

## ***Eon'gan*: Vernacular Letters of Korea during the Joseon Period**

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### **Vernacular Script and Vernacular Letters of Joseon Period**

Letters written in the Korean alphabet during the Joseon period are usually referred to as *eon'gan* (諺簡, “vernacular letters”). This is a reflection of the fact that the Korean alphabet in those days was called *eonmun* (諺文, “vernacular script”) and considered lower in quality as compared to the Chinese script, which was called *munja* (文字, “characters”) or *jinseo* (眞書, “real script”). As is well-known, it became possible to record the Korean language in full measure due to the promulgation of *hunmin jeong'eum* (訓民正音, “Correct Sounds to Teach the People”) in the reign of King Sejong, but the usage of *hunmin jeong'eum* was largely restricted in practice. And far from replacing Chinese script to become the official script, *eonmun* acquired only supplementary functions such as translating Chinese books or regulating readings of Chinese characters (An Byeong-hui 1985: 805-820; Nam Pung-hyeon 1996: 25-26). Moreover, the formal usage of *eonmun* was extremely restricted, which can be inferred from the fact that documents written in *eonmun* were considered unofficial. *Eonmun* was not acknowledged as the true national script until a royal edict was declared by King Gojong in 1894 that read, “All laws and orders should in principle be written in Korean script with translation in Chinese script, or, they could be written by mixing Korean and Chinese scripts.”

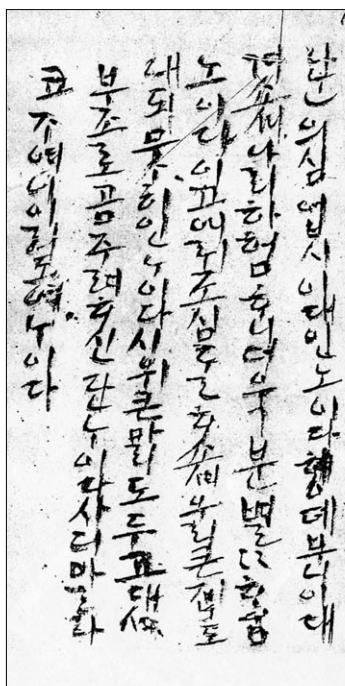
The vernacular script was restricted for public usage, and the same was true of vernacular letters (hereafter referred to as *eon'gan*). The limitation is more apparent in the sex of those who wrote and received *eon'gan*. From the middle

of the sixteenth century, many *eon'gan* were exchanged, but it is difficult to find *eon'gan* used among men. Rather, it seems that men wrote letters using Chinese characters amongst themselves, from which men's dominant social position in contemporary society can be inferred, and this fact agrees with the assumption that *eonmun* was not acknowledged as official. Therefore, in the Joseon Period, whether it was the sender or the recipient of the *eon'gan*, at least one was certain to be a woman. Another name for *eon'gan* is *naegan* (內簡, "inner letters") due to its gender-specific characteristic. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that these letters were written by and sent to women only. Existing *eon'gan* from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show that recipients could be men of all classes in society, ranging from the king and scholar-officials down to commoners who have mastered *eonmun*. Although letters written in Chinese script circulated exclusively among scholar-officials, *eon'gan* did not belong to any specific class, that is to say, anyone could be the composer or the recipient of *eon'gan* (Baek Du-hyeon 2001: 201-207).

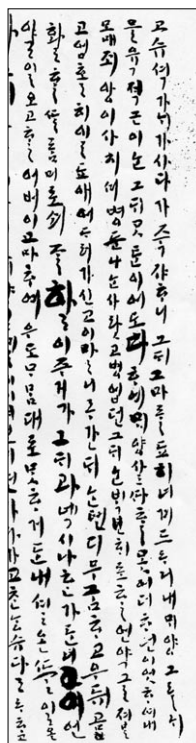
### **Proliferation of *Eon'gan***

As stated before, *eon'gan* were not associated with any specific social class but were widely used by all. However, just as *eonmun* underwent the process of proliferation, *eon'gan* first circulated in the palace, then among the *yangban* (兩班) class, and then finally among the commoners (Baek Du-hyeon 2001: 199-207). Although there is evidence from the *Joseon wangjo sillok* (朝鮮王朝實錄, Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty) that *eon'gan* were circulated in the palace from a very early time, the *eon'gan* extant today show that *eon'gan* of scholar-officials predate those of the palace. The reason could be that *eon'gan* composed in early times did not survive to the present, but the fundamental reason is that people inside the palace were forbidden from keeping *eon'gan* from the outside, and vice versa. Such can be seen in the example of a queen and her maiden home. When the queen received *eon'gan* from her relatives who lived outside the palace, she would write her responses in the margins of the letters received, and return them to her family with the purpose of not keeping any outsider's script in the palace. When the queen's letters arrived, her family would gather them with decorum and wash off the script on the letters in order to show reverence for the palace. The earliest *eon'gan* of scholar-officials that are extant today are the *Suncheon Kim-ssi myo chulto ganchal* (順天金氏墓出土簡札,

“Letters from the Coffin of Suncheon Kim-ssi”) unearthed from the tomb of Suncheon Kim-ssi in Cheongju, Chungcheongbuk-do in 1977. Many *eon'gan* (189 pieces) dated before the Imjin Waeran (Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592), assumed to be from sometime during the latter half of the sixteenth century, were discovered at the site and found to have been mainly sent between parent and child, husband and wife, mother-in-law and son-in-law, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, brother and sister, and so forth (Jo Hang-beom 1998: 7-15). If *eonmun* began to be commonly used in provincial regions in the sixteenth century, it can be inferred from these letters that the vernacular script and

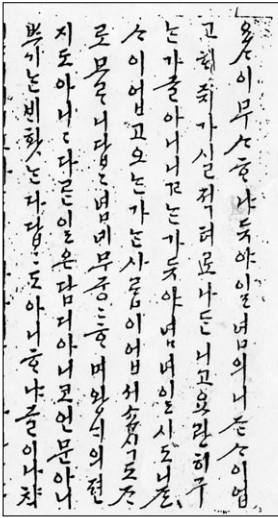


**Material 1.** *Eon'gan* of Songgang's mother (1571): Mother (Juksan An-ssi, 竹山安氏) to son (Songgang Jeong Cheol, 松江 鄭澈)<sup>1</sup>

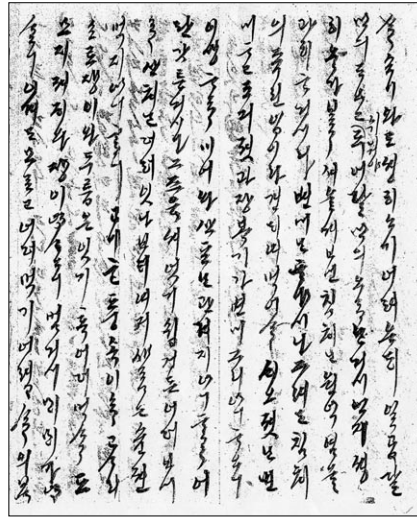


**Material 2.** *Eon'gan* of An Min-hak (1576): Husband (An Min-hak, 安敏學) to wife (Hyeonpung Kwak-ssi, 玄風郭氏)<sup>2</sup>

1. See Kim Il-geun for details on bibliography and deciphering of this *eon'gan* (Kim Il-geun 1991: 49-50, 180).
2. See Gu Su-yeong for details on bibliography and deciphering of this *eon'gan*. (Gu Su-yeong 1979: 169-184).



**Material 3.** *Eon'gan* of Wansan Yi-ssi (1704): Mother (Wansan Yi-ssi, 完山李氏) to son (Maeng Suk-ju, 孟淑周)<sup>3</sup>



**Material 4.** *Eon'gan* of Kim Jeong-hui (1841): Husband (Kim Jeong-hui, 金正喜) to wife (Yean Yi-ssi, 禮安李氏)<sup>4</sup>

vernacular letters had been widely accepted by the latter half of the sixteenth century. The number of extant *eon'gan* dating from the seventeenth century has largely increased, and there are even a handsome number of *eon'gan-cheop* (collections of vernacular letters) from prestigious families that have been handed down. All of these speak well for *eon'gan* being widespread.

Handwriting changes in *eon'gan* show more evidence of the spread of *eon'gan* over time. Materials of the early stage during the latter half of the sixteenth century (Material 1 and Material 2) show that men and women were both writing in the so-called *hyobinche* (效顰體) style, which awkwardly imitated the writing style of Chinese characters; all characters were written separately, and there was almost no sign of the cursive hand. But as time passed, women's handwriting became nearly fixed in the so-called *gungche* (宮體), or palace, style (Material 3), and men were writing in an extremely cursive hand that connected several characters at one time (Material 4). The changes in handwriting

3. See Kim Il-geun for details on bibliography and deciphering of this *eon'gan*, (Kim Il-geun 1991: 74-77, 176).

4. See Kim Il-geun for details on bibliography and deciphering of this *eon'gan*, (Kim Il-geun 1991: 49-50, 180)

show that both men and women became more familiar with *eon'gan* as compared to the early stage.

The pattern through which *eon'gan* spread beyond scholar-officials to commoners and those of the lower classes is not yet clear. However, it has been verified that people of the lower classes used *eon'gan* from the seventeenth century. Due to the fact that *eon'gan* appeared in an intermittent fashion, it is not easy to trace the process of their proliferation among the lower classes. Nevertheless, the appearance of *Eon'gandok* (諺簡牘, Formulas of Vernacular Letters) in the nineteenth century gives us a clear sense that *eon'gan* were generalized even among people who were not official-scholars. *Eon'gandok* was a collection of *eon'gan* formulas and functioned as a textbook to teach both the women of the scholar-official class and commoners how to compose letters. *Eon'gandok* was published for commercial purposes, which implies that the usage of *eon'gan* was common. Moreover, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the *Jeungbo eon'gandok* (增補諺簡牘, Complemented Formulas of Vernacular Letters) appeared, which complemented the former *Eon'gandok*, and the large circulation of its *banggak-bon* (坊刻本, privately published version) is more evidence of an even wider prevalence of *eon'gan*. New formulas in the forms of *baeji* (牌旨) and *gomok* (告目) were added in the *Jeungbo eon'gandok*, and it is obvious that *eon'gan* were also common among people of lower classes due to the fact that these formulas were used in the *eon'gan* between master and servant.

## Contents of *Eon'gan*

Although *eon'gan* were publicly restricted, they were the most common means to express people's feelings in everyday life; the *eon'gan* of the palace were no exception. Let's take a look at some of the *eon'gan* written by the king and queen in the middle of the seventeenth century (Kim Il-geun 1991: 59-66).<sup>5</sup>

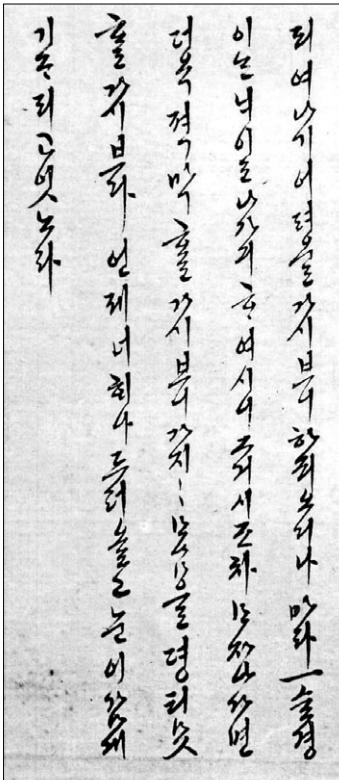
(1a). 숙경이는 니일 나가과 하여시니 그거시조차 무자 나가면 더욱 적막  
흘가 시브니 가지 " 무음을 덩티 못 흘가 시브다 언제 너히나 드러올고  
눈이 감게 기 더리고 잇노라 (Material 5)

5. See Kim Il-geun for details on bibliographies and deciphering of *eon'gan* in Materials 5, 6, and 7.

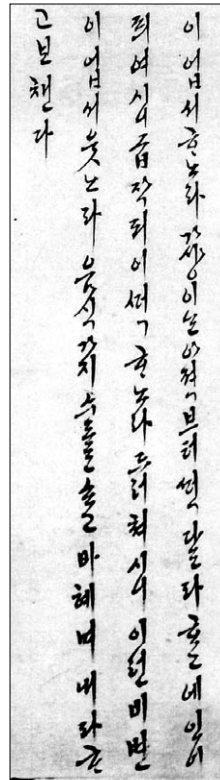
[I will send Sukgyeong (淑敬) away from home tomorrow. If she leaves home now, I will be more lonely. (Thinking of this), I really cannot calm myself. I wonder when you will come back. I cannot help closing my eyes and waiting for your return.]

(1b). 가상이는 아적브터 썩 달라 하고 예인이 피여시니 급작되이 썩 하노라 드러쳐시니 이런 비변이 업서 옷노라 음식 가지 수를 손고바 헤며 내라 하고 보챌다 (Material 6)

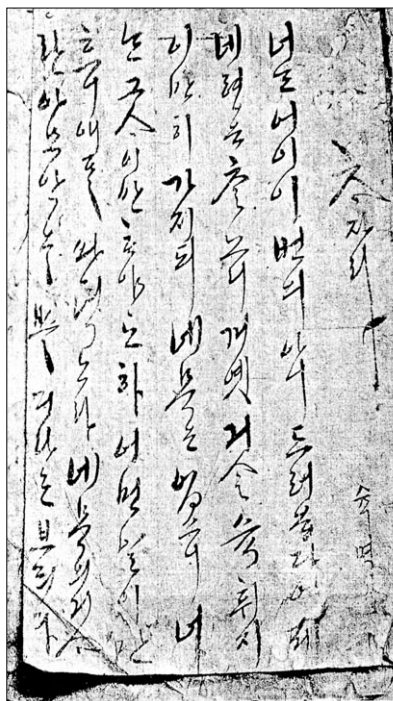
[Gasang (the name of Queen Inseon's grandson) begged for rice cakes since this morning. We suddenly found ourselves rushing to prepare rice



**Material 5.** Eon'gan of Queen Inseon: Mother (Queen Inseon, 仁宣王后) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong, 淑明公主)



**Material 6.** Eon'gan of Queen Inseon: Mother (Queen Inseon, 仁宣王后) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong, 淑明公主)



**Material 7.** *Eon' gan* of King Hyojong: Father (King Hyojong, 孝宗大王) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong, 淑明公主)

cakes, and all were amused at the unexpected situation. Counting the prepared food with his fingers, he importuned to eat them.]

(2) 너는 어이 이번의 아니 드러온다 어제 네 형은 출노리개엿 거슬 숙취지이 만히 가지되 네 목은 업스니 너는 그 스이만 향야도 하 어떤 일이 만흐니 애 돌와 덕노라 네 목의 거스란 아모 악을 뜯디라도 브되다 츠자라 (Material 7)

[Why didn't you come back this time? Yesterday your elder sister (Princess Suga, 淑安公主) received many pendant ornaments, and even Sukhui (younger sister of Princess Sungmyeong) received a lot, but nothing was left for you. My heart aches when I think of the difficulties you suffer these days. I want you to get your share back from your sisters even if with "violence."]

*Eon' gan* (1a) was the letter sent by Queen Inseon to her daughter, Princess Sungmyeong. The letter expresses the mother's loneliness after her youngest daughter wedded as well as her heart longing for the already married daughter, Princess Sungmyeong. From the expression of "I cannot help closing my eyes and waiting for your return," we can conjure the image of an anxiously expecting mother. *Eon' gan* (1b) describes a fretful little grandson who suddenly wants rice cakes. Despite the unexpected disturbance, the grandmother's affection for the cute coquetry of her little grandson was well displayed. Both (1a) and (1b) convey the ordinary sorrow and joy of everyday life in the palace, no different from ordinary families.

This ordinariness is not only seen in the *eon' gan* sent between the mother and the daughter in the palace, but Material 7 is also filled with the same ordinary love between the father, King Hyojong, and his daughter, Princess

Sungmyeong. It seems that the father was very sorry at the absence of her daughter, Princess Sungmyeong, when the pendant ornaments were distributed among his daughters. So he wrote to ask Princess Sungmyeong to visit her sisters and get her share from them, even by violent means. In this part of the letter, we can feel the king's humor together with the extremely ordinary love of the father.

The situation was such even in the extremely stern palace, let alone in the *eon'gan* circulated among commoners. In fact, *eon'gan* were the most common means for the people to convey their true feelings of everyday life during the Joseon period. Further, *eon'gan* were not only sent between the living but also put into the coffins of the dead to express deep sorrow for their early departure. Letters in coffins first appeared as early as the latter half of the sixteenth century as can be seen in the example of *eon'gan* from/to a scholar-official below:

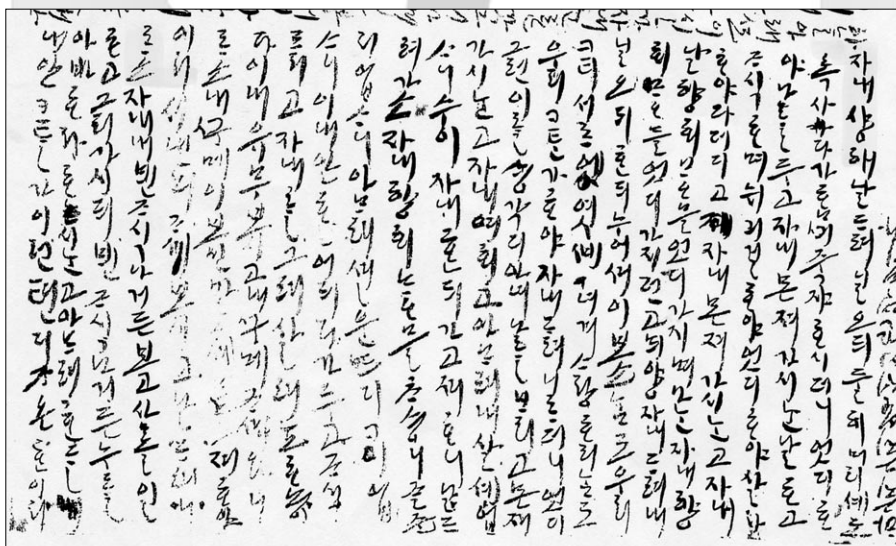
(3a). ...엇하여 내 모매 죄양이 사히셔 병 둔 나는 사랏고 병 업던 그디는  
 백년히로 훌 언약글 저 불고 엄홀히 일도애 어드러 가신고 이 말 니르간디  
 는 텃디 무굼하고 우뉘 곱활홀 쫄람미로쇠 즐홀이 주거 다 그디과 백시나  
 흥가 든너 이 언알 일오고... (Material 2)

[Why is it that I am still alive despite various ailments, and where did you, who have ever been healthy, suddenly go, breaking our promise to live together for one hundred years? This world feels so big yet empty. I'd better die and go to you, so we can keep our promise.] <*Eon'gan of An Min-hak* (1576): Husband to wife>

(3b). 자내 상해 날드려 닐오디 돌히 머리 세도록 사다가 흠찌 죽자 하시  
 더니 엇디 하야 나를 두고 자내 몬져 가시는 날하고 츠식하며 뉘 괴걸하야  
 엇디 하야 살라 하야 다 더디고 자내 몬져 가시논고 자내 날 향히 모을  
 엇디 가지며 나는 자내 날 향히 모을 엇디 가지던고 미양 자내드려 내  
 닐오디 흥디 누어서 이 보소 녀도 우리기터 서르 에엿세 녀겨 사랑하리  
 녀도 우리 기터가 하야 자내드려 니르더니 엇디 그런 이를 싱각디 아녀  
 나르 버리고 몬져 가시논고 자내 여히고 아미려 내 살세 업스니 수이 자  
 내흥디 가고져 하니 날 드려가소 자내 향히 모을 츠싱 니줄 주리 업스  
 니 아미려 설운 뿌디 기어 업스니 이 내 안홀어디다가 두고 츠식 드리고  
 자내를 그려 살려노 흥뇌이다 이 내 유무 보시고 내 쉰매 췌세 와 니르소  
 내 쉰매 이 보신 말 췌세 듣고져 하야 이리서 년뇌 췌세 보시고 날드려 니  
 르소 (Material 8)



[You often said that we would live until our heads turn grey and then die together. Why is it that you deserted me and went to your reward so early? What makes you think that I would be able to live without you? The feelings you had for me are just like the feelings I have for you. When you were alive, I asked you every night while we lay together, “Honey, do other couples love each other like we do?” How could you forget that promise and go away by yourself, leaving me alone? Without you I cannot live, and so please let me go with you. I am unable to forget you in this life; my mind’s grief is immeasurable in this world. I do not know whether I can put my sorrow away and continue to live with our children while missing you. Read my letter carefully, and come to my dreams and talk to me. I want to hear in my dreams that you read my letter. For this reason I put it in your coffin. Read it carefully and talk to me.] <Eon' gan of Yi Eung-tae's wife (1586): Wife to husband (Yi Eung-tae)>



Material 8. Eon' gan excavated in the tomb of Yi Eung-tae (1586): Wife to husband (Yi Eung-tae, 李應台)<sup>6</sup>

6. See An Gwi-nam for details on bibliography and deciphering of eon' gan, (An Gwi-nam 1999: 40-46).

(3a) is a letter in a coffin sent by An Min-hak to his wife (Material 2), and (3b) is the *eon'gan* in the coffin of Yi Eung-tae, put in by his wife (Material 8). Both were put on the chests of the dead as if to protect them, and both express the distress and desolation of the writers after losing their beloved partners. The wife's letter in the coffin in particular, which recalls one sweet moment when the husband was still alive and which asks her husband to come to her in her dreams, still touches the reader's hearts even after four hundred years. Because earnest feelings of individuals could be expressed in *eon'gan*, they are found in the coffins of the dead.

### *Eon'gan* as Material for Academic Research

Because *eon'gan* were the most popular means to express private feelings, they contain the richest common vocabularies among the materials of the time. Let's look at some of the *eon'gan* from the same king and queen as mentioned above:

(4a). 숙경이는 나가니 그 거술사 두고 쇼일도 하고 걱정도 하며 날을 디 내더니 무자 내여 보내니 경수로 나가건마는 섭 " 호젓 곶브기를 어이 다 덕으리 이리 섭 "고 곶브나 마음을 모디리 머거 웃고 내여 보내엿노라

[I have spent my days with Sukgyeong and worried about her. She will soon enter the wedded state. And although it is a happy occasion for our family, I am still very sad and feel lonely. How can I write down all that I feel in this letter? I repressed feelings of such emptiness and confusion and send her to her marriage with a smile.] <*Eon'gan of Queen Inseon* (1660s): Mother (Queen Inseon) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong)>

알폰 디는 조금도 이리 업서 훈가지라 하니 아마도 민망 " 훈기 아따라타 업서 ㅎ노라

[I'm so very sorry beyond expression to hear that you are the same as before and not recovered even a little from your illness.] <*Eon'gan of Queen Inseon* (1660): Mother (Queen Inseon) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong)>

전년 이 때에 모다셔 즐거이 디내던 이리 그 더덕 네 일이 되어 일마다 아

니 설운 이리 업스니 혼갓 톡 // 혼 눈물뿐이로다

[At this time last year, we gathered here and had a great time, but it is now the past. Everything is of sorrow, and I live feeling only disheartened and choked up in my heart.] <*Eon'gan of Queen Inseon* (1660): Mother (Queen Inseon) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong)>

(4b). 병과 죽과는 되여야 도타 혼니 혼 시국 부비수처 알코 도화야 도혼 디 더리 어렵듯 혼고 이시니 더욱 곱 // 혼여 혼노라

[It is said that illness and hot porridge are at their best when they are intense. She will get well after a moment of intense suffering, but it does not look that way with her. And I am very frustrated about her condition.] <*Eon'gan of Queen Inseon* (1669): Mother (Queen Inseon) to daughter (Princess Sukhwi, 淑徽公主)>

우호로 부모를 싱각 혼고 싱심도 무익 혼 슬쭈지 말고 밥이나 힘써 먹고 병 드러 근심 기티디 말아

[If you think of your parents above all else, please do nothing harmful to yourself, such as becoming too sorrowful to affect your health, skipping meals, and getting ill so as to cause us to worry about you.] <*Eon'gan of King Hyojong* (mid 17th Century): Father (King Hyojong) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong)>

원상의 싱일의 오손 조각 모화 혼여 준 거시 머어시 이것 혼리 할미 하암 이 그리 혼석저이 혼엿닷다

[How can my mind be in a comfortable state when I saw Wonsang wear clothes made from cut pieces of cloth on his birthday? His grandmother's stupidity made him look ridiculous.] <*Eon'gan of Queen Inseon* (mid-seventeenth century): Mother (Queen Inseon) to daughter (Princess Sungmyeong)>

In (4a), each of the underscored words “곶브-,” “아 므라타 없-,” and “톡 톡 혼-” means “feel such emptiness and confusion,” “be beyond expression” and “feel only disheartened and choked up.” These are words describing the subjective feeling of the writer. As mentioned above, these were popularly used in the

*eon'gan* of the seventeenth century, but they were rarely found in printed materials of the time. The discordance lies in the fact that *eon'gan* were more suitable for expressing one's private and true feelings, therefore quite different than the vocabulary of more official documents. In (4b), although the underscored words “부 비숫-,” “슬쭈지,” “혹석젯-” and “이젯ㅎ-” did not appear very often as in (4a), neither can they be found in the printed materials of that time period. Today's archaic dictionaries are based on vocabulary from printed materials, so these words are not found in such dictionaries. There is a lot vocabulary from *eon'gan* that should be registered in archaic dictionaries. Thus, it is not excessive to say that *eon'gan* are “the treasure-house of everyday vocabulary” from the point that most of the words were actually used in everyday life.

The characteristics of vocabulary in *eon'gan* are closely related to the fact that the Korean language used in *eon'gan* has nothing to do with *eonhae* (諺解, vernacular translations). The extant printed materials were mostly translated from other languages into Korean, and thus, contain *eonhae* features that make these materials not free of limitations or influences from the original works (mostly Chinese books). An example of such an interruption is the *Dongguk sin-sok samgang haengsil-do* (東國新續三綱行實圖, Illustrated Conduct of Three Bonds of Korea, Newly Supplemented) of 1617. In it, “그 어미와 밋 식어미로 더브러” (*Yeollyeodo*, 烈女圖 8: 7b) and “밋 밤 들때 ㄱ마니 나가” (*Yeollyeodo*, 烈女圖 4: 41b) are the translations for “與其母及姑” and “及夜間潛出” of the original text, respectively. “밋” should not be added in accordance with Korean grammar in the former sentence, and in comparison to “밤 들때 미쳐,” the translation of word order is unnatural in the latter sentence. These are the results of forcefully matching the Chinese character “及” to the native Korean word “밋” (“밋-” with “to reach”) and making a rigid word-for-word translation according to the word order of the original text. However, due to the nature of *eon'gan*, such interruptions did not exist in *eon'gan*. The word order and vocabulary of *eon'gan* simply reflect natural Korean language; it has nothing to do with any kind of “translation.” It is no exaggeration to say that the literary style of *eon'gan* made a great contribution to the literary style of the vernacular prose of Korea because *eon'gan* were extensively used by people of all social strata who had mastered *eonmun* (諺文).

An *Eon'gan* is basically a letter with a sender and a recipient. Moreover, we can know who was of high or low status because the identities of the sender and recipient are shown on the envelopes or are inferable from the contents of the letter, along with what the relationship between them was. In this way, *eon'gan*

have great value in investigating the honorific system of the classic Korean language. Also, because of the conversational feature of *eon'gan*, colloquial and dialectic expressions appeared at a relatively early stage.

(5a). 자내 여히고 아마려 내 살 세 업스니 수이 자내 흔디 가고져 하니 날  
드러 가소 자내 향히 모으물 초싱 니줄 주리 업스니 아마려 설운 빠디 그  
이 업스니

[Without you I cannot live, and so please let me go with you. I am unable to forget you in this life; my mind's grief is immeasurable in this world.]  
<Eon'gan excavated from the tomb of Yi Eung-tae (1586): Wife to husband (Yi Eung-tae)>

(5b). 마님 기체후 일히 만안 하옵신지 벵 복모 구〃 무님하성니오며 (...  
중략...) 안의 가 단여온 후은 전인을 허옵던지 쇼인니 가서 문안 하옵고  
자서한 말심을 살불넌지 하촉 허옵시기를 바리옵네다

[I wonder if my master's health is in a good state. I prostrate myself before you, for I cannot control myself from longing for you [skip] after I stop by Anui (name of a place), please issue orders to me as to whether you will send someone to me or whether I myself should go visit you to give you more details.] <Gomok (1894): Commoner to magistrate (Jo Byeong-gil, 趙秉吉)><sup>7</sup>

(5a) is a part from the letters in the coffins previously introduced. The words and expressions underscored appeared earlier in *eon'gan* than in printed materials. It is known from printed materials that “자내” (prototype of present-day “자네” in Korean) as the second person pronoun was found first in the *Cheophae sin'eo* (捷解新語, Shortcut to the New Language [in Japanese]) of 1676, and “히” as an abbreviated form of “히여/히야” appeared after the nineteenth century in the later period of the modern Korean language, but such usages can be found in *eon'gan* from the latter half of the sixteenth century. If “흔디” in the expression “자내 흔디” is the old form of present-day “한테” in Korean, this can also be considered as a good example of spoken Korean appearing at an earlier period

7. See Kim Il-geun for details on bibliography and deciphering of *eon'gan* (Kim Il-geun 1986: 93-95; 1991: 243-244).

than its written counterpart. (5b) is a part of an *eon'gan* whose recipient was Jo Byeong-gil, the magistrate of Yeongnam District, and the sender was a commoner (the formula of this letter is called *gomok*, 告目). The underscored words of the letter are considered to be dialects (Gyeongsang dialect) corresponding each to “일향, 병, 말습, 슬을는지” of the central language. Not only the native Korean words, but even the conservative Sino-Korean words had various forms of dialect, and this reaffirms the colloquial characteristic of *eon'gan*.

On the other hand, *eon'gan* express the feelings of everyday life, so we can understand the real state of the individuals and contemporary society from the contents of *eon'gan*.

(6a). 형데 이신 적의도 그리 앓기와 온갖 사외를 ㅎ읍거든 이제 불형ㅎ와  
 제 형을 일허시니 제 아비 골육이 저만 잇습거든 더욱 므슴 사외를 아니  
 ㅎ오리잇가 ... 세상의 네브터 즈손이 거포 주그면 그 훗 즈식을 즈식이라  
아니ㅎ야 일흠을 손이라 커나 나그내라 커나 짓줍고 놈의 집의 가 길러  
내누니 만ㅎ니다

[Even when the brothers were alive, all kinds of taboos were made to keep him (Yun I-hu, 尹以厚 [1636-1699]) from dying. Now a misfortune occurred, and I-hu lost his elder brother. Now that his father (Yun Eui-mi, 尹義美 [1612-1636]) has just one son, won't he make even more taboos? From old times, when descendants died successively, many people would name the surviving heir “guest” or “traveller” and send him to be fostered by other families.] <*Eon'gan of Yun Seon-do* (1657): Brother-in-law (Yun Seon-do, 尹善道, the younger brother of Yun Seon-eon) to sister-in-law (Wonju Won-ssi, 原州元氏, the wife of Yun Seon-eon, 尹善言)><sup>8</sup>

(6b). 일것 ㅎ야 보낸 춘물은 마른 것 외의난 다 상ㅎ야 먹을 길이 업습 약  
 식 인절미가 앓갑습 슈이 와도 성이 오기 어려운디 일곱 달 만의도 오고  
 쉬어야 두어 달 만의 오읍는 것 엇지 성히 올가 보읍 서울서 보낸 침채는  
 원약 염을 과히 ㅎ 거시라 변미는 ㅎ야시나 그러도 침채의 주린 입이라  
 견디어 먹어습 시오젓만 변미 ㅎ고 조긱젓과 장복기가 변미 그리 아니 ㅎ  
 오니 이상 ㅎ읍 미어와 산포는 관겨치 아니 ㅎ읍 산채는 더러 잇나 보디 여  
 귀 사름은 슌전 먹지 아니 ㅎ오니 고이 ㅎ 풍속이 읍 고소리 쇼료장이와 두

8. See Bak Yo-sun and Kim Il-geun for details on bibliography and deciphering of *eon'gan* (Bak Yo-sun 1974: 281-290); Kim Il-geun 1986: 66-67; 1991: 206-209).

룹은 잇기 혹 어더 먹습 도모지 저지와 장이 업스오니 범거시 띠미가 업  
스오니 이셔도 모로고 어더 먹기 어렵습 (Material 4)

[Almost all of the dishes you made with effort and sent to me went bad and could not be eaten except for the dried foods. *Yaksik* (flavored glutinous rice) and *injeolmi* (cake made from glutinous rice) were, regrettably, inedible. No matter how quickly food is sent, it is difficult for it to arrive in an edible condition. It normally takes seven months, or at least a few months, for food to arrive here. How can the food remain in good condition? *Chimchae* (gimchi) sent from Seoul was too salty, so its taste has changed. Nevertheless, I managed to eat it because I had a hankering for it. The taste of pickled shrimps changed, but it is a little strange that pickled yellow corvina and thick soy paste mixed with red pepper did not change so much. *Mieo* (?) and the dried strips of beef are good. If you can get things like fish eggs easily there, please send them to me. I guess there are wild edible greens here somewhere, but it is very strange that the people here do not eat them at all. There are fern brakes, *sorujaeng'i*, and aralia shoots here, so I gather and eat them sometimes. There are no markets for buying or selling, so it is very difficult to get what I want although I know they exist.] <*Eon' gan of Kim Jeong-hui* (1841): Husband (Kim Jeong-hui, 金正喜) to wife (Yean Yi-ssi, 禮安李氏)>

(6a) is the *eon' gan* sent by Gosan Yun Seon-do (孤山 尹善道) to his sister-in-law. Gosan was having a dispute with his sister-in-law regarding the problem of adopting a grandson. In the letter, we see a new image of Gosan who used logic to persuade his sister-in-law with honesty, but what is more noteworthy is that the custom of the time was proven by Gosan's words. When the descendants of a family die successively and it becomes difficult to maintain the bloodline of a clan, the heir would be named "guest," or "traveller," and sent to be raised by another family. It helps us understand the taboo of contemporary scholar-official families. *Eon' gan* (6b) was written by Chusa Kim Jeong-hui (秋史 金正喜) at the time when he was banished to Jeju Island. He describes in detail the difficulties of getting food. Although some food was mailed by his family from Seoul, food sent by ship normally took seven months or so to arrive, or at least a few months if delivered quickly. Chusa was making a cross-question, "How could the food be in good condition?" and one by one reporting on the state of the food he received. Besides this description, he thought the customs of Jeju Island strange because

Jeju people did not eat wild edible greens, saying that the ones he liked could not be found in the market. The serious situation Chusa faced, together with the customs of the local Jeju people, are neatly presented before us. It reaffirms that *eon'gan* can help us grasp the society of the past more clearly.

## Summary

*Eon'gan* were the common means to express the private feelings of everyday life during the Joseon period. From the above, we see that *eon'gan* were used widely, from the king as well all the way to the lower classes, and thus, *eon'gan* have become a precious soil in which the Korean language has been preserved. *Eon'gan* are totally free of the characteristics of translated materials; they show a natural word order and contain the rich everyday vocabulary of the Korean language of the time. Also, *eon'gan* are colloquial in that they precisely reflect the honorific system, the dialect, and the spoken form of the contemporary language more than any other material. As such, they complement the printed materials that were centered on translation and contribute greatly to the depth and breadth of research conducted on the history of the Korean language. On the other hand, the contents of *eon'gan* display the actual daily life of the times, so they are also active materials for research on the living history of Koreans, and the history of Korean folklore and education, and so on. That is to say, *eon'gan* are not only valuable for studying the Korean language, but also can be used for research in various other fields. We should actively promote the discovery of new *eon'gan* and push for further interdisciplinary studies in the future.

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