Literary Powerhouse from the Social Margins: Poetry Societies of Secondary Status Groups in Late Chosŏn Korea

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The communal composition and recitation of poems, as the marker of cultural distinction, constituted the central activities in the social networking of educated elites throughout premodern Korea. Poetry societies, therefore, had prospered in elite circles until the dawn of the modern period. This literary culture trickled down to nonelites during the late Chosŏn period (1392–1910). Some poetry societies of secondary status groups developed into centers of literary production in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Seoul; prominent *yangban* elites willingly joined them, and their events attracted attention from poets across the country irrespective of their social status.

This article explicates how this cultural leadership by secondary status groups was possible in this particular moment of Korean history despite the rigid social stratification that lasted until the end of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1910. Drawing upon sociological studies by Pierre Bourdieu and Ronald Burt, it focuses on the diverse connecting roles that secondary status groups played in the late Chosŏn bureaucracy. It also discusses how these groups' monopoly on printing technologies, which had been the vocational marker of their social inferiority, fostered *yangban* elites' technological dependency on them when no other outlets for textual production remained available. Filling political, economic, and technological structural gaps, secondary status groups became cultural leaders whom *yangban* elites needed to perpetuate their social domination.

Introduction: Poetry Societies in Premodern Korea

The ability to compose exquisite poems was one of the literary skills that educated elites strove to perfect in premodern Korean society, whose cultural norms were governed by the classical Chinese tradition. While expressing their thoughts and feelings in their poems, they could prove their academic and cultural sophistication by composing impeccable verses following complex rhyming rules. The indispensable role of poetry composition in political communication made it even more important for scholar-officials to learn how to write good poems. Diplomatic protocols were always accompanied by the participants' poems, which embodied both hierarchy and harmony between the two countries involved. The poems exchanged between Chosŏn (1392–1910) and Ming (1368–1644) diplomats on such occasions, for instance, were compiled together as a collection (*Hwanghwa chip* 皇華集).[1] Proficiency in poetry composition thus had both cultural and political significance. Korean

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1. For more details, see Sixiang Wang, "Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea: Knowledge Production and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1392–1592" (PhD diss., Columbia Univ., 2015).

literati were expected to compose and recite poems in flawless form in both private and public settings.

The practice of composing poems using the rhymes and metrical rules of those written by others promoted poetry exchanges that became the ideal mode for elite social networking. Physical and temporal separation between poets did not prohibit this kind of interaction, because they could add on to any poems only if they had composed their own poems by matching the rhymes. Nevertheless, physical gatherings could animate the practice of composition as a group. Poets could work on the same topics simultaneously. They could also compose interlinked poems: each group member could take a turn by using the rhymes of the poem composed by the person right before them.[2] The final product was a series of poems interconnected in both format and content. The oral recitation and aural appreciation of these poems made these meetings more invigorating. Social gatherings for composing poems together thus developed into a popular networking pattern for literati in premodern Korea.

Although we cannot confirm the exact origin of such cultural activities, precedents began to appear in the Koryŏ period (918–1392).[3] Educated male elites of the Chosŏn dynasty continued this tradition and developed poetry societies (*sisa* 詩社) to increase cohesion among the group members while distinguishing themselves from nonelites through a lifestyle saturated with literary refinement. Along with the bifurcation of the elite class into the prominent *yangban* 兩班 and the lesser *chungin* 中人 since the late sixteenth century,[4] this particular mode of social networking trickled down to the secondary status groups during the late Chosŏn period.[5] Poetry societies by secondary status groups particularly developed in the Seoul area, where members worked in government positions requiring special skills such as medicine and interpretation or as petty clerks in diverse offices. The popularity of *chungin* poetry societies peaked in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. *Chungin* poetry societies in Seoul prospered to the extent that *yangban* elites had no qualms about joining them. Emphasizing the diverse ways in which some *yangban* elites supported *chungin* writers in this context, Chŏng Okcha claimed that their literature (*wihang munhak* 委巷文學) could thrive under the aegis of some prominent *yangban* scholars.[6]

2. These interlinked poems communally composed by a group of poets were called *kaenghwasi* 賡和詩. This genre was popular in the eighteenth century during the reigns of Yŏngjo 英祖 (r. 1724–1776) and Chŏngjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800). *Chungin* poets also emulated this genre in their gatherings. For more details, see Chŏng Okcha, *Chosŏn hugi chungin munhwa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchisa, 2003), 232.

3. For instance, Yi Illo 李仁老 (1152–1220) wrote about the Association of the Erudite in the Bamboo Forest (Chungnim kohoe 竹林高會), which he established with Im Ch'un 林椿 (d.u.), O Sejae 吳世才 (1133–?), Cho T'ong 趙通 (d.u.), Hwangbo Hang 黃甫沆 (d.u.), Ham Sun 咸淳 (d.u.), and Yi Tamji 李湛之 (d.u.). See "The Biography of Yi Illo" (*Yi Illo chŏn* 李仁老傳), in *The History of the Koryŏ Dynasty* (Koryŏsa 高麗史), 102.10a–b; Yi Kyubo (1168–1241), "Treatise on the Seven Sages" (*Ch'irhyŏnsŏl* 七賢說), in *Yi Sangguk chip* 21.6a–b.

4. During the late Chosŏn period, the term *chungin* had not served as an umbrella term that included diverse secondary status groups. For instance, *muban* 武班 (military officers) or *hyangni* 鄕吏 (clerks in local magistrate's offices) were not covered by this term. These groups co-existed with *chungin* in its narrow sense, which signified the group of court and urban professionals, such as interpreters, medical practitioners, legal experts, etc., as well as the group of petty clerks in the central government. For this reason, Kyung Moon Hwang refers to all these groups as secondary status groups instead of *chungin*. My usage of *chungin* mostly falls into its narrow definition, although some theoretical reflections on their advantageous positions in social interactions and cultural production are also applicable to other secondary status groups. See Hwang, *Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006).

5. Chŏng Okcha, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," *Han'guk hakpo* 109 (2002): 2–58.

6. Chŏng Okcha, *Chosŏn hugi munhwa undongsa* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1988), 225–26.

Yangban elites' patronization of *chungin* cultural leadership, however, demands more scrutiny. Although *chungin* poets did not develop a subversive culture threatening *yangban* domination, some of them did emphasize how unfair the social status system was by venting their grievances in their poems.[7] *Yangban* elites would have been concerned about these critical voices and wary about helping the *chungin* literary enterprise prosper. The incongruity between social status and degree of literary refinement could also have weakened their sociopolitical leadership, which was rooted in the Confucian classical tradition. Here, Norbert Elias's study of the ways manners and etiquette trickled down in early modern Europe offers a substantial basis for analysis. Elias demonstrates that nonelites imitated elite culture when they perceived that upward social mobility was possible, as when the French bourgeoisie emulated the lifestyle of the nobility; but when the chances for upward social mobility were negligible, as in the case of the German middle-class intelligentsia, nonelites tended to create their own subversive culture.[8] This seemingly persuasive analysis of sociocultural interactions between elites and nonelites, however, does not apply to the study of Chosŏn poetry societies. The *chungin* poetic practices, modeled after elite culture, prospered in spite of the impossibility of upward social mobility; the rigid social stratification lasted until the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. *Yangban* elites, moreover, shared their literary heritage with *chungin* groups at the risk of eroding their own cultural prestige and social privileges.[9] How can we understand this cultural partnership between *yangban* elites and secondary status groups?

This essay will address this question by examining the development of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society 松石園詩社, generally regarded as the most successful poetry society led by secondary status groups, at the turn of the nineteenth century. By examining diverse factors that contributed to the society's success, this article will demonstrate that cultural leadership by secondary status groups does not necessarily attest to the destabilization of the social status system. Rather, it was instrumental in fostering the mutual dependency between *yangban* elites and their *chungin* counterparts in political, economic, and technological areas, which coordinated the best interests of the upper echelons of Chosŏn society. Unlike in early modern Europe as analyzed by Elias, in Korea the converging cultural practices between elites and secondary status groups did not lead to the closure of the sociopolitical gap between them.

CHUNGIN AS CONNECTORS

The binary social status system in the early Chosŏn law code—the commoner group (*yangin* 良人) and the lowly group (*ch'ŏnin* 賤人)—was during the second half of the dynasty divided into four groups: the aristocracy (*yangban*), the secondary group (*chungin*), the commoners (*sangin* 常人), and the lowborn (*ch'ŏnin*).[10] According to the claims of *chungin* themselves, which we can corroborate through analysis of their genealogies, this group seems to have developed into a separate class in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth

7. For instance, Ku Chagyun argued that the *chungin* class could develop a "counterculture" against *yangban* elites based upon their administrative dominance and the accumulation of wealth. See Ku, *Chosŏn p'yŏngmin munhaksa* (Seoul: Minhaksa, 1974).

8. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 5–43.

9. Sixiang Wang made a similar point in his discussion of the role of professional interpreters in the Sino-Korean relationship during the early Chosŏn period. See Wang, "The Sounds of Our Country: Interpreters, Linguistic Knowledge, and the Politics of Language in Early Chosŏn Korea," in *Rethinking East Asian Languages, Vernaculars, and Literacies, 1000–1900*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 58–95, especially 80.

10. Chŏng, *Chosŏn hugi chungin munhwa yŏn'gu*, 11–24.

century.[11] The term initially referred to technical experts barred from moving up to key government positions filled by high-ranking officials. *Chungin*, however, served as an umbrella term that included diverse secondary status groups. Because the Chosŏn legal system prohibited the secondary sons of aristocratic families, who were offspring of *yangban* fathers and commoner or slave mothers, from taking the civil service examinations, they entered low-ranking government positions by taking miscellaneous exams for various specialties, which included translation, medicine, law, arithmetic, and astrology.[12] Beginning in the late fourteenth century, even within the same elite clans, those who took official positions in the central government began to split from their clansmen who worked as low-ranking clerks in the local offices of their hometowns. Such divisions of lineage groups within the same clan based upon different positions in the Chosŏn bureaucracy had taken root since the late sixteenth century and caused the formation of one *chungin* branch.[13] Another vocational group that joined the *chungin* class was military officers. Eugene Park has shown that the military examination system during the late Chosŏn period satisfied the status aspiration of those who were marginalized from the political center.[14] As these positions had become hereditary toward the end of the dynasty, technical experts, petty government clerks, secondary sons from *yangban* families, military officers, and provincial clerks converged into one class. Sandwiched between *yangban* elites and commoners, the *chungin* class positioned themselves at the border between the downgraded *yangban* and commoners striving to move up the social ladder.[15]

Eligibility for government positions in the Chosŏn bureaucracy in this way mirrored the social hierarchy. The bureaucratic eligibility reserved for *yangban* aristocrats violated the merit-oriented selection process in the civil service examination system based upon the notion of Confucian egalitarianism.[16] The Chosŏn bureaucracy "reinforced" and "refined" the hereditary social status system by perpetuating the *yangban* aristocrats' domination of political power and social prestige.[17] The result was a mixture of merit and hereditary qualifications instead of the pure rationality, meritocracy, and egalitarianism expected in Confucian political philosophy.[18] The restrictive bureaucratic structure and its subsequent closure to nonaristocrats, however, did not necessarily mean that they had no access to Confucian education and the literary Chinese classical tradition. The genealogical origins shared by *yangban* aristocrats and some *chungin* groups partly explain their intertwined cultural heritage. Despite the vocational limitation in the central government, these *chungin* groups continued to cultivate literary skills and classical knowledge in order to perpetuate their positions in the lower bureaucracy and maintain exclusive marriage networks among themselves.[19] These activities sustained *chungin* men's aspiration for upward social mobility and distinguished them from nonelites.

11. Chŏng, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," 6.

12. *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 1.66a–b.

13. Yi Sugŏn, *Yŏngnam sarimp'a ŭi hyŏngsŏng* (Kyŏngbuk Kyŏngsan-si: Yŏngnam taehakkyo minjok munhwa yŏn'guso, 1979), 2 and 148.

14. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600–1894* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2007).

15. Chŏng, *Chosŏn hugi chungin munhwa yŏn'gu*, 16.

16. Hwang, *Beyond Birth*, 6.

17. Hwang, *Beyond Birth*, 1 and 24.

18. James B. Palais, "Confucianism and the Aristocratic/Bureaucratic Balance in Korea," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44 (1984): 427–68, especially 437 and 446.

19. Chŏng, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," 6.

The nature of government positions occupied by *chungin* groups also demanded literacy in practical genres.[20] Record-keeping and the production of official reports were the most significant duties of petty clerks in various government offices. Although *yangban* aristocrats intended to discriminate against the *chungin* class by relegating them to clerical positions, their own tendency to shun and denigrate administrative work while focusing on policy making forced the *chungin* clerks to take charge of the daily operation of government offices.[21] This situation differed starkly from the increase of clerks in Western Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. Ben Kafka argues that the influx of massive amounts of documents into the government led ministers to hire more clerks at lower salaries to share the administrative burden; the consequence was a diminished quality of personnel.[22] In the Chosŏn bureaucracy, however, the *yangban* elites did not share the clerical work with *chungin* men but freed themselves from it. Thus, the *chungin* class monopolized the management of paperwork, which made *yangban* elites dependent upon them. The administrative literacy attained while handling various documents in their jobs allowed *chungin* men to venture on to classical literature, which brought them cultural distinction.

The hereditary technical positions that some *chungin* groups dominated also required them to study specialized genres in their own fields, such as medicine, astrology, mathematics, law, and foreign languages. Knowledge of one specialized subject did not automatically translate into comprehensive knowledge of the Confucian classics and classical Chinese literature. The embrace of reading and studying as part of their vocation, however, equipped them with practical literacy in literary Chinese, with which they could deepen their knowledge about the classical Chinese literary tradition.

Some specialized knowledge also positioned *chungin* men better than *yangban* aristocrats both politically and culturally. For instance, with knowledge of spoken Chinese and Chinese clerical writing (*imun* 吏文), official interpreters directly interacted with contemporary Chinese scholar-officials, whereas *yangban* officials had to rely on their linguistic mediation.[23] When this advantage was accompanied by literary talent and cultural refinement, the interpreters could outpace their *yangban* superiors in forming networks with Chinese intellectuals. Yi Sangjŏk 李尚迪 (1804–1865), who maintained close relationships with many prominent Chinese intellectuals of the period, exemplifies this. He cultivated his networks with Chinese intellectuals through diverse cultural interactions during his frequent visits to Beijing as an official interpreter. This bond across borders culminated in the publication of the collection of 115 letters that Yi exchanged with twenty-nine Chinese literati (*Haerin ch'ŏksŏ* 海隣尺書).[24] It is also well known that he brought a painting (*Sehando* 歲寒圖) by his mentor, Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856), to Beijing and received enthusiastic comments on it from sixteen Chinese scholars.[25] Access to practical tools (spoken Chinese) and refined cultural sensibility (classical literature and antiquity) empowered some *chungin* scholars to occupy a central position in high culture during the late Chosŏn period. When

20. Ch'ŏn Pyŏngsik, *Chosŏn hugi wihang sisa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1991), 31.

21. Ch'ŏn, *Chosŏn hugi wihang sisa yŏn'gu*, 220.

22. Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 92.

23. For a discussion about the significance of Chinese clerical writing, see Wang, "Sounds of Our Country," 68, and Chŏng Taham, "Yŏmal sŏnch'o ŭi tong'asia chilsŏ wa Chosŏn esŏ ŭi hanŏ, hanidu, Hunmin chŏng'ŭm," *Han'guksa hakpo* 36 (2009): 269–305.

24. Chŏng, *Chosŏn hugi chungin munhwa yŏn'gu*, 94.

25. Sung Lim Kim, "Kim Chŏng-hŭi and Sehando: The Evolution of a Late Chosŏn Korean Masterpiece," *Archives of Asian Art* 56 (2006): 31–60, especially 42–49, 53–58.

equipped with sophisticated tastes, the *chungin* men on the fringe of Chosŏn bureaucracy were entitled to become "connectors" interlinking and hybridizing diverse cultural groups.[26]

The position as connectors provided some *chungin* men with rare opportunities for money making in Chosŏn society, where *yangban* elites monopolized material wealth based upon their domination of landholdings and agricultural production. The official interpreters, for example, were able to make immense profits through international trade. The Chosŏn court, instead of covering travel expenses, allowed envoys to China to take commodities such as ginseng and silver to sell.[27] With no direct trade between Qing China and Tokugawa Japan until the late seventeenth century, the Chosŏn interpreters could reap handsome profits by acting as intermediaries between the two countries. These wealthy translators materially supported the poetry societies of their own class by financing publication projects and social gatherings.[28] As direct trade resumed between China and Japan in the late seventeenth century, however, the room for making profit through international trade shrank, and interpreters competed for reduced trade opportunities with private merchants as well as among themselves.[29]

The place of *chungin* on the fringe of elite culture and the bureaucratic structure positioned them in what Ronald Burt calls "structural holes," which made them indispensable intermediaries between the *yangban* elites and the rest of society as well as among men of letters across East Asia. Burt demonstrates that people connecting across groups are more familiar with alternative ways of thinking or behaving, because opinions and behaviors are more homogeneous within groups than between them. He thus argues that brokerage across structural holes offers a vision of options otherwise unseen, which makes the brokerage the mechanism of social capital.[30] Likewise, *chungin* men played the role of intermediaries connecting elites to other groups, which included both nonelites within the Chosŏn society and men of letters in neighboring countries. Their familiarity with diverse cultures across class boundaries and national borders increased the possibility that they could become savvy creators of new trends. Their position at the sociocultural crossroads, moreover, allowed them to amass great wealth, which would not have been possible otherwise in Chosŏn society. The combination of cultural sophistication and financial assets elevated *chungin* men to lead a new literary initiative in late Chosŏn Korea.

THE FORMATION OF THE SONGSŎGWŎN POETRY SOCIETY

Since the early seventeenth century, *chungin* poets in Seoul had organized their own poetry societies, and some of them began to attain fame with their literary talent. For instance, Ch'oe Kinam 崔奇男 (1586–?), who was a slave in Sin Iksŏng's 申翊聖 (1588–1644) residence, gained attention from Sin's father, Sin Hŭm 申欽 (1566–1628), due to his poetic talent. Sin Hŭm appreciated Ch'oe's poems so highly that he widely circulated them among the elite.[31] With Sin's help, Ch'oe could work as a clerk in the court and in 1643 even accompanied

26. Malcom Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2000), 34–36 and 46–59.

27. This kind of commodities for travel expenses were called "eight bags (*p'alp'o* 八包)," because each envoy could bring eight bags of ginseng, each of which weighed 10 kŭn 斤 (0.6 kg). For more about the *p'alp'o* system, see *Sukchong sillok* 6.47a (8/23/1677).

28. Hŏ Kyŏngjin, "Samch'ŏng sisa wa 'Yukka chabyŏng'," *Han'guk hakpo* 53 (1988): 54–78, at 55.

29. Kang Myŏnggwan, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1997), 82–83.

30. Burt, "Structural Holes and Good Ideas," *American Journal of Sociology* 110 (2004): 349–99.

31. Yi Sangjin, "Ch'ogi yŏhang sisŏnjip yŏn'gu: 'Yukka chabyŏng,' 'Haedong yuju' e taehayŏ," *Han'guk hanmunhak yŏn'gu* 14 (1991): 223–57, at 226.

the Chosŏn envoy to Japan, where his poems became very popular. Ch'oe along with five other poets from secondary status groups organized a poetry society in the Samch'ŏng area of Seoul. Because most members were wealthy through their vocations as translators or medical doctors, the flair of their gatherings matched those of *yangban* elites.[32] Their poetry anthology, *Recitation of Miscellanies by Six Poets* (*Yukka chabyŏng* 六家雜詠), was put together in 1660.[33] Many of their poems lamented the gap between their literary talents and the discrimination against their low social status.[34] Despite these grievances, some *chungin* poets closely interacted with *yangban* elites. The Naksongnu Poetry Society 洛誦樓詩社, organized by Kim Ch'anghŭp 金昌翕 (1653–1722) from the prominent Andong Kim clan, for example, welcomed such *chungin* poets as Hong Set'ae 洪世泰 (1653–1725) and Ch'oe Tongp'yo 崔東標 (d.u.).[35] They, however, only played fringe roles in *yangban* poetry societies. The fact that a few *chungin* poets joined *yangban* poetry societies did not elevate their cultural standing across the board. Exuberant cultural interactions between *yangban* elites and *chungin* did not take place until the establishment of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society in the late eighteenth century.

Formed in 1786 by a group of thirteen Seoul *chungin* men, the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society was different from its predecessors in that most of its members worked as petty clerks in the central government. Originally called the Okkye Poetry Society 玉溪詩社 after a creek on Inwang mountain, around which most of the thirteen founding members resided, the society gathered regularly for poetry composition as a group. Although there were some changes in the core membership, it did not exceed around fifteen people.[36] As shown in poetry societies organized by *yangban* aristocrats or their secondary sons, shared social status and age figured prominently in membership to Okkye.[37] The members' concentrated residency in the central Seoul area also helped them to establish cohesive networks among themselves. They founded this association and decided to meet once a month because they believed that only friendship through literature could last forever.[38] The early participants kept their in-house activities exclusively among themselves. For instance, the documentation about the operations of the society was not to be circulated to nonmembers.[39] The members also ensured that their ties built upon mutual trust and shared ethical principles. The communal literary activities would enhance the members' moral consciousness, and vice versa.[40] All members were to rectify other members' ignominious behavior. If any member conducted himself dis-

32. Hŏ, "Samch'ŏng sisa wa 'Yukka chabyŏng'," 55.

33. These five poets include Chŏng Namsu 鄭枏壽 (d.u.), Nam Ŭngch'im 南應琛 (1596–?), Chŏng Yenam 鄭禮男 (1578–?), Kim Hyoil 金孝一 (d.u.), and Ch'oe Taerip 崔大立 (d.u.).

34. Yi, "Ch'ogi yŏhang sisŏnjip yŏn'gu," 238.

35. Chin Chaegyo, "Yijo hugi munye ŭi kyosŏp kwa konggan ŭi chaebalgyŏn," *Hanmun kyoyuk yŏn'gu* 21 (2003): 499–530, at 508.

36. The manuscript album of 1791 preserved in the British Library put together the paintings of ten scenes of Okkye along with poems accompanying them. It states that one of thirteen original members could not actively participate in the activities of this poetry society due to the worldly affairs. As three others joined, it was celebrated with this manuscript album. The album includes two addenda of 1804 and 1818, which show that the core members slightly shrank to thirteen and twelve for the respective years. See *Okkyesa* (British Library, Or. 11356).

37. An Taehoe, "18-segi sisa ŭi hyŏnhwang kwa chŏn'gae yangsang," *Kojŏn munhak yŏn'gu* 44 (2013): 421–50, at 421 and 426–27.

38. *Iŏm chip* 11.12a–13b.

39. "Okkyesa sugye sich'ŏp," quoted from Chŏng, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," 12–13. Also see Pak Yunmuk, "Okkye sisa sŏ," in *Chonjae chip* (Han'guk munjip ch'onggan, vol. 292, 449a); Hŏ Kyŏngjin, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa* (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1997), 567.

40. "會以文詞，結以信義" in *Okkyesa* 玉溪社, quoted in Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 181.

honorably, all the others would discuss how he should be punished in the group.[41] In spite of its identity as an association for poetry composition, the earlier development of the Okkye Poetry Society also focused on representing its members as bona fide Confucians striving to embody moral principles. For the first five years, this poetry society remained low-key and exclusively for its members, in stark contrast to its bustling public events in later years.

After Ch'ŏn Sugyŏng 千壽慶 (?–1818) took over the leadership in 1791 the Okkye Poetry Society developed into the major literary platform on the national stage. With this transition, the gatherings were held at Ch'ŏn's place—Songsŏgwŏn (The Garden of Pine Trees and Stones). Accordingly, this poetry society was renamed Songsŏgwŏn. Not only did its members inherit the spirit of earlier *chungin* poets experimenting with new poetic styles imported from contemporary Qing China,[42] this poetry society also actively published the poems they composed. The album of collected poems (*Okkye ajip ch'ŏp* 玉溪雅集帖), compiled also in 1791, displays the cultural flair of this group. Another album (*Okkye ch'ŏngyu ch'ŏp* 玉溪清遊帖), put together after the gathering in the sixth month of the same year, also included paintings portraying the meeting along with the poems composed on that occasion. Kim Hongdo, the renowned master of genre painting, painted one of them, although he was not a member of Songsŏgwŏn. Later in 1797, the poem celebrating this gathering was added to this painting by Ma Sŏngrin 馬聖麟 (d.u.)—a famous *chungin* man of culture. Kim's painting and Ma's poem added to it show that the news about the gatherings in Songsŏgwŏn and the poems composed at them were widely circulated.[43] Producing and sharing texts and images held vital significance as the gatherings' central activity. Recounting how it operated, Pak Yunmuk 朴允墨 (1771–1849) pointed out that "people always composed poems upon gatherings; these poems were always compiled as books" 會必有詩, 詩又成卷.[44] Physical gatherings, the collective creation of poems, and their coordinated materialization in book form contributed to both the cohesiveness of networks among the members and the fame of this poetry society in the broader cultural landscape.[45]

The number of participants also expanded remarkably under Ch'ŏn's leadership, in contrast to the exclusive coterie earlier. Poets across the country joined diverse Songsŏgwŏn events regardless of their social status. A poem composed by Chang Hon 張混 (1759–1828) in 1812 shows that about fifty people gathered for one meeting.[46] In the society's peak days, the number of participants at meetings never dropped below thirty to fifty.[47] It became

41. Chŏng, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," 13.

42. For the new poetic movement led by *chungin* poets in the mid-eighteenth century, see An Taehoe, "Paekt'ap sip'a ŭi yŏn'gu: Yi Tŏngmu, Yu Tŭkkong, Pak Chega rŭl chungsim ŭro," *Yŏlsang kojŏn yŏn'gu* 1 (1988): 150–244. However, *chungin* poetry collections mostly include poems in contemporary style (*kŭnch'esi* 近體詩) favored by the *yangban* elites, whereas the collections of individual *chungin* poets experiment with various poetic styles. The editors of poetry collections could have chosen this particular style in consideration of the *yangban* readership. See Ch'ŏn, *Chosŏn hugi wihang sisa yŏn'gu*, 113.

43. This album is owned by a private collector and has been exhibited in several museums, which include the Handok Museum of Medicine and Pharmacy and Gyeonggi Province Museum. Both museums have lost contact with the collector, so I could not get permission to include an image of Kim Hongdo's painting. For more details about this album, see Hŏ Kyŏngjin, "Chungin chisigin tŭri kkum kkuŏttŏn kongdongch'e," *Sŏul Sinmun*, December 7, 2007.

44. "Preface to the History of Okkye Poetry Society" (*Okkye si sa sŏ* 玉溪詩史序), in *Collection of Pak Yunmuk's Writings* (*Chonjae chip* 存齋集), vol. 23. See http://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=MO#/dir/node?dataId=ITKC_MO_0606A_0240_010_0100.

45. For a detailed discussion about the concerted composition of poems, see Ch'ŏn, *Chosŏn hugi wihang sisa yŏn'gu*, 86.

46. Hŏ, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa*, 177–78; Ch'ŏn, *Chosŏn hugi wihang sisa yŏn'gu*, 86.

47. *Hŭijo ilsa*, ha (下).3b.

impossible to cook meals for them with the kitchen facilities of Songsŏgwŏn.[48] The *chungin* biographers of the nineteenth century recorded that there was no day when gatherings did not happen at Ch'ŏn's place.[49] Yu Chaegŏn 劉在建 (1793–1880) commented that people considered it a high honor to have their names included on the roster of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society.[50] Cho Hŭiryong 趙熙龍 (1789–1866) also pointed out that poets across the country considered it shameful not to join its events regardless of their degree of poetic talent. The popularity of Songsŏwŏn made joining its meetings a significant ritual for poets of the period. Cho further reflected that he could not imagine how hard it must have been to lead Songsŏgwŏn, as there were very few people in history who could gather friends only with writings.[51]

THE ART OF COORDINATION

Under Ch'ŏn's leadership, the society coordinated a national community of letters that had a pervasive impact on the literary culture of the period. The opening of events to nonmembers regardless of their social status and background marked the most distinctive change. The grand meeting in 1793, organized to imitate Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) poetry gathering at the Orchid Pavilion (Ch. *Lanting shihui* 蘭亭詩會), was a turning point in its history.[52] In contrast to such gatherings before, *yangban* elites began to contribute to the publication project that was to celebrate this event. The members invited Sin T'aekkwŏn 申宅權 (d.u.), a *yangban* aristocrat well known for his scholarship, to write a panegyric for the collection of poems composed on this occasion (*Okkye kyech'uk sangch'un sich'uk* 玉溪癸丑賞春詩軸). Considering the exclusive circulation of internal documents among members in the earlier stage of this poetry society, it was a remarkable change in both their authorship and readership.

Chungin poets, however, had often collaborated with and solicited tributes from prominent *yangban* scholar-officials for the publication of their collected poems. Hong Set'ae, for instance, decided to compile about 230 poems by forty-eight *chungin* poets into the collection titled *Remaining Pearls of Korea* (*Haedong yuju* 海東遺珠) in 1712, because Kim Ch'anghyŏp 金昌協 (1651–1708), a prominent *yangban* scholar-official, encouraged him to do so. In his preface to this collection, Hong exhibited ambivalent views about *chungin* poetry in the society's rigid status system. He claimed that the enactment of emotions in language becomes poetry, in which there is no distinction between high and low. At the same time, however, he stated that the ordinary scholars in narrow streets (meaning *chungin*) are inspired and dance at the bottom of society only when the *yangban* scholar-officials recite poems at the top.[53] While implying that the innate literary talents of *chungin* poets were equal to those of *yangban*, he confirmed *chungin* subordination to the elites in terms of cultural initiatives.

Folk Songs of the Splendid Period (*Sodae p'ungyo* 昭代風謠), a large collection of 685 poems composed by 162 nonelite poets and published in 1737, also borrowed three *yangban*

48. Hŏ, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa*.

49. Yu Chaegŏn, *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok*, tr. and ed. Silsi Haksa Kojŏn Munhak Yŏn'guso (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1997), 324; Cho Hŭiryong, "Hosan'gi," in *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok, Hosan waesa happon*, ed. Hosan'gi in Han'gukhak munhŏn yŏn'guso (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1974), 540.

50. Yu, *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok*, 324.

51. Cho, "Hosan'gi."

52. Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 184–85.

53. *Yuha chip*, kwŏn chi ku, "Haedong yuju sŏ"; see http://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=MO#/dir/node?dataId=ITKC_MO_0440A_0100_020_0040.

elites' voices to place this publication in the preexisting literary tradition.[54] In one preface, O Kwang'un, censor-general at the time, elaborated on the value of the poems compared to those written by *yangban* elites.

> Songs [*yo* 謠] reveal the ways people transform wind [*p'ung* 風] in nature into sounds. These sounds, amounting to nature itself, reflect both human nature and emotions, which can be either turbid or flourishing [depending on circumstances]. … The tunes of Zhou-dynasty China [1046–771 BCE] were all derived from ordinary people, so they were completely natural. After the Han period [220 BCE–221 CE], the tunes mostly came from scholar-officials; thus, they were not completely natural. … Scholar-officials could not take up creating [delightful] tunes and songs [due to their official duties]; thus, the narrow and dirty back streets and poor households sometimes became ideal environments [for this task]. Because the scholar-officials of later periods focused on the civil service examinations, they could not make their tunes complete. … Only people of our country from [narrow] alleys [meaning *chungin*] do not have to distract their minds with preparation for the civil service examination, from which they are excluded by national law. Their birth in bustling Seoul also saved them from the isolation of the provinces. Thus, they play around in poetry societies and sing the culture.[55]

Although O apparently trumpets the cultural and moral superiority of *chungin* poets, it is erroneous to infer that *yangban* scholar-officials like him relinquished their cultural supremacy. In his own poem placed before all the others, Ko Siŏn 高時彦 (1671–1734), a *chungin* poet who compiled and edited this collection, revealed an ambivalent stance about *chungin* poems vis-à-vis *yangban* poems. Although social status was artificially made, he stated, the Heaven-bestowed beautiful sounds were meant to echo together as one regardless of social stratification.[56] At the same time he claimed that this collection would pair with *Selected Writings of the East* (*Tongmunsŏn* 東文選), the collection of poems composed by ruling elites from the Silla kingdom (57 BCE?–935) to the early Chosŏn period. Compiled by the royal order of King Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 1469–1494), it included 4,302 poems by about five hundred poets. Twenty-three court ministers joined the editing process, and the final product amounted to 133 fascicles. In other words, this collection glorified the literary high culture of *yangban* elites that had continued throughout Korean history regardless of dynastic changes. By making this work a reference point in evaluating his own collection of *chungin* poems, Ko appears to have taken the cultural supremacy of *yangban* elites for granted and internalized this given frame. The endorsements written by *yangban* scholar-officials, in this regard, did not harm their authority at all. To the contrary, such patronizing gestures would entrench the cultural hierarchy, reflecting the social status system in a more egregious manner. The cultural partnership between *yangban* and *chungin* was possible only when *chungin* men performed their cultural inferiority, which reaffirmed the existing social status system.

What then made the partnership between *yangban* and *chungin* special in the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society? Unlike its predecessors, who opposed and internalized social discrimination at the same time, the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society made social stratification ambiguous by expanding the bounds of its membership both vertically and horizontally. After Ch'ŏn Sugyŏng took over, the society held biannual poetry composition contests in spring and fall to accommodate all people who could not join the regular meetings. Because they welcomed poets irrespective of their social status, these contests were called "white wars" (*paekchŏn* 白

54. These three *yangban* scholar-officials include O Kwangun 吳光運 (1689–1745), Cho Myŏnggyo 趙命教 (1687–1753), and Yun Kwangŭi 尹光毅 (1695–?).

55. O Kwangun, "Sodae p'ungyo sŏ," in *Yaksan man'go* 211.47b.

56. Ko Siŏn, "Sŏ Sodae p'ungyo kwŏnsu," in *Sodae p'ungyo*; see http://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1772509&cid=49394&categoryId=49394.

戰), which meant war fought without weapons, as the poets competed only with their literary talents. Pak Yunmuk described it as "war among men of virtue" (*kunja chi chaeng* 君子之爭), fought by the "righteous army from the bastion of literary culture" (*saru chi ŭibyŏng* 詞壘之義兵).[57] The contests were held in the open field around the Lotus Pond (Yŏndang 蓮塘) in eastern Seoul. Several hundred people from across the country assembled. Participants who had the means brought additional lunches for destitute poets who could not afford their own meals. The participants drew lots to be divided into two groups: northern and southern. Those who chose the theme for the southern group were to use the rhyme chosen by the northern group, and vice versa. When the poetry scrolls were all collected, they "piled up to the height of the hip of a cow." A slave delivered them to the most renowned writer of the period for evaluation and ranking. Both high-ranking scholar-officials and celebrated *yangban* writers considered it an honor to serve as referees. After the winner's name was announced, the scroll containing his poem was circulated so widely across the city that it was frayed when the winner got it back. Because people considered it very important to attend this contest, even if the travel expenses made them go broke, they did not regret it. When the patrols caught people after curfew, they were released if they said they were participating in this poetry contest.[58] Even with the acknowledgment of a certain degree of dramatization, this panegyric description shows that all participants had to follow the same rules for poetry composition; talent counted as the only criterion to win honors. This mode of coordination completely differed from piggybacking on the prestige and fame of some *yangban* patrons.

Despite the described festive atmosphere, the above account written by Yi Kyŏngmin 李慶民 (1814–1883) does not clearly explain how the mobilization of poets nationwide was possible. It was unprecedented that several hundred poets across the country got together in one place at the same time to compete. Appropriating the communicative methods developed by elite groups was essential in this process. Yi's record shows that the Songsŏgwŏn members relied on established modes of communication to reach potential participants. The first task for the organizers of the poetry composition contests was to "issue a document" (*palmun* 發文).[59] This particular document's genre was a "circular letter" (*t'ongmun* 通文) that announced the details about the upcoming events. Circular letters were exchanged between groups of people to disseminate a variety of information or to mobilize them into collective action. The scholars affiliated with local Confucian academies had widely used them since as early as the mid-sixteenth century as they engaged with one another on diverse topics, both academic and political.[60] By the eighteenth century, usage of such letters trickled down to nonelites, due to their effectiveness in mobilizing groups of people.[61] In particular, the secondary sons of *yangban* families, *sŏŏl* 庶孼, actively utilized circular letters in rallying their groups to protest social discrimination against them.[62] For instance, a group of *sŏŏl* men

57. "Postscript for the Album of White Wars" (*Paekchŏn ch'ŏp pal* 白戰帖跋), in *Collection of Pak Yunmuk's Writings* (*Chonjae chip* 存齋集), vol. 23. See http://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=MO#dir/node?grpId=&itemId=MO&gubun=book&depth=5&cate1=Z&cate2=&dataGubun=%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85%EC%A0%95%EB%B3%B4&dataId=ITKC_MO_0606A_0240_030_0030.

58. *Hŭijo ilsa*, ha.3b–4a.

59. *Hŭijo ilsa*, ha.3b–4a.

60. Hwisang Cho, "Circular Letters in Chosŏn Society: Writing to Publicize Opinions," in *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392–1910*, ed. JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009), 100–102.

61. Hwisang Cho, "The Epistolary Brush: Letter Writing and Power in Chosŏn Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 75 (2016): 1055–81, especially 1070–71 and 1075–77.

62. Chŏng, *Chosŏn hugi munhwa undongsa*, 223–24. Sun Joo Kim claims that the *chungin* group in general protested the state law barring them from high-ranking positions. She points out that the *sŏŏl* groups emphasized

from Kyŏngsang province submitted a memorial to the throne demanding equal standing in the local societies with *yangban* elites, which bore more than three thousand signatures.[63] In the early nineteenth century, they succeeded in coordinating 9,996 people across the country to sign the joint memorial that they submitted to the throne for the same reason.[64] This kind of petition drive required well-developed networks on the local, regional, and national levels, which were interlinked through multilevel epistolary practices.[65] The Songsŏgwŏn also utilized this sophisticated mechanism of communication to reach nationwide networks of poets, regardless of their social status.

The *chungin* poets' appropriation of circular letters goes back to their positions in structural holes. Being on the border between *yangban* elites and commoners allowed them to import whatever resources or knowledge that might improve their sociocultural standing from both sides. As brokers, they appropriated the circular letters used by Confucian elites for their own mobilization to organize new cultural events. Organizational creativity amplified the local customs created by the members of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society into national spectacles. Success depended on repurposing the existing communicative mode for a new cultural enterprise. The result was a new literary culture dominated by secondary status groups.

COMPLICITY IN POLITICO-ECONOMIC FIELDS

This raises the question of how *yangban* elites tolerated the ascendancy of *chungin* poets and willingly joined the Songsŏwŏn events along with other participants from across the country. With no drastic overhaul in poetic styles and literary trends, the changes in nonliterary fields could have influenced the mode of poetic production in this period. In this respect, the political and economic collusion between the Songsŏwŏn members and the *yangban* class deserves detailed examination.

Different from previous *chungin* poetry societies, where the dominant roles were played by technical clerks such as interpreters and medical doctors, the Songsŏwŏn was the literary association for the petty clerks in the central government. Whereas *chungin* technical clerks genealogically diverged from the elite clans, the petty clerks mostly came from among the commoners and even slaves.[66] These commoners and slaves could reach the lower rungs of bureaucracy through the recommendations of prominent elite families after serving them as servants (*kyŏmin* 傔人) for many years.[67] The *kyŏmin* performed mundane and trivial tasks, from preparing tea or medicine to taking care of their masters' bedding and table settings. Their duties also involved writing practices such as sending and receiving letters on behalf of their masters. Some of them exhibited exceptional literary talent that elevated their standing in the interactions with their masters. For instance, Hong Ponghan 洪鳳漢 (1713–1778), a

their talents and merit, whereas other *chungin* technical specialists underscored their clan origins from pure scholar-official (*sajok* 士族) ancestry. The *chungin* groups intended to distinguish themselves from *sŏŏl*, whose blood lines were tainted by their nonelite mothers. This argument holds true for some *chungin* groups formed in the early Chosŏn period. However, it neglects the complexity surrounding the issue, particularly that the secondary sons of *yangban* families had joined the *chungin* class at least during the early Chosŏn period, as the state law only allowed them to take government positions as technical specialists. See Sun Joo Kim, "Fragmented: The T'ongch'ŏng Movement by Marginalized Status Groups in Late Chosŏn Korea," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 68 (2008): 135–68, especially 156. Also see n. 12 for details on the Chosŏn law about this issue.

63. *Yŏngjo sillok* 119.41b (12/28/1772).

64. *Sunjo sillok* 26.27b–31a (7/25/1823).

65. Cho, "Epistolary Brush," 1070–73.

66. Kang Myŏnggwan, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," *Taedong munhak yŏn'gu* 25 (1990): 109–47, at 115.

67. Kang, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," 147.

leading political figure of the Noron faction in the eighteenth century, hired a *kyŏmin* named An Suuk 安守旭 (d.u.) who was exceptionally good at drafting various texts. Hong habitually consulted An in writing personal letters as well as official reports to government offices and even memorials to the throne.[68] These *kyŏmin* with literary talent sometimes taught the sons of their masters, accompanied their masters to their provincial positions as secretaries, and frequently acted as companion for poetry exchanges. With skills in producing and handling documents, ex-*kyŏmin* commoners and slaves formed a new group of low-ranking clerks in the government.

More than half of the core members of Songsŏgwŏn came from among these petty clerks.[69] Close ties with illustrious elite families were thus not uncommon. For instance, Chang Hon's family had maintained a close relationship with Hong Sŏkchu's 洪奭周 (1774–1842) family for four generations, which allowed him to land a government position. Cho Susam 趙秀三 (1762–1849), another core member, was connected with the prominent P'ungyang Cho clan. Pak Yunmuk, who left many records about Songsŏgwŏn, was supported by Sŏ Chunbo 徐俊輔 (1770–1856). Based upon this kind of connection, famed scholar-officials frequently wrote prefaces or postscripts for *chungin* publications.[70] These *chungin* men's political dependency on their former masters developed into cohesive cultural networks that fostered their mutual communion through literary activities. Moreover, King Chŏngjo's willingness to hire *chungin* scholars for court positions requiring literary skills not only heightened their fame as writers but also enhanced their access to cultural resources.[71] The shared cultural dispositions again solidified the political ties between the two groups.

The political partnership between *yangban* elites and petty clerks also fostered their economic complicity. The petty clerks in government offices emerged as the nouveau riche in the mid-eighteenth century. After two foreign invasions by the Japanese and Manchu respectively in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the population of Seoul exponentially increased with the expansion of bureaucracy, ending up somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 during the late Chosŏn period. The increase mostly took place in the nonelite sectors that either filled the lower rungs of the bureaucracy or served the needs of the increased population. The subsequent development of commerce in Seoul spawned a new source of wealth on which *chungin* men staked a claim.[72] They accumulated remarkable wealth particularly through taking bribes from those who wanted to facilitate administrative processes in their favor. Because getting a kickback turned into administrative routine, it was not even considered a crime toward the end of the dynasty. Kang Myŏnggwan has claimed that this extortionate exploitation was possible because *yangban* scholar-officials turned a blind eye to the corruption of petty clerks. Many clerks shared profits with their *yangban* patrons,[73] so the bureaucrats' political patronization of their nonelite subordinates was repaid in the form of economic benefits. The illicit wealth amassed this way did not develop into meaningful capital that could be invested in further production. It was more likely to be squandered on a sumptuous lifestyle and luxurious cultural spectacles.[74] This situation made

68. Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 42–45.
69. Kang, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," 139.
70. Kang, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," 122.
71. Kang, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," 140.
72. Kang Myŏnggwan, "Yŏhang, yŏhangin, yŏhang munhak," *Han'guk hanmunhak yŏn'gu* 17 (1994): 407–21, especially 408–10.
73. Kang, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏngajŏn sahoe ŭi pyŏnhwa wa yŏhang munhak," 147.
74. Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 151.

the lavish gatherings and the large-scale publication projects of *chungin* poetry societies in the late Chosŏn period possible.[75]

In correlating the complicity between *yangban* elites in politico-economic fields and the collaborative literary activities of petty clerks, Pierre Bourdieu's study of the cultural field is very useful. He claims that the social formation is structured through a series of hierarchically organized fields, political, economic, educational, cultural, etc. Although each field is relatively autonomous, the positions that individuals take in different fields determine the structure among fields. This idea helps us better frame how the literary field interacts with social and political factors. The possession of political and economic capital, as the principle of legitimacy, sets the position of the cultural field, either subordinate or dominant, within the field of power.[76] The relative autonomy of the literary field, however, does not allow the changes in social and political fields to affect literature directly. Their influences occur only through the mediation of the culture as a whole. Because the poetry societies operated through social practices that involved the production of literature, the influences of the political and economic fields were at once direct (on networking processes among members) and indirect (on the mode of literary production). The cultural partnership between the *yangban* and *chungin* poets thus pertains to the positions that each group had taken in the political and economic fields, while their literary styles operated within broader cultural trends of the period. When the *yangban* elites benefited through their political and economic partnership with *chungin*, they did not mind welcoming their *chungin* subordinates to their own cultural field. However, the modality of social discrimination in the Chosŏn bureaucracy inadvertently made *yangban* elites more dependent on *chungin* men in printing and publication, which played a crucial role in the mode of cultural production in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this situation, *yangban* elites seem to have relegated cultural leadership to *chungin* poets.

TECHNOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY

Chungin men's domination of the state-run printing office also contributed to their positioning at the center of the cultural field. From the early years of the dynasty, the Office of Editorial Review (*Kyosŏgwan* 校書館) had been one of the few government bureaus run solely by *chungin* clerks.[77] The revitalization of state-led cultural projects during the reign of King Chŏngjo entrenched this bureaucratic segregation even more by assigning *chungin* clerks to run the Office of the Supervision of Printing (*Kaminso* 鑑印所), newly established in 1790. Chang Hon, who led the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society with Ch'ŏn Sugyŏng and others, for instance, worked in this office as a reviewer (*sajun* 司準) from 1790 to 1816.[78] Considering that the Chosŏn state printing office produced the largest number of titles during Chŏngjo's reign,[79] he must have been familiar with diverse advanced printing technolo-

75. Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 113.

76. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Arts and Literature* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993).

77. Another bureau run only by *chungin* men was Aekchŏngsŏ 掖庭署 which took care of the delivery of directives by the king and royal family members, royal audiences, and managements of stationery. See Kang, *Chosŏn hugi yŏhang munhak yŏn'gu*, 48.

78. Chang Hon was recommended for this position by O Chaesun 吳載純 (1727–1792), who was the head minister of the Ministry of Personnel. See Chang Chiyŏn, *Ilsa yusa* (Kyŏngsŏng: Hoedong sŏgwan, 1927), 17. Also see "Chang Hon chŏn," in *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok, Hosan Waesa happon*, 541–42.

79. Hŏ, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa*, 224. For the titles that Chang produced during his tenure, see Jae-moon

gies of the period.[80] In particular, Chosŏn printing culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was heavily influenced by contemporary Chinese printing. As the Qing court had been working on the compilation of the *Complete Books of the Four Storehouses* (Ch. *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書) since 1773, techniques using wooden moveable type improved remarkably in order to meet the demand for massive textual productions with no substantial financial burdens. The books produced this way were categorized as "treasure collection editions" (Ch. *juzhenben* 聚珍本). Korean printers imitated their typographic characteristics, and wooden moveable type began to spread, particularly in the private printing sector.[81] In this period, Chang Hon emerged as a key printer in the circle of Seoul literati, with his own wooden moveable type (*Iiŏm cha* 而已广字).[82]

Besides honing their expertise in printing techniques, *chungin* printers frequently oversaw the editing of the titles they printed.[83] The records about Chang Hon, for instance, state that he edited various books published with royal sponsorship, besides a series of Confucian classics; all ended up being classified as outstanding editions (*sŏnbon* 善本).[84] His skills in book production and textual editing were widely acclaimed by officials with literary fame working in the Office of the Special Councilors (*Hongmun'gwan* 弘文館), the Office of Royal Decrees (*Yemun'gwan* 藝文館), and the Kyujanggak 奎章閣 Library; thus, Chang took charge of most printing jobs in his office.[85]

The publication of the *Continued Selection of Folk Songs* (*P'ungyo soksŏn* 風謠續選) in 1797 benefited from Chang Hon's key position in the Office of the Supervision of Printing. This collection, compiled by core Songsŏgwŏn members, was to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of *Folk Songs of the Splendid Period*, discussed earlier. Intended to preserve and disseminate the literary oeuvre by *chungin* poets, it contained 723 poems composed by 333 *chungin* poets after 1737. Apart from the expanded coverage, this collection is also notable in that the moveable type of the Office of the Supervision of Printing was used for its publication. It is one of a few private publication projects for which there is a written record of such usage.[86] Without Chang Hon's access to the resources at the office, this would not have been possible. We do not have exact information about the print runs of this title. Considering the substantial number of intact copies that survive, however, this collection must have been printed in great quantity and widely circulated.[87] The dissemination of a vast number of magnificent copies epitomized the cultural sway that the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society wielded in this period.

The central position of *chungin* men in the state printing offices also seems to have affected the ways *yangban* literati considered *chungin* poetry culture. Unlike the earlier emphasis on how *chungin* poets could be on a par with their elite counterparts, the *yangban* commentators on the *Continued Collection of Folk Songs* stressed the cultural leadership of *chungin* men despite the social discrimination against them. In particular, one of the three prefaces

Hwang, "A Re-assessment of the Characteristics of Chang Hon's Instructional Texts," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 27 (2014): 211–39, at 218–20.

80. Yun Pyŏngt'ae, "P'yŏngmin Chang Hon ŭi p'yŏnch'ansŏ wa kanhaengsŏ," *Sŏjihak yŏn'gu* 10 (1994): 45–72, at 63.

81. Ch'ŏn Hyebong, *Han'guk sŏjihak* (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 2010 [1991]), 513.

82. Ch'ŏn, *Han'guk sŏjihak*, 510–14.

83. Hŏ, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa*, 214 and 225.

84. "Chang Hon chŏn," in *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok, Hosan Waesa happon*, 541–42. For the classical genres that he edited in the Office of the Supervision of Printing, see Chang, *Ilsa yusa*, 17–18.

85. "Chang Hon chŏn," in *Ihyang kyŏnmunnok, Hosan Waesa happon*, 541–42.

86. Yun, "P'yŏngmin Chang Hon ŭi p'yŏnch'ansŏ wa kanhaengsŏ," 63.

87. Yun, "P'yŏngmin Chang Hon ŭi p'yŏnch'ansŏ wa kanhaengsŏ," 56.

for this collection, written by Yi Kahwan 李家煥 (1742–1801)—a high-ranking court official and a grandson of Yi Ik 李瀷 (1681–1763), a prominent Neo-Confucian polymath of the eighteenth century—demonstrates the upgraded status of *chungin* poets and their works. Yi Kahwan claimed that anyone under heaven could compose poems because everyone is born with human nature and sentiments (*sŏngjŏng* 性情). Poetry, he continued, becomes extinct when human nature and sentiments wither and dry up, and there is no more pernicious cause of this than the pursuit of wealth and fame (*pugwi* 富貴). When human nature and sentiments shrivel, there will be no poems even from those with lofty talent and skill in languages. Many great poems had come from those who were poverty-stricken and from lowly backgrounds. These poems, however, tended to be full of indignation and complaints, which men of virtue lamented. Yi emphasized that only this collection could express warm and gentle feelings to dispel people's resentment. These poets, he concluded, were what people generally called the "tune of the splendid period" (*sodae chi p'ung* 昭代之風).[88]

Different from similar encomiums observed in earlier cases, the context for this commentary included *yangban* elites' technological dependency on *chungin* printers in this particular period. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *yangban* elites had become increasingly interested in publishing their own works. Private academies had met these demands by the mid-eighteenth century as the local centers for private printing. The metropolitan elites, who needed the supporting voices on their political stance from the nonofficial sectors, had maintained close relations with provincial scholars affiliated with local Confucian academies since the rise of factionalism in the late sixteenth century. Metropolitan elites could publish their own works there. According to Sŏ Yugu's 徐有榘 (1764–1845) *Surveys on Publications* (*Nup'an'go* 鏤板考), seventy-eight academies published 167 titles until 1796. And about eighty percent of these titles were the writing collections of individual scholars.[89] Starting in the eighteenth century, however, the Chosŏn court aspired to restore state control over local academies due to their excessive increase and their encroachment on state authority. In 1714, the court decreed that the local academies established without the government's approval should be abolished.[90] The Chosŏn court reconfirmed this regulation in 1741 by abolishing about 180 academies founded after 1714 without its approval.[91] The state policy culminated in the closure of all but forty-seven major academies in 1873.[92] The role of local academies as publication centers subsequently diminished, which required *yangban* elites to pursue new publication venues. The quality of books produced through commercial private printers in this period remained crude due to their lack of necessary facilities and skilled printers.[93]

In this situation, most *yangban* elites with modest means either extended their social networks or made use of their official rank to utilize state-owned printing resources.[94] Printing experts like Chang Hon emerged as the most in-demand *chungin* printers. Besides working in the Office of the Supervision of Printing, Chang carved his own wooden moveable type

88. Yi Kahwan, "P'ungyo soksŏn sŏ," in *Kŭmdae simun ch'o (ha)*, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* 255.429c.

89. Sin Yangsŏn, *Chosŏn hugi sŏjisa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Tosŏ ch'ulp'an hyean, 1996), 195, 270–71.

90. *Sukchong sillok* 55.10b–11a (7/11/1714).

91. *Yŏngjo sillok* 53.21a (4/8/1721).

92. *Kojong sillok* 8.18b–19a (3/20/1871). Also see Milan Hejtmanek, "The Elusive Path to Sagehood: Origins of the Confucian Academy System in Chosŏn Korea," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 26 (2013): 234.

93. Ch'ŏn, *Han'guk sŏjihak*, 249.

94. Kyung Hee Rho, "Metal-Type Books and Their Readers in Premodern Korea," in "The Materiality of Reading in Premodern Korea: Voice, Image, and the Book," panel discussion, Annual Conference of the Association of Asian Studies 2018 (March 23).

with which he privately published numerous titles.[95] His type was used even after his death in 1828.[96] His fame in textual editing also brought him private publication projects.[97] For example, many titles printed with moveable type possessed by Pak Chonggyŏng 朴宗慶 (1765–1817), a scholar-official from the eminent Pannam Pak clan, were actually copyedited by Chang Hon.[98] The sociocultural standing of *chungin* printers was elevated because *yangban* elites badly needed their expertise in printing and book production. The metropolitan elites could have willingly joined the activities organized by the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society and tried to enhance their relationships with its members in the expectation of collaborating with them on various publications.

The discussion so far shows the ways *yangban* elites relied on the technological aid of *chungin* printers for the publication of their own literary works. The vocational discrimination against the *chungin* class paradoxically empowered them to become leaders of cultural production. The marginal positions that *chungin* men occupied in the Chosŏn bureaucracy offered them, in Caroline Levine's term, an affordance, that is, a potential use or action "latent in material and designs," through which they could exercise cultural agency and tweak the sociopolitical hierarchy.[99] In other words, the affordance in the social status system, which operated through the elites' technological dependency upon a secondary status group, brought about an uncommon cultural partnership in the development of *chungin* poetry societies.

The success of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society also reveals the complicated implications that technological breakthroughs have for sociocultural development. The advanced printing technologies in premodern Korea did not necessarily bring about any meaningful sociocultural changes, as Elizabeth Eisenstein cogently showed to be the case in early modern Europe, where the printing revolution sparked the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution.[100] Mastery of printing technologies by minor social groups was the vocational marker of their social inferiority rather than of their potential to be agents of change. But in Korea, when secondary status groups cultivated cultural practices on a par with elites and co-opted their networking modes, this technological expertise had completely different effects on the society. Shared cultural codes and aesthetic tastes made the collaborations between *yangban* and *chungin* proliferate, in which private publishing figured prominently.

CONCLUSION

Eiko Ikegami's study of aesthetic associational life in Tokugawa Japan has shown that the shared cultural practices among people of different social standings did not necessarily undermine the rigid social stratification. To the contrary, they buttressed the status system

95. The oldest remaining title printed with Chang's wooden moveable type is *Ahŭi wŏllam* 兒戲原覽 published in 1803. Some early titles include *Mongyu p'yŏn* 蒙喻篇, *Kŭnch'wi p'yŏn* 近取篇, and *Tangnyul chibyŏng* 唐律集英, produced in 1810. See Yi Ŭnyŏng, "Chang Hon ŭi *Mongyu p'yŏn* yŏn'gu," *Hanmun hakpo* 34 (2016): 65–96, at 78.

96. For these titles, see Ch'ŏn, *Han'guk sŏjihak*, 513.

97. Han Yŏnggyu, "19-segi kyŏnghwa sajok ŭi hagye ch'wihyang kwa manmyŏng sajo," *Inmun kwahak* 48 (2011): 277–300, at 291.

98. For these titles, see Hŏ, *Chosŏn wihang munhaksa*, 225.

99. Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015), 6–7 and 27.

100. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979).

by offering social actors informal opportunities to relieve social pressures.[101] The nonelites' emulation of elite culture does not always indicate the erosion of social stratification in early modern Japan, in stark contrast to what Norbert Elias argued in the context of the early modern French bourgeoisie.

Likewise, the cultural leadership by *chungin* poets in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Chosŏn demonstrates that the cultural sophistication and organizational success of the secondary status group did not always lead to changes or destabilization in the social status system. In this society with rigid social stratification, nonelites' emulation of elite culture can be attributed to diverse factors. The marginal social positions to which secondary status groups were relegated had developed into crucial structural holes: the fringe positions that *chungin* men occupied in the state bureaucracy and social structure allowed them to get to know, understand, and adapt to new information and cultural trends earlier than other social actors. When others needed the new knowledge, *chungin* men could modify the power relationship by gaining an affordance, elevating their cultural stature. Unlike official translators, who sometimes outwitted their *yangban* superiors in diplomatic settings, petty clerks could help their *yangban* patrons access new sources of wealth and materialize their literary productions through this brokerage role, which in part motivated the *yangban* men to patronize them in the Chosŏn bureaucracy. *Chungin* men who took this position in the political and economic fields could shape the cultural norms of the period through their poetry societies. Instead of eliminating social discrimination, the cultural partnership between *yangban* and *chungin* set them apart from the rest of the society and allowed them to dominate the limited socioeconomic resources and cultural capital.

The radical changes in nineteenth-century Chosŏn political structure, however, gave rise to changes in the positions that *chungin* groups had taken in the political, economic, and cultural fields. The enthronement of a series of boy kings and their political reliance on their queen-mothers concentrated political power in the queen-dowagers and their natal families, who dominated court politics. The collusive relationship between court ministers and petty clerks fell apart, as direct connection to royal in-laws emerged as the new mechanism for entry into political power. This change also made the *chungin*'s printing technology no longer useful for cultural leadership. Some affluent aristocrats and powerful royal in-law families cast their own metal type, using mostly iron.[102] Once the *yangban* were no longer dependent on the *chungin*, the cultural partnership between these two classes dissolved. After the death of Ch'ŏn Sugyŏng in 1818, the Songsŏgwŏn gradually crumbled. Later *chungin* poets established similar poetry societies modeled after it during the mid-nineteenth century; however, they no longer garnered support from the elites, let alone elicited national attention.[103] The leading role of the Songsŏgwŏn Poetry Society in turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Seoul manifested the ideal setting for the best interests of the upper echelon of the society, whether politico-economic or cultural, at that particular moment of the Chosŏn dynasty.

101. Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

102. Ch'ŏn, *Han'guk sŏjihak*, 513.

103. These include Sŏwŏn sisa 西園詩社, Piyŏn sisa 斐然詩社, and Chikha sisa 稷下詩社. See Chŏng, "Chŏngjo tae Okkye sisa ŭi kyŏlsa wa chin'gyŏng sihwa," 7–8.