

# Ideal Places in Classic Korean Poetry

Peter H. LEE

University of California

Most of classic Chinese ideal places, such as the time of Perfect Virtue 至德之世,<sup>1</sup> the Village of Not-Even-Anything 无何有之鄉 or the Broad and Borderless Field 壙垠之野,<sup>2</sup> the Land of Virtue Established 建德之國,<sup>3</sup> the country of Utmost North 終北之國,<sup>4</sup> and a dream land of Hua-hsü 華胥氏之國,<sup>5</sup> represent versions of chronological and cultural primitivism, models of simplicity, freedom, spontaneity, and ease. These eu-topoi (well-place) are really ou-topoi (no place), which can, as the speaker in *Lieh Tzu* avers, “be reached only by a journey of the spirit” 神游而已.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Peach Blossom Spring 桃源,<sup>7</sup> the first Chinese literary *locus amoenus* created by T’ao Ch’ien (365–427), is also one such place that haunted the imagination of later poets. In depicting man’s first and ideal state uncorrupted by the conventional system of values and conventional standards of judgments, the creators of a perfect society or a good place emphasized its “negative amenities”<sup>8</sup>: no distinction of good and evil, no useless knowledge and writing system, free from pride and envy, sickness and decay, sorrow and anguish, lust and hate, labor and war. The goal of the Taoist concept of enlightened living is embodied in the Nameless Man’s advice to T’ien Ken in the *Chuang Tzu* (7): “Let your mind wander in simplicity, blend your spirit with the vastness, follow along with things the way they are, and make no room for personal views” 遊心於淡，合氣於漠，順物自然，而无容私焉。<sup>9</sup>

In addition to a recurrent allusion to these places, Korean description of a pleasant place is found in the prose genre of the record (*ki*)—description of buildings (house, arbor, tower) and the natural riches surrounding them; and in the records of a dream journey (*mongyu rok*)—works that begin and end with dreaming and awakening, often in a pleasant place. Both written in classical Chinese, the aim of the first, like the 17th century English country house poems, is to stress the idea that the dweller’s virtue is reflected in the edifice and environment, and that of the second, akin to the Western dream allegory/vision, is to criticize the present or to seek for the ideal future. In this paper, I will discuss how classic Korean poets in the vernacular discovered a pleasant place here and now, in history, and what forms, themes, and techniques they employed in their works.

1.

Courtiers who helped found the new dynasty of Chosôn sang of a peaceful golden age as the product of the prowess of the Confucian soldier-statesman and later as that of reigning monarch's enlightened rule. Maeng Sasông 孟思誠 (1360–1438) who served the great king Sejong as Chief State Counselor, sings of simple joys of country life. His *Kangho sasi ka* 江湖四時歌 (Four Seasons by the Rivers and Lakes) is the first *sijo* 時調 sequence, and his image of an age of peace and prosperity consists of simple rural felicity. Spring gives him uncontrollable rapture (*mich'in hûng*), and he drinks turbid wine by the river with damask scaled fish as a side dish. In summer, the river sends to the speaker, who has no work, breeze to keep him cool.

Summer comes to the rivers and lakes,  
I'm idle at the grass hut.  
Friendly waves in the river  
Only send a cool breeze.  
I can keep myself cool  
Because of royal favor.<sup>10</sup>

In autumn, when every fish is sleek, he casts a net from his boat and leaves it to the stream's flow. In winter, when snow piles more than a foot high, he wears a bamboo hat and coarse-woven garment to keep himself warm. That he can enjoy leisure and simple seasonal pleasures in the country—nature's bounty and his comfortable life—are the gifts of the king. By simple panegyric topography Maeng has constructed the golden age under the benevolent rule of his king.

The idea that the peace the speaker enjoys is a gift of the king recurs in other similar works, such as the first song in the original "Fisherman's Songs" 漁夫歌 in twelve stanzas preserved in the *Akchang kasa* 樂章歌詞:

The old fisherman living in the cove says:  
"Life on the water is better than life in the hills."  
Cast off, cast off!  
A neap tide in the morning, a flow tide at night.  
*Chikokch'ong chigokch'ong osawa*  
Even a fishing rod and bright moon are royal favors.<sup>11</sup>

In the first of 12-stanza sequence, the speaker again builds a simple panegyric landscape and affirms the truth that the world of politics is not far away from the vision of a golden age.

2.

The epideictic strategy of the Korean country house poems, such as Chông Ch'ôl's 鄭澈 "Little Odes on Mount Star" 星山別曲 (*Sôngsan pyôlgok*) and Pak Illo's "Hall of Solitary Bliss" 獨樂堂 (*Tongnaktang*) bears similarities to seventeenth century English country house poems, including the ideal landscape as reflecting the virtue and character of the subject, like the paradisaical setting blessed with soil, air, wood, and water in Penshurst; an absence of display; the idealization of the subject by associating him with paragons of virtue in the tradition; emblematic association of plants and animals with his virtue; and a combination of the topographical and the didactic. On the other hand, such Korean works omit any description of buildings or their pedigree, the role of the landed aristocracy in the rural community, tenants, retainers, and servants, communal life (public meals and gatherings), the subject's forefathers, and hyperbolic flattery with political implications. The epideictic poet's job is to create an enduring monument of poetry to stimulate emulation; hence the poem dwells on the subject's moral beauties, and their lasting impact on society and culture. The praise of moral and spiritual excellence calls for a context of solitude and nature. Often explored are the dialectic patterns of withdrawal and emergence, the contemplative and active, self and the world, the contemplative as a necessary stage for an active career, moral cultivation as a prerequisite for public service, and the individual's moral sense as the only safeguard for institutions. Thus, in the course of describing the subject's moral beauties—be he a Taoist immortal or a Confucian sage—through praise of landscape, the poet reaffirms traditional cultural values and parades his knowledge of history and literature.

Written to praise the elegant life that Kim Sôngwôn 金成遠 (1525–1598) had established at the Mist Settling Hall and Resting Shadow Arbor on Mount Star in South Chôlla province, Chông's "Little Odes on Mount Star" (c. 1578) catalogues the delights of the four seasons, for example:

Floating clouds at the sky's edge come and go  
nestling on Auspicious Stone Terrace;  
their flying motion and gentle gestures  
resemble our host.  
White waves in the blue stream  
rim the arbor,  
as if someone stitched and spread  
the cloud brocade of the Weaver Star,  
the water rushes in endless patterns.  
In other mountains without a calendar

who would know the year's cycle?  
Here every subtle change of the seasons  
unrolls before us.  
Whether you hear or see,  
this is truly the land of immortals.

I follow the peach blossom causeway  
over to Fragrant Grass Islet.  
As I stroll to the West Brook,  
the stone screen painted by nature  
in the bright moonlit mirror  
accompanies me.  
Why seek Peach Blossoms Spring?  
Earthly paradise is here.<sup>12</sup>

Mount Star exceeds in beauty T'ao Ch'ien's Peach Blossom Spring; that it is, in fact, "the land of the immortals," is a topos of outdoing, but it could also be a reflection of the patriotic theme. The expansive landscape reflects Kim Sôngwôn's own liberality, freedom, and unworldliness, and the floating clouds and waterfowl (duck) mentioned elsewhere in the poem symbolize the mind and courtesy of the host. Thus, the poet is all the more cautious against the intrusion of cultural barbarians:

Don't boast of  
the recluse's riches  
lest some find out  
this lustrous, hidden world.

At the end, the poet, enraptured by the music played by his host on the black zither, avers that Kim is the true immortal in harmony with the workings of the universe, metaphorically flying high on the back of the crane. The crane is not only a symbol of longevity but a fitting emblem of unity and harmony. It soars above the world while maintaining an intimate relation with it, uniting time and space, time and timelessness.

The "Hall of Solitary Bliss"<sup>13</sup> by Pak Illo 朴仁老 (1561-1643) was written on the occasion of his poetic pilgrimage to the Hall of Solitary Bliss on Mount Purple Jade in Kyôngju, where the remains of Yi Ônjôk 李彦迪 (1491-1553) are preserved and Pak paid tribute to the master's memory. Yi Ônjôk served as Fourth Inspector and Second Censor before he suffered in the 1530 purge and withdrew to Mount Pur-



ple Jade near Kyôngju to study Neo-Confucian philosophy. In 1537, he was recalled by royal order and filled a number of high posts. The “Hall of Solitary Bliss” does not dwell on his political achievements, however, but on his exemplary virtues. As a statesman he was equal to Hou Chi 后稷 or Lord Millet, ancestor of the Chou dynasty, and Chieh 契, a wise minister under the legendary Emperor Shun. But caught in a political purge of 1547, he was sent into exile to the north where, like the Grand Tutor Chia I 賈誼 (201–168 B.C.) in Ch’ang-sha, he spent seven years in cold Kang-gye. There he transformed the rigors of the political winter into the bliss of a virtuous spring.

The poem utilizes such metaphors of natural harmony as graceful mountain peaks, a winding stream, straight bamboo, a caressing wind, and a dense pine grove and implies that these were spared by heaven and treasured by earth so that their riches could be handed down to the true “owner.” The emphasis is on the beauty, purity, and spontaneity of nature, symbolic of the subject’s harmonious, enlightened state of mind. The hall itself is a center of moral cultivation; what is praised is a way of life in the ideal setting, a mode of existence vital to the preservation of the enduring norms of the lettered class. Friends there are said to include such emblematic animals as hawks and fishes. These classical images from poem 239 in the *Book of Songs* 詩經<sup>14</sup> imply the self-contentedness of even birds and fish as first, as in the original context, a sign of the extent of moral transformation effected by an ideal ruler 鳶飛戾天魚躍于淵 (though here fish do not jump into the fishermen’s nets in their eagerness to serve the owner)<sup>15</sup> and, second, as emblems of the workings of the Confucian Way—how it is clearly seen in heaven and on earth.

Yi’s retreat surpasses in beauty and purity the Garden of Solitary Bliss 獨樂園 of Ssu-ma Kuang 司馬光 (1019–1086), Censer Peak 香爐峰 on Mount Lu 廬山, sung of by Li Po 李白 (701–762), the T’ien-t’ai Mountains 天臺山 in Chekiang, or even Peach Blossom Spring, the Chinese Arcadia. In moral and spiritual stature Yi Ônjôk is compared to Mount T’ai or the polestar, supreme emblems of Confucian moral rhetoric. Such hyperbolic description and metonymical representation create the *locus amoenus*—an ideal microcosm that mirrors the ideal state built on the Confucian political-moral philosophy. But on another level—since in Confucianism the disrupter of social and moral harmony is man himself—the poet has subtly introduced a satirical bite. That is, the images of perfection and hyperbolic praise indirectly deride those ignorant of the ideal pattern of emergence and withdrawal, the art of biding time, and cultivation of the self. A victim of political machination and senseless bloodshed which upset the moral and cosmic harmony, Yi’s dream of creating another golden age was shattered and the country became a wasteland. Still, even in exile he “cultivated virtue, the forthright Way,” and history eventually vindicated his name, private academies enshrined him, and he was worshipped in the

Confucian Temple, the highest honor accorded a scholar-statesman. Thus he was able to make use of adversity as a trial of spirit. “Jade is concealed in the rock, yet the hill is refulgent with it 玉蘊含輝,<sup>16</sup> says a passage in Lu Chi’s *Essay on Literature* 文賦 aptly evoked to exalt the master’s rural solitude, contemplative leisure, and complete modesty.

Virtue therefore serves as a bulwark against mutability. The man who dwells in the Hall of Solitary Bliss has conquered time by his paradigmatic acts, and his enduring virtues are bright as the sun and moon, eternal as the cool wind that blows through the hall itself.

Heaven so high and earth so rich,  
they, too, will dissolve into dust.  
None is eternal but the cool wind that blows  
through the Hall of Solitary Bliss.

### 3.

My third example is *The Angler’s Calendar* 漁夫四時詞 (1651) by Yun Sôndo 尹善道 (1587-1671), the product of his leisurely life at a favorite retreat, the Lotus Grotto 芙蓉洞 in southwest Korea. Written in intricate stanzas differing from the conventional *sijo* form, a pair of four-syllable words is added after the first line, and three-syllable onomatopoeic words after the second line.

Throughout the cycle Yun Sôndo introduces a number of subtle variations in form and organization. The emphatic syntactic division expected in the third line to introduce a deliberate twist in phrasing or meaning is often replaced by different technique. In the first poem of spring, the third line continues the description of a given spring scene (line numbers refer to the original):

line 1    fog lifts, the sun shines  
line 2    night tide neaps, high waters rush on  
line 3    flowers in the river hamlet, distant views

A similar structure recurs in the first poem of winter;

line 1    clouds roll away, the sun is warm  
line 2    heaven and earth are frozen, water is clear  
line 3    the boundless water is a silk brocade.

Here and elsewhere Yun Sôndo wishes to create an ideal landscape with memorable,

fresh particulars, the radiance of spring with visual freshness as in the first example. He is aware of the power in the landscape and attempts to reflect it in his description; at other times, a given landscape is designed to harmonize with his mood and superior solitude.

Images of nature that demonstrate the excellence of his estate in spring include: gulls (2); a distant fishing village (4); supple and sweet willows and flowers (6); fragrant grasses, orchids and angelica, the moon (7); peach blossoms (8); and the cuckoo (9). Indeed, Yun has broken the *sijo* canons to help create a place rich in natural beauties and to suggest that the fisherman lives in a state of joyful harmony—otherwise, nature imagery would be meaningless.

Lastly, what strikes the modern reader is a frequency of four-character Chinese phrases (I count thirty-two instances), especially when such a sonorous phrase, followed by a Korean marker, begins the third line, occupying the first hemistich (ten instances in the cycle,) Here I cite four examples.

This angler's life is [*ôbu.saengae.nûn* 漁夫生涯는]  
How I shall pass my days. (Spring 10)

Northern coves and southern river, [*pukp'o.namgang.i* 北浦南江이]  
Does it matter where I go? (Summer 3)

Do you hear an oriole calling [*pyôksu.aengsong.i* 碧樹鶯聲이]  
Here and there in the green grove? (Summer 7)

In an empty boat, with straw cape and hat, [*koju.sarip.e* 孤舟蓑笠이]  
I sit and my heart beats fast.<sup>17</sup> (Winter 7)

Often called in to satisfy metrical requirements and to say much in little to create an echo, these Chinese phrases produce a slow and solemn effect like a succession of spondees. Chosen for orotundity, they stand out amidst the Korean letters calling for an educated response. This dramatic shift in tone and diction recalls the use of Latinate elements in English poetry. The poetics of *sijo* calls for two metric segments in the first hemistich of the third line, but the examples cited offer one five-syllable segment that calls attention to its deliberate irregularity, slowing down the line with a distinct stress on each syllable.

The ten poems in the spring cycle depict a day's activities of a fisherman as he sets sail, scanning the river hamlets and distant views. Gulls accompany him and the servant boy and he makes sure that a wine flagon has been loaded. Passing hill upon hill, he hears a cuckoo and sees the willow in the distance. He then asks the boy to

have an old net ready. But being reminded of “The Fisherman” 漁夫 attributed to Ch’ü Yüan 屈原,<sup>18</sup> where the wise fisherman advises the wronged idealistic courtier the art of swimming in the sea of life, he asks himself if he should catch fish at all, especially when Ch’ü Yüan’s soul might reside in a fish. Twilight approaches, the speaker wishes to return to the shore and re-affirms that rank and riches are not what he wants. He then realizes that now the moon has occupied the boat, “small as a leaf.” The drunken speaker sees the peach blossoms floating down the stream, perhaps from T’ao Ch’ien’s literary utopia, an indication that he is far away from the world of men. On the boat he wishes to view the moon through a “bamboo awning.” Accompanied again by the cuckoo’s song, the speaker registers his heart’s rapture, treading fragrant grasses and picking orchids and angelica, as he mends his way to his cottage after passing a day as a wise fisherman.

Ideal places evoked in our examples are not placed at some immeasurable distance from the present, elsewhere and some other time; nor are they an enclosure, gated and walled; nor a country of the mind to be attained only by the force of the imagination. Maeng Sasông finds his pleasant place in the rural landscape and sings not only of his happy life but also of virtuous royal work that guarantees such lifestyle. In the country house poems, the pleasant landscape is the metonymic representations of the virtues of the subject. The epideictic poets such as Chông Ch’ôl and Pak Illo affirm the values of history and culture which insist on the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, society and nature. Subtly underlying the poems is the poets’ conviction that the return of political-moral harmony depends upon the harmony between man and nature. The restoration of civil order calls for man’s moral regeneration, but action might bring about a faster change hastening the application of the Arcadian vision to the world of politics. Such a dream, combining the active and contemplative, finds expression in the country-house poems. As a man’s dwelling expresses his virtue, so should a dynasty. Only a ruler’s bestowal of virtue on people and country can transform chaos into order and reaffirm the values of civilization. The ideal landscape, then, provides a setting in which to contemplate the enduring norms of history and culture.

Yun Sôndo working on the topos of fisherman as sage indicates that the happy fisherman’s discovery of self and nature is the result of his renouncement of the world. Hence the poems celebrate the newly discovered values by means of a pleasant landscape. But his place is not an unattainable ideal, a dream world, or only an interior landscape: it is here and now (Pogil Island 甫吉島, 18 km SW of Wando, South Chôlla province). As a seasoned politician who served four kings and spent 14 years in exile, Yun is content to bring in harsher realities and does not banish politics, generally considered inimical to a good life in nature, from his rural contemplation. Poetry cannot be divorced from reality, it is involved in history and, as

Yun says, we cannot dismiss its political and social engagements. "Is it a fairy land, or Buddha's realm?/It can't be the world of man," avers the poet viewing his estate covered with snow (Winter 4). It is in the pleasant place (Arcadia) that the poet learns the significance of the transformation of self by nature and the values of the creative independence of poetry. Arcadia is indeed "a place of witness, the place where...the Individual Talent [is] brought into confrontation with the Tradition."<sup>19</sup>

Korean poets understand life in relation to the fundamental patterns of nature and their poems become the vehicle for their acceptance of the human condition. Korean creators of ideal places have successfully expressed their view of life that combines both action and contemplation and that includes a relationship with reality. And they have shown their capacity to transform a common place into an ideal/pleasant place. "A heart that is distant creates a wilderness around it" 心遠地自偏, declared T'ao Ch'ien.<sup>20</sup> As long as man lives in joyful harmony with nature, s/he will always find a pleasant place.

## Notes

1. *A Concordance to Chuang Tzu*. Harvard Yen-ching Institute Sinological Index Series Supplement 20 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 9: 23; Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 105.
2. *Concordance* 7: 20 (Watson, pp. 93-94).
3. *Concordance* 20: 52 (Watson, p. 211).
4. *Lieh-tzu chi-shih* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1970), p. 163 (A.C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* [London: John Murray, 1960], p. 102-3).
5. *Lieh-tzu chi-shih*, p. 41 (Graham, p. 34).
6. *Ibid.*
7. James R. Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 254-58.
8. Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 117.
9. *Concordance* 7: 20 (Watson, p. 94).
10. Sim Chaewan, *Kyobon yôktae sijo chônsô* (Seoul: Sejong munhwasa, 1972), Nos. 124, 127, 115, and 116. The last line of the summer poem no. 127 (pp. 47-48) reads: *imomi sônulhaeomdo yôk kunûn isyatta* 이몸이서늘해움도亦君恩이 샅다.
11. *Akchang kasa* (reprint, n.d.); not listed in Sim Chaewan, op. cit. The last line reads: *ilgan myôngwôri yôk kunûn isyatta* 一竿明月이亦君恩이 샅다.
12. From my *Pine River and Lone Peak: An Anthology of Three Chosôn Dynasty Poets* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), pp. 60-64.
13. For more see *Pine River and Lone Peak*, pp. 26-29 and pp. 106-112 for translation.
14. Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 213.
15. Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst," lines 32-33, and Thomas Carew, "To Sexham," lines 27-28.
16. Cyril Birch, ed. *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 210; Victor Mair, *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (1994), p. 129; "When the rock embeds jade, the mountain glows."
17. *Pine River and Lone Peak*, pp. 154-167.
18. David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), pp. 90-91.
19. Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 47.

20. "Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine," 5: 4 (Arthur Waley, *Translations from the Chinese* [New York: Vintage Books, 1971], p. 83).

*Chōng Ch'öl*

Little Odes on Mount Star

(c. 1578)

[*Sōngsan pyōlgok*]

An unknown guest in passing  
stopped on Mount Star and said:  
"Listen, Master of Mist Settling Hall  
and Resting Shadow Arbor,  
despite the many pleasures  
life held,  
why did you prefer to them all  
this mountain, this water?  
What made you choose  
the solitude of hills and streams?"

Sweeping away the pine needles,  
setting a cushion on a bamboo couch,  
I casually climb into the seat  
and view the four quarters.  
Floating clouds at the sky's edge come and  
go

nestling on Auspicious Stone Terrace;  
their flying motion and gentle gestures  
resemble our host.

White waves in the blue stream  
rim the arbor,  
as if someone stitched and spread  
the cloud brocade of the Weaver Star,  
the water rushes  
in endless patterns.

In other mountains without a calendar  
who would know the year's cycle?  
Here every subtle change of the seasons  
unrolls before us.

Whether you hear or see,  
this is truly the land of immortals.

The morning sun at the window with  
plum trees—

the fragrance of blossoms wakes me.

Who says there is nothing  
to keep an old hermit busy?  
In the sunny spot under the hedges  
I sow melons,  
tie the vines, support them;  
when rain nurtures the plants,  
I think of the old tale  
of the Blue Gate.

Tying my straw sandals,  
grasping a bamboo staff,

I follow the peach blossom causeway  
over to Fragrant Grass Islet.  
As I stroll to the West Brook,  
the stone screen painted by nature  
in the bright moonlit mirror  
accompanies me.

Why seek Peach Blossoms Spring?  
Earthly paradise is here.

The casual south wind  
scatters green shade;  
a faithful cuckoo,  
where did he come from?  
I wake from dozing  
on the pillow of ancient worthies  
and see the hanging wet balcony  
floating on the water.

With my kudzu cap aslant  
and my hemp smock tucked into my belt,  
I go nearer

to watch the frolicking fishes.  
After the rain overnight,  
here and there, red and white lotus;  
their fragrance rises into the still sky  
filling myriad hills.

As though I had met with Chou Tun-i  
and questioned him on the Ultimate  
Secret—

as though an immortal Great Unique  
had shown me the Jade Letters—

I look across Cormorant Rock  
by Purple Forbidden Shallows;  
a tall pine tree screens the sun,  
I sit on the stone path.

In the world of man it is the sixth month;  
here it is autumn.

A duck bobbing on the limpid stream  
moves to a white sandbar,  
makes friends with the gulls,  
and dozes away.

Free and leisurely,  
it resembles our host.

At the fourth watch the frost moon  
rises

over the phoenix trees.

Thousand cliffs, ten thousand ravines,  
could they be brighter by daylight?

Who moved the Crystal Palace  
from Hu-chou?

Did I jump over the Milky Way  
and climb into the Moon Palace?  
Leaving behind a pair of old pines  
on the fishing terrace,  
I let my boat drift downstream



as it pleases,  
passing pink knotweeds  
and a sandbar of white cloverfern.  
When did we reach  
the Dragon Pool below Jade Ring Hall?  
Moved by a sunset glow,  
cowherds  
in green pastures by the crystal river  
blow on their pipes.  
They might awaken the dragon  
sunk deep at the pool's bottom.

Emerging from mists and ripples,  
cranes might abandon their nests  
and soar into midair.  
Su Shih in his poem on Red Cliff  
praises the seventh moon;  
but why do people cherish  
the mid-autumn moon?  
When thin clouds part,  
and waves grow still,  
the rising moon  
anchors herself in a pine branch.  
How extravagant! Li Po drowned  
trying to scoop up the reflected moon.

North winds sweep away  
the heaped leaves on empty hills,  
marshal the clouds,  
drive the snow.  
The Creator loves to fashion—  
he makes snowflowers of white jade,  
devises thousands of trees and forests.  
The shallows in front freeze over.  
A monk crosses over  
the one-log bridge aslant,  
a staff on his shoulder.  
What temple are you headed for?

Don't boast of  
the recluse's riches  
lest some find out  
this lustrous, hidden world.  
Alone, deep in the mountains,  
with the classics, pile on pile,  
I think of the men  
of all times:  
many were sages,  
many were heroes.  
heavenly intention goes  
into the making of men.  
Yet fortunes  
rise and fall;  
chance seems unknowable.  
And sadness deep.

Why did Hsü Yu on Mount Chi  
cleanse his innocent ears  
When he threw away his last gourd,  
his integrity became even nobler.

Man's mind is like his face—  
new each time one sees it.  
Worldly affairs are like clouds—  
how perilous they are!

The wine made yesterday  
must be ready:  
passing the cup back and forth,  
let's pour more wine till we're tired.  
Then our hearts will open,  
the net of sorrow unravel to nothing.  
String the black zither  
and pluck "Wind in the Pines."  
We have all forgotten.  
Who is host and who is guest.  
The crane flying through the vast sky  
is the true immortal in this valley—  
I must have met him  
on the Jasper Terrace under the moon.  
The guest addresses the host with a word:  
"You, sir, you alone are immortal."

*Pak Illo*

### The Hall of Solitary Bliss (1619)

[*Tongnak tang*]

Long ago I heard of Purple Jade Mountain  
and the Hall of Solitary Bliss,  
those cool and quiet places.  
But I was a soldier then,  
anxious, with a burning heart.  
Danger lurked; our shores were besieged.  
Faithful to my duty,  
I wielded a glistening spear  
and galloped on my armored horse.  
But I long for my teacher  
even more now that my hair is gray.  
Today I start out at last  
with bamboo staff and straw sandals.  
Like the Wu-i Mountains,  
the peaks look graceful,  
and the river winds  
like the I.  
Such a place  
needs a host.  
Sages and gentlemen  
from Silla of a thousand years  
and Koryō of five hundred,  
how many of you have crossed the lovely  
pass?  
Heaven created it; earth has treasured it  
and revealed its secrets to him.  
Everything has its owner, they say.  
How true! Yi Onjök is its true owner.

I push aside tangled creepers  
and open the elegant, secluded chamber  
of the Hall of Solitary Bliss.  
Its beauty is unmatched!  
Outside, a thousand stalks of tall bamboo  
surround the emerald stream—  
and here, ten thousand books  
line the walls.



The works of Yen Hui and Master Tseng on the left,  
those of Tzu Yu and Tzu Hsia on the right.  
He revered the sages of the past  
and wrote poems.

In peaceful nature he was so immersed  
that he felt at home in all situations.  
He called it Solitary Bliss,  
a fine name for so elegant a life.  
Ssu-ma Kuang, had *his* garden of solitary  
bliss;  
but could it match the beauty of this place?

I enter Truth Nurturing Hermitage  
to search for truth.

Winds caress me as I contemplate.  
My mind becomes pure and bright:  
how marvelous is T'oegye's brush stroke:  
I see its matchless excellence.  
On my walk to the Fish Viewing Terrace,  
the rocks show precious traces  
of my teacher's staff and sandals.  
The pine he planted retains its ancient air,  
how delightful  
the unchanging view.

I feel as refreshed as when  
I entered his fragrant study.

I think of the past:  
high rocks and sheer cliffs  
resemble a mica screen by Lung-mien.  
In the lucid mirror of the pool,  
the light of the sky and the shadow of  
clouds entwine,  
a cool breeze and bright moonlight  
dazzle my eyes.  
Hawks and fish were  
my teacher's friends.  
He contemplated, sought truth,  
cultivated learning and virtue.  
I cross the stream to a fishing terrace  
and ask white gulls near the beach:  
birds, do you know  
when Yen Kuang returned to the Han  
House?

The evening smoke settles  
on the mossy strand.

Dressed for spring,  
I climb to Yōnggwi Terrace,  
its beauty unchanging throughout the ages;  
my spirits are high.

"Enjoy the breeze and go home singing":  
today I know the pleasures of Tseng Hsi.

A light rain  
over the lotus pond beneath the terrace  
scatters pearls  
on large jade leaves.

Nature this pure deserves our delight.

How many years have passed  
since Chou Tun-i left the world?  
Only the perennial fragrance of my teacher  
abides!

Through hovering purple mist

a cataract tumbles down  
a sheer red cliff—  
a long hanging stream.  
Where is Incense Burner Peak?  
Mount Lu is here.

I look down Lucid Mind Terrace.  
My rustic mind cleansed by freshness,  
I sit alone  
on the terrace,  
while the hills are reflected  
in the glassy pond with clear breezes.  
Birds sing sadly  
from green shadows.

I linger and recall  
retracing the master's steps.  
As always, spring water is crystal clear  
at Cap-String-Washing Terrace;  
but in the age of decadence  
men still struggle in the red dust  
when they might be better off  
cleaning their cap strings.

I climb Lion Rock  
to view Mount Virtue.  
Like jade in its brightness,  
my master's brilliance shone here.  
Now the phoenix has left, and the hills are  
bare;

only a solitary cuckoo sighs at dusk.  
The spring from Peach Blossom Cave  
carries fallen petals day and night.  
Is this Mount T'ient'ai? Is it Peach Blossom  
Spring?

Where is it?  
The footsteps of immortals are remote.  
I don't know where I am.  
I'm not a gentleman  
and am far from wise;  
but I enjoy the mountain and forget to  
return home.

Leaning against a rock,  
I scan hills and waters  
far and near.  
Ten thousand flowers  
weave a brocade,  
and their fragrance  
drifts on valley winds.  
A distant temple gong  
echoes riding the clouds.  
Even the pen of Fan Hsi-wen  
can't capture this landscape.  
So fetching are the views,  
they stir the wanderer's heart.  
I ramble everywhere  
and arrive home late  
as the sun sets  
behind western hills.

On my climb again to the Hall of  
Solitary Bliss  
I look about for traces of his presence.  
And here he is;  
he welcomes me.

“I see him in the soup and on the walls.”  
 Gazing at the sky and ground  
 I sigh  
 and recall his deeds.  
 This is the desk by the window where he sat,  
 oblivious of worldly cares,  
 where he read the sages’ books  
 and reaped the fruits of his study.  
 Thus he continued the tradition, opened a  
 new path,  
 and brightened the Way for us,  
 truly a happy gentleman of the east,  
 the only one worthy of the name.  
 Further, filial piety and brotherly love as  
 roots,  
 through loyalty and sincerity,  
 he became a Hou Chi and Chieh  
 at the court of the wise king  
 and hoped to secure  
 the peace of Yao and Shun.  
 But the times were adverse,  
 the loyal and wise were banished.  
 In high mountains and deep valleys,  
 those who heard and witnessed lamented.  
 For seven years  
 he never saw the sun;  
 he shut the door to search his mind  
 and cultivated virtue—the forthright Way.  
 Right prevailed over evil in the end;  
 the people acclaimed him of their own ac-  
 cord,  
 and mindful of  
 his enduring work,  
 they erected a shrine in Kanggye,  
 the place of exile,  
 remote and poor,  
 and learned men  
 hastened to revere him.

They built an academy on Purple Jade  
 Mountain  
 above the springs and rocks.  
 Numerous students  
 pluck the lute and hum poetry  
 as though Chou Tun-i and the Loyang  
 scholars  
 were gathered here once again.  
 I walk around Goodness Seeking Hall;  
 it holds the sacred Goodness Embodying  
 Shrine,  
 where sacrifices to him never cease.  
 It’s not by chance that he is so honored.

Because we can’t  
 honor him enough,  
 he’s enshrined in the Confucian Temple—  
 a lovely custom, a grand affair!  
 Our civilization matches  
 that of Han, T’ang, and Sung.  
 Ah, we are in Tzu-yang,  
 in Cloud Valley.  
 The water on Sesim Terrace  
 glows with his virtue and favor.

His spirit lingers  
 where the dragon reigns.  
 Wonderful are the workings  
 of the Heavenly Artificer!  
 Overjoyed,  
 yet unable to fathom  
 the infinite landscape,  
 I linger for a month.  
 I open my rustic mind  
 to deepen my sincere respect for him  
 and turn every page  
 of his works.  
 His thousand words and myriad sayings  
 are all wisdom, each revealing  
 a long tradition and ways of thought  
 as bright as the sun and moon—  
 light  
 illuminating the dark.

If his thoughts fill our hearts,  
 if sincere intent directs our minds,  
 if we order our life to pursue the Way,  
 if our words are loyal and our deeds  
 faithful,  
 then goodness will naturally follow.  
 Ah, let’s ponder his teaching,  
 students,  
 and look  
 for myriad years to this wise man,  
 great as Mount T’ai, remote as the polestar.  
 Heaven so high and earth so rich,  
 they, too, will dissolve into dust.  
 None is eternal but the cool wind that blows  
 through the Hall of Solitary Bliss.

*Yun Sōndo*

The Angler’s Calendar (1651)

[*Ōbu sasi sa*]

Spring

1  
 Fog lifts in the stream before me,  
 The sun lances the back hills.  
 Cast off, cast off!  
 The night tide neaps, and now  
 High water rushes upon the shore.  
*Chigukch’ong chigukch’ong ōsawa.*  
 Flowers in river hamlets are fair to see,  
 But distant views swell my heart.

2  
 Day is warm,  
 Fishes float in the blue.  
 Hoist anchor, hoist anchor!  
 In twos or threes,  
 Gulls come and go.  
*Chigukch’ong chigukch’ong ōsawa.*

Boy, I have a rod;  
Have you loaded a flagon of wine?

3  
A puff of east wind ruffles  
The stream's surface into ripples.  
Raise sail, raise sail!  
Let's go to West Lake  
By the East.  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
Hills pass by,  
More hills greet us.

4  
Is it a cuckoo that cries?  
Is it the willow that is blue?  
Row away, row away!  
Several roofs in a far fishing village  
Swim in the mist.  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
Boy, fetch an old net!  
Fishes are climbing against the stream.

5  
The sun's fair rays are shining,  
Water shimmers like oil.  
Row away, row away!  
Should we cast a net,  
Or drop a line on such a day?  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
The Fisherman's Song stirs my fancy;  
I have forgotten all about fishing.

6  
Let's return to the shore,  
Twilight trails in the west.  
Lower sail, lower sail!  
How supple and sweet  
Willows and flowers on the riverbank!  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
Who would envy three dukes?  
Who would now think of earthy affairs?

7  
Let's tread on fragrant grasses  
And pick orchids and angelica.  
Stop the boat, stop the boat!  
What have I taken aboard  
On my boat small as a leaf?  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
Nothing except mist when I set sail,  
When I row back the moon is my tenant.

8  
Drunk I lie asleep,  
What if the boat floats downstream?  
Moor the boat, moor the boat!  
Peach Blossom Spring is near,  
Pink petals leap on the stream.  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
I am far away from red dust—

The world of men.

9  
Let's stop angling and see  
The moon through the bamboo awning.  
Drop anchor, drop anchor!  
Night settles,  
The cuckoo sings a sweet song.  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
The heart shouts its peak of joy,  
I have lost my way in the dark.

10  
Tomorrow, tomorrow, we have tomorrow.  
A spring night will soon see the day.  
Bring the boat ashore, bring the boat  
ashore!  
With rod for a cane,  
Let's find our twig gate.  
*Chigukch'ong chigukch'ong ōsawa.*  
This angler's life is  
How I shall pass my days.