiction, and perhaps an attractive dream in the minds of the readers. In fact, interpersonal relationships were not only forbidden with the opposite sex, but were also limited between women. One female character in Kuunmong laments

“Men can make friends and help each other, but women have no one to talk to but the servants, so where can they go to fix their mistakes and to whom can they turn to polish their studies?” 9

In Ch’angsön gami-rok too, true friendship among women is longed for: “As the relationship between friends is also accounted for in the five (Confucian) virtues, it is not wrong for us to become friends, even though we be women.”

Even in the selection of prospective spouses, there is a claim that the parents may make suggestions, but the actual choice is up to the man and woman directly involved. A woman in Kuunmong goes one step further, saying:

“For a woman to follow a man is the biggest event in her life, and the honor or dishonor, the happiness or misfortune of her entire life depend on it. As I am a young woman, it is considered improper for me to choose my own husband, but do they not say from old times that the subjects shall choose the king?”

and as subjects are supposed to choose their king, writes letters to a man in order to meet the ideal man.10

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8 In traditional society, the meeting of young men and women was forbidden by Confucian customs. The only way for them to meet was secretly, “over walls or through fences”. This in fact was a common method used by lovers in old novels. Yi To-ryöng was able to meet Ch’un Hyang because of her low social status. Yun Yö-ok and Chun Ch’ae-gyöng playing go together in Ch’angsön gami-rok is a decidedly unusual occurrence, and definitely ahead of its time.

9 Kuunmong Vol III, Kojön Munhak Taegye 9 (Munyung Sŏgwan, p 251)

10 This action was taken by Chun sojŏ in regards to Yang So-yu. The passage quoted above is translated from Kuunmong Chinese version, Second Episode (same as above, p.459).
Also, in relation to marriage, the practice of early marriage comes under criticism. Hwa Jin remarks that “The practice of early marriage in the court (here referring to the Chosŏn court and not the Ming court) has become a custom, forcing marriage between children who know nothing about it, so some unhappy victims are inevitable.” Such social practices as disregarding the will of the person involved in one of the most important decisions of their lives, or of marrying children who were not even through puberty yet were without doubt great hindrances to happiness and freedom. This work does not show how to overcome these hindrances, but it at least points out the problems.

3) The Exemplar and Refinement of Language and Behavior

Ch'angsŏn gamŭrok is set in 16th century China, but if one reads it with a 17th century upper class Chosŏn family in mind, it works equally well. The progress of the story is a case of many interpersonal relationships and of complex outside affairs. A novel is generally made up of the actions and words that occur throughout, and these are all appropriate and justified.

Let us take as an example the scene in which Nam Ch’ae-bong visits the Chin family estate with her servant Kye-aeng. Ch’ae-bong had been following her father into exile when they met a band of thieves at Lake Tongŏng and she lost her parents (They fell in the water and nearly drowned, but were saved through a miracle and met there daughter again many years later.) The poor young orphan girl left all alone far from home had no choice but to seek some place of shelter. Thus she came to knock at the door of the Chin family, whom she did not know. Ch’ae-bong sent her servant ahead of her saying, “I am a noble young lady, and cannot enter a house that I do not know,” and told her to find out in detail about the family and report back to her. If the place were not suitable for her, “then let me die in the street, I shall not enter,” she says, in firm determination. This Chin family estate is none other than the home of Chin Ch’ae-gyŏng. At this time, no one was home but Ch’ae-gyŏng and her mother, Madame Oh. Madame Oh, having heard about Ch’ae-bong from Kye-aeng, calls her own servant, Cho-yŏng, and tells her to tell Ch’ae-bong, “Feeling pity for your unfortunate plight, cold and hungry and homeless, I am sending a palanquin to bring you here.”11 Ch’ae-gyŏng, meanwhile, is listening to the conversation, and tells her mother, “I know you feel sorry for her and are trying to help, but if she were a true and upright young woman, her pride would not allow

11 Ch’angsŏn gamŭrok, author’s copy, Book 3, p.20.
her to come here.” Madame Oh sees her daughter’s point immediately and changes
the message. The message that the servant Cho-yŏng brings to Ch’ae-bong is as
follows:

It is with sadness that I hear from your servant that you have met with misfortune.
It seems that you will have difficulty conducting the funeral out on the street, so my
daughter and I will assist you in this. Please stay at our humble home until the
mourning period has passed, and then make your way back to your hometown.12

After expressing condolences on the young lady’s misfortune, she invites her into
her house, however unworthy it might be, as holding the funeral outdoors would be
difficult. The meaning of this message is completely different from that of the first.
This message takes the tone not of patronizingly helping an unfortunate creature,
but one of respect and deference for the young lady. It respects her personality.
Upon receiving this message, Ch’ae-bong is reassured and enters the Chin family
estate, and thereafter her behavior in interpersonal affairs, both as a lady and as the
head of a mourning family, are described as impeccable and following the
established rules to the letter.

The original readers of these Women’s Novels, the upper class women of the
Chosŏn Period, lived their lives in an “enclosed space”, and had no way to
experience directly the outside world. Even so, these women’s homes were very
different from the small family homes of today, in that interpersonal relationships
were complicated and strictly regulated, and also that the scale was much larger and
the events that took place there many and various. Even political events
occasionally affected their lives for the better or worse. It was an absolute
requirement for upper class women of the time stay clean and pure, follow
procedures to the letter, and to observe proper etiquette in all of their words and
actions. For this purpose some education of young women took place in the homes,
but it was the novel that was the perfect textbook for women of the time.

As observed above, novels can give examples of unforeseeable turns of events
and of many and complicated interpersonal relationships. Of course novels cannot
be quite as complicated as reality itself, but they can at least give several different
typical models of reality. The topsy-turvy tale of Ch’ungsŏn garmi-rok, involving
several families and many different people, not only gives abundant knowledge
about life, but serves as an example of proper behavior, language, and procedure

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12 Same as above, p 21.
Not only that, but it does not require compliance to abstract rules or concepts, but paints a concrete picture for the reader, thus becoming more persuasive.

The stylistic characteristics of the classical Chinese version of Ch’angson gamuit-rok were mentioned above. The vernacular version is also written in a very refined literary style, but also includes interesting analogies, proverbs, and maxims, and even incorporates a little humor to keep it lively and not boring. It also displays great linguistic knowledge, including everyday language and literary language. This kind of literary expression seems to reflect the language used by the upper class of the day. The style of this novel coincides with the linguistic trends of the Sadaebu. The letters in the vernacular we have access to today echo the stylistic characteristics of Ch’angson gamuit-rok. Women in particular used the language of Women’s Novels as models for refined, cultured language and for letter writing and expression.

5. Conclusion

What is the significance in literary history of the Women’s Novel established in the 17th century?

Ch’angson gamuit-rok, Kuunmong, and Sassi namjong-ki were all written to meet the demands of female readers. The fact that author and reader were clearly separate, as well as the emergence of ‘long-form vernacular novels’ were firsts in Korean literary history. The authors of these novels belonged to the upper class, and the world they portrayed was also that of the upper class. However, the paradoxical compromise that, while confining women to the limits of the home, acknowledged the need to give them a limited amount of freedom allowed the feeling of women longing for freedom to be reflected in the novels. In addition, the writing of these novels in the vernacular not only included women for the first time in the literary circle, but also opened the possibility of including the general masses as well. The advent of the Novel Era, a major event in literary history, was at hand.

The Biographical Novel, which preceded the Women’s Novel, was still a relatively short form. The Women’s Novel, however, took the giant leap to long form. What is the principle behind this lengthening of form? The Biographical Novel generally used the simple form of a single individual’s life story. Even Hong Kil-dong Jón is the same in this regard. In Ch’angson gamuit-rok, however, the stage of the novel covers several different families, and the story is intricately woven through many different characters. The scene changes for each chapter, sometimes even within a single chapter, and each change of scene brings a change of
characters. Events are not laid out in a linear, chronological fashion. A rearrangement of time and space characteristic of novels takes place.

In some places a certain situation is laid out without preparation, and then a “flashback” to the past occurs. This is completely for theatrical effect. The novel as a whole concerns the story of a family, but war stories take up a considerable proportion of the second half. One may say that war stories have been added into the structure of a ‘family novel’. In other words, the principle behind the lengthening of this novel is one of complexity of structure.

Because the principle of complexity of structure is employed, life is reflected more richly and the world portrayed in the work is more varied. Thus one can say that this novel’s literary value is great. Kuunmong also makes use of a similar technique. However, it is created along somewhat different lines from Ch’angson gamu-rok. Whereas Kuunmong is literature characteristic of the nobility (Kwiyok), Ch’angson gamu-rok belongs strongly to the upper class (Sadaebu).\(^{13}\)

(Translated by David Baxter, Seoul National University)

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\(^{13}\) The relationship between Ch’angson gamui-rok and Sassi namyöng-ki is a topic for further research. These two novels are similar in subject matter and illustrations, which were written first? Cho Söng-ki, the author of the original Ch’angson gamui-rok, died three years before Kim Man-jung, but it is impossible to tell which work was written first, as we do not yet know when each was written. Unlike Ch’angson gamui-rok, the story of Sassi namyöng-ki centers around a single family, and the conflict there between wife and concubine. It seems that the author deliberately simplified the complex structure of Ch’angson gamui-rok for this purpose, whichever came first, Sassi namyöng-ki succeeded in clearly establishing its theme, but it does not have as rich a literary world as Ch’angson gamui-rok.
GLOSSARY

Chang yông 張平
Chang sŏnjang-jŏn 張丞相傳
Ch’angson gamull-rok 増善感義錄
Che Hwan’gong 齊桓公
Chin Ch’ae-kyŏng 陳彩瓊
Chin sojŏ 秦小姐
Cho Chae-sam 趙在三
Cho Ch’un-ho 趙春鎬
Cho Mun-hwa 趙文華
Cho Sŏng-ki 趙聖期
Cho yŏng 趙英
Ch’oe Hyŏn-sŏp 崔賢燮
Ch’ok kye-gwang 崔繼光
Cholsu’ae-jip 招修齋集
Chŏngjo 正祖
Chŏng Tong-jun 鄭東浚
Chŏng-wi 正緯
Chu Won-jang 周元璋
Ch’unhyang 春香
Ch’unhyang-jŏn 春香傳
Chungjong 中宗
Hŏsaeng 許生
Hong Ki-dong-jŏn 洪吉童傳
Hwa Ch’un 花塀
Hwa Jin 花珍
Hwa Un 花雲
Hyŏngjong 顯宗
Hyeŏe 惠帝
Im sojŏ 林小姐
Iyŏpsanbang 二葉山房
Kim Ch’un-t’ack 金春澤
Kim To-su 金道洙
Kim Man-jung (Sŏp’o) 金萬重 (西浦)
kunja 君子
Kuunmông 九雲夢
Kwŏjok 貴族
Kye-aeng 계영
Kyubang sosŏl 閔房小說
Yi Chae 李緝
Yi Toryŏng 이도령
Yi Won-ju 李源周
Lim Hyŏng-t’aek 林煥澤
Myŏngjong 明宗
Myŏngsa 明史
Mujong 武宗
Mun Sŏn-gyu 文璇奎
Nam Ch’ae-bong 南彩鳳
Nam Kon 南衮
Nam( Southerner ) 南人
Okkap yahwa 玉匣夜話
Ŏm Ki-ju 嚴基珠
Ŏm Sung 嚴嵩
Ongnimmong 玉嶙夢
Ongnumong 玉樓夢
Pak Chi-wŏn(Yŏnam) 朴趾源 (燕岩)
pŏlyŏl 閔閱
Pŏnhan 范漢
sarim 士林
Samgwan-ki 三官記
Samgukchi yŏnŭi 三國志演義
Sassi namjŏng-ki 謝氏南政記
Sejo 世祖
Shin Tae-shik 申泰植
Son 小人
Sŏn 西人
Sŏngjo 成祖
Sŏng-gyŏng 成卿
Sŏng Nak-hun 成樂熏
Song Shi-yol 宋時烈
Songnam chapchi 松南雜識
Sukchong 蕭宗
Tanjong 端宗
Tongjong 潞庭
Wolhwa 月華
Won’gam-rok 鬼感録
Yang So-yu 楊少游

Yŏngjo 莊祖
Yŏnsan-gun 燕山君
Yŏnŭi 演義
Yu Tae-yu
Yun Won-hyŏng 尹元衡
Yun Yŏ-ok 尹汝玉
Yun Ok-hwa 尹玉華