Lecture 5
Premodern Literature

The yangban (양반 양반)

- Yangban is the term used to describe very broadly the literati class of Confucian trained scholar-officials who represented the upper class of Joseon dynasty society.
- “Yangban literally means "[the] two classes" and during the Goryeo period was supposed to refer to both the civil (文 문) and military (武 무) officials. However, as the civil officials came to political dominance and military officials were held in low regard, it increasingly came to denote the civil literati.
- The ideal Confucian society was hierarchically divided into four recognized classes, top to bottom: officials, farmers, artisans/craftsmen and merchants/traders (士農工商 사농공상).
  - The emperor, kings and royalty were above this grouping; military men: entertainers and slaves were below it.
  - The yangban considered themselves to represent the officials (士) and the fact military were not included in this scheme is one of the justifications for holding them in low regard.
- Yangban owned land and slaves, but didn’t work and didn’t pay tax: their only job was to study and pass the civil service examination. If they failed the examination, they still would not work.

Three other related terms:
- **sadaebu (사대부 사대부)** Another word for the upper class literati, interchangeable with ‘yangban’.
- **yurim (儒林 유림)** Term for Confucian scholars, lit. ‘Confucian/scholar forest’.
- **seonbi (선비 선비)** Korean word meaning ‘scholar’. Today it can have negative connotations of laziness, implying someone who doesn’t care for practical work.

Some recommended English language books on premodern Korean literature:


**si 詩 and song ga 歡**

- In premodern works, the term **si (詩 시)**, typically translated as ‘poetry’, always refers to Chinese language compositions.
  - However, **si** is now the general word for modern Korean language poetry.
- By contrast, **ga (歌 가)** ‘song’ was used to refer to Korean language poems, indicating that they were originally sung to music.
Early Korean language songs

**Hyangga (향가 番歌) "native/local songs"
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- Songs composed in Korean language surviving from the Unified Silla and Goryeo periods.
- They were also known as sanoe (詞腦 사뇌).

- Hyangga were written in the *hyangchal* (향찰 'native tablet/writing') transcription system. Similar to modern Japanese writing, this mixes the use of Chinese characters: some are used for their semantic meanings, and others for their phonetic sound value to represent Korean morphology (grammatical particles, verb endings etc).
  - As a result the *hyangga* are difficult to translate with 100% accuracy.
  - Despite this, they are the only primary source for historical linguists investigating the Old Korean language.

- Only 25 *hyangga* remain:
  - 14 recorded in the *Samguk-yusa* (三國遺事 삼국유사 1283).
  - 11 more composed by the celebrated monk Gyun’yeo (均如 鈞如 923-73) aka “Senior Monk of the Great Hwa’eom, Double Exalted Great Master of Complete Penetration” 大華嚴首坐圓通兩重大師 좌원통량중대사, these are known as the *Songs of the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra bodhisattva* (普賢十願歌 보현십원가).
    - They are recorded in the biography of Gyun’yeo (均如傳 國於傳 1075) included as an appendix to the *Samguk-yusa*; they are accompanied by loose Chinese translations which aids in their decipherment.
    - Each of the poems is based on one of the Ten Great Vows of Buddha, with an extra concluding poem.

**Goryeo gayo (고려歌謠 고려가요)****

- Literally means "Goryeo songs"; also referred to as *jangga* (장가 "long songs").
- These songs were largely transmitted orally and not written down in Korean script until as late as the early 16th century.
- Therefore we do not know if the surviving texts have been censored or changed according to the more prudish standards and tastes of Joseon dynasty literati.

- The songs in large part owe their survival to the adoption of their accompanying music for court use from the beginning of the Joseon dynasty: songs composed to celebrate the founding of the new dynasty were sung to the tune of these popular Goryeo songs.
- 72 songs are known of, but only 33 have survived, including:
  - 22 written in hangul, 3 in the *idu* (吏讀) transcription system¹) and 7 more in Chinese translation.
  - They are found in the *Goryeo-sa* (高麗史 고려사 the dynastic history of Goryeo, completed 1451). *Akjang-gasa* (樂章歌詞 악장가사 "Words for music" 1493) and the *Siyon-hyang’ak-bo* (時用鄕樂譜 시용향악보 "Notations for Korean music in contemporary use", early C16th).

1) *Idu* is the general term for writing Korean language with Chinese characters; *hyangchal* can also be included in this term, but applies only to the early examples. *Idu* continued to be used by the Joseon bureaucracy even after the invention of hangul.
• In the last of these sources, 12 of the songs are considered to be associated with shamanist rituals.

• The term byeol-gok (별곡 lit. "different melody") often found in the titles of individual songs. This is another way to distinguish them from Chinese music.

There are two main types of Goryeo gayo:

Sog’yo (俗謠 속요 lit. "secular/worldly songs")
• Contain a refrain usually at the end of each stanza that sets the mood of the song.
• The refrains are generally onomatopoeic, expressing the sense of musical accompaniment.
• Examples include: Seo’gyeong-byelogok (Song of the Western Capital (aka Pyeongyang) 西京別曲), Cheongsan-byelogok (Song of Green Mountain 靑山別曲), Isang-gok (Treading Frost 履霜曲) and Gasiri (Will you go? 가시리).

Gyeonggi-che-ga (景幾體歌 경기체가 "gyeonggi form songs")
• The 4th and 6th lines of each stanza contain the recurring refrain 景畿 엇더 흘나잇고 gui eotteo hani’iggo? "What’s to be done?!"
• Examples include Hallim-byelogok (翰林別曲 Song of Confucian Scholars, c.1216), Gwandong-byelogok (關東別曲 Song of the Diamond Mountains, c.1328) and Jukgye-byelogok (竹溪別曲 Song of the Bambook Stream, 1348).

Hansi - Chinese poetry 漢詩 한시
• Two main types of Chinese poetry were freer form "old style" (古體詩 고체시), and "modern style" (近體詩 근체시).
• 'Modern style' are 4 or 8 line poems obeying rhyme schemes (discussed below).

Ballad of King Dongmyeong (東明王篇 동명왕편 Dongmyeongwang-pyeon)2)
• Is an example of an "old style" poem, written by Yi Gyubo (李奎報 이규보 1168-1241), one of the best known and celebrated writers of the Goryeo dynasty.
• The ballad is a rendition of the Goguryeo foundation myth telling of progenitor Jumong (aka King Dongmyeong), being born from an egg conceived by sunlight, escaping from the kingdom of Buyeo and establishing Goguryeo.
• The story is neither Confucian nor Buddhist, and contains elements clearly influenced by northeast Asian shamanism (including a shape-shifting contest).

Modern style hansi quartrains
• 'Quartrains' are four lined poems, in Korean they are known as jeolgu (絶句 절구) but normally just referred to as hansī.
• They can be doubled in length to become eight lined poems, known as bae’yul (排律 배율).
• Each line of a jeolgu or bae’yul was either 5 or 7 characters in length (표음 오언 o’eon /

2) English translation:  
http://koreanology.wordpress.com/2013/03/17/sources-yi-gyubos-ballad-of-king-dongmyeong-%E6%9D%B1%E6%98%8E%E7%8E%8B%E7%AF%87-part-1-of-3/
칠언 ch’ir’eon): thus 'pentasyllabic' (5 syllables) or 'heptasyllabic' (7 syllables).

- This style of hansi reached its zenith during the Tang dynasty (618-907), the two best known Chinese poets being Li Bai (李白 701-762) and Du Fu (杜甫 712-770).
- In Korea, hansi quartrains were the most popular form of poetry from the Goryeo period onwards until the beginning of the 20th century.
- Ability to compose quartrains was not just for poetic pleasure: they were one of the fundamentals of passing the civil service examination (科舉 과거) throughout the Goryeo and Joseon periods.

Rhyme scheme and tonal metre of hansi

The rhyme scheme:

- In premodern Chinese poetry, Chinese characters were divided into 106 groups of characters which rhymed with one another (106 韻字 백육운자). Each group is represented by one particular character from that group, so if you look up any character in a dictionary, it will have the rhyme-group character noted in brackets.
- In any one poem, all of the rhyming characters must come from the same group.
- The rhyming characters are the last character of the even numbered lines (i.e. lines 2 and 4, and 6 and 8 if eight lines long). The last character of the first line is also often from the rhyming group but doesn’t strictly have to be.
- All characters from any one rhyme group have the same tone (see below), and by far the most popular tone for rhyming was pyeong (平 평), for which there were 30 different rhyme groups.
- A typical yangban party game was for someone to chose a certain rhyme group and then everyone would have to compose their own poem using rhyming characters from that one group.

Tonal metre:

- Characters in Classical Chinese had one of four possible tones: pyeong (平 평 "even/low"), sang (上 상 "rising"), geo (去 거 "leaving") and ip (入 입 "entering"). These four tones do not correlate with the four tones of modern Mandarin Chinese.
  - Luckily for poetry, the latter three tones are all treated as one group, termed cheuk (仄 측 "high/inflected").
  - Therefore one only has to memorize which characters are pyeong 平, and all the others can be considered cheuk 仄.
- The tonal scheme looks like this:

  企业
  寅申酉戌 丑未辰午 寅申酉戌 丑未辰午 尾牙
  木木木木 木木木木 木木木木 木木木木 木木木木
  
  The mountain hue of Mount To is imbued with forest green.
  The stone statues’ caps and sleeves are encroached upon by the moss’s dew.
  Just as when the Japanese invaders were frightened [from this place] in the year of the Dragon (1592).
  The wind in the pines makes the sound of flutes and zithers. 3

3) Taken from:
• In each line the 2nd (and 6th) characters must alternate in tone with the 4th character - the \textit{X Y X} pattern.
• The 5th and 7th (or 3rd and 5th if a \textit{jeolgu}) much also alternate with one another - the \textit{a b} pattern.
• At the same time the 2nd column of characters must alternate between the 1st and 2nd lines, and between the 3rd and 4th (and 5th and 6th, and 7th and 8th) lines.
• The tonal metre did not have to be 100% followed; a good poem was considered more important than only following the rules!

\section*{Joseon period poems in Korean: sijo and gasa}

\section*{Sijo 時調 시조}

• Sijo were vernacular Korean poems that likely developed during the Goryeo period.
• They were sung to established melodies and transmitted orally.
• They were first written down during the early 18th century: this occurred with the rise of professional singers.
• The first collection of Sijo appeared in 1728 titled \textit{Cheonggu-yeong'eon} (靑丘永言청구영언 "Eternal words of the Green Hills").
  • Cheonggu 'green hills' is poetic name for Korea.

\section*{Structure of sijo:}

• Each sijo is three lines long.
• Each line is divided into four metric segments of several syllables each.
  (the numbers indicate number of syllables)

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<td>second line:</td>
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<td>third line:</td>
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• The last line usually begins with an interjection indicating a shift to subjectivity that introduces a counter-theme, paradox, resolution, judgement, command or exclamation.

Famous 16th century sijo poets included: the famous \textit{gisaeng} Hwang Jin'i (黃真伊 황진이 c.1506-44), Jeong Cheol (鄭澈 정철 1537-94) and Yun Seondo (尹善道 윤선도 1587-1671).

• \textit{Gisaeng} (妓生 기생) were female entertainers.
• Yun Seondo is considered to have been a master of longer form sijo such as \textit{Song of Five Friends} (五友歌 오우가 O’u-ga) and the \textit{Angler’s Calendar} cycle (漁父四時詞 어부사시사 Eobu-sasi-sa 1651).

\url{http://koreanology.wordpress.com/2013/01/11/sources-yu-deukgongs-nostalgic-reflections-of-the-twenty-one-capitals-%E4%BA%8C%E5%8D%81%E4%B8%8D%E9%83%BD%E6%87%B7%E5%8F%A4%E8%A9%A9-1732-part-1-of-6/}
**Gasa** 歌詞 가사

- Free form narrative poems, written in vernacular Korean.
- Lines are similarly structured to sijo, but the poems are much longer and more descriptive.
- Many gasa were written by commoners (庶民 서민), women (閨房 규방) as well as yangban living in exile.
- Famous poets include Jeong Cheol and Bak In-ro (朴仁老 1561-1642).
  - Bak In-ro was a low ranking general who wrote several gasa including *Song of Peace* (太平詞 Taepyongsasa) relating his experience of the Japanese invasions.

Brother and sister poets who lived (and died) against the trend:

**Heo Nanseolheon** (許蘭雪軒 허난설헌 1563-89)

- Born into a prestigious family of high ranking scholar-officials.
- Her older half-brother, Heo Seong (許箴 1548-1612) served on a 1590 envoy to Japan and supported the contention that Hideyoshi was planning to invade.
- Her younger brother was Heo Gyun (see below).
- Their older immediate brother, Hagok Heo Bong (荷谷 許篈 1551-88), was also a high official and gifted writer but due to factional strife - he was an Easterner - was exiled for 3 years.
- Hagok who enabled Nanseolheon to study Chinese poetry under the same teacher as Heo Gyun.

- Nanseolheon was married around the age of 15, to Kim Seong-rip (金誠立 1562-92) of the distinguished Andong Kim clan. The marriage was clearly unhappy, she had a difficult relationship with her mother-in-law and Seong-rip spent much time away from Nanseolheon, "studying".
- Nanseolheon had two children, a girl and boy, but both died young.
  "The combination of physical beauty and superior talent [to her husband], must have posed a real problem for Nanseolheon in her efforts to adapt herself to the ideal image of a woman cast in the Joseon society mould. Here was a singular woman who read the classics widely and who was influenced more by Taoism than by either Confucianism or Buddhism." (Choe-Wall 2003:10)

- Some 214 of her poems remain, collected and transmitted by Heo Gyun: she gained recognition in China first.

- Despite being one of the greatest poets (in Chinese) of the Joseon dynasty, she has remained relatively under-appreciated in present day South Korea (e.g. there are few modern editions of her poetry in bookshops.)

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"Nanseolheon was born and bred in a yangban family. Unlike the majority of women who had the same family background however, she showed a remarkable understanding and sympathy for the deprived groups of society - women of poor families, gisaeng, palace ladies etc. Her father, although he held high office in government, was content to be poor, and he remained incorruptible. This is one of several of her poems which are written allegorically as an expression of protest against social injustice." (Choe-Wall 2003:66)
Scarlet raindrops sweeping over the Spring mountains.  
(translation in Choe-Wall 2003:14)

- This traditional method of colouring nails is still popular today, called *bongseonhwa sontop-muldeul'igi* (봉선화 손톱물들어기).

**Heo Gyun (許筠 허균 1569–1618)**

- One of the most famous literary critics of the Joseon dynasty and celebrated author of the first Korean novel.

**Biography:**

- Father died when he was aged 12.
- Heo Gyun studied under *Yu Seong-ryong* (柳成龍 유성룡 1542–1607), and learnt poetry from *Yi Dal* (李達 이달 1539–1618) who was a secondary son (though gained some recognition and position - fought with a *uibyeong* (義兵 의병 "righteous army") people's militia against the Japanese and was skilled enough at Chinese poetry to be regarded as one of the "Three Tang Talents" of Joseon).
- In 1597, Heo Gyun passed the civil service examination in first place; he was given a position (都事 대사) in Hwanghae-do province but lost the job after 6 months for involvement with a Seoul *gisaeng*.
- He subsequently received other posts in 1604 he became magistrate of Su'an (遂安郡守 modern North Hwanghae-do province) but lost the job on charges of practicing Buddhism.
- In 1606 he worked as an attendant (종사과 종사) welcoming the Ming emissary Zhu Zhifan (朱之蕃); he showed his sister’s poetry to Zhu through whom it was first published and became widely known in China.
- Heo Gyun was given another position (侍書 수서) but again lost it after 3 months on charges of practicing Buddhism.
- He was given a lesser post and began associating with seoryu secondary sons (庶流 서류). Upon losing this job, too, he went travelling around Bu'an (present day North Jeolla province), where he met the *gisaeng* *Gyesaeng* (桂生 계생) and the commoner poet *Yu Hui-gyeong* (劉希慶 유희경 1545–1636).
- In 1609 he served taking care of another visiting Ming mission and was once more promoted.
- The following year, however, he was exiled to Jeolla province on grounds of passing his nephew and son-in-law when serving as supervisor for the final level of the civil service examination held in the palace (殿試 jeonsi).
- In 1613 several of his seoryu friends were executed and so he joined the Greater Northerner faction (大北派 대북파) for protection.
- Both in 1614 and 1615 he travelled to China on official missions for imperial birthday celebrations. This allowed him to make acquaintance with various Chinese scholars. He brought back many books including the *Taiping Guangji* (太平廣記 - collection of Chinese legends and stories comprising some 500 volumes!), as well as a Catholic prayer text and maps.
- In 1617 he was further promoted but the next year came into conflict at court with Gi Jaheon (奇自獻 인목 왕후 1562–1624) over the imprisonment of Queen Inmok (仁穆왕후 1584–32) and stripping of her title; Gi Jamun had opposed this and was exiled. Thereupon Jamun’s son Gi Jun-gyeok (奇俊格 기준경 1594–1624) memorialized the throne denouncing Heo who was forced to defend himself.
- Subsequently Heo’s associate, Hyeon Eungmin (玄應旻), was accused of hanging a manifesto (檄문) on Namdae-mun gate (Great South Gate of Seoul). Already under investigation, Heo was found guilty of incitement and publicly executed through live dismemberment (陵遲처斩 농지처징).

- Heo Gyun’s writings displayed a concern for creating a fairer society, abolishing the caste system, seeing the end to factionalism and hiring of people according to their talents (which was itself a Confucian ideal); today he is romanticized as a revolutionary.
- Similar to his sister, he also displayed a strong interest and belief in *Taoism* and
Buddhism and was thus regarded as a heretic by the ultra-orthodox Neo-Confucian establishment.

- Many of his writings survive but much too has been lost, including various poetry collections and what was said to be an important account of the Imjin-waeran invasion, *Dongjeong-nok* (*Record of the Eastern Invasion*).

- He is best known for authoring Korea’s first novel, *Hong Gildong-jeon* (洪吉童傳 "Tale of Hong Gildong").
  - Tale of a seojja secondary son, Hong Gildong, who turns to righteous banditry (義賊 uijeok) to fight against the corruption in society.
  - Hong Gildong learns and makes use of Taoist magic powers to fight his adversaries.
  - The story is said to be influenced by the 14th century Chinese bandit novel *The Water Margin* (水滸傳 Shuihu Zhuan).
  - The name, at least, was borrowed from that of a real bandit called Hong Gildong (洪吉同) who was recorded in the *Joseon Sillok* (朝鮮王朝實錄 조선왕조실록) as having been active around Chungcheong-do province in the years 1500-01 and had since become a folk hero.

《經廢寺》

經廢寺  경폐사  The ruined temple
古寺經年感廢興（蒸）  고사경년감폐흥  One feels (or ‘is moved by’) the ruination and restoration of the old temple through the years,
重來不復見殘僧（蒸）  중래부복견잔승  Coming again, no remaining monks can be seen anymore;
香盤寂寂塵滿（蒸）  향반적적응진만  The incense dish is filled with lonely, lonely dust,
時有村巫點佛燈（蒸）  시유촌무점불등  At times the village *mudang* (‘shaman’) lights the Buddhist lanterns.