

Materials on Korean Studies

Annotated Translation of
“A Memorial of My Aunt,
Madam Yun of Papyeong”

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Introduction to Text

The piece of writing selected is a type of eulogy which a person would write for a deceased relative on the event of their memorial ceremony. The purpose of such writing was to memorialize and cherish the dead, so it often contained praises of the deceased as well as the lamentations of the writer. This writing would be read and offered up with written prayers during the ancestor memorial service for the dead. Although both men and women wrote such eulogies, women often used *hangeul* while men wrote in *hanmun*. This text is a rare example of a eulogy written by a woman in *hanmun*.

The writer of this particular eulogy was a woman by the name of Nam Jeongilheon (1840-1922). She was born in the 6th year of the reign of King Heonjong, in the city of Uiryong in Gyeongsangnam Province near the Nam River in the southeast of Korea. Nam Jeongilheon's father, Nam Saewon, was the seventh grandson of the well-known scholar and politician Nam Guman (1629-1711), who had served as Prime Minister under King Sukjong and was leader of the *sonon* court faction. At the age of three, Nam Jeongilheon mastered the reading and writing of *hangeul*, and from then on her grandfather began to teach her to read *hanmun*. It was said that even though she was taught dozens of new characters each day, she was able to memorize them all and eventually even mastered the Confucian Classics and historical records. At the age of 16, Nam Jeongilheon married Seong Daeho (1839-1859) but, four years later, he passed away and she became a childless widow. Since her husband died before she bore a son, Nam Jeongilheon's father-in-law found a relative for her to adopt as a son and named him Seong Taeyoung. Based on poetry written in her spare time, Nam Jeongilheon cherished her adopted son and the two had a close relationship. It is on account of the efforts of this son that any record of Nam Jeongilheon remains for posterity. Nam Jeongilheon kept her poems hidden until 1894 when, following the Donghak Uprising, she burned the majority of them. Immediately following her death in 1922, Seong Taeyoung gathered up the remaining works written by his adoptive mother and published them in 1923 in an anthology named after her. This published anthology contains 57 poems, one eulogy, and several epitaphs (Lee and Hur 2005; Lee and Jeong 2005).

Although not stated explicitly, the eulogy transcribed and translated here most likely originated in the afore mentioned *Jeongilheon's Collected Poems*. This version, however, appears in the anthology *The World of Korean Classical Women's Scholarship*

한국 고전 여성 문학의 세계 edited and translated into Korean by Lee Hai-soon and Jeong Ha-yeong. When translating the eulogy presented here, I have also consulted Lee and Jeong's Korean translation. While their annotations concerning certain antiquated and ritual phrases were extremely useful, I found several instances of translation in which the Korean meaning did not seem explicitly derived from the Sinitic characters themselves. Thus, although Lee and Jeong no doubt constructed these interpretations based on a detailed knowledge of Nam Jeongilheon's life, there are several passages which I have translated differently in order to convey the imagery of the original text. Some of these phrases may sound odd to a modern English ear because there are no equivalents or because the intertextual references are unfamiliar. However, as a scholar who is interested in *how* people say things and what that reveals about their thoughts and lives, I believe that it is important to maintain as much of the original phrasing as possible in the translation.

Translation of "A Memorial of My Aunt, Madam Yun of Papyeong"

This year's ancestral rites are¹ on the 21st day² of the 3rd month³ in the year of the Monkey⁴ and I, Madam Nam of Uiryong,⁵ the widowed niece by marriage,⁶

1. The phrase 維歲次 is a phrase meaning "This year's ancestral rights are..." and is an idiomatic expression used at the beginning of a funeral oration or writing about a dead person which expresses condolences or lamentation and mourning.
2. 丙申 is the 33rd in the sexagenary cycle so it seems that the 21st day was a 丙申 day
3. 丙子 is the 13th year in the sexagenary cycle and it seems that Madam Nam of Uiryong was specifying that in that year the third month was a 丙子 month.
4. 甲 means "first" or "the first of the ten Heavenly Stems"; 申 "the 9th of the twelve Earthly Branches"; 丙 "the 3rd of the ten Heavenly Stems"; 朔 "new moon" or "the first day of the lunar month"; and 甲申 the 21st year of the sexagenary cycle, or the year of the monkey. Since the coup of 1884 was called 甲申政變 and Nam Jeongilheon lived from 1840-1922, the year she is referring to can only be 1884. On the assumption that the year in question was 1884 and that every 60 years the cycle repeats itself, I looked at a lunar calendar for the year 1944 and the 2nd day of the third lunar month would have been April 13th ("Gregorian-Lunar Calendar Conversion." Hong Kong Observatory. Accessed March 31, 2015. <http://www.hko.gov.hk/gts/time/conversion.htm>).
5. Uiryong 宜寧 is the name of a town in the southeastern province of Gyeongsangnam. It is situated near the centre of the province near the Nam River. The present-day town is located at approximately 35°20'N 128°20'E. Uiryong was the ancestral seat of Nam Jeongilheon's natal family (the Nam family) and not where she was residing at the time when she wrote this text.
6. Nam Jeongilheon is a widow writing about her uncle's wife.

sincerely make offerings, by means of humble and small things, to the spirit of my dead aunt. I write worthless writings, weep, and tell about my aunt.⁷ Now, I sit on the bamboo mat before the spirit of Madam⁸ Yun of Papyeong, Yi Gong of Jeungsan's⁹ deceased wife, and I say: "Alas!¹⁰ To grieve but not weep is a grief more extreme than weeping. To hold a memorial service but not write is like not holding a memorial service at all." In thinking of my mother, I think of my aunt and on account of my affection I make an offering to the spirit of the dead. In weeping for my mother, I weep for my aunt, and I let others know about her by means of writing.

Alas! What person does not have a true maternal family?¹¹ But my maternal family is different from that of others. The affection of my blood relations and the sincerity of my debt of gratitude makes us as if we are relatives of one family.¹² Aunt loved me as if I were her own daughter and relieved me from distress as if she were my own mother. Like a mother calling her daughter, my aunt would certainly say "my daughter," and like a daughter calling her mother, I would also say "my mother." Thereupon we formed a mother-daughter relationship. It was like the natural display of relatives. In our utmost affection we were very close, and in our utmost aspirations we concealed nothing.

7. Nam Jeongilheon refers to her aunt as 眞外戚叔母 which means "the wife of one's father's younger brother on the father's maternal (the paternal grandmother's) line." Since English lacks equivalent specificity, I have decided to just use the word "aunt."

8. Madam Yun of Papyeong's official title is 淑人, which means "virtuous woman." This title was given to the wives of civil officials or military officers who were above the 3rd rank inside the government.

9. Jeungsan 甌山 is difficult to locate because there are multiple places in Korea that bear the name. According to *Atlas of Korea* there are at least five such places in South Korea (Gangwon Province, Chungcheongnam Province, Gyeongsangbuk Province, and Jeollabuk Province), and two places in North Korea (Hamgyeongnam Province and Pyeongannam Province). Since Nam Jeongilheon is writing about her aunt married to her father's younger brother, it would make sense for them to reside in the vicinity of the family seat in Uiryeong. There is a Jeungsan Township in Gyeongsangbuk Province on the border with Gyeongsangnam Province (approximately 36°N 128°E) which is approximately 60-65 km from modern day Uiryeong and 30-35 km from the Nakdong River. There are also two places called Jeungsan in South Korea, one in Chungcheongnam Province and one in Gyeongsangnam Province. The latter is in Yangsan City, Mulgeum Town, which is located on the Nakdong River at approximately 35°20'N 129°E.

10. 嗚呼 denotes sounds of sadness or mourning.

11. By maternal family Nam Jeongilheon means her natal family. Since she has married and become a part of her husband's family, she uses the term 外, as her son would, to refer to the mother's side of the family.

12. In Joseon Korea, a woman changed families when she got married. Not only did she become part of her husband's family, but she ceased to belong to her natal family. However, in the case of Nam Jeongilheon, she remained close to her "former" natal family.

My aunt would "tut tut" when asked about me and sigh saying, "What a pity are my daughter's abilities and behavior! Not only are your abilities and behavior satisfying, but you have the generosity and skills of a gentleman. The love of my heart concentrates on you because of this."¹³ She frequently instructed me saying, "After your mother dies¹⁴ you must devote yourself to making offerings to the spirit of the dead. Take care of the writing and weep." The clear ringing sound of her words when she repeatedly taught me not to neglect the concerns of my heart still rings in my ears. Now I am the one whose tears become writing and who tells people about my aunt. All I am doing is expressing my utmost affection. How can there be a believable ceremony that relates my utmost affection without writing?

Alas! The grief! My aunt was a lady from the ancient days. She appeared naturally virtuous and gracious. She was equipped with the four virtues and beauty, and she had abundant experience in the Confucian Classics. She looked all around using the bright and beautiful lamp of the married women of the three periods of history.¹⁵ She wove and used her surplus strength in the day to make the substance of her body's actions one in accord with her inner heart. Her virtuous example within the house became a paragon for the whole family. Heaven blessed Madam Yun of Papyeong, along with the distinguished generations of the family and its fortunate relatives, and brought good fortune and luck to her so that the jade emblem was clear¹⁶ and the copper stamp shone brightly.¹⁷ Of the three blooming flowers in the courtyard, one flower was fragrant before the others. There is a country of the way where the phoenix cries and the rising sun enters upon a time of the

13. Presumably the aunt is not saying it is a pity that Nam Jeongilheon has abilities and good conduct but that she was born a woman and hence was not able to take full advantage of her skills in society.

14. Here the aunt is most likely referring to herself because Nam Jeongilheon previously mentioned that she called her aunt "mother."

15. 三古 refers to the division of the ancient times into three parts: 上古, 中古, and 下古.

16. 玉徽 refers to a circular sign or binding made out of jade that would be attached to the side of the six-stringed Korean zither. A jade sign meant that the product was of top quality. Here the aunt's exceptional talents are likened to the jade sign, meaning that they are of the best quality (Lee and Jeong 2005).

17. 銅章 refers to a stamp made out of copper. In Han China, government officials whose stipend was over a certain amount would get a copper stamp and a black cord. 銅章 also refers to a stamp made of copper which was given to commemorate integrity and morality. Nam Jeongilheon is saying that the status and the integrity of the family shone brightly because of her aunt (Lee and Jeong 2005).

mugwort.¹⁸ Filial piety is cultivated, and this is the honour of both the family and the country.

"Alas! The grief! How can I forget my aunt? Every person has a mother, but only I had two mothers. The utmost affection of mother and daughter was bestowed evenly between them both. My biological mother was my mother and my aunt was also my mother. In the year of the Ox, my mother unnaturally saw only heaven and left, and I, the one thread that did not die, wept blood at the age of three.¹⁹ What could I rely on? Only my aunt was alive. She pitied me for not having a mother and sympathized with me and loved me especially. I boarded a sedan chair and desired to set forth from my native calm town, and so I left my mother.²⁰ Thus, mother and daughter parted,²¹ but even though the steep and dangerous road²² was far, our correspondence was not cut off. Mother returned to the Nakdong River²³ and my family was at the lake,²⁴ but she still conveyed happy news to me as time passed. I longed for trivial things

18. Lee Hai-soon and Jeong Ha-yeong translate 朝陽, 鼎茵孝養 as "The morning sun shines and so a peaceful age came and children support their parents with utmost sincerity and parents raise their children well."

19. When she was three years old, Nam Jeongilheon's mother died and she wept bitterly.

20. This possibly refers to her marriage at the age of 16 since upper class women usually only traveled when they left their father's house and went to their husband's house. It is unclear whether she means her biological mother or aunt here, but in reading the next sentence it becomes clear that she is talking about her aunt.

21. Aunt and niece.

22. 鳥道, meaning "bird road," denotes a road so steep and dangerous that only a bird could manage it.

23. The aunt returns to 洛, which could mean either Seoul 京洛 or Nakdong River 洛東江. In the Korean translation by Lee Hai-soon and Jeong Ha-yeong, this has been translated as "Seoul." I have chosen not to do this on the grounds that the part of 京洛 which denotes Seoul is 京 since 京府 and 京師 both also mean Seoul. Nakdong River has its head near Angdong in Gyeongsangbuk Province and empties into the Korea Strait near Busan in Gyeongsangnam Province. It flows through the southeast quadrant of the Korean peninsula. There are also several places called Jeusan 鰲山 in relative proximity to the Nakdong River and so it would make sense for the aunt to return to the Nakdong River.

24. The text says merely 湖 but in their Korean translation Lee Hai-soon and Jeong Ha-yeong use the term 湖西 which refers to the provinces of Chungcheongbuk and Chungcheongnam. However, the term 湖南 can be used to refer to the provinces of Jeollabuk and Jeollanam. Both of the Chungcheong and Jeolla Provinces are in the southwest quadrant of the Korean Peninsula. There is a large lake called Daecheong Lake on the edge of Chungcheongbuk Province (at approximately 36°20'N 127°30'E) which is possibly the lake referred to since Chungcheongnam Province lies to the west and Jeolla Province to the south. 湖 is also the name of a county district/village. There is a place called "Hogoeul" in the city of Gunsan Naun-dong, which is located on the west coast in Jeollabuk Province near the border with Chungcheongnam Province (approximately 36°N 126°45'E). However, since the text says only 湖 I have chosen to use only "lake" in my translation.

and since the river and the lake²⁵ were distant we neither *had*, nor did *not have*, future plans.²⁶ What did I think this spring when the cart came and only then did I receive the news of my aunt's death? The separation of the recent years has suddenly become for eternity. In the past I had two mothers, but both have died. The road to the netherworld is dark and lonely. The face that I modeled myself after is forever obstructed and there is no price to make it fall from the sky, so I cry day and night. In time I presented myself to my father. He wore his official uniform and jade beads,²⁷ and was at ease and healthy. Now there is a filial young man, so he is able to continue the family honour.²⁸ Surely mother knows this. Do not forsake me because of my words of great grief! It is the sorrow of my utmost affection. Alas! There is not much but please receive this sacrificial offering and eat."²⁹

Original Text

維歲次，甲申三月丙子朔，二十一日丙申，戚姪未亡人宜寧南，謹以菲薄之奠，
鹵奔之文，哭告于真外戚叔母，今甌山李公故室，淑人坡平尹氏之靈筵，
曰：嗚呼，哀而不哭，則不哭之哀甚於哭，祭而無文，則無文之祭如不祭，
我以思母之思，思我戚母情以奠，我以哭母之哭，哭我戚母文以告。
戚母有知而聽我哀辭耶。

嗚呼，人孰無真外氏，而吾之真外家與恒人異，嫺親之情，恩義之篤，
如一家親，叔母愛我若己女，救我若親母，母之呼女，必曰吾女，女之呼母，
亦曰吾母，遂結母女之義，有若天顯之親。

至情無間，至志無隱。有時對吾，咄咄咨歎曰：惜哉，吾女之才行，
不惟才行之美，汝有丈夫之器量，是尤吾心之鍾愛也。常常教吾曰：汝母死後，

25. I read 江湖 as 江 and 湖 (meaning river and lake) rather than together meaning "nature" or "wide world" since I decided to understand 洛 as the name Nakdong River 洛東江. Under this interpretation, since the aunt lived near a river and Nam Jeongilheon lived near a lake, 江湖 would refer to the location of the aunt and the location of Nam Jeongilheon.

26. 後期 meaning "plans of a later period" and 有無 meaning "to have or not have." Presumably these future plans are plans to see each other again.

27. 緋玉 refers to the silk clothes and jade headband buttons worn as the official uniform of men of a certain rank in the royal palace.

28. This most likely means that her father now has a son or has adopted a son.

29. 尚饗 is a phrase used at the end of a written prayer. It means "There is not much but please receive the sacrificial offerings (of food) and eat."

汝必致奠而祭，為文而哭。申申之教，未忘于心，琅琅之言，猶在乎耳。今我一哭為文而告者，亦發於至情而已，何信於禮所云至情無文乎。

嗚呼，哀我戚母古之女士，天姿淑惠，四德具美，博涉經籍，三古女史，蘭燈周覽，女紅餘力，日用體行一部內則，梱內懿範，一門是式。

喬木世家，同其休戚，天祐淑人，降之福祥，玉徽泠泠，銅章煌煌。三秀庭芝，一枝先芳，有道之邦，鳳鳴朝陽，鼎茵孝養，家國之光。

嗚呼，哀我戚母俾也可忘。人皆一母，我獨二母，母女至情，得于勻賦。親母亦母，戚母亦母。丁丑不天，天只見背，未忘一縷，泣血三載，于何是恃，維戚母在，矜我無母，憐我尤愛。

千里安邑，板輿將發，我就母氏，母女相別，烏道云遐，鴈書不絕。母氏還洛，我家于湖，時貽德音，我思區區，江湖杳茫，後期有無。孰謂今春車來乃訃。頃年一別，奄作千古，昔有二母，今焉皆逝。泉塗冥漠，儀容永閉，穹隕無涯，日夜我涕。時觀阿爺，緋玉安康，茲有孝兒，克紹家聲，母兮有知。德我哀辭，匪我汰哉。至情之悲，嗚呼，尚饗。

Significance of Text

The segregation of female and male physical spheres among the *yangban* of Joseon Korea led to an equally stringent focus on the male in the public life of the country, which has historically permeated the English language scholarship on Korea. More recent scholarship has, however, made efforts to escape from such a mold and delve into the lives and influences of Korean women. In doing this, many scholars either slip into another dichotomy, that of the relationship between man and woman, or deal with a woman on her own as though she did not form connections with other people. These are not easy molds to escape since women were always referred to legally as being related to a man—someone's daughter, wife, or mother—and hierarchies within the female quarters of the husband's house were determined by the position of a woman's male relatives: husband or son. Yet, it is important to remember that women spent the majority of their lives amongst other women and thus female relationships were some of the most important day to day relationships for women. While the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law has been interrogated, the relationships between other women in the husband's house—sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law's wives, and concubines—is

rarely examined.³⁰ Even less discussed in English language scholarly research is the relationship between a woman and her mother or natal female relatives.³¹ A possible reason for this vacuum could be the lack of sources, particularly of an official nature, which are available for study. Records of mother/daughter relationships are relegated to such evasive sources as personal correspondences and writings. For this reason, the eulogy of Nam Jeongilheon for her aunt could present a rare glimpse into a hitherto uncommonly studied relationship in a woman's life.

In her eulogy, Nam Jeongilheon not only expressed the usual description of a woman's virtue, but she explained how her aunt stepped in to care for her from feelings of sympathy and affection. She continued to describe how the two of them had a strong and extremely affectionate mother/daughter relationship, and how, even when legally separated by marriage, Nam Jeongilheon continued to correspond with her aunt and maintained strong ties of affection with her natal family. By Nam Jeongilheon's own admission, her case cannot be upheld as the standard; however, such a eulogy serves as an example that breaks from the stereotypical female relations presented in the official records. At the very least, it prompts scholars to continue to examine issues of women in Korea and to acknowledge the extreme variation in the relationships of women. It also demonstrates the need to further examine sources written by women, or about women, whenever possible.

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30. Harvey (1983) does make a brief mention of sister-in-laws in his discussion of *minmyeoneuri* while Deuchler (1977) goes into some discussion of the place of the secondary wife in her husband's household.

31. Kendall (1983) has strived to remedy this through her discussion of Shamanistic *guts*.

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