Politeja
No. 1(95), 2025, pp. 277-292
https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.22.2025.95.16

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THE COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE OF CHŎNG MONG-JU'S BIOGRAPHY – THE *SAMGANG HAENGSIL-TO* VERSIONS

ABSTRACT This paper examines the portrayal of Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination in the *Samgang haengsil-to* (*Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships*), one of the earliest texts intended for a broader, common audience due to its use of vernacular script. As a prominent philosopher and politician of the late Koryŏ period, Chŏng Mong-ju's death became a symbolic turning point in the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty, despite his staunch opposition to it. This study explores how the narrative of his assassination was woven into the foundational myth of Chosŏn and traces the shifts in responsibility and blame for his death as the dynasty evolved. Through an analysis of these early sources, the study aims to uncover how this pivotal event was presented to the populace in comparison with other official sources and contemporary interpretations.

Keywords: Chŏng Mong-ju, *Samgang haengsil-to*, collective history, Chosŏn propaedeutics

INTRODUCTION[1]

Chŏng Mong-ju (1338–1392) emerges as a prominent figure in late fourteenth-century Korea, renowned for his roles as a diplomat, poet, and Confucian philosopher during the late Koryŏ period. In his life, revered for his knowledge and good judgment, he was a trusted advisor to the Koryŏ kings. As a diplomat, travelling to Ming China and Japan, he also created the basis for the *sadae-kyorin*[2] type of relations Chosŏn later established with its neighbours.[3] Alongside fellow scholars Yi Saek (1328–1396) and Kil Chae (1353–1419), who remained loyal to the Koryŏ dynasty, Chŏng Mong-ju chose to forego honours and prestigious appointments in the newly established Chosŏn government (1392–1910). Instead, he and many others resigned from their positions and retreated to their home provinces, setting a precedent for later scholars to oppose the government on the basis of Confucian principles. The 'Three Ŭns'[4] provided a model for formal protest among subsequent officials, becoming ideological patrons for the *sarim* faction.[5] However, unlike his counterparts, Chŏng Mong-ju never reached his home province, as he was assassinated *en route*, becoming a martyr for the cause of loyalty to the Koryŏ dynasty. His exemplary conduct even when faced with his assailants was frequently referenced in subsequent writings, from both governmental and opposition perspectives, serving as a symbol of loyalty and self-sacrifice for a cause one believes in. It was such a watershed moment in the history of the Korean Peninsula that, as Choi Byonghyong noted in his introduction to the translation of the *Annals of King Taejo*, the *ch'ongsŏ*[6] ends with the death of this scholar.[7]

[1] This paper utilizes the McCune-Reischauer romanization system for Korean script. Korean names appear in their traditional order, with the family name preceding the given name. Names of Korean researchers is the exception, where the romanization preferred by the authors has been kept. Dates attached to the kings refer to their reign unless otherwise marked.

[2] *Sadae* was the policy of "serving the great," namely, China. This ideology promoted a tributary relationship with China, emphasizing loyalty to the Chinese emperor and adherence to Confucian principles. It shaped Chosŏn's foreign policy, cultural practices, and diplomatic relations, influencing various aspects of governance and society. *Kyorin*, meaning "good neighbourly relations," was a term used in regard to contacts with other kingdoms and groups enabling Chosŏn's trade and exchange of goods as well as ensuing military support.

[3] Jeong Seong-sik, "14th Century Jeong Mong-Joo's International Diplomacy Ideology," *The Onji Collection of Works*, vol. 57 (2018), pp. 150-160.

[4] A collective name describing Chŏng Mong-ju, Yi Saek and Kil Chae. It translates as "Three Recluses" and relates to their pennames, P'oŭn, Mogŭn and Yaŭn respectively. In all three names the "ŭn" syllable means "recluse".

[5] *Sarim* Faction (Forest Scholars Faction) was a group that emerged in the early Chosŏn period from the scholars who opposed the rule of King Sejo (1455-1468). The political stronghold of the *Sarim* scholars was in the provinces, as they were purged from the court several times.

[6] The general introduction of *The Annals of King T'aejo.* Each record for the rule of a Chosŏn king started with a *ch'ongsŏ* which recounted the king's early life as a prince and crown prince. *Ch'ongsŏ* in the Annals of T'aejo recounts the entire known history of the family line.

[7] Choi Byonghyon, *The Annals of King Taejo Founder of Korea's Chosŏn Dynasty*, London 2014, p. XXII.

Throughout history, numerous versions and interpretations of Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination have circulated, often differing in detail. These dissimilarities include the identity of the murderer and the location of the deed. This paper examines the version of events presented in the *Samgang haengsil-to* (*Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships*), one of the earliest texts intended for a broader audience. The first part offers general observations on the evolution of Chŏng Mong-ju's remembrance, drawing from modern scholarship on classical sources. Additionally, some observations on contemporary representations through popular culture are shared. The second part of the study focuses on Chŏng Mong-ju's biography (*Mongju unmyŏng,* [Chŏng Mong-ju's fate]) as depicted in the *Samgang haengsil-to.* Three versions – 1490, 1581, and 1726 editions – are considered in this analysis. By comparing the original text written in classical Chinese (*hanmun*) with its vernacular translations, this study explores the presentation of the historical context, the portrayal of Chŏng Mong-ju, his actions, and the establishment of his legacy. This comparative analysis highlights the key differences in the portrayal of Chŏng Mong-ju's actions and assassination across various editions of the *Samgang haengsil-to*. Ultimately, this paper seeks to illuminate the discrepancies between modern interpretations and early historical sources, questioning the role of the *Samgang haengsil-to* in shaping collective memory long-term.

EVOLUTION OF THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHŎNG MONG-JU'S DEATH

Kim Boe-Jeong established that it was during the seventeenth century and the reign of King Injo (1623–1649) that the narrative of Chŏng Mong-ju's death underwent a transformation. He notes that it was the *Yŏsa jegang* and *Hwich'an yŏsa* texts[8] that sought to downplay or obscure the identity of Chŏng Mong-ju's murderer, mentioning only that he was killed among other scholars.[9] As discussed in a later section of this study, the *Samgang haengsil-to* account specifically identifies Cho Yŏng-gyu as the one sent to carry out the assassination. While many sources indicate that Cho acted on the orders of Yi Pang-wŏn, both *Yŏsa jegang* and *Hwich'an yŏsa* suggest that it was Yi Pang-wŏn's father, Taejo Yi Sŏng-gye, the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, who orchestrated the act. The same research also demonstrates that the famous Sŏnjuk Bridge in Kaesŏng was first identified as the site of Chŏng's assassination in *Hwich'an yŏsa*.[10] A similar claim is later made in the classical treatise *T'aengniji,* which asserts that the

[8] *Yŏsa jegang* (麗史提綱) authored by a prominent Confucian scholar Yu Kye (兪棨; 1607-1664) and *Hwich'an yŏsa* (彙纂麗史) authored by Hong Yŏ-ha (洪汝河, 1620-1674) are seventeenth-century texts presenting a chronological, bird's eye view of Koryŏ history.

[9] Kim Boe-Jeong, "Recognition for Jeong Mong-Ju during the Time from Injo's Reign through Hyeon-jong's Reign," *Journal of Poeun Studies (Poeun Studies)*, vol. 24 (2019), p. 257.

[10] Ibid, pp. 268-269.

assassination was ordered by T'aejo and was carried out on Sŏnjuk Bridge.[11] Kim's findings align with this study, which will later present evidence that earlier sources describe Chŏng Mong-ju's death as occurring *en route* to his home province.

A similar trend can be observed in non-official accounts of the event. Kwon Young-ho's research into folktales surrounding Chŏng Mong-ju reveals this historical dissonance. While many versions place the assassination in Kaesŏng or at Sŏnjuk Bridge, there are notable variations: in one version, Chŏng Mong-ju is killed by Yi Pang-wŏn's men, while in another, the deed is carried out by Yi Pang-wŏn himself.[12]

Twenty-first-century academic studies often gloss over their sources detailing Chŏng Mong-ju's death. Little to no doubt remains that if the assassination was not carried out by Yi Pang-wŏn, it was at least ordered by him. This seems to be in line with Pang-wŏn's later policy, *[s]tarting with the beating to death of Jeong Mong-ju during the late [Koryŏ]*[13] and helps with establishing the narrative of a warrior-king, which also contextualises his subsequent actions.[14] After all, Yi Pang-wŏn *not only [...] kill[ed] [Chŏng Mong-ju] and [Chŏn Tojŏn] in the late [Koryŏ] to early [Chosŏn] periods, but also ascended to the throne only after he murdered his half-brothers [...]*.[15] This characterisation primarily serves to reinforce the image of Yi Pang-wŏn as a ruthless and strategic figure, rather than focusing on Chŏng Mong-ju himself. However, as Kang highlights, contemporary scholarship interprets Chŏng Mong-ju's death not solely as an indicator of Pang-wŏn's inclinations but as part of a broader ethical discourse. An alternative perspective underscores the extreme lengths to which a Chosŏn scholar might go to uphold the Confucian principle of loyalty, encapsulated in the maxim to *not serve two masters*.[16] Also, the Sŏnjuk Bridge as the site of Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination became a significant locus of a collective memory, intrinsically linked with his death. As Hildi Kang observes [...] *Driven by passion and ambition, [Pang-wŏn] ignored his father,*

[11] Yi Chung-hwan, *T'aengniji*, translated (into Korean) by Min-su Yi, Seoul 2012, p. 113, Olje Classics, vol. 25.

[12] Kwon Young-ho, "Poeun (圃隱)'s The Human Nature in the Folktale and Its Personality – Educational Meanings," *Kukhak yŏn'guronch'ong*, vol. 23 (2019), pp. 48-53.

[13] Park Hong-Kyu, "King Taejong as a Statesman: From Power to Authority," *Korea Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2006), p. 193.

[14] Often put together with later palace coups of the First and Second Strife of Princes (1398 and 1400) and the murder of Chŏng Tojŏn.

[15] Kang Jae-eun, *The Land of Scholars: Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism*, translated by S. Lee, New Jersey 2006, p. 195.

[16] The phrase "A loyal subject does not serve two masters" (忠臣不事二君) originates from the twenty-second biography in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記), specifically the *Biography of Tián Dān* (田單列傳). The complete expression, "A loyal subject does not serve two masters, and a virtuous woman does not marry twice" (忠臣不事二君, 貞女不更二夫), became a foundational principle for the social and moral order of Chosŏn society, reflecting the Confucian emphasis on loyalty and fidelity. This is also depicted in a famous *sijo* poem *Tansimga* written by Chŏng Mong-ju in response to Yi Pang-wŏn's poem *Hayŏga*. As Chŏng Mong-ju states: Though I die and die again a hundred times/ That my bones turn to dust, whether my soul remains or not/ Ever loyal to my Lord, how can this red heart ever fade away? (Ibid, p. 170).

joined his henchmen, ambushed [Chŏng Mong-ju], and killed him on the [Sŏnjuk Bridge in Kaesŏng...]. The assassination is famous. The bridge is remembered to this day.[17] Hildi Kang emphasises the emotional intensity surrounding this event. However, some scholars contend that the act was less a matter of passion and more a calculated response to *[Chŏng Mong-ju's] attempt to eliminate [Yi Sŏng-gye]'s forces [...] [Yi Pang-wŏn] who was aware of this plan in advance, sent several men, including [Cho Yŏng-gyu], to assassinate him at Sŏnjuk Bridge*.[18] This portrayal of Yi Pang-wŏn's premeditated actions, ambushing Chŏng Mong-ju at or near the bridge, is not only reflected in historical discourse but also perpetuated in modern popular culture, particularly in historical dramas *sagŭk*. As recently as 2022, the KBS series *The King of Tears, Lee Bang-won* portrayed the assassination of Chŏng Mong-ju as a brutal murder committed in broad daylight, with Yi Pang-wŏn present at the scene. This dramatic confrontation at the bridge is a recurring trope in dramas depicting the era of Chosŏn's establishment. A notable earlier example is the 1996 series *Tears of the Dragon*, which similarly aligns with this narrative convention.

SAMGANG HAENGSIL-TO AND CHŎNG MONG-JU'S BIOGRAPHY

The information outlined above, however, is inconsistent with one of the first official publications – a biography titled *Chŏng Mong-ju's fate*. It was one of 330 stories of paragons of Confucian virtues published in the year 1434 titled *Samgang haengsil-to* (*Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships*). The compilation served as a moral guidebook, widely distributed by the court in Chosŏn Korea. Each biography was illustrated in a way that made it easier for readers to remember the events and morals of the story.

The reasoning behind its form and creation is well-documented, stemming from an order by King Sejong following a patricide committed on the Korean Peninsula in 1428. This act, flagrantly contrary to the principles of Confucian moral conduct, is said to have prompted Sejong to commission the compilation (Sejong *sillok,* 10/9/27). Initially published in 1434 solely in *hanmun* (text written in Chinese script), the text comprised narratives illustrating exemplary conduct by filial sons, loyal subjects, and devoted women – embodiments of the Confucian virtues inherent in the three fundamental human relations. The title of the compilation corresponds to the three pillars of Confucian society, organised into three volumes:

- stories of filial sons (*hyoja*)
- stories of loyal subjects (*ch'ungsin*)
- stories of devoted women (*yŏllyŏ*)

[17] H. Kang, *Tombstones without a Tomb: Korea's Queen Sindeok from Goryeo into the Twenty-First Century*, Irvine 2017, p. 51.

[18] Kang Ji-hee, "Documents and Memories about Poeun," *Journal of Poeun Studies* (*Poeun Studies*), vol. 14 (2014), p. 151.

Chŏng Mong-ju's biography became a part of the *ch'ungsin* volume. The aim was to evoke dedication and obedience in performing the duties arising from the role of a subordinate. Obedience, however, was not to be understood as blind devotion to an individual, rather it expressed the need to act for the good of the sovereign, even if it required disobeying an order, namely, the values expressed by the life and death of Chŏng Mong-ju.

It is also noteworthy that this biography was included in all later abridged versions of the *Samgang haengsil-to*, suggesting its cultural capital. Subsequent editions, featuring translations into the vernacular script, underscore the government's confidence in the influence of the *Samgang haengsil-to* on the populace but also its recognition that it required continuous reassessment for potentially outdated and objectionable content. The first modified edition, published in 1481, introduced a translation into Korean native script alongside the *hanmun* version. Although primarily a visual alteration, this edition marked the introduction of the newly created vernacular Korean writing system, later known as *hangŭl*. This format became standard in all future editions.

The 1490 edition, pivotal for the research in this paper, underwent significant revisions in terms of its content. While predominantly retaining the Chinese narratives, this revised edition was condensed to 35 stories in each volume, resulting in a total of 105 stories. Several narratives deemed discordant with Confucian teachings were omitted, reflecting a deliberate editorial choice.[19] A new goal was also set for the publication, namely, to strengthen the ethical discipline that had been undermined by the fighting between coteries and palace factions during the reign of the Chosŏn kings Munjong, Tanjong, Sejo and Yejong.[20] At this time Chŏng Mong-ju was already included in official court memorial rites (*jesa*) performed for deceased meritorious subjects. His position as a paragon of Confucian virtue was also seen outside of the court, as he became a patron of several newly established *sŏwŏn* academies. The earliest was built in 1553 and acquired a royal charter soon after in 1554 and later in 1603.[21] Given that these academies were mostly being established and run by scholars who had fallen out of favour with the king or had deliberately resigned from their posts, Chŏng Mong-ju's esteem both among those in power and those out of power in the Chosŏn period becomes clear.

SOURCES

The research in this paper relies on three distinct Korean translations of *Samgang haengsil-to*, originating from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and eighteenth centuries, respectively. The oldest of these translated works is the *Illustrated Guide to the Three*

[19] Oh Young Kyun, "Printing the *Samgang Haengsil-to* (Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships), a Premodern Korean Moral Primer*," *East Asian Publishing and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2011), pp. 21-23.

[20] Choi Yuncheol, "A Study on the *Haengshildo* Print of the Joseon Dynasty," *Kich'o chohyŏnghak yŏn'gu*, vol. 10, no. 5 (2009), p. 502.

[21] Park Seong-hee, "A Study on the Historical Significance of Jeong Mong-Ju (鄭夢周) and Chungnyeol Seowon (忠烈書院)," *Journal of Humanities* (Inmun kwahak yŏn'gu), vol. 24 (2017), p. 117.

Relationships from 1490, hereafter referred to as T1 (Translation No. 1). This version is digitally available in the Sejong Kojŏn Database, where scanned pages with the text from 1490 have been uploaded. Each text is accompanied by a legend explaining certain terms and outdated vernacular. In the analysis conducted for this paper, the images provided on the website were utilised, and the *hangŭl* transcription contained therein was included in the accompanying appendix.

The second translated work used in this study is the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships* from 1581, designated as T2. This version was published as a book by the King Sejong Memorial Society in 1972. In the preface, the editor, Hong I-Sŏp, explains that it is a reissue of an edition held in the collection of the Sŏnggyun'gwan University Library, dating back to the second half of the sixteenth century.[22]

The latest of the examined translations is the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships* from the first half of the eighteenth century (hereafter T3). Several editions from this period exist, and this study also relied on the version of the translation made available in the public domain by the University of California as part of its Korean Rare Books Collection. It is a three-volume edition dated 1726, downloadable from the Internet Archive (https://archive.org/), a non-profit institution specialising in archiving multimedia resources.

A FEW GENERAL REMARKS ON THE VERNACULAR TRANSLATION

An analysis of the translations of stories T1, T2, and T3[23] from the source text written in *hanmun* classical Chinese into Korean, utilising the native writing system, reveals semantic and lexical disparities among subsequent translations, along with variations in translation accuracy into Korean.[24] The translation in T1 employs a mixed system, wherein Sino-Korean vocabulary is conveyed through *hanja* ideograms, while grammatical endings and native vocabulary are expressed in the vernacular script. Consequently, the Korean rendition of T1 remains comprehensible to individuals possessing some proficiency in reading the Chinese writing system. The decision to incorporate Chinese ideograms into the Korean text during translation cannot be solely attributed to the absence of native equivalents or synonyms capable of substituting Sino-Korean terms, as this practice was adopted across diverse contexts. Notably, personal

[22] Hong I-Sŏp (ed.), *Samgang haengsil-to* (Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships, abbreviated edition, 1581 version), Seoul 1972, pp. 7-13.

[23] This article follows the concept of source text and receptor/target text as presented in Nida's works (See: E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden 1964; E.A. Nida, C.A. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden 1982). For this paper the original biography written in classical Chinese *hanmun* is understood as the source text and any translation into the vernacular Korean script is seen as the receptor/target text.

[24] These remarks are based on the research conducted in the author's unpublished PhD thesis completed in 2019: K. Kozioł, *Rola koreańskiego alfabetu rodzimego w tłumaczeniach* Samgang Haengsil-to *(Ilustrowany Przewodnik Po Trzech Zasadach)*, PhD dissertation, University of Warsaw, 2019. The thesis was submitted in Polish.

and geographic names were consistently rendered using *hanja* ideograms. Additionally, some cases of implementing ideographic composites necessitated footnote explanations. Compared to other translations these constitute the defining characteristic of the T1 text. The recurrent presence of annotations suggests that the translators harboured uncertainties regarding the accurate interpretation of the translated text. It is reasonable to assume that commentaries were employed to elucidate terms that may have been unfamiliar to the average individual in Chosŏn.

It was thus deduced that the inclusion of ideograms in T1 was a deliberate choice, not a necessity stemming from the absence of native vocabulary. This decision may be justified by the contemporary perception of the new writing system; the native Korean script. It is noteworthy that less than fifty years separated the introduction of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* writing system and the publication of the fifteenth-century translation of T1. The lack of confidence in the ability of the native script to convey certain concepts may have stemmed from the fact that it was initially viewed not as a standalone writing system but as another transcription system, hence the belief that it could not accurately convey the intended content. However, this skepticism regarding the limitations of the native script is not evident in the sixteenth-century translation of T2. The translators of this edition of the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships* abandoned ideographic notation entirely, opting instead for exclusive use of the vernacular script. This resulted in a translation that favored native vocabulary equivalents whenever possible. Additionally, the translators consciously omitted the annotations present in the T1 translation, suggesting a deliberate decision.

Therefore, it is inferred that the translators of T2 believed that a coherent text written in the native script would be comprehensible to the reader without additional annotations. Consequently, it was established that the authors of the sixteenth-century translation, T2, had confidence in the ability of the native script to convey the message effectively, assigning it a primary role in adapting the translation for the common people's understanding. The target text – the translations of the biographies found in the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships* from the years 1490 and 1581 exhibit a similar structure to the source text, with no distinct structural features evident in the T1 and T2 editions. Both the 1490 and 1581 translations adhere closely to quoting the biography and presenting the sequence of events in the subsequent stories. Since the differences in these translations are lexical and not narrative, these will not be regarded separately.

In the T3 translations into Korean, only the native script is utilised to convey the entire text. However, there is a distinct lexical selection evident here, with a notable bias towards Sino-Korean vocabulary compared to T2. This approach allowed for the most accurate reflection of the meaning conveyed by the ideograms from the source text. On the other hand, T3 underwent deliberate structural changes compared to the original *hanmun* text. T3 sought to include the protagonist's name as early as possible, presenting it in the first words of the biography, often at the expense of historical context. The method of constructing translations and the information they contain clearly differs in the degree to which the message is tailored to the capabilities of the

recipients of the statement.[25] Through research and comparison of the various texts, it was shown that the greatest variation in the amount of information provided occurs in the biographies of loyal subjects to which Chŏng Mong-ju's biography belongs. T3 translations often omitted entire passages of the source text. Given that these were circulated in the eighteenth century, this author attributes these changes to the functioning of biographies in the oral tradition and the elevation of the protagonists to the rank of national symbols, influenced by previous versions of the *Illustrated Guide to the Three Relationships*.

As a result of the analysis of the source material of the compilation and the comparison of their information value with the translated texts, the author of the work concludes that the translations of the shortened versions of *Samgang haengsil-to* from 1490, 1581 and the eighteenth century were self-sufficient texts, able to be understood without prior knowledge of the original, only based on folk knowledge existing in the collective memory of Koreans.

CHŎNG MONG-JU'S DEATH AS DEPICTED IN THE *SAMGANG HAENGSIL-TO*

The biography of Chŏng Mong-ju in the *Samgang haengsil-to* represents one of the earliest official accounts of the incident, sanctioned by the court. Originally published in 1434, the *hanmun* text predates other narratives, with the exception of a version of events documented in the *Annals of T'aejo* from 1413.[26] It is necessary to point out that the core part of the *Samgang haengsil-to* biographies, that were written in classical Chinese, remained unaltered in later versions, with only modifications made to the accompanying translation. The source text, a biography written in *hanmun* is as follows: *at first, Ch'oe Yong*[27] *led the army of Sin U,*[28] *but T'aejo turned the troops around and installed a new king*[29] *onto the throne. Left Vice-Minister Cho Chun [1346–1405],*

[25] E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science*..., p. 170.

[26] Along with "History of Koryŏ" (*Koryŏsa*), this is an important and often main source for academic studies into the life of Chŏng Mong-ju. It underwent revisions at that time and was ultimately published in 1451.

[27] Ch'oe Yŏng (崔瑩; 1316-1388) was a general during the late Koryŏ period. During the period in question, he served as deputy prime minister. In the conflict with Yi Sŏng-gye – who at that time served as the border governor of the northeastern region – he sided with King U. After Yi Sŏng-gye took power, he was exiled and ultimately sentenced to death.

[28] King U (禑; 1374-1388) is referred to in the text as Sin U (辛禑), Sinjo (辛朝) or Sin-ssi (辛氏). King U was born as Mo Nino (牟尼奴; 1365-1389). According to some theories he was the initially unrecognized son of Kongmin and according to others – the son of his advisor, Sin Ton. Texts from the Chosŏn period, wanting to emphasize his non-royal origins, titled him after the monk's surname.

[29] This refers to Prince and then King Ch'ang (昌王; 1388-1389) – the son of U. At the time of his accession to the throne, Ch'ang was seven years old. He was murdered along with his father a year later, and the last ruler of the dynasty, King Kongyang (恭讓王, 1389-1392) was installed on the throne.

Minister Chŏng Tojŏn,[30] Minister of the Security Council Nam Ŭn [1354–1398], and others appealing to human hearts and the Mandate of Heaven wanted to put T'aejo on the throne. In the third lunar month of 1392, T'aejo fell from his horse, and Chancellor Chŏng Mong-ju submitted a letter to the king at that time demanding the dismissal of T'aejo and his henchmen. Also, Kim Kwi-ryŏn [?–?] and Yi Pan [?–?] were supposed to be exiled. Princes Ŭian and Hŭngan[31] warned T'aejo and asked what he intended to do in this situation, T'aejo replied, 'Life or death depends on the will of Heaven. All I can do is accept it.' The princes sent for the troop commander Cho Yŏnggyu [?–1395] and said: 'The merits of the Yi house to the royal family are known to all, now how are we to submit to the [slander] of the people. Who of future generations will know the truth? Is there anyone among [your] troops who will find strength [for us]?' To which Yŏnggyu replied, 'Wouldn't I dare?' Then he and the others followed Mong-ju and killed him with one blow. Having been informed about it T'aejo became angry and was speechless in his fever. And when T'aejong ascended the throne, he said [about Mong-ju]: 'He sacrificed himself for those he served rather than bow to another [ruler].' And he gave him the posthumous name Munch'ung.[32]

In the analysis of the text, four key aspects will be examined. Firstly, the method by which the time frame is established and the biography commences. Secondly, the manner in which the text introduces the protagonist of the story. Thirdly, the portrayal of his actions towards the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty. Lastly, the variations in the assassination and its remembrance will be discussed.

Establishing the Historical Context

Some of the time frames for the events are established through chronological information, notably the year 1392. However, most of it is referenced through historical events and important figures. Thus, the text presupposes historical competency, indicative of the existence of a model reader.[33] Such a reader would likely interpret the initial line as referring to the events of 1388 and the famous Retreat from Wihwa-to.

[30] Chŏng Tojŏn (鄭道傳; 1342-1398) who in the original text is referred to as *chŏngdang* (政堂), i.e. an official of the second rank in the Royal Secretariat. During the Chosŏn period he served as Chief Chancellor. He was killed by Yi Pang-wŏn, later King T'aejong, in a palace coup in which the prince also killed his younger half-brothers.

[31] Prince Ŭian (義安大君; 1348-1408) was T'aejo's half-brother. He was born Yi Hwa (李和). Prince Hŭngan (興安君; 1365-1398) was the husband of T'aejo's third daughter. He was born as Yi Che (李濟), and his family came from Sŏnju.

[32] 初崔瑩勸辛禑. 興師功遼. 我太祖擧義回軍. 復立王氏左使趙浚. 政堂鄭道傳. 密直使南誾等. 知天命人心所在欲推戴太祖. 洪武壬申三月. 太祖馬. 守侍中鄭夢周. 以浚. 道傳. 誾等. 同心輔翼. 令臺諫劾流之. 遣金龜聯. 李蟠. 就貶所將殺之. 義安大君和. 興安君李濟等. 白太祖. 曰. 勢已急矣. 將若何. 太祖曰. 死生有命. 但當順受而已. 和. 濟謂麾下趙英珪曰. 李氏之有功王室. 人皆知之. 今爲人所陷. 後世誰知. 麾下士其無効力者乎. 英珪曰. 敢不從命. 英珪等要於路. 擊殺夢周. 太大怒. 因病篤. 至不能言. 恭定大王卽位. 以專心所事. 不貳其操. 贈謚文忠.

[33] U. Eco, *Lector in fabula*, tłum. P. Salwa, Warszawa 1994, pp. 72-82.

It would also not be inappropriate to refer to the king by his surname, indicating his status as a usurper. King U, to whom the text refers, in the early Chosŏn period was often depicted as the son of the Buddhist monk Sin Ton, likely to underscore the moral decline of the previous dynasty. Recognising that the reader would comprehend that the text begins by referencing the events of the year 1388, subsequent lines refer to the years 1388–92 when, despite the installation of a Koryŏ king, some politicians – including those mentioned above – advocated for the establishment of a new dynasty.

The Introduction of the Protagonist

The text introduces the protagonist in the same manner as other individuals – simply by referencing Chŏng Mong-ju's official title. Therefore, his role as a protagonist can be inferred through the title of the biography and the accompanying illustration, rather than through the composition itself. Here, he is depicted as another official in historically tumultuous times, providing insight into his significance within the narrative framework.

Chŏng Mong-ju's Role in Resisting the Founding of the Chosŏn Dynasty

The submission of the appeal marks an incident of incitement that ultimately led to the death of Chŏng Mong-ju. He is portrayed as a staunch opponent of T'aejo's influence and the notion of establishing a new dynasty, attempting to caution the king. This decisive action positions him as a perceived threat to T'aejo's reign, prompting concern among his allies and kin.

The Assassination and Later Remembrance

It is noteworthy that the involvement of T'aejo and T'aejong is depicted here in a rather passive manner. T'aejo's reaction upon hearing of Chŏng Mong-ju's objections is portrayed in a manner befitting a model Confucianist, devoid of any personal reflections. Similarly, T'aejong, who in later retellings of the story has a significant, active role in the death of Chŏng Mong-ju, is conspicuously absent from the main events. Furthermore, his subsequent statement appears more akin to a cautionary tale than a genuine reaction. This suggests the possibility that these words may not have been uttered by either king or were intended as a fable, although historical records support T'aejo's reaction.[34] Here, the royal uncles, princes Ŭian and Hŭngan, bear the brunt of responsibility for the assassination, along with the actual assailant – Cho Yŏnggyu.

Now that the main features of the source text have been established, let us delve into the target text (translations) to examine how they interpret and convey these key elements.

[34] Choi Byonghyon, *The Annals...*, p. 97.

T1 and T2: *At first, Ch'oe Yong led Sin U's army against Yodong,*[35] *but our T'aejo turned the army around and installed a new king. Left Vice-Minister Cho Chun, Minister Chŏng Tojŏn, Minister of the Security Council Nam Ŭn and others, appealing to people's hearts and the Mandate of Heaven, wanted to put T'aejo on the throne <the term ch'udae means to raise someone as ruler>. In the third lunar month of 1392, T'aejo fell from his horse, and Chancellor Chong Mong-ju submitted a letter to the king at that time demanding the dismissal of T'aejo and his henchmen. Also Kim Kwi-ryon and Yi Pan were to share this exile. Princes Ŭian and Hŭngan warned T'aejo and asked what he intended to do in this situation, T'aejo replied, 'Life or death depends on the will of Heaven. All I can do is accept it.' The princes sent for the commander of the troops, Cho Yŏnggyu, and said: "The merits of the Yi family for the royal family are known to all, now how are we to submit to the people's [slander]. Who of future generations will know the truth? Is there anyone among [your] troops who will find strength [for us]?" To which Yŏnggyu replied, "Wouldn't I dare?" Then he and the others followed Mong-ju and killed him with one blow. And when T'aejo heard about it, he became angry and was speechless in his fever. When T'aejong ascended the throne, he said [of Mong-ju]: "He sacrificed himself for those he served rather than bow to another [ruler]." And gave him the posthumous name of Munch'ung.*

The comparison of translations with the preceding analysis reveals notable lexical changes rather than narrative ones. While T1 and T2 are treated as a single text due to their lexical similarities, it is evident that both translations differ slightly from the original *hanmun* text, albeit maintaining the general message. The significant alteration occurs in the opening line, where the Retreat from Wihwa Island is referred to as *leading the army against Yodong*. This change, made at the end of the fifteenth century, presents an intriguing shift. While historically, Yodong or the Liaodong Peninsula belonged to the Koguryŏ kingdom, at this point in time, it could suggest opposition to Chosŏn's suzerain – Ming China. This portrayal could position King U as a supporter of the Yuan dynasty, perceived by many Confucian scholars as a barbarian dynasty. Such a depiction would emphasise the misdeeds of the former Koryŏ king, though further research is necessary to confirm this interpretation. Despite this significant alteration, the rest of the translations remain loyal to the main text, maintaining clarity regarding the assailant while leaving the location of Chŏng Mongju's death vague.

T3: *Chŏng Mongju was a minister during the fall of Koryŏ. King T'aejo won the favor of the people, and Cho Chun, Chŏng Tojŏn, Nam Ŭn and others helped him. Chŏng Mongju was very worried [by T'aejo's actions] and submitted a letter [regarding him] to the king.*

[35] Yodong (better known as Yoryŏng-sŏng) is the former Korean name of the Chinese province of Liáoníng (遼寧), which was part of Koguryŏ territory during the Three Kingdoms era. After taking power, the Ming dynasty troops occupied this region. In 1388, in addition to sending an official protest, Ch'oe Yŏng sent an army there under the command of Yi Sŏnggye to conduct an expedition to reclaim the lost lands. Yi Sŏnggye was opposed to this expedition for both pragmatic and ideological reasons and eventually returned the troops to the capital. This was the first stage of the coup, which ended with the creation of a new dynasty by Yi Sŏnggye. This event is known as the Wihwa-to retreat (*Wihwa-to hoegun*, 威化島回軍).

Cho Chun, Chŏng Tojŏn, Nam Ŭn and others led to his conviction and exile. Princes Ŭian and Hŭngan sent for Cho Yŏnggyu and said, 'The merits of the Yi line to the royal family are known to all, now how are we to submit to the [slander] of the people. Will you find strength [to help us]?' Whereupon Yŏnggyu followed Mong-ju and killed him with one blow. And when T'aejo heard about it, he became speechless in his anger. When T'aejong ascended the throne, he found Chong Mongju's loyalty to the dynasty beautiful and gave him the posthumous name of Munch'ung. <Chŏng Mongju's nickname is Master Poŭn>.

As previously discussed, the structure of all T3 biographies adheres to a formula where the protagonist's name and office are presented at the outset. This characteristic is evident in this translation as well, making it challenging to determine whether the name and rank would be enough for the general public of the eighteenth century to recognise this scholar. This is because the identity of the protagonist is also identified only in the first line and not explained later. However, as has already been pointed out, by this time Chŏng Mong-ju was considered a meritorious subject, honoured with a court memorial rite (*jesa*), and he was held as a patron of provincial *sŏwŏn* academies, by the end of the eighteenth century.[36] Consequently, it is plausible that additional contextual information was deemed unnecessary, as the mention of his name alone could evoke appropriate mental associations.

In the subsequent line, the target text identifies other individuals involved in the events and identifies the assassin. Similar to previous translations, T3 also implies the lack of involvement of T'aejo and T'aejong, instead implicating their kin as responsible parties. Interestingly, T3 deviates from the source text by omitting introductions for other officials, merely mentioning Cho Chun, Chŏng Tojŏn, and Nam Ŭn by name. This omission may not be coincidental, considering that all three individuals were recognised by T'aejo as *first class meritorious subjects*, particularly for their role in *the elimination of the last vestiges of political support for the old regime, particularly the assassination of Chŏng Mong-ju in 1392*.[37] Furthermore, as previously observed, although these three individuals were rewarded for their actions, it was ultimately the purged Chŏng Mong-ju who was revered as a meritorious subject and regarded as a symbol of unwavering loyalty.[38]

CONCLUSION

This study has delved into the narrative depiction of Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination as portrayed in the source text, *Samgang haengsil-to*, and its three translations, T1/T2 and T3. Through the analysis, several key narrative points have emerged. Firstly, the

[36] Park Seong-hee, "A Study...," p. 115.

[37] D.N. Clark, "Chosŏn's Founding Fathers: A Study of Merit Subjects in the Early Yi Dynasty," *Korean Studies*, vol. 6 (1982), p. 18.

[38] Song Sun Kwan, *Intellectuals and the State: The Resilience and Decline of Neo-Confucianism as State Ideology in Joseon Korea*, PhD dissertation, SOAS 2014, p. 33.

establishment of the historical context differs slightly across the translations, with T1/T2 referencing the Retreat from Wihwa-to, and T3 mentioning the events without specific historical allusions. However, all versions present Chŏng Mong-ju as a loyal Koryŏ subject in tumultuous times. Secondly, the introduction of the protagonist remains consistent across the texts, emphasising Chŏng Mong-ju's official title and role within the narrative framework. Thirdly, the portrayal of Chŏng Mong-ju's actions towards the Chosŏn dynasty varies, with T3 placing more emphasis on the involvement of other officials and omitting the direct implication of T'aejo and T'aejong. Finally, the remembrance of Chŏng Mong-ju's actions diverges slightly, with T3 highlighting his significance as a meritorious subject and symbol of loyalty.

In comparing the information gathered from the source text and translations to the widely held belief of Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination by T'aejong on Sŏnjuk Bridge, it becomes evident that the narrative presented in *Samgang haengsil-to* and its translations offers a more nuanced portrayal of the events. While the source text and T1/T2 imply Taejong's involvement indirectly, T3 shifts the focus to other officials, suggesting a deliberate narrative choice to downplay the king's role and thus protect the reputations of the dynastic founder T'aejo Yi Sŏng-gye and his successor T'aejong Yi Pang-wŏn, who was also the father of King Sejong who first initiated the compilation and publication of the *Samgang haengsil-to*. As discussed, this version of the story has since been overshadowed by other narratives that have become more prevalent in both popular media and academic texts. While the *Samgang haengsil-to* version might have been widely recognised in its own time, this more subtle and ambiguous portrayal has been largely replaced by other, more definitive versions of the story.

Furthermore, this study highlights the broader implications of how historical narratives are constructed and transmitted. The *Samgang haengsil-to*, as a text aimed at the common people and widely distributed, sought to shape public understanding of loyalty and moral conduct in the face of political turmoil. In contrast, modern historical dramas, which serve as a medium for the general public, reflect the evolving interpretations of these narratives. Although the *Samgang haengsil-to* version initially served to illuminate the complexities of loyalty and betrayal during Chŏng Mong-ju's assassination, it has since been supplanted by later interpretations from the 17th century that adhere more closely to the 'Sŏnjuk Bridge narrative.' Just as many contemporary academic texts perpetuate this latter version, modern dramas often prioritise dramatic storytelling over the nuanced portrayals found in earlier texts, thereby reinforcing the simplified narrative of Chŏng Mong-ju's death. This shift underscores the complexities and differing interpretations surrounding historical narratives and the ongoing interplay between these narratives and popular media. It also illustrates how historical memory of a nation is shaped, reshaped, and sometimes oversimplified in the transmission of historical events to future generations, emphasising the need for critical analysis in this process.

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