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“The Biography of Attendant Jeong”
by Sigyeongam

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Introduction

Goryeo monk Sigyeongam 息影庵 (b. ca. 1281) wrote “Biography of Attendant Jeong” (Jeongsija jeon),¹ a biography of the staff of an eminent monk (Gim 2006, 350). It is one of seven “biographies” of subjects such as wine, cash, ferment, a turtle, bamboo, paper, and, in this story, a staff (Lee 2014), in the anthology, the *Selections of Refined Literature from the Country to the East* (*Dongmunseon* 東文選) ([1478] 1518).² Chinese and Korean literary historians have referred to the genre as *jia zhuan* (K. *gajeon* 假傳). Herbert Franke (1974, 23-31) has translated *jia zhuan* as pseudo-biography.

Who was Sigyeongam?

Buddhist monks renounce their secular surname and given name, and take a Buddhist given name or “dharma name” (e.g., “Yeon’gam”), the surname Shi (Śākya; K. Seok), and a cognomen (e.g., “Sigyeongam”) (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 292). Korean literary historians have thus had to ask, who was the monk Sigyeongam? Gim Hyeol-lyong (1983) thought that Sigyeongam could have been the third son of King Chung-seon, Deokheunggun Hye. Yi Jong-mun, however, refuted this theory, saying that it is inconsistent with the impression that one gets from Sigyeongam’s writings: Sigyeongam was an eminent monk (Yi 2002; Gim 2006, 349). Gim Geon-gon agrees with Yi Jong-mun (Gim

2006, 350). After examining historical materials and, moreover considering errors in the Deokheunggun theory, Gim argues that Sigyeongam was not Deokheunggun, but a man who was born in Namweon County, North Jeolla Province, was from the Yang family, and moreover that his dharma name was Yeon’gam 淵鑑 (pond mirror).

Sigyeongam, or “dwelling where I rest my shadow,” was a cognomen that referred to his place of residence. The dwelling “Sigyeongam,” from which he took his cognomen and literary name, was built at Manhaeng Temple on Baljeon Mountain, by a monk named Un’gi, who was a disciple of Jin’gak guksa Hyesim 眞覺國師 慧心 (1178-1234) (Gim 2006, 363).³ Hyesim wrote in his “Foreword to an Inscription for Sigyeongam” (Hyesim)⁴ that when Un’gi grew old, and felt weary and weak, Un’gi built the dwelling on the eastern side of Manhaeng Temple. He named the house “Sigyeong” ([dwelling where] I rest⁵ my shadow).

Sigyeongam was the brother of Yang Dae-hak 梁大學, a scholar who lived in the county of Namweon, in South Jeolla Province. Jeong Po 鄭誦 (1309-1345)⁶ wrote about Sigyeongam and a brother of Sigyeongam, a monk named Unyuja Tagyeon 雲游子卓然, in a letter to their nephew, a monk named Myook Sangin 妙瓊上人, Yang Dae-hak’s son. Sigyeongam was the eldest of the three brothers (Yun 2017, 88). Jeong referred to Sigyeongam with deference as “Senior Priest Pond Mirror of Weollam Temple” (Weollam jangno Yeon’gam 月南長老淵鑑) (Gim 2006, 364-65). Jeong Bo wrote that Myook Sangin had studied Buddhism with Sigyeongam. Thus, Sigyeongam’s secular surname was Yang, and he was an eminent monk at Weollam Temple in Gangin, South Jeolla Province (ibid. 365).

Sigyeongam was a friend of civil officials Yi Jae-hyeon (1287-1367), Min Sa-pyeong (1292-1359), and Yi Am (1297-1364) (Gim 2006, 352). Yi Jae-

* I would like to thank the referees at the *Review of Korean Studies* for referring me to articles that helped me to revise my article (Gang 2009; Gim 2006; Yun 2017; Yi 2002). I have received support for this project from the Strategic Initiative for Korean Studies, at the Academy of Korean Studies; and a Foreign Language Area Studies fellowship, while I was a graduate student at Columbia University.

1. I have consulted a photographic reproduction of the original *hanmun* text and a Korean translation by Im Ch’ang-sun, published in the *Gugyeok Dongmunseon* (*The Dongmunseon, Translated into Korean*) in 1969. This 1969 edition was edited and published by the Minjok munhwa chujin wiwonhoe (Committee for the Advancement of National Culture). The *hanmun* text of “Jeongsija jeon” is in fascicle 101, pages 2-4 of the *Dongmunseon* (volume 8, pages 26-27 in the 1969 edition), and the Korean translation is in volume 8, pages 90-92 in the 1969 edition. The texts can be accessed, moreover, on the website “Hanguk gojeon jonghap DB” (Comprehensive Database of Korean Classics), <https://db.itkc.or.kr>.
2. The *Dongmunseon* was compiled by Seo Geo-jeong (1420-1488), Gang Hui-maeng (1424-1483), and Yang Seong-ji (1415-1482), and published in 1478. The title of the anthology alluded to the *Wen xuan* 文選, compiled by Xiao Tong (501-531). David Knechtges has translated the title *Wen xuan* (K. *Munseon*) as “Selections of refined literature” (1982).

3. Hyesim wrote two pseudo-biographies about ice and bamboo: “The Biography of Daoist Practitioner Ice” (Bingdoja jeon) (1229) and “Biography of Bamboo, the Noble One” (Jukjonja jeon) (ca. 1229) (Yun 2017, 77). The “Biography of Bamboo” depicts the transmission of the Southern School of Chan Buddhism; and “Biography of Ice” depicts Hyesim’s pursuit of enlightenment (ibid. 84).
4. Hyesim, Sigyeongam myeong byeongseo 息影庵銘并序, *Muuija sijip* 無衣者詩集, *gwon ha* 卷下 (qtd. in Gim 2006, 363n31).
5. Jinul (b. 1158) taught of “rest” as a way to practice no-mind, or absence of the deluded mind: “As soon as any mental state arises, we rest... This is the method of extinguishing delusion through resting.” (qtd. in Buswell 1991, 128).
6. A disciple of Choe Ja 崔滋 (1188-1260).

hyeon and Min Sa-pyeong wrote poems to Sigyeongam; and Yi Am's friendship with Sigyeongam was commemorated in the epitaph by Yi Saek for the stele at Yi Am's grave (ibid. 356).

Attendant Jeong

Attendant Jeong is a *seokjang* 錫杖, or the staff of an eminent monk. Goryeo paintings extant in Japan depict Ksitigarbha (Jijang bosal) holding a *seokjang*.⁷ The upper part was made of tin, the middle of wood, and the lower part of horn. The top of the staff was made in the form of a stupa, and a large ring was placed like a halo around the stupa, from which about six smaller rings dangled. The monk shook the stick like a rattle, to alert animals and insects to his approach when he was walking in the woods (Unheo 1964, 450). The monk would thus save animals and insects from incurring bad karma if they attacked him in a confrontation, and could scurry or fly away to safety. The monk rattles the stick when he goes to beg for food at someone's house, too, to let them know he is there. A monk begs for food to help others accumulate merit towards their salvation and to practice patience. The monk dedicates the merit accumulated from begging to his enlightenment and the happiness of all beings. The sound of the wooden rings clicking on the staff, moreover, symbolizes the way that the Buddha's teachings are transmitted through hearing (Interview with Yeongdam seunim 2011). The ornamentation on the staff also represents the monk's cultivation—six rings indicate that the monk has practiced the Sad-pārāmitā (ibid.).⁸ The staff is thus an object that is a very meaningful part of a monk's practice of Buddhism.

Attendant Jeong has the head of an ox, with red horns. The red horns form the halo at the top of the cane (Gim 2006, 368). He has an “Iron Mouth,” moreover, that corresponds to the six rings on a *seokjang* (ibid.). The name “Iron

Mouth” refers to Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897),⁹ who was known as “Iron Mouth” because he was very articulate (Sigyeongam [1478] 1969, 91).

Attendant Jeong represents the ideal of *iryu junghaeng* 異類中行 (Yun 2017, 78; 90). Chinese monk Shi Shuang Qingzhu expressed this ideal with the image of an ox, a being “with skin of fur, and large horns on its head” (*pimo daegak* 被毛戴角) (ibid. 82). *Iryu junghaeng* is harmony in human nature and throughout the universe (*jungyong* 中庸) (Chan 1963, 96), free of prejudice in favor of or against difference and similarity; and moreover, signifies a Buddhist teacher's unstinting and untrammelled ability to take on various characteristics or qualities in order to lead sentient beings (including those who are animals or ghosts) to salvation (Unheo 1976, 710-11). The phrase *iryu junghaeng* appears in the “Record of the Transmission of the Lamp of the Jingde Period (1004-1007)” (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄), in Book Eight, “Chan Master Nanquan Puyuan”: “One day the master instructed the assembly saying, ‘It is said that the absolute soon changes. Today's masters and monks might have to go into a quite different round of existence.’ Guizong replied, ‘Even as an animal there is no need to engender the retribution of an animal’” (Daoyuan 2015).

Shaped like a pole, Attendant Jeong represents, moreover, the poem by Changsha Jingcen about going beyond the abiding place on the top of a hundred-foot pole (*baichi gantou* 白尺竿頭) (Egan 2010, 194; Yun 2017, 78; 89). The pole is “a metaphor for reaching a state of pacified mind” (*anxin* 安心) (Egan 2010, 194). One must move beyond that abiding place (ibid. 207), and abandon all fixed concepts and attachments (ibid. 94). Yun Ju-pil (2017, 78) interprets the poem as signifying that a bodhisattva must take a further step beyond pacified mind, in the process of his or her cultivation; the poem represents the ideal of *iryu junghaeng*.

Attendant Jeong, and the True Nature of Things

Sigyeongam seeks enlightenment from thinking about things such as bamboo (Gang 2009, 100). In “An Essay about Bamboo Trees at Bamboo Pavilion, Woldeung Temple,” Sigyeongam wrote:

7. For Goryeo paintings depicting the *seokjang* see Yi 1981, and *Goryeo Buddhist Paintings: A Closer Look*, February 25-May 28, 2012, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D. C.

8. The Sad-pārāmitā: six methods to cross the sea of life and death and to reach nirvana: 1) practicing compassion; 2) conduct that is in accordance with Buddhist morals; 3) patience; 4) always making an effort in one's spiritual cultivation and not being lazy; 5) practicing meditation; and 6) abandoning personal wisdom and incorrect opinions and obtaining true wisdom (Unheo 1976, 680).

9. One of the Five Founders of the Linji school of Zen Buddhism. His cognomen Zhao Zhou 趙州 referred to his home monastery, Guanyin Monastery in Zhao Zhou (ibid. 795).

When bamboo shoots emerge, they are immediately splendid and exceptional; from this, one can see that the moment of enlightenment¹⁰ occurs instantly—one can see that there is sudden enlightenment. One sees that as the bamboo ages, it grows firmer. Thus one knows that, after sudden awakening, there is gradual cultivation. When one sees that bamboo is empty in the center, one can see that its nature is emptiness. Bamboo grows straight; this speaks of ultimate reality. Its roots transform into a dragon. This is a metaphor for realizing one’s Buddhahood. The fruit of the bamboo tree is food for the phoenix; seeing this, one can understand the Way to help other people. (qtd. in Gang 2009, 100)

Contemplating things, the adept can realize his or her innate Buddhahood, thereby attaining sudden enlightenment, and then practice gradual cultivation (ibid.). Emptiness is “the lack or absence of intrinsic nature in any and all phenomena. Because all phenomena are dependently arisen, they lack, or are empty of, an intrinsic nature characterized by independence and autonomy” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 872). Sigyeongam sees things as arising dependently, and as being empty of intrinsic nature (Gang 2009, 101). Looking at bamboo, one can realize one’s Buddhahood and understand how to help other human beings.

“Things” are a friend or a Buddhist teacher to Sigyeongam (Gang 2009, 101). When Sigyeongam looks at bamboo, or a Buddhist cane, he sees something that helps him and others attain enlightenment, and he feels thankful and appreciative, as though towards a friend and teacher. Sigyeongam depicts Attendant Jeong as a friend. This expresses mindfulness of one’s feelings as one contemplates ultimate truth: one feels thankfulness.

Gang Hye-gyu observes that this feeling of warm friendship toward things explains why the narrative structure of “The Biography of Attendant Jeong” is so different from that of Neo-Confucian pseudo-biographies. The Story of Attendant Jeong is written from a first-person perspective; other *gajeon* biographies are written from a third-person perspective. Third-person omniscient narrative tries to maintain the illusion of objectivity. Sigyeongam

reveals this to be an illusion: even objective narrative is dependently-arisen, the result of a person’s apprehension of things. Sigyeongam forgoes the illusion of objectivity and writes in the first-person voice, “I.” He writes in the first-person voice about a friend who helps him attain correct cognition of the final nature of things.¹¹

Text and Annotated Translation

“Biography of Attendant Jeong” by Seok Sigyeongam

丁侍者傳/ 釋息影庵 / 立冬日昧爽·息影庵在菴中·倚牆睡·聞外有庭拜問訊聲云·新到丁侍者·參·恠而出視之·有人焉·形纖而長·色默而光·赤角高撐·若觚鬪·玄睛挺露·若瞋怒·彳于而入·子瓜而立·息影庵始而懼然·頃而呼曰·子來前·姑有問於子·且子何名爲丁·何自而來·來何爲乎·抑吾素不識子面·子而稱侍者何以·豈有說乎·言未既·丁遂雀躍以進·徐其辭而謹對曰·古初有聖人·其首牛者曰包犧·吾考也·其身蛇者曰女媧·吾妣也·生吾林中·棄而不育·霜雹暴之·則若悴而死·而風雨恩之·則若榮而生·而歷寒暑千百而后·長而成人材·綿代迄于晉俗而爲范氏家臣·始學漆身之術·降于唐僧·而爲趙老門人·又加鐵嘴之號·于后遊定陶·遇丁三郎於塗·熟瞪而謂曰·見子形·上橫下豎·宜以吾姓累汝姓·吾固當因而不革焉·凡吾職在扶侍人·人使吾·吾賤且勞矣·然非其人莫敢使·故吾所扶侍蓋寡·惟其不遇·失所歸附·流寓海宇·爲土偶所笑·今而久矣·昨天哀吾奇·命之曰命汝爲花山侍者·其往奉職·師事之惟謹·吾聞命·歡躍隻脚以來·願長老容受·息影菴曰·噫哉·丁上座·古聖之遺體也·角不崩壯也·目不逃勇也·漆身以念恩讎·信也義也·鐵嘴以捷問對·智也辯也·職扶侍·仁也禮也·擇歸附·正也明也·集斯衆美·長生不老死·非聖即神·烏可企也·予不敢有一於此·不當子之所友·況所師乎·華都復有山花其名者·[口+珏]菴老和尚·住彼山二年·山雖同名·人不同德·天命子往者·非于此·蓋于彼也·子往矣·因爲歌而送之曰·丁哉趨而之乎[口+珏]菴之庭·予匏瓜於此·不若汝丁·

I was in my house one day in early winter, asleep at daybreak as I sat against a wall, when I heard someone greet me from the garden.¹²

“Your Attendant Jeong is here to see you,” the voice said.

10. *Dunwu* (K. *dono*) 頓悟. In Chinese, “sudden awakening,” or “sudden enlightenment”; the experience described in the Chan school that “seeing the nature” (*jianxing* 見性) itself is sufficient to enable the adept to realize one’s innate Buddhahood (*jianxing chengfo* 見性成佛)” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 273).

11. Emptiness is the final nature of things (*dharmatā*) (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 872).

12. The image of Attendant Jeong in the yard brings to mind a story about Zhaozhou Congshen: “A monk once asked Zhaozhou Congshen, ‘What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?’ Zhaozhou answered, ‘The cypress in the courtyard’” (Egan 2010, 199).

Thinking it strange, I went out and looked to see who it was. There was a being standing there who was very thin and tall. It was black and lustrous. It had red horns on its head that it lifted high into the air as though ready to attack. The pupils of its eyes were black, and its eyes bulged from its head, as though glaring in anger.

It bounded into the yard, and slowly came to a standstill.

I was frightened. Then, after a few moments, I said, “Come forward. I have a few questions that I would like to ask you.

“Why are you named ‘Jeong’? Where are you from? Why have you come here? I don’t recognize your face; why do you say that you are my attendant?”

Before I finished speaking, Jeong leapt forward through the air. Then he replied slowly, with dignity and respect, “In ancient times, when the sages¹³ first appeared, there was a sage with the head of an ox. His name was Fu Xi. He was my father. There was also a sage with the body of a snake. Her name was Nu Wa.¹⁴ She was my mother. She gave birth to me in the middle of a forest, but she abandoned me and did not raise me.

“When frost and hail fell, I became emaciated, and died. With the blessings of rain and wind, though, I came to life and flourished.

“Hundreds of thousands of seasons of cold and hot passed, and I grew and became a man of talent and ability.

“After generations spreading like gourds,¹⁵ I became a household retainer of the Fan clan, in the world of the Jin.¹⁶

“I learned how to lacquer my body.¹⁷

13. *Seongin* 聖人.

14. “Fu Xi and Nu Wa are both creation deities in Chinese mythology. After the separation of heaven and earth, Nu Wa fashioned clay figurines of human beings and the myriad creatures that came to life. Afterwards, disaster struck. The sky collapsed; earthquakes shook the land; violent waves destroyed people’s houses; and hungry beasts menaced people’s lives. Nu Wa repaired the broken sky with melted five-colored stones and thus saved the human race from extinction. Fu Xi, on the other hand, is the creator of the sacred Eight Diagrams, which allowed people to decipher the secrets of nature and to communicate with heaven” (Wu 1987, 171).

15. 縣代 *myeonda*. An allusion to the song “Spreading,” in the *Book of Songs* (*Shi jing*), in the section “The Major Odes” (Da ya): “The young gourds spread and spread/ The people after they were first brought into being/ From the River Du went to the Qi” (qtd. in Allen 1996, 232).

16. The Jin dynasty (265-420).

17. *Chilsin* (to lacquer one’s body 漆身). This alludes to the story about Yu Rang of Jin: “Xie Rang wanted to assassinate Zhao Xiangzi in order to avenge Zhibo’s death. He painted his body with lacquer so that he looked as though he had a contagious disease, in order to alter his appearance, and swallowed coal so that his voice was hoarse” (*Zhan guo ci* [Strategies of the Warring States]).

“Then, in the era of Tang dynasty monks, I became a disciple of Zhao Lao. I too was given the literary name ‘Iron Mouth.’

“Later, I traveled to Dingtao.¹⁸ I met Jeong Samnang on a dirt road. He looked at me intently, then said, ‘Looking at your form, I see that your upper body is horizontal, and your lower body is vertical. I should give you my surname.’ I took the surname, and have not changed it.

“My occupation is to support and attend to human beings. I find it very menial and exhausting work. However, only worthy human beings can make use of me. Therefore, those whom I can help are very few.

“Unable to find a person to help, I had no one to whom I could belong, and I drifted into the ocean. A figurine made of earthenware laughed at me.¹⁹

“That was all quite some time ago.

“Yesterday, Heaven took pity on my unfortunate life, and said, ‘I hereby make you the attendant of Flower Mountain.²⁰ Go and take up your duties. Serve the monk there as your Teacher.’

“When I heard Heaven’s command, I jumped with gladness all the way here, on my one leg. I pray that you will accept me as your attendant.”

I replied, “How virtuous you are, Elder Jeong. You have a body bequeathed to you by the Sages of Antiquity. You are very sturdy since your horns are intact. And it is admirable that you still have your eyes.

“That you have painted yourself with lacquer to protect yourself from the

18. There is a story in the *Tong zhi* 通志, about how descendants of Jiang Taigong 姜太公 got the surname “Ding” 丁: after Jiang Taigong was enfeoffed as a retainer of the state of Qi 齊, his son Ji 伋 was given the posthumous title Duke Ding (Ding Gong 丁公). Afterwards, the descendants of Ji took “Ding” as their surname. They made Ding their progenitor, took Shandong province as their clan seat (since this is where the state of Qi had been), and lived in the province of Dingtao 定陶縣 (Gang 2009, 94). Attendant Jeong is given the surname Jeong (Sino-Korean) (Ch. Ding), in the County of Dingtao. This may refer to the story of where the Ding clan got its surname.

19. Su Dai 蘇代, an orator of the Warring States period, said that a wooden figurine said to an earthenware figurine, “If it rains, you will dissolve and disappear.” The earthenware figurine replied, “Since I am made of earth, I must dissolve in order to return to my birthplace, the soil. You, however, do not know where you will float away if there is a heavy rainfall” (Sigyeongam [1478] 1969, 91).

20. Gang Hye-gyu has tried to locate the Flower Mountain where Sigyeongam, the narrator, lives. He concludes that it could be on Ganghwa Island; or it could be in South Jeolla province. “In Rhapsody on Three Cities (Samdobu 三都賦),” Ch’oe Cha wrote of a harbor at Ganghwa Island, with two “Flower Mountains” that formed the “threshold” of the harbor (Gang 2009, 97). Sigyeongam was once at Weoldeung Temple, on Flower Mountain, in Suncheon, South Jeolla province. Sigyeongam, “Weoldeungsa jungnu jukki” 月燈寺竹樓竹記 (Gang 2009, 97).

elements makes you very reliable and trustworthy.²¹

"You are very intelligent and articulate, your iron mouth quick to ask questions or reply. You are humane and kind, and have decorum, since your heaven-ordained duty is to support and help others."

"That you have chosen to seek someone to whom you can belong shows that you are morally correct and bright.

"With all of these qualities assembled in you, you have lived a long life and have not aged or perished. You must be a divine being, if not a sage.

"How could I be your supervisor? I dare not claim to have any of your qualities, and do not deserve to be your friend. How could I presume to be your Teacher?

"There is another Flower Mountain, on Ganghwa Island.²² An old monk named Gagam²³ has lived on that mountain for two years. Although the mountains have the same name, I do not have Gagam's virtue. Heaven ordered you to go there, not here. You should go there."

Then I sent him off with a song:

"Jeong! Hurry over to Gagam's yard.

I am rooted here like a gourd.

Not like you, Jeong."

21. This refers to the "preservative" qualities of lacquer when applied to objects: "Its known preservative and water-resisting qualities led to the use of lacquer as a protective dope on a whole range of materials and manufactured objects in Han and earlier times...[For] this and other qualities, such as high resistance to heat and acids, lacquer excels both as a protective envelope and as a vehicle for surface decoration" (Willets 1967, 126).

22. Hwado refers to Ganghwa Island (Gang 2009, 91).

23. The name "Gagam" refers to a historical person. In "Record of Painting Biro Hall at Seonwon Temple" (Seonwonsa Birojeon dancheonggi 禪源寺 毘盧殿 丹青記), Sigyeongam wrote that a monk named Gagam was abbot of Seonwon Temple in 1324 and 1325. Sigyeongam, "Seonwonsa Birojeon dancheonggi," *Dongmunseon, gwon* 65 and 205 (Gang 2009, 96; Yun 2017, 88). Seonwon Temple is in Jisan village, in the township of Seonwon, in Ganghwa County, and is 1 km away from a mountain named Flower Mountain (Hwasan) (Gang 2009, 96). Seonwon Temple was designated Korean historical site no. 259 in 1977. There was an archaeological study of the site in 1996-2000 (ibid. 96n22). Sigyeongam helped restore murals at Seonwon Temple in 1327 (Yun 2017, 88).

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