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The Perception of the Other in 15th century Korean literature – a Case Study of Kim Sisǔp’s Poetry

Abstract
In the last few decades, the question of how Koreans perceive the people of neighbouring countries, primarily the Chinese, Japanese and Manchu, has become a significant subject in studies on the middle and late period of Chosŏn. In the research on early Chosŏn period, the pre-modern Korean perception of ‘Others’ is still a rather underrepresented issue. So far, studies on the early Chosŏn period have mostly focused on inter-state relationships, encounters of envoys and other state representatives with foreigners. These studies have shed interesting light on the political rhetoric of the Korean state; however, as they were concerned with investigating state-led enterprises, they have been less successful in revealing issues of inter-personal contact on the individual level.

The present paper is intended to fill this gap by raising the question of how social and political outsiders in the early Chosŏn state perceived foreigners whom they met while roaming the country. The research is based on a poetological analysis of a few poems which were written by the most representative author of early pangeoin literature in Korea, Kim Sisǔp (1435-1493). These poems describe Kim Sisǔp’s encounters with Japanese people during his wanderings on the coast of the east sea. The study of Kim Sisǔp’s poems reveals a number of interesting points about a Korean individual’s encounter with and perception of the Japanese people in mid-15th century. Though being a political outsider, Kim Sisǔp kept to certain cultural stereotypes in the perception of the ‘Other’, which, basically, were formed by the Chosŏn state’s ideology of a hierarchical order of states. However, Kim Sisŭp’s perception of the ‘Other’ also includes some individual notes.

Introduction
In the last few decades, the question of how Koreans perceive the people
of neighbouring countries, primarily the Chinese, Japanese and Manchu, has become a significant subject in studies on the middle and late period of Chosŏn.\(^\text{1}\) In the research on early Chosŏn period, however, the pre-modern Korean perception of 'Others' is still a rather underrepresented issue. This is especially true in regard to the investigation of multi-dimensional aspects, which are generated by encounters between Koreans and other people, specifically, their personal communication with each other, emerging visions of the 'Other', impacts on self-understanding, etc. So far, studies on the early Chosŏn period have mostly focused on interstate relationships, encounters of envoys and other state representatives with foreigners.\(^\text{2}\) These studies have shed interesting light on the political rhetoric of the Korean state; however, as they were concerned with investigating state-led enterprises, they have been less successful in revealing issues of inter-personal contact on the individual level.

Being aware of this lacuna, the present paper is intended to contribute to the research by raising the question of how social and political outsiders in the early Chosŏn state perceived foreigners. Intellectuals who were not bound by the duties of an official had more opportunities to travel and perhaps could meet foreigners while roaming the country. These outsiders were of diverse backgrounds and varied in lifestyle, ideology and religion as well as the degree to which they kept themselves outside of state affairs. They included, for instance, Confucian scholars and retired officials (ch’ŏsa處士) who lived at their private estates in the countryside, dedicated themselves to self-cultivation and the education of the young generation. These ch’ŏsa often maintained some contact with local, provincial or even central administrators, and towards the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, they increasingly engaged in the local politics of their area. On the other extreme, there were the pangoein方外人("wan-derers beyond the world"), i.e. those intellectuals who kept themselves most detached from society and followed Taoist and/or Buddhist concepts. For this paper, the case of Kim Sisŭp金時習 (1435–1493), who is regarded as the most representative author or even forefather of early pangoein literature in Korea, has been selected. In the research, a

\(^{1}\) Ubong Ha, Chosŏn hugi sirhakcha-ŭi Ilbon’guan yŏn’gu (Study of Sirhak scholars' views on Japan in late Chosŏn) (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1989). For research publications on Chosŏn envoys to Japan, see the secondary bibliography in Pak Youngsook’s paper in this volume.

\(^{2}\) Ubong Ha, Chosŏn sidae Han’gugun-ŭi Ilbon insik (The perception of Japan by Koreans in the Chosŏn period) (Seoul: Hyean, 2006).
poetological analysis will be carried out of a few poems, which describe Kim Sisùp’s encounters with Japanese people. It should be acknowledged that two of the poems have already been introduced in previous research works. However, these works did not deal with the subject, which is the focus of this paper. On the one hand, the poems were mentioned in biographical studies of Kim Sisùp’s life, and on the other hand, in Art historians’ research on the tea ceremony and related production of art objects. Furthermore, these previous works did not provide any thorough analysis of the poetic texts.

Before turning to the examination of Kim Sisùp’s poems, it is necessary to provide some background information, which will be helpful to understand the author’s ideas and images conveyed in his poems. Most importantly, we shall look at the historical context in which these poems were written. For this purpose, we will briefly give overview of the foreign affairs of the Chosŏn state in the relevant period, the 15th century, and discuss how Chosŏn perceived its relationships with the neighbouring countries and people and positioned itself within the sinitic worldview. Thereafter, we will take a look at the biography of Kim Sisùp and explain the inner-political circumstances as well as Kim’s personal reasons and motives that led him to choose the life of a “wanderer outside of society” and which eventually gave him the opportunity to encounter Japanese people during his journey on the east coast of the Korean peninsula. We will also provide a short description of the whole poetry collection where Kim’s poems about his encounters with the Japanese have been handed down to us. As much as possible, we will try to provide information about the time and place of composing the respective poems. After these preparatory steps, a close reading of the poems will follow.

Foreign affairs of Chosŏn in the 15th century

The beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty was marked by successful efforts by the Korean court to stabilize foreign relations. The relations with Ming China were finally regulated in the beginning of the 15th century. The Korean court followed the policy of sadae (serving the great) acknowledging the Ming dynasty as the centre of civilization. The regulations with Ming China created favourable conditions for normalizing the relations with Korea’s neighbours in the north and south/east.

To prevent frequent attacks by the Jurchen people, measures were undertaken to strengthen the country’s border in the north. In 1434, six garrison forts (yukjin 六鎭) were established in the northeast, and a decade later, in 1443, four military counties (sagun 四郡) were created in the northwest. By these measures, the frontier was gradually extended to the natural defence line formed by the two rivers, Tuman and Amnok, and consequently the state territory was roughly established within the borders present today.

In the southeast, the threat posed by Japanese marauders at the end of Koryŏ gradually subsided in the beginning of Chosŏn, although incidents of pillaging still occurred from time to time. The bases from which these marauders mounted their attacks were on Tsushima. As the mountainous, rocky, islands were unfavourable for producing enough food, many Japanese on Tsushima had to provide for themselves either through trade or by launching forays in the neighbouring countries. To wipe out the bases of pirates, King Sejong sent a strong military force to attack Tsushima in 1419. After the rulers of Tsushima had sent repeated missions to Korea, Chosŏn finally granted the Japanese limited trading privileges.

Along the southeast coast of Korea, three ports (samp’o 三浦) were opened to the Japanese to facilitate trading activities. In each of the ports, business and living quarters – so-called “Japan houses” waegwan 倭館 – were provided.4 Subsequently, a trade agreement was reached in 1443, to regulate and limit the volume of goods that could be traded. These measures eventually established peace in the south of the Korean peninsula.5

The Korean court’s policy of securing its northern and southern border

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areas was a combination of diplomacy, naturalization of border people and trade policies. By 1450, the Chosŏn court had established the basic pattern of its relations with the Jurchen and the Japanese. As historians have pointed out, the Chosŏn court regularized its foreign relations by implementing a hierarchy, consisting of Ming China at the top and then Chosŏn, the Japanese, and the Jurchen. This hierarchical order was based on a differentiation between the culturally defined Chinese Hua and the culturally different or ethnic outsiders Yi (‘barbarians’). Chosŏn referred to Ming Dynasty as Hua and affiliated itself with its esteemed neighbour. As a country that adopted Neo-Confucianism as state ideology, Chosŏn strove to become a dignified member of the Sinocentric world. This self-understanding was not only linked to Chosŏn’s national security, but was also of considerable cultural significance. The political concept of differentiating between Hua and Yi had a tremendous influence on the perception of the ‘Other’.

The outsider-poet Kim Sisŭp
Following the brief discussion of the external context, we will now provide a short introduction of the poet Kim Sisŭp and explain the internal circumstances that caused him to choose a life outside of state affairs and wander throughout the country.

From his family background, Kim Sisŭp belonged to the elite of society, the yangban, which had a considerable impact on his self-consciousness as an intellectual and author of literature. Although Kim Sisŭp’s family appears to have been of quite low level within the yangban stratum in Early Chosŏn dynasty, they still could be proud of their illustrious origin. They traced their history back to the famous ancestor Kim Al

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8 The family suffered a decline in the most recent generations before Kim Sisŭp’s birth.
chi of the Silla period and, through their ancestral line of Kim Chu-wôn, they were related to the local power elite in Kangnûng. The family was also on good terms with high officials at the royal court; even state councillor Hô Cho (1369–1439) visited their home. Among Kim Sisûp’s teachers in his childhood was Yun Sang (1373–1455), who later became instructor of the heir apparent (canonized King Tanjong, r. 1453–1455). This indirect connection with the boy-king through the same teacher must have strongly influenced Kim Sisûp in his future reaction to the tragic fate of the boy-king.

Kim Sisûp was very talented, but he lived in a time of inner-political turbulence; thus, at a certain moment, he was confronted with limitations in applying his talents and abilities in the contemporary society. He was praised as a promising child-prodigy and was dreaming about successfully passing the state examinations, followed by entering state service. The crucial turning point in Kim Sisûp’s life came in 1455 when King Tanjong was forced to abdicate in favour of his uncle, Prince Suyang (canonized King Sejo, r. 1455–1468). For him, a young man of 21 years of age (according to Korean counting), still full of idealism, the news about the usurpation of the throne was a shocking experience.

At first, Kim Sisûp had no precise idea of which way of life to choose as a form of protest against the usurpation of the throne. In his youth, he had received a thorough training in Confucian classics and had also come into contact with Taoist and Buddhist ideas. As he states himself in the epilogue of his Yu Kwansô rok 遊關西錄, his decision to withdraw from public and live in reclusion was motivated by Confucian principles. But the way he chose was an unorthodox one – namely, living as a Buddhist monk roaming the country. He spent the rest of his life as an outsider to political affairs (pangoein). In moments of crisis, he tried to find the clue to questions preying on his mind in alternative concepts to state ideology, Neo-Confucianism, and studied a broad spectrum of philosophical ideas probing Hwaôm and Sôn Buddhism as well as various currents of Taoism. Besides his refusal to serve under the usurper Sejo, the main motive for Kim Sisûp’s pilgrimage was obviously his wish to find some consolation for the miseries of his contemporary society. The life of a wandering monk served equally as his means of protest against Sejo’s usurpation of the throne and his own means of overcoming his grief and indignation. During his wanderings, he tried to forget the problems of his contemporary society, but in fact he was hardly able to completely leave
behind his thoughts about the secular world.  

**Kim Sisǔp’s poetry collection Sayurok**

As a tool to respond to the circumstances in which he found himself, Kim Sisǔp eventually resorted to writing literature. In the early period of his life (from age 23 to age 37), Kim Sisǔp undertook extensive wanderings throughout the country and rendered his observations, experiences, feelings and ideas in poetic form. At the end of his wanderings in a particular region, before (or shortly after) starting a new journey, he assembled his poems into a separate poetry collection. The poems that he had written while visiting the northwest region of the Korean peninsula almost approaching the border of the country were collected in the *Yu Kwansó rok 遊關西錄 (Record of Pilgrimage in Kwansó)*. The poems from his travel to the north-east region were put into the *Yu Kwandong nok 遊關東錄 (Record of Pilgrimage in Kwandong)* and those from the southwest region into the *Yu Honam nok 遊湖南錄 (Record of Pilgrimage in Honam)*. Those dealing with his last station, the southeast region, were included in the *Yu Kűmo rok 遊金鰲錄 (Record of Pilgrimage on Mt. Kűmo)*. These four poetry collections were later published together under the title *Four Records of the Pilgrimages (Sayurok 四遊錄)*. The *Sayurok* represents a unique account of a pre-modern Korean intellectual’s travels throughout the country. Comprising as much as 475 poems, the *Sayurok* stands out for its comprehensiveness. As Kim Sisǔp was not bound by the tight schedule of a government official, he had the fortune to see far more of the country than any of his contemporaries. His travel route was so comprehensive that later generations envied him for his sightseeing opportunities and even exaggerated the extent of his journeys saying that he visited “all corners of the country”.  

In regard to the subject of the present paper, particular telling are a few poems in the fourth poetry collection, the *Yu Kűmo rok*. I have

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selected those poems, which more or less explicitly deal with Kim Sísúp's views on Japan and the Japanese. There are probably many more poems that could reveal to us his perception of the 'Other', but their indirect hints still need to be disclosed.

*Time and place of composing the Japan-related poems*

The poems which reflect Kim Sísúp's views on Japan and his encounters with Japanese people in the southeast of the Korean peninsula have no time indicator. However, there are a few hints enabling us to narrow down the time frame in which they were written. The *Yu Kúmo rok*, which includes the Japan-related poems, was completed in the spring of the year *kyesa*, 1473, as evident from Kim Sísúp's small epilogue. As the previously compiled collection dealing with Kim Sísúp's travels in the southwest region, the *Yu Honam nok*, is dated autumn of 1463 in its respective epilogue, we get a time span between 1463 and 1473.

But it is possible to define the time even more precisely if we take into consideration the poem, which comes next to the Japan-related poems in the *Yu Kúmo rok*. The poem deals with Kim Sísúp's invitation to the opening ceremony of the Wŏn'gaksa monastery 圓覺寺, which was held in the capital Hansŏng on the birthday of Buddha (the 8th day of the 4th lunar month) in 1465. If Kim Sísúp kept to a chronological principle in arranging this part of the *Yu Kúmo rok*, the poems listed before the invitation to the Wŏn'gaksa ceremony must have been written earlier than spring 1465.

Summarizing the above-mentioned facts, we have grounds to assume that Kim Sísúp's encounters with Japanese people at the east sea probably happened in the time between autumn of 1463 (completion of the *Honam nok*) and before spring 1465 (invitation to the Wŏn'gaksa ceremony).

After roaming the country for about ten years, Kim Sísúp decided to seek a permanent place to live and finally settled down for a while on

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12 Sísúp Kim, *(Kugyŏk) Maewŏltang chip*, 297.
14 As has been pointed out by many Korean researchers, Kim Sísúp apparently kept to a chronological order of arranging his poems in the *Yu Kwansŏ rok*, *Yu Kwangong nok* and *Yu Honam nok*, while in the case of his fourth collection, the *Yu Kúmo rok*, it may be true only for its first part. For the second part, which follows after the poem about Kim's invitation to the Wŏn'gaksa ceremony, it is difficult if not impossible to discern any chronological order.
Mount Kūmo, south of the old Shilla capital Kyŏngju. It was near the monastery Yongjangsa 莊長寺, where he chose to live and built a hut for himself. He stayed at this place for about seven years (1463–1471), with breaks taken for two short travels to the capital.

Previous researchers have expressed the assumption that Kim Sisūp's encounters with the Japanese took place at Yŏmp’o Harbour 盐浦 in Ulsan county. Among the three ports where guest houses for the Japanese (waegwan倭館) were established, Yŏmp’o was closest to Kyŏngju. The Korean scholar Sim Kyŏngho estimates that it took just one day of walking from Kyŏngju to Yŏmp’o. There was a road connecting Kyŏngju with Yŏmp’o and Pusan, which passed the entrance of the mountain pass to the Yongjangsa monastery. This road had been an important traffic road for diplomatic relations since the Shilla period.

The Tongguk yŏji sŏngnam 東國輿地勝覽 indicates that the military camp (yŏng營) of Yŏmp’o was 23 里 east of Ulsan county’s administrative centre, and there was a village with Japanese (waeho倭戶 or waeri倭里) who permanently lived there. Yŏmp’o was reopened for Japanese envoys and traders by the Korean court in 1426, along with the already existing ports of Pusanp’o in Tongnae (today Pusan) and Naeip’o in Ungch’ŏn (today Chinhae).

Analysis of poems
In the next chapter, we will undertake a close reading of a few poems written by Kim Sisūp and examine what they reveal about the author’s views on Japan and his encounters with Japanese people. For a deeper understanding of the poems’ content, we will analyze them according to the order in which they appear in Kim Sisūp's poetry collection. In our previous studies of Kim Sisūp’s poetry, we became aware that it is useful to pay attention to the sequence of the poems because Kim Sisūp himself has arranged his works into particular collections. Furthermore, it is always recommendable to consider not only those poems that openly

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15 Ch’oe, 'Ilbon Muromati sidae-ui ch’oamch’a’, 163–175; Sim, Kim Sisūp p’yŏnggŏn, 278.
16 Sim, Kim Sisūp p’yŏnggŏn, 278.
19 For the location of Yŏmp’o and the other ports with Japan Houses see the map in James B. Lewis, Frontier Contact, 18.
address a certain subject but also a wider range of works. Relying on this experience, we include the following poem into our discussion, which is placed before the two poems explicitly speaking about Kim Sisůp’s encounters with the Japanese. As we will see, this poem also touches on the subject, but in a suggestive manner.

*On the coastal strip* Haeyŏn 海堧

The sea is smooth and the sand soft.  
The sky is wide and endless the view.  
Penglai island vaguely [appears in the distance], pure and shallow.  
The holy tree *fusang* could [almost] be climbed up.  
The fishermens’ huts just appear as four-five spots.  
The setting sun is already at a low height.20  
The old entrenchment is drenched with cold mist.  
In the border region the sound of the horn dies away.21

海平沙復軟  
天闊望中寬  
蓬島疑淸淺  
扶桑可躋攀  
漁家四五點  
斜日兩三竿  
故壘寒煙濕  
邊聲角殘

The poem tells us that Kim Sisůp visited a military outpost on the sea before taking a look at the Japanese settlement in Yǒmp’o. The “military” is expressed by the “old entrenchment” (*koru* 故壘) and the military horn (*hwagak* 畫角) in the poem’s text. It is not clear whether the “old entrenchment” was the nearby Yǒmp’o garrison or one of the other defence facilities on the eastern seashore.

The poem starts with an exciting picture of the sea. Apparently, the poet describes his first observations and emotions when he arrived at the seashore. Everything appears idyllic. The sea is smooth, unruffled, and the wide sky allows for an endless view. Exaltation overpowers the poet when he watches this peaceful, gorgeous picture of nature. He is so

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20 Literally, ‘an altitude of two-three *k’an*.’
21 Sisůp Kim, *Kugyŏk* Maewŏltang chip, 276.
excited that he envisions seeing the legendary Taoist island of Immortals, Penlai (蓬島, 蓬萊山), far off in the horizon.

The idea of a mysterious land is transmitted by another image as well: the tree fusang (扶桑) (in Korean: pusang). In Chinese mythology, fusang refers to a divine tree in the east from where the sun rises. It is alternately interpreted as a mulberry tree or hibiscus plant. Since its introduction in the Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing 山海經) and other ancient texts, people developed various perceptions about the location of fusang. As pointed out by Edward H Schafer, in his study of Tang poetry, the land of fusang was identified as 'lying very remote from the civilized nations of Chinastan – certainly beyond the waters around P'eng-lai – and few men have ever seen it. One source alleges that it lies even beyond the far shore of the Eastern Sea'. On the other hand, some Tang poets believed that fusang was closer and more accessible than that – and even that it lay between the [Chinese] mainland and Japan. For the latter perception, Schafer cites a number of poems, including Wang Wei (王維, 699–759)’s farewell poem on the occasion of Abe no Nakamaro (晁衡)’s return to Japan in 753: 'The trees of your home are beyond Fu-sang.' The key connotations that associated “Fusang” and Japan in the Tang poems are the great distance separating Japan and China and the great danger in travelling between the two. Through the circulation of these poems in Japan, it is believed that the Japanese themselves began to use “Fusang” to refer to their own land. Over the course of time, the poetic image of fusang connoting Japan became widespread in all East Asian countries, including Korea.

Returning to the discussion of Kim Sisüp’s poem, we have to note that it is quite difficult to speculate about the meaning that he put in the image of fusang. His poem is highly suggestive and probably combines both: the vision of an imaginary, holy, tree and the poetic image connoting Japan. Kim Sisüp constructs the connection between both in a sophisticated way.

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In the first four lines, real observations of the natural phenomena (sea, sand, sky) are paralleled by envisioned ones (the imaginary islands Penglai and fushang). Moreover, during his contemplation in view of the grand nature, Kim Sisŭp reaches a state of mind where he transfers himself into another, mysterious world: the fushang tree is allegedly so close to him that he feels he could almost “climb up it”.

In the fifth line, the poet, however, turns back to observations of the real landscape. From the macroscopic perspective of sea and sky as well as sacred attributes, his view moves to the microscopic one. Abruptly, the poet starts to speak about the human world: the dwellings of fishermen on the seashore. In view of the impressive natural phenomena, the human world looks miniscule. The few huts appear only as small spots (or dots) in the grand natural spectacle.

Despite the difference in size, however, there exists a correspondence between the micro- and the macro world. Both are in a peaceful, tranquil state. The sounds of the military horn are fading away, i.e. signalling that there is no high alert. The last two lines of the poem indicate that the poet realizes his position at the country’s border. He emphasizes that the situation on the border is secure.

Looking back at the whole structure of Kim Sisŭp’s poem, it is now appropriate to think anew about still undiscovered messages in his poem. Linking the (seemingly disconnected) first and second half of the poem, we may draw a new connection between key images: fushang tree - fishermen’s huts – border region. If we recall the possible connotation between fushang and Japan, we might assume that the “fishermen’s huts”, which Kim Sisŭp saw at the seashore were dwellings of the Japanese, not Koreans. The last lines of the poem then may be more specifically interpreted as expressing the poet’s relief and satisfaction that there are no threats by pirates anymore. The period of frequent attacks on the Korean borders is over, and the Japanese who now come to the Korean peninsula are occupied with a peaceful profession.

The image of fusang also includes an indirect time indicator – sunrise, dawn, and morning. This time is contrasted with the information in the poem’s sixth line speaking about “the setting sun” being only “at a height of two-three k’an”. Thus, Kim Sisŭp, in his poem, spans a time from

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26 In fact, Kim Sisŭp could not have seen any Japanese island from his position in Yŏmp’o. Even from Pusan Harbour, the closest point on the island Tsushima, 49.5 km away, is visible only on exceptionally bright days. However, in Kim Sisŭp’s Collected works, there is no evidence that he travelled to Pusan or any point in its neighbourhood.

88
morning to evening. It may be assumed that he spent the whole day watching the amazing picture of the sea. This assumption is also supported by the fact that in the sixth line “cold mist” han yŏn 寒烟 is mentioned, which stands in contrast to the unhindered bright view in the poem’s first few lines drawing the picture of the sea in the morning. Right at the moment when night is approaching, it is time for the poet to return with his thoughts to the human world and to “read all the signs”, which may inform him about the current situation on the country’s border.

The way in which the key issue, border security, is addressed in the above-discussed poem resembles that of another poem written by Kim Sisŭp earlier, in the period when he travelled in the northern region of the Korean peninsula. For comparison, we will just cite the most important parts of Kim Sisŭp’s poem:

*Naval frontier guard Haesu* 海戍

On the far blue sea
the marines are calm, without any noise. …
When the sun sets, the cymbal rings out
[announcing] the general’s late patrol around the office.\(^\text{27}\)

茫茫滄海上
戍卒靜無譁
落日鳴刁斗
將軍打晩衙

This poem deals with Kim Sisŭp’s visit to a frontier guard at the northwestern seashore, namely, Anyungjin 安戎鎭.\(^\text{28}\) The garrison was erected at the northern border of the Koryŏ state in 973–974 and was of great strategic importance: Anyungjin was famous for beating back the invasion of the Khitan under So Sonnyŏng (Xiao Xunning 蕭遜寧).\(^\text{29}\) In the poem “Naval frontier guard” *Haesu*, we have a similar setting as in “On the coastal strip” *Haeyŏn*. Embedded in a macro picture of nature, Kim Sisŭp


\(^\text{28}\) On today’s NorthKorean maps approximately in Naedong-ni, Ipsŏk-myŏn, of Anju-gun.

\(^\text{29}\) *Han’guk minjok munhwa taesajŏn*, vol. 14, 530.
draws a peaceful picture of the seashore. His observation of stable conditions at the country’s border is made at the time of sunset. Recalling the decisive historical battle at this place, the poem is purported to emphasize that in the contemporary period, Korean people do not have to worry about threats from northern invaders.

In contrast to the first poem, in the Yu Kūmo rok, which we have discussed above, the second one is directly and in many details speaking about Japanese people.

*The settlement of island barbarians Toigō* 島夷居

Earning their livelihood in the coastal area,
[they live in] a few dozen of reed-thatched houses.
By disposition they are hot-headed, their boats are tiny.
Their customs are different, their speeches boastful.
Their home lies far on the blue horizon.
But they settled on this coast of the jade-green sea.
When they came and submitted to [our] king's civilizing influence,
His Majesty commended them for their good act and welcomed them.30

濱海為生利
茅茨數十家
性躁漁艇小
俗異語言奢
鄉遠靑天際
身樓碧水涯
來投 王化裏
主上正矜嘉

In the poem’s title, Kim Sisǔp uses a common trope found in many prose and poetry works in Chosǒn, both official ones and private: *Toi* meaning “Island barbarians” and referring to the Japanese living on the islands. In the poetic diplomacy of Chosǒn, this expression included the notion of the culturally different or ethnic outsiders Yi, who, as we have explained above, were differentiated from the culturally defined Chinese (and Korean) Hua. The Term *Toi* also appears in another poem by Kim Sisǔp:

“On the tower of Great Peace” *T’aewharu* 太和樓

“From the high tower I look directly to the place where the island barbarians *toiju* live.”

高樓直望島夷洲

As the poem *T’aewharu* focuses on Kim’s self-perception, we shall leave it out of our further discussion here. The poem is interesting for a particular study on the question of how the perception of the foreign affected the self.

In the first passage of *Toigŏ*, Kim Si-sŭp employs a set of stereotypes drawing on the perception of the culturally different ‘Other’. The customs of the people in the Japanese village are different from his own home. Their disposition (nature) is hot-headed and their speeches boastful and arrogant, implying that they neglect the Confucian principles of propriety: to be simple and modest in behaviour and speech. The distance to the cultural ‘Other’ is also expressed by the spatial position of the poet. All suggests that Kim Si-sŭp is watching from a distance. However, mixed with reflections on the ethnic and cultural ‘Otherness’, there are notes included about the conditions of life in the stranger’s village: they live in reed-thatched houses, have only tiny boats, earn their livelihood from fishing. These images, related to the poor life of fishermen, are also quite stereotypical in the East Asian literature, but, interestingly enough, they normally appear in socio-critical poetry. That means they are frequently used as stereotypes for the social ‘Other’, not so much the cultural ‘Other’. We can find these common stereotypes in a number of Kim Si-sŭp’s poems about Korean people as well.

As Kim Si-sŭp observes the difficult, exhausting, work the Japanese have on the coast, he feels sympathetic and grasps the reason why they moved from their home to his country. And finally, in the last lines, he expresses his satisfaction that they subjected themselves to the Korean king’s civilizing, transforming, influence (*wanghwa*). Thanks to the king’s wise policy and benevolent care, Kim Si-sŭp expects that these Japanese are getting educated and civilized (*kyohwa*). Again, like in the above-

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31 Si-sŭp Kim, *(Kugyŏk) Maewŏltang chip*, 277. The T’aewharu tower was in Ulsan.

discussed work, this poem indirectly includes the thought: now the Japanese may/do not cause trouble.

The praise of the Korean king is indeed remarkable for a dissident like Kim Sisüp. By wang and chusang in this poem, of course, the contemporary King Sejo is referred to. But in fact, this is not the only case where Kim Sisüp differentiates between Sejo’s achievements in foreign policy and his bloody, illegitimate usurpation of the throne. Even if Kim Sisüp was opposed to Sejo in inner-political questions, he stood firm with the king when it came to issues of foreign relations.

After having realized his position in the border area, taken a look at the Japanese village and pondered about the relationship between “us and the others”, Kim Sisüp finally had an encounter with the ‘Other’ on an individual level.

_Talk with a Japanese monk, Senior priest Shun Yǒ il tong sǔng Chun changuo hwa_ 與日東僧俊長老話

Having departed far from his home,
    his thoughts are occupied with solitariness.
The old Buddha statue and wild flowers
    disperse the loneliness.
In an iron kettle he brews the tea
    preparing it for the guest to drink,
In a fire pot of unglazed clay he fans the embers
    to burn incense.
It is deep spring, the moonlight over the sea
    comes through the door of mugwort stalks.
Rain has stopped, a wild fawn
    is tramping across the herb’s shoots.
The state of meditation and the traveller’s feelings
    are refined and noble.
Nothing disturbs our friendly talk
    all this bright night long.^33

^33 Sisüp Kim, (Kugyŏk) Maewŏltang chip, 277.
As the title of the poem indicates, the poem portrays an encounter with a Japanese monk, Head Priest Shun. Besides the information about his name and status, nothing is known about the Priest Shun. Chōrō/changno長老 is the status of a senior priest in Zen Buddhist monasteries. Previous researchers have suggested that the Priest Shun probably was from the Gozan 五山 (Five mountain) system because many of these priests were involved in diplomatic contacts between Japan and Chosŏn, either as compilers of documents or in the function of accompanying missions. It is known that a few Japanese priests also lived in waegwan in Korea.

From the very beginning of the poem, Kim Sisŭp shows sympathy towards the Priest Shun, expressing compassion with the foreigner who has come from a remote country. During the meeting with the guest from abroad, Kim Sisŭp realizes that both of them are travellers and, staying far away from their home, share the same kind of solitary feelings. Gazing at the Buddha statue and wild flowers, however, disperses the weary thoughts of travellers and the loneliness. Both drink tea together and enjoy the meditative atmosphere created by the tea ceremony.

They sit in a simple hut with a door made of mugwort stalks, which serves as the ritual place of the tea ceremony. Thus, they are detached from the world of affluence that exists outside of this hut and which would disturb persons to grasp the ultimate truth. Without any time pressure, everything necessary for the tea ceremony is prepared: slowly, the water for the tea is boiled and fire is laid and fanned in the incense burner. Observing the brewing of the tea and the burning of incense, Kim Sisŭp and Priest Shun separate from everyday life and leave their thoughts about past experiences. Their attention is concentrated on a few simple, yet meaningful objects: the “old” Buddha statue, an iron kettle, a fire pot of “unglazed” clay and “wild” flowers. The image of “wild flowers” implies the idea that they are not cultivated ones. The flowers are

34 Kyŏngho Sim, Kim Sisŭp p’ŭngjon, 279; Chŏnggan Ch’oe, ‘Ilbon Muromati sideo-ŭi ch’oamch’a,’ 168.
35 This fact is reported in the Haedong chegukki, 1471.
probably put naturally in a vase or pot, i.e. not artificially arranged like it 
would have been done in Ikebana. They are admired because of their 
own immanent beauty. The contemplation over these simple, “artless” 
objects generates a deep aesthetic and spiritual experience, and both 
participants of the tea ceremony move into another world. Natural 
phenomena like the moonlight over the sea and rain, as well as the 
passing of seasons (“deep spring”) are observed as they are in their natural 
way. Real landscape comes to be undistinguishable from an imaginary 
one: “a fawn is tramping across herb’s shoots”.36

Jointly experiencing the particular spiritual atmosphere of the tea 
ceremony, Kim Sisúp is impressed by the advanced state of meditation 
achieved by Priest Shun. As he respectfully says at the end of his poem, 
Priest Shun’s state of meditation (sŏn’gyŏng)37 is “refined and noble” 
(adam 雅淡). It is of such a level that both can understand each other 
and talk as friends without any hindrance, all night long.

Starting with Asakawa Noritaka38 in 1930, Japanese and Korean 
researchers have mentioned Kim Sisúp’s encounter with Priest Shun in 
their studies on the origin of the sŏ’ancha (thatched tea hut) ceremony in 
the Muromachi period, the production of pottery in Chosŏn and the 
trade exchange of teacups between Korea and Japan.39 In their studies, 
they hypothesized that the original trend of the sŏ’ancha ceremony 
(草庵) spread from Korea to Japan and that this was connected with 
Kim Sisúp. As I am not an expert in this field, I cannot and will not 
comment on their discussion about the origin and spread of the sŏ’ancha 
ceremony. For this paper, which is focused on studying Kim Sisúp’s 
perception of the ‘Other’, it is important to clarify another point: Who is 
the guest (kaek) and who is the host (chuin)?

36 In later times, the motive of a fawn tramping across herbs was painted on scrolls and 
became an essential element in Japanese tea huts.
37 sŏn (dhyāna): a series of cultivated states of mind which lead to a ‘state of perfect 
equanimitiy and awareness’; kyŏng (viṣaya): The ‘spheres’ of the six senses and their 
objects, comprising colour, form, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations. www.china 
buddhismencyclopedia.com.
38 Noritaka, Asakawa, Fuzan’gama to Tsushū’gama (Kilns in Pusan and on Tsushima). 
Tōkyō: Saikokai, Shōwa 5 [1930], 66.
39 The sŏ’ancha (Korean: ch’oamch’a) ceremony developed in Japan after the 15th 
century. It distinguishes itself by simplicity, in contrast to the previous aristocratic 
tradition of the shōin 書院 (Korean: sŏwŏn) tea ceremony which was focusing on 
refined tea, elegant, colourful paintings and tea cups from Song or Yuan.
In the opinion of early researchers (both Japanese and Koreans), Kim Sisüp acted as host, thus, transmitting the knowledge about the sŏ'ancha ceremony to the Japanese Priest Shun.\(^{40}\)

In an iron kettle I brew the tea
preparing it for the guest to drink,
In a fire pot of unglazed clay I fan the embers
to burn incense.

Recently, the Korean researcher Sim Kyŏngho, however, suggested in his seminal biography of Kim Sisüp that the host is the Japanese Priest Shun.\(^{41}\)

In an iron kettle he brews the tea
preparing it for the guest to drink,
In a fire pot of unglazed clay he fans the embers
to burn incense.

With regard to the linguistic understanding of Kim Sisüp’s poem, Sim Kyŏngho is correct. If we look at the grammar in the Classical Chinese text, we see that there indeed is no marker for any subject change between the first two lines of the poem and the subsequent two lines. As the subject in the first two lines is the Priest Shun, consequently, from the grammatical viewpoint it follows that he is the subject in line three and four, too. Besides, I would add there is also another strong argument for the suggestion that Priest Shun is the subject in the questioned lines. It is related to a practical issue: The place where Kim Sisüp was able to meet the foreign priest was not his home in Kyŏngju.\(^{42}\) So he could not have used his own home/hut for hosting Priest Shun and serving him a tea ceremony. Taking these two arguments (the linguistic and the practical one) into consideration, we have chosen to follow Sim Kyŏngho’s interpretation in our translation of the poem into English.\(^{43}\) There is no option but to choose among the above given English translations because


\(^{41}\) Kyŏngho Sim, Kim Sisüp p’yŏngjŏn, 279-280.

\(^{42}\) Japanese envoys (which might have included priests as well) people were not allowed to travel freely around the country but had to follow certain prescribed routes and time schedules on their way from the ports on the East coast to the capital and back.
English does not allow to leave sentences without any clear subject marker, in contrast to Classical Chinese.

However, if one looks into the Zen Buddhist meaning of the tea ceremony, any of the hitherto suggested interpretations and translations prove to be misleading. The simplicity and the socializing and entertaining features of the tea ceremony level off the differences between host and guest. In other cases, it would concern social differences, but here in Kim Sisūp’s poem, it helps in levelling off ethnic/national differences – between a Korean and a Japanese. The tea ceremony is no ceremony in the original meaning of the word. It is not that ‘one subject conducts a ceremony with the object tea. /…/ There is only tea, a non-dualistic state of mind to which this training method leads like other Zen methods as well.\[44\] In the tea ceremony, a synthesis of arts is created. This artistic product exists just for a moment. In its creation, all senses of man are involved but the dualistic intellect is brought to silence.\[45\] In other words, in the Zen Buddhist tea ceremony, if carried out and experienced appropriately, there is no differentiation between subject (tea brewer) and object (tea). Ultimately, it becomes meaningless who brews the tea – the Japanese priest or Kim Sisūp. Following this Zen-Buddhist meaning, it would be preferable to choose a neutral personal pronoun (English “one”, Swedish and German “man”) or passive verb forms in order to produce a translation of the questioned two lines of Kim Sisūp’s poem, which would be in accordance with the source text in Classical Chinese.

In an iron kettle one brews the tea/ tea is brewed preparing it for the guest to drink.
In a fire pot of unglazed clay one fans the embers/ ember is fanned to burn incense.

Admittedly, such a translation would not be a good poetic rendering in English at all. We have given this working translation in an attempt to render the Zen-Buddhist non-dualistic thinking expressed in the Classical Chinese source text. By jointly taking part in and experiencing the tea ceremony, any differentiation comes to finally be erased: between subject


\[45\] *Lexikon der östlichen Weisheiten*, 62.
and object, host and guest, thinking and sensuality. The indiscriminative Zen-Buddhist thinking makes any differentiation in the ethnic belonging of the participants meaningless.

**Conclusion:**

Our study of a few poems written by Kim Sisûp during his wanderings on the coast of the east sea reveals a number of interesting points about a Korean individual’s encounter with and perception of the Japanese people in mid-15th century. Though being a political outsider, Kim Sisûp kept to certain cultural stereotypes in the perception of the ‘Other’, which, basically, were formed by the Chosôn state’s ideology of a hierarchical order of states. However, Kim Sisûp’s perception of the ‘Other’ also includes some individual notes. His awareness of social issues lets him feel pity for the poor fishermen who have come to the Korean seashore to earn their living. If we follow the order of the poems, we can see that Kim Sisûp in his approach to the ‘Other’ went through several steps: In the first, very suggestively written poem, he realized his position in the border area. In the next poem, he took a careful look at the Japanese village and pondered about the stranger’s mentality. With these initial reflections about the relationship between “us and the others”, it seems Kim Sisûp has prepared himself for a meeting with a foreign individual on closer terms. Sharing the same feeling of loneliness as traveller and having the joint experience of a Zen-Buddhist tea ceremony, Kim Sisûp eventually goes beyond any differentiation in ethnic/national belonging. Kim Sisûp’s last poem about his intimate meeting with the Japanese priest provides a good illustration of the idea put forward by François Hartog and other theorists that travel literature may work as an operation of “translation” aimed at transforming difference into sameness.⁴⁶

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47 Apparently a mistake by the author. Instead of 砥 the first character is 砥 in the name of the Kirimsa monastery (祇林寺) in Kyŏngju.


