

Masks and their Aesthetic Meaning*

- A new approach to Chǒng Ch'öl's tan'ga -

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I. Introduction

Chǒng Ch'öl (1536~1593) is one of the most original poets in the classical age of Korea.¹⁾ He was a specialist of Korean traditional songs as well as a literate.²⁾ Like most other poets, he wrote the lyric poems in classical Chinese and made lyrics³⁾ in vernacular. His Korean poems are lyrics sung to the various tunes

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1) There are many research achievements about Chǒng Ch'öl as one of the most prominent poets in Chosŏn dynasty. In most achievements, it was emphasized that originality is one of the most distinguished characteristics in his literary works.

2) cf. Cho, Kyu-ick. *Kagok ch'angsa ū kungmunhakchök ponjil*. Seoul:Chimmundang, 1994. pp.205-230.

derived from *taeyŏp*(大葉),⁴⁾ consisting of both regular and irregular tunes.

When he secured high posts, he came into conflict with his political rivals. He suffered from the party strife. Under such situations, he wrote 4 long narrative poems, *kasa*(歌辭), and more than 80 short songs and several hundreds of short poems in Chinese.

He was a heavy drinker as well as an illustrious official. The spirit of the time imposed rigid regulations on everybody. The Confucian society needed moralists, but he wanted to live as a liberalist. Therefore, his way of thinking or acting could not be tolerated. Therefore, he was compelled to wear the masks to hide his identity in his works.

In this paper, I wish discuss his works with a focus on the interrelations of masks, aesthetic consciousness, and musical tunes.

II. Masks and artistic characters in his short songs

Two questions about his *tan'ga*(短歌)⁵⁾ may be raised. One is his attitude to human beings and worldly affairs, the other is his method of expressing them in his works. Internal and external circumstances influenced the formation of his consciousness and consequently, his view of the world and of life were embodied in his poetry. And the view of the world and of life was embodied in his thematic and aesthetic consciousness. He wanted to embody two themes in his works. They

3) The short poems written in Korean letters in the classical age were usually sung by people. It was a tradition before modern times in Korea. Most Koreans thought that poems and song words belong to the same category.

4) *Taeyŏp* was a part of *chinjak*(眞勺) tune, the traditional music since the late Koryŏ dynasty. Although we don't know the time of its appearance and the process of its development exactly, the *mantayŏp*(慢大葉)·*chungtaeyŏp*(中大葉)·*saktaeyŏp*(數大葉) known as the original body of the present *kagok*(歌曲) are supposed to be derived from *taeyŏp*. <cf. Yang Tŏksu. "The preface," *Yangkŭmsinbo*. Seoul:T'ongmunkwan. 1959.>

5) The short poems written in the Korean letters in the classical age of Korea. It was sung with the *Kagok* tunes. It is a proper noun used frequently in Korea.

are a commitment to the real world and a desire to escape from it. Most people at that time believed that the realistic order was based on Confucian principle. So they wanted to construct an ideal world from reality. And the imagination was important, because it allowed them to be free from all mundane affairs, at least ideally. It was not easy for the poet to express his true or unconscious ego in a powerfully ideological society of Chosŏn. Therefore, Chŏng needed various personae in his works. The persona for the ruling class or the gentry was a social being, a public figure among them.

He lived as a public figure, but it was nothing but a persona in view of his original ego. The poet wore some masks. Although his true face was behind them, we cannot affirm today which one it was. But we can say that most masks reflect the characteristics and the horizon of expectation⁶⁾ of the literati class. A subject devoted service to the king and a governor who was to care for the people are good examples of the public persona. But Chŏng Ch'öl's unique personality as a poet appears as another persona in his works. He wore masks for the purposes of escaping from the complicated real world. If a guardian of ideology and a loyal subject could be a persona, a drunkard can be another. The personae in his works appear as characters in conflict with each other. Two ways of conflict, the conventional and unconventional, are shown in themes and languages. The daily language embodies the conventional ones. It is difficult to express the poet's individuality or true self in the daily language. Certainly we can break away from convention through individual language or expressions. The poet generally attempts to dissociate himself from ideological issues and social norms. If an ideology or social standards demand a public persona, the poet's personality away from the ideology or social concerns demands other personae.

The number of public personae cannot help being restricted, but the personae deviated from them can be diverse. When deviant personae are expressed, each

6) The level of expectation that most members of one society originally have had.

realizes the different literary beauty. The public persona and its deviations realize different types of literary beauty. These are contrasted each other as *choim*(조임) and *p'urōjum*(풀어줌).⁷⁾ *Choim* describes a case that ideology rules over emotional freedom absolutely. But *p'urōjum* is an action that allows human emotion to be released freely. *P'ulda*(풀다) is a term found in traditional shamanism in Korea. Namely, *salp'uri* (살풀이) and *ponp'uri* (본풀이) are the ritual origin of this notion. Therefore, the fundamental spirit of the notion communicate the temper of the general populace too. Shamanism took charge of the important role of *p'urōjum* in human life.

From some time ago, songs partly played an easiest and most useful role to take the place of shamanism. Human mind can be changed by the existing state of things, and the people's emotion is expressed in language and action. Sometimes, they could express their feelings through ballads or songs. They succeeded in venting their grudge by expressing what can't be communicated by the form of daily language. If we take into account the history of the lower classes that were oppressed by such social factors as class, gender, wealth, and education, grudge is a characteristic of their psychological phenomenon. Lower class people were able to obtain some form of catharsis through songs.

Tune is correlative to the thematic consciousness and masks in songs. Chōng's short songs were also sung by people, and then were sung to the various tunes of *taeyōp*. The tunes are divided into several kinds in terms of mood. The indications of tunes is supplied to most of his songs in the anthologies of songs. There are several cases in which certain songs are given different tunes according to various anthologies or different edition of a given anthology. By compiling the frequency of the various tunes, I have found that the type of *saktaeyōp* occupy 62%. *Isaktaeyōp*(二數大葉)⁸⁾ is a tune that seems to describe the dignified bearing of the

7) *Choim* is the noun form of *choida* (조이다). It means an action of driving the human mind into a fixed formula. *P'urōjum* is the noun form of *p'urōjuda* (풀어주다) or *p'ulda* (풀다). It is the opposite of *choim*.

8) The solemn *isaktaeyōp* starts after finishing the *u-cho-ch'osaktaeyōp*(羽調初數大葉) as a prelude. It is long

scholar in the Chosŏn dynasty. Not only *saktaeyŏp*, but also *rong*(弄)·*rak*(樂)·*p'yŏn*(編) which varied from it were commonly used.

The tunes of *taeyŏp* group are descended from one of the traditional tunes since the late Koryŏ dynasty, *chinjaksamkigok*(眞勻三機曲) to sing <Chŏngkwajŏng(鄭瓜亭)>. But only *saktaeyŏp* had been very popular from the 17th century. Then, various tunes had been derived from it. *Rong·rak·pyŏn*, the musical variations of *kagok* appeared at about the late of 18th century.

The solemn and slow *saktaeyŏp* can be said a regular tune, on the contrary *rong·rak·p'yŏn* are irregular tunes that the riotous funny airs are intermingled with. *Isaktaeyŏp* is the fundamental tune in *kagok*. And it takes in 14 to 15 minutes to sing it wholly. *Isaktaeyŏp* with a dignified touch has been used to sing mainly short lyrics. But *rong*, *rak*, and *p'yŏn* are merry tunes to sing long and narrative lyrics.

The items of *Isaktaeyŏp* handed down up to now are two man's songs each in *p'yŏngjo*(平調) and *gyemyŏnjo*(界面調), five woman's songs in *gyemyŏnjo*. These were handed down by *Ha Kyuil*(河圭一), a traditional master singer.

Later, *rong* was branched into *wurong*(羽弄), *p'yŏngrong*(平弄), *ŏllong*(言弄). If we take into account that the section 2·3·4·5 of *ŏllong* are same as *tugŏ*(頭舉), it may be a musical variation from *tugŏ*. *Rak* is a tune originated from *Akhakwebŏm*(樂學軌範). And it was branched into *gyerak*(界樂), *wurak*(羽樂), *ŏllak*(言樂·筵樂). There is a phrase, "in time of peace as the King Yo and T'ang, many beautiful flowers are coming out splendidly in the spring castle(堯風湯日 花爛春城)" in the "songs' mood" of *Kagokwŏnryu*(歌曲源流). The phrase means that *rak* is an endlessly pleasant tune as a spring flower hill. Therefore, *rong·rak·p'yŏn* have a playing and gay zest as a flowing stream. The three tunes of *rak* were handed down by *Ha Kyuil*.

P'yŏn means weaving or compiling. To put it concretely, it is that the musical

and slow enough to take about 15 minutes in singing.<cf. Song Bang-song. *A General History of Korean Music*. Seoul:Ilchogak, 1984. pp.414-422.>

rhythm is close. The variations of *p'yŏn* are the fastest songs in *kagok*. Hence, musically, "*yŏkkŭm*(억음)"/"*p'yŏn*"/"*sasŏl*(사설)" designates a piece whose meter differs from another piece or other pieces with which it is associated or from which it is derived.⁹⁾

It can be said that Chŏng Ch'ŏl also sang his songs in the *saktaeyŏp* tune. Judging from such phrases as "*kagok* or other"¹⁰⁾ in the old documents related to Chŏng Ch'ŏl, we can infer that he made or sang his songs for himself.

Let's look at the following songs.

- ① If you meet young girls on your path,
Be sure to make a detour.
If you meet young men on your way,
Be sure to turn back.
If the person is not your man or girl,
Do not ask his or her name.

<p.67.>¹¹⁾

- ② Two stone Buddhas on the wayside
Without clothes and food—
You weather wind and rain,
You brave snow and frost.
You do not know the wrench of parting.
In this I envy you most.

<p.85.>

9) Chang Sa-hun. *Kugak Non'go-Studies in Korean Music*. Seoul:The Seoul University Press, 1982. p.681.

10) We can find the phrase "*kagok* or other" in some parts of collection of his works.

11) Peter H. Lee. *PINE RIVER AND LONE PEAK—An Anthology of Three Chosŏn Dynasty Poets—*. Hawaii:University of Hawaii Press, 1991. p.67. *The same shall apply hereinafter.

The central theme of ① is a moral law of discrimination between men and women. The moral law is a rule of everyday life formed with a special ideological basis. Based on Confucian ideology, the "rule of everyday life" is a written or unwritten law governing people. There is little room here for expressing the poet's mind freely in this song. The energy of poet's mind points to the outer world. Because the speaker with the public mask expresses his didactic intent, the theme or mood of a given song reflect stereotype or ready-made ideas, which correspond to them.

But ② is different. We see here that the outward oriented energy of psychology calms down into the ego. He succeeds in expressing the unexpectedness and novelty in his work by selecting a parting between man and woman as a literary object. It is an excellent song rising above Confucian ideology or the stereotype as well as a sharp expression to be accomplished only by his emotional insight. The speaker in this song is putting on a mask of an ordinary man or woman.

① was sung in the tune of *isaktaeyŏp*, while ② was sung in *wu-isaktaeyŏp*(羽二數大葉)·*wurak·wugŏ*(羽舉). The songs emphasizing ideology or rationality having a public mask tend to show *choim* and regulation. The other masks express *p'urŏjum*, a release.

- ③ I am fifty, but I am not old.
 I see wine wherever I go
 And grin at its presence.
 Do not press me why.
 I cannot forget you; we have
 known each other just too long.

<p.80.>

- ④ Let's drink a cup,
 and then another.

Let's pluck flowers and count
 as we drink more and more.
 When your body dies,
 it will be borne on a rack
 wrapped around with a straw mat,
 or in a hearse with colored curtains,
 with myriad people following in tears.
 And when you're laid down
 among the rushes,
 under overcup oaks and white poplars,
 under yellow sun and white moon,
 under fine rain or thick snow,
 or when chilly winds sough,
 who will offer you a cup of wine?
 Furthermore, when only a monkey whistles
 on your grave,
 What good will it do to regret?

<p.65.>

- ⑤ I bemoan the death of my husband
 And tears course down my bosom.
 I cannot still my crying child;
 He complains that the milk is too salty.
 "O wretched baby,
 What is woman supposed to do?"

<p.86.>

The speaker in ③ presents the persona of a heavy drinker. In fact, Chǒng was fond of drinking and left a lot of episodes behind. If we take into account his

wish to be free of the restraint of public affairs in the real world, it is needless to say that he wanted to put on his favorite mask in the songs. Here, he is exposing his human face with the mask of a heavy drinker. But in the real world, he would rather die than live because he was ashamed of mistakes from drinking, and so pledged not to drink again.¹²⁾ Additionally, his human face is exposed in that he tolerates the weakness generously instead of feeling shame or criticizing. He succeeded in dispelling the mental burden of not keeping his pledge with himself.

④ is regarded as a model of sad song.¹³⁾ The irresistible power of death is expressed dramatically, emphasizing that persons, either in humble or noble stations, are equalized on their deathbed. The mask in ④ is different from that in ⑤, as a person with refined taste who takes a far-sighted view of all worldly affairs. There is pain from the conflict with a death as an extreme situation, which in his mind he accepts it disinterestedly. And ④ is the result of catharsis from accepting death as inevitable. The mask in ⑤ is a woman crying over her husband's death. But there is no room to solve the tragic situation in this song.

The possibility of internal purification can be made by maximizing the tragic situation. The husband's death would be a great tragedy to woman. This song's tragic distinction comes to the climax with the scene of a baby crying for the salty taste of his mother's milk with the sorrowful tear running down her bosom. By describing the woman's tragedy, the song heightens the effect of catharsis. Catharsis, internal purification, calls for *p'urŏjum* in a literary work. And these songs were sung in the irregular tunes.

12) Of course, he couldn't keep the pledge.

13) cf. Hong Man-jong. "An Epilogue to Changjinjusa," *Chinbon Ch'ŏnggyŏng'ŏn*. Seoul:Sijo Society, 1987. p.48(右將進酒辭 松江所製 盖做太白長吉勸酒之意 又取杜工部總麻百夫行君看東縛之語 詞旨通達 句語悽惋 若使孟嘗君聞之 淚下不但雍門琴也)

III. Conclusion

Chǒng Ch'öl succeeded in exposing his true heart by means of creating various masks in his works. He was a typical poet who used masks in his songs. Therefore, we don't know which one represents his true face. He succeeded in fitting the theme of a given song to the traditional music tunes. Those indicate that he was one of the great poets of the day.

The personae in Chǒng's songs are divided into two kinds, ideological and personal. Ideological personae have the social and public traits. It means that the society of those days was under the control of ideology, especially the Confucianism. Their speakings are mostly stereotyped. They embodied the conventional or routine theme like loyalty and filial piety. As a natural consequence, the ideological personae drived the human mind into some fixed formula. *Choim* is such type of action as driving. I confirmed that these songs with ideological persona were sung to mainly *Isaktaeyöp*, the regular tune. Therefore, the mood of songs was solemn and dignified.

Personal personae have the individual and internal traits. They generally pursue self-reflection or emotional release through the original expressions. They embodied the unconventional or non-routine theme through the irregular type of singing tunes, like *rong·rak·p'yŏn*. And they pursued *p'urŏjum*, the action type of allowing human emotion to be released freely. Eventually, Chǒng succeeded to pursue the desire of romantic enjoyments by adopting the personal personae and singing to the irregular tunes.

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국문 요약

가면과 그것의 미적 의미

조 규 익

시인으로서의 송강 정철이 지닌 최대 장점은 이념적 굴레로부터 벗어나 자신의 내면세계를 자유로이 표출시킨 점에 있다. 중국인 이외의 작가나 독자들에게는 단지 글문학일 뿐이었던 한시를 주된 장르로 수용했으면서도 당대 우리의 말문학에 또한 뛰어난 면을 보여주었다. 특히 우리 말문학으로서의 시가가 당대에 가창되던 노래말이었다는 점은 송강을 포함한 당대 지식층의 교양 범위가 문학과 음악에 걸쳐 있었음을 입증하는 사실이기도 하다. 이처럼 송강은 자신의 노래를 전통 곡조들에 맞추어 짓거나 올려부를 수 있는 인물이었다. 또한 그는 자신의 노래에 다양한 가면의 화자들을 등장시켰다. 화자들은 자신들만의 독특한 어조로 그들의 정서를 표출하였으며, 시인이나 가객들은 주제나 어조에 맞는 분위기의 곡조에 그 노래말들을 올려 불렀다. 따라서 사회적 공인의 가면을 쓴 화자가 등장하여 이념추구의 주제의식을 진술한 노래말들은 정격의 곡조에 올려 불렀고, 다양한 여타 가면의 화자들이 등장하여 자유로운 감정을 표출한 노래말들은 변격의 곡조들에 올려 불렀다. 이와 같이 노래의 내용·주제의식·곡조 등이 일치되는 양상을 보여주면서도 그 갈래가 다양하다는 점, 이념지향의 보수계층 출신이면서도 본능지향의 우리말 노래를 능숙하고도 자유롭게 지을 수 있었다는 점 등이 송강의 시가문학에서 발견하는 두드러진 특징들이다.