

Articles



Volume 24 Number 1

June 2021

www.kci.go.kr The Review of Korean Studies

Article

The Tang-Song Poetry Debate in Joseon

Christina HAN

www.kci.go.kr



The Review of Korean Studies Volume 24 Number 1 (June 2021): 215-238

doi: 10.25024/review.2021.24.1.215

©2021 by the Academy of Korean Studies. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Past generations of poets and literary critics in East Asia celebrated the poetry of China's Tang and Song dynasties as the two pinnacles of poetic achievement written in literary Sinitic. The endeavors to judge the superiority of one over the other led to intense discussions among the Chinese literati that lasted over seven centuries. The Tang-Song poetry debate began during the late Song, developed steadily through the Yuan and the Ming, and reached its full maturity in the early Qing. The ideas and discourses begotten from the debate had a huge impact on the composition and study of poetry in China as well as in Korea and Japan. In all three countries, the debate focused on evaluating the two poetic traditions and determining the best poetic model to follow (Jo 1984; No 2012). The extent and fortitude of the debate was later characterized by early modern Chinese reformers as an expression of literary antiquarianism. Formative thinkers like Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) criticized the long-standing reverence for Tang-Song poetry as an anachronistic trend that, from the twelfth century onwards, caused Chinese writers to spend their energy on reviving the ancient poetic traditions than on creating "new" poetry (Hu 1917; qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 2000, 357-60).

In the context of the Joseon dynasty's literary development, the Korean literati's participation in the Tang-Song poetry debate was later condemned by writers and critics, not only as a source of antiquarian predisposition, but also as a sign of Joseon's willful imitation of China that was destined for failure (Sim 1992). A close investigation of the Joseon literati's engagement in the debate, however, reveals that they saw it as a conscious effort to contribute to and morph the latest transcultural developments in poetry. More importantly, the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon often included advocacy for Joseon poetry as well as critique (and even rejection) of Ming-Qing poetry. All in all, the literary movement, which appeared to be antiquarian and Sinophilic, was in fact highly reflective of Joseon's contemporary political and ideological concerns, expressing the efforts by the Joseon state and its literati to establish their unique literary identity and tradition.

The Tang-Song Poetry Debate in China

Many of the cultural achievements that came to characterize the Chinese civilization, including innovations in the field of poetry, were made during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Tang poets, such as Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), were iconized as China's most celebrated cultural heroes by later generations of writers. The poets of the succeeding Song dynasty (960-1279) were confronted with the challenge of creating a distinct poetic tradition while referencing the successes of their immediate predecessors (Zheng 2016). The Song dynasty witnessed the invention and popularization of a new poetic form, *ci* 詞, and prolific literary production by renowned poets, most notably Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), whose fame and influence came to match those of Li Bai and Du Fu. The beginning of the Tang-Song poetry debate is attributed to Zhang Jie (*jinshi* 張戒) 1125), a Southern Song scholar-official who explained in his writing the differences between Tang and Song poetry. In the late Song, disapproving voices against Song dynasty's poetic conventions became increasingly pronounced. Late Song scholars like Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187-1269) pointed out the negative influence of Neo-Confucian didacticism on contemporary poetry and began to call out for a reform based on the Tang model, which they deemed as a poetry inspired by natural emotion (Zha 2014, 385).

The popularity of Tang poetry continued to rise throughout the subsequent Jin and Yuan dynasties (1115-1234; 1271-1368). The Yuan experienced a huge Tang poetry resurgence. Various compilations of Tang poetry, including the most influential anthology *Tang yin* (*The Sounds of the Tang* 唐音) (1344), compiled by Yang Shihong 楊士弘 (14th century), were published during the Yuan dynasty. More importantly, sophisticated conversations about Tang and Song poetry emerged, laying the firm theoretical foundations for the debate's later developments. Overall, the Yuan saw a shift from historical to stylistic discussions of Tang and Song poetry. Most notable was Dai Biaoyuan's 戴表元 (1244-1310) conceptualization of the idea "Tang style" (*Tang feng* 唐風) as a profoundly personal poetic style and a principle of poetic creation inspired by individual emotions and experiences (than as a collection of poetic standards established by the Tang poets) (Zha 2014, 376).

The veneration for Tang poetry continued into the succeeding Ming dynasty (1368-1644), during which the Tang-Song poetry debate gained a

great momentum. By the mid-Ming, Tang poetry was elevated to the position of unchallenged supremacy when prominent writers of the time, namely, the Earlier Seven Masters (*qian qi zi* 前七子) and the Later Seven Masters (*hou qi zi* 後七子),¹ called for a complete rejection of Song poetry. These fourteen poets and their followers promoted a revival and careful imitation of High Tang and pre-Tang poetry, harshly arguing that Song was a dynasty that produced no poetry (Qiu and Hu 2000). In the late Ming, however, a more balanced approach to the Tang-Song poetry debate gained the upper hand as critics began to focus on exploring each tradition's unique characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses.

The debate carried on throughout the ensuing Qing dynasty (1636-1911) and played a momentous role in shaping the poetic discourses in China until the end of the pre-modern era. In the early years of Qing, Tang poetry and the Tang-styled poetry of the Earlier and Later Seven Masters enjoyed great popularity. In the preface to *A Selection of Great Ming Poems* (*Huang Ming shi xuan* 皇明詩選), published in 1643 right after the fall of the Ming dynasty, Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608-1647) states that the spirit of poetry found in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) was recovered through Tang poetry which the Ming poetic masters successfully restored (Wang 2012, 38-40).

Later in the Qing dynasty, however, the Chinese literati began to condemn Ming poets' imitation of Tang poetry and developed a particularly condemning view of Ming poetry, ranking it the lowest point in the steady decline of poetry since the time of Tang. The popularity of Tang poetry in the early Qing was due to Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1661-1722) who, through active promotion of High Tang poetry, tried to diffuse poetry's civilizing influence (Wang 2012, 181-83). In the background, however, weary of the long dominance of Tang poetry, Chinese writers began to revisit Song poetry in search of a breakthrough. Influential writer and thinker Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), for example, came to the defence of Song poetry and argued that the Song poets were the only successful students of the Tang poets. The esteem for Song poetry steadily

grew throughout mid-Qing until eventually Tang and Song poetry became increasingly seen as two connected traditions from the same ancient root. From the eighteenth century on, there was a push for poetry that reflected individual sensibility and creativity while drawing inspiration from both Tang and Song poetic traditions.

The Tang-Song Poetry Debate in Joseon

The Tang-Song poetry debate in Korea did not start until the fourteenth century with the beginning of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897). In the preceding Goryeo dynasty (918-1356), Song poetry was in style thanks to the close cultural exchanges between Song and Goryeo. Even after the fall of the Song by the Mongols in 1279 and throughout the subsequent Mongol occupation of Goryeo, the love of Song poetry did not wane in the peninsula. Additionally, the enthusiasm for Tang poetry in the Yuan literary scene did not seem to have had a significant impact on the Goryeo literati.

Song poetry continued to be favored in the early years of the Joseon dynasty (Seo 1705, 15:14a-b). The Joseon state established strong diplomatic ties with the Ming dynasty, and before long, cultural trends from China, including the Tang-Song poetry debate, were introduced to Joseon. Compilations of Tang poems were imported in large numbers from the Ming, including the popular Yuan dynasty anthology, the *Tang yin* (No 2015, 126). The growing enthusiasm for Tang poetry in fourteenth-century Joseon was noted by Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-1396) who described the lively study of and experimentation with Tang poetry among his contemporaries (Yi 1627, 13:20b). By the fifteenth century, the Tang-Song poetry debate dominated the discussion of poetry in Joseon. Tang poetry was esteemed as the heir of the Three Hundred Poems of the *Shijing* while Song poetry was deemed as its inferior (Seo 1478, 94:26a-b). In the sixteenth century, criticisms against Song poetry intensified, accused of being prosaic, didactic, and uninspiring (Yi 1633, 21:28a). In the following century, however, many began speaking in defence of Song poetry, and soon both Tang and Song poetic traditions were recognized as authoritative standards (Kim 1702, 9:22a; Kim 2001, *byeoljip* 3:13b; Heo 17th c. 25:361; Kim 1986, 9:12a-b). Finally, in the eighteenth century, there was a general movement away from imitation toward originality regarding poetic creations (Kim 1804, 1:4b-5b; Yu

1. The Earlier Seven Masters were Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1530), He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521), Xu Zhenqing 徐禎卿 (1479-1511), Bian Gong 邊貢 (1476-1532), Kang Hai 康海 (1475-1540), Wang Jiushi 王九思 (1468-1551), and Wang Tinxiang 王廷相 (1474-1544). The Later Seven Masters were Li Panlong 李攀龍 (1514-1570), Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-590), Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495-1575), Zong Chen 宗臣 (1525-1560), Liang Youyu 梁有譽 (1521-1556), Xu Zhongxing 徐中行 (1517-1578), and Wu Guolun 吳國倫 (1524-1593).

1832, 6:24a-b).

From this quick overview, it may appear that the Tang-Song poetry debate in the Joseon followed the course of its development in China, that is, from the long ascendancy of Tang poetry from the twelfth through the seventeenth centuries, to the reinstatement of Song poetry in the seventeenth century, and lastly the endeavor toward mediation and emphasis on individual creativity from the eighteenth century onward. There were, however, some fundamental differences between the debate's development in China and in Korea. To begin, the debate in China unfolded over a span of four very distinct dynasties, while in Korea it occurred in a single (albeit long) dynasty, Joseon. This meant that the Joseon literati had to understand and grapple with different Chinese dynasties' positions in the debate; in other words, as much as the debate was about Tang and Song poetry, it also concerned Yuan, Ming, and Qing poetry. Moreover, while the debate in China remained largely a literary movement, the debate in Korea was heavily influenced by Joseon's specific political situations and ideologies. This unique context allowed the Joseon literati to produce ideas on poetry that were dissimilar to and, at times in conflict with those held by the Ming literati, despite the feelings of close cultural identification. In fact, the Joseon literati actively critiqued Ming compilations of Tang poems and proceeded to produce their own along with extensive body of critical literature (No 2015, 138-53). All in all, three key factors that impacted the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon can be identified: 1) a strong Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, 2) an awareness of temporal and cultural distance from China, and 3) King Jeongjo's literary reform.

Joseon Neo-Confucianism and the Tang-Song Poetry Debate

Since its founding, the Joseon state embraced the Zhu Xi School of Neo-Confucianism and instituted it as a state ideology as well as the basis of education and civil service examination. After the fall of the Ming, Joseon's support for orthodox Neo-Confucianism intensified in an effort to establish its legitimacy as the defender of Confucian civilization regionally and to increase and centralize state control domestically. This particular political and cultural environment shaped the Joseon literati's engagement in the Tang-Song poetry debate.

On the most fundamental level, there was a contentious dispute about the value of poetic pursuit. Orthodox Neo-Confucianism taught its followers to devote themselves fully to personal moral cultivation and fulfillment of societal duties. While opinions varied as to the usefulness of poetry, the art form was certainly regarded as a trivial pursuit in comparison to more serious scholarly enquiries and official responsibilities. The Joseon Neo-Confucians revered the *Shijing*, the classical poetry anthology compiled by Confucius, as an essential component in the Confucian canon, but not everyone agreed with giving the same degree of respect to Tang poetry. Some scholars even questioned the Ming literati's view of Tang poetry as a definitive authority in poetry. As the seventeenth-century scholar Bak Se-chaе 朴世采 (1631-1695) noted, some among his contemporary literati questioned the claim that the study of Tang poetry was good for educating the young since the harmful effects these poems could have on one's performance of duties had not been attested (Bak 1732, 50:5b-6a). In fact, despite Tang poetry's immense popularity, proving its superiority in terms of its value in Neo-Confucian education was difficult as none of the great Tang poets were accomplished in Confucian scholarship with the exception of Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824). The Joseon literati's particular adoration for Han Yu's poetry can be understood in this light. After all, the Tang was not a very Confucian dynasty, and sincere Confucians like Han Yu had to risk their lives to advocate their cause.

In the same vein, the Joseon literati also had reservations about the Ming literati's renunciation of Song poetry. Despite the accusation of poetic incompetency, the Song dynasty witnessed a great Confucian revival in the form of Neo-Confucianism as well as prolific production of poetry by Neo-Confucian masters, including Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). The Tang poetry fad in Joseon upset scholars like Yun Geun-su 尹根壽 (1537-1616) who argued that rather than following the footsteps of Tang poets, scholars and writers should model themselves after Song Neo-Confucians and strive to revive their spirit (Yun 1597, 7). Many Joseon literati contested the straightforward rejection of Song poetry. Heo Gyun 許筠 (1569-1618) (17th c., 4:175) claimed while Song poetry was inferior to Tang poetry, not all Song poets were equal. Hwang Gyeong-won 黃景源 (1709-1787) (1790, 5:38a-b) remarked that the Song poet Su Shi, for instance, deserved to be emulated, for besides being a poet, Su was also an expert in Confucian Classics.

Indeed, the Joseon literati did not simply accept the Ming's polarizing view

of Tang and Song poetry but challenged its simple dichotomy. For the most part, the poets and literary critics of Joseon agreed with and further expanded on the theory of relative differences between Tang and Song poetry based on their respective emphasis on emotion and idea. Sin Gyeong-jun's 申景濬 (1712-1781) (1910, 8:10a-13b) contribution to the debate through a creative use of diagrams demonstrates the intensity and gravity with which the Joseon literati engaged the theory. Many expressed doubts about dichotomic approach to the Tang-Song poetry debate. Yang Gyeong-u 梁慶遇 (b. 1568) pointed out that the so-called Tang poetry consisted of divergent styles. He stated that late Tang poems, for instance, differed significantly from High Tang poems, and while the use of anecdotes was often associated with Song poems, Tang poems also employed the same technique (Yang 1647, 9:10a). Sin Heum 申欽 (1566-1628) (1629, 51:7b) and Yi Sik 李植 (1584-1647) (1674, 14:15b-16b) warned their fellow literati to take caution when following the style of any poet from the Tang, be it Han Yu or Du Fu. Yi Dan-ha 李端夏 (1625-1689) asserted that all talks about Tang and Song poetry were useless unless the heart remained the focus of poetic composition. Citing the *Shijing's* definition of poetry, Yi (17th c., 2:36a-38a) identified poetry as "words naturally expressed from the heart" and encouraged his contemporaries to concentrate on cultivating their hearts.

Behind their attitude of reservation, there was a shared belief in the unchallenged authority of the *Shijing* and Zhu Xi's poetry. Zhu Xi's poetry was regarded as the "correct sound" to be emulated, much like the Three Hundred Poems in the *Shijing* (Sin 1629, 51:7b-8a). In China, throughout the Ming, Zhu Xi's thoughts gradually declined in influence. The Ming scholars' lackadaisical attitude towards Zhu Xi's poetry was harshly criticized by the Joseon literati who went on to produce detailed annotations and philosophical treatises on Zhu's major poetic works (Han 2013). In Ming China, the efforts to reconcile the supremacy of Tang poetry and that of Zhu Xi's poetry led to an absurd situation of classifying Zhu Xi's poetic works as Tang poems (Wang 2012, 221). Instead of resorting to such awkward and inaccurate compromise, the Joseon literati chose to defend Song poetry and celebrated Zhu Xi's poems as masterful examples of Song poetry (Yi 1766, 27:23a-b). Furthermore, in preference to the stark Tang-Song dichotomy of late Ming, the Joseon literati sought to expound the relationship between Tang and Song poetry in non-exclusive ways. Sin Heum (1629, 50:1b), for instance, used the analogy of sudden and gradual enlightenment in Buddhism to describe the relationship

between the two poetic traditions, the idea first articulated by the early Ming literary theorist Gao Bing 高棅 (1350-1423) in his influential anthology *Tangshi pin hui* (*Graded Compendium of Tang Poetry* 唐詩品彙) (Yu 2008, 247).

Temporal and Cultural Distance and the Problem of Imitation

Tang poetry was greatly esteemed in sixteenth-century Joseon. Thanks to the dedication and talent of Yi Dal 李達 (1539-1612), Choe Gyeong-chang 崔慶昌 (1539-1583), and Baek Gwang-hun 白光勳 (1537-1582), later called the Three Tang Poets, the Tang-style poetry took root in the Joseon literary scene (Kim 2007; Yang 2012). Many came to believe in the possibility of restoring Tang poetry in Joseon and strove towards realizing this goal. Yi Sun-in 李純仁 (1533-1592) (1891, 4:12a-b), for example, stated that some Joseon poets, like the Three Tang poets, produced commendable Tang-style poems by eliminating the detrimental influences of Song poetry and cultivating clear and refined poetic energy (*qi* 氣) through a rigorous study of Tang poetry.

Enthusiasts argued that a successful restoration of the ancient poetic tradition would require a profound understanding of the tradition based on sound learning. Critiquing the trend of formalistic imitation of Tang poetry, Yu Mong-in 柳夢寅 (1559-1623) (1832, 6:24a-b) extolled the Ming poets' adamant determination and unyielding efforts to emulate the Tang poets and enjoined the Joseon literati to struggle harder to produce literature that could match the Chinese in excellence. The emphasis on learning from the Chinese poets with the goal of outperforming them was also echoed in the discussion of Song poetry. During the seventeenth century, when the interest in Song poetry was renewed, scholars like Sin Yu-han 申維翰 (1681-1752) (1770, 9:8a-b) claimed that after familiarizing themselves thoroughly with the works of the Song poets and making them their own, the Joseon literati should be able to compose Song melodies that can match the ancient works.

Despite such optimism, however, due to the temporal and cultural gaps between the Chinese dynasties and Joseon, many also expressed doubts about the prospect of realizing these ambitions. Although the revival of Tang poetry was possible for the Yuan and the Ming literati, there was no guarantee that the same could be possible for the Joseon literati who, after all, were not native users of the Chinese language. Even positively spirited Yu Mong-in (1832, 6:25a)

described Joseon as “a peripheral land” with few outstanding and broad-minded people and limited access to new literature and scholarship. Like Yu, in voicing their anxiety, many affirmed the Sinocentric worldview that placed Joseon in a peripheral space, deficient in vital energy (*qi*) central to composing Tang poetry (Yu 1608, Preface:1-3).

As noted earlier, during the eighteenth-century, in both Qing and Joseon, the imitative mode of poetic composition was abandoned in favor of more personal poetry, yet their reasons for rejecting imitation were different. In the case of Qing, the motivation was largely driven by the changing literary and cultural trends that focused on individuality than tradition. In the case of Joseon, however, in addition to the renewed emphasis on individual expression, an increased awareness of cultural differences also played a significant role in the growth of anti-imitation movement. Such understanding was founded on the recognition of the historicity of poetry and poetic trends, aptly summarized in the following quote by Kim Jae-chan 金載瓚 (1746-1827):

In poetry, never imitate the ancients....Born in a later time, it is impossible to restore the language of previous times. Therefore, Song cannot be Tang. Ming cannot be Song. This is the Way of Poetry—Never imitate the ancients. Between our country and China, there is absolute difference in size. There is also difference in customs and talent. Even at times when someone with poetic fame comes along, it is difficult for that person to claim equality with Chinese poets, let alone surpass the Chinese!...Among influential people in our country, few are gifted in poetry. Admiring the ancients and criticizing the contemporaries, this is what I refrain from. (Kim 19th c., 8:1a-b)

Kim repudiates imitation as a fundamental antithesis to the “Way of Poetry.” Recognizing the uniqueness of each dynasty and culture, he asserts that there is no need for competition amongst dynasties and that striving to imitate ancient poetry would be futile. Like Yu Mong-in, Kim harbors a Sinocentric worldview that situates Joseon in the margin of literary universe, but he also criticizes indiscriminate adoration of Chinese poetry as well as unwarranted degrading of Korean poetry.

Other eighteenth-century scholars provided more empirical reasons for opposing imitation of ancient Chinese poetry. Yu Deuk-gong 柳得恭 (1748-1807) (18th c., 7:111-12) characterized imitation of Tang and Song poetry

as a case of anachronism, comparable to using ancient prescription to cure present-day disease, which was not only ineffective but also detrimental. Hong Seok-ju 洪奭周 (1774-1842) (18th c., 24:545-46) questioned the possibility of properly understanding or recreating Tang and Song poetry after many centuries, claiming that the views of his contemporaries were based on a limited number of samples from the past. Bak Je-ga 朴齊家 (1750-1805) distrusted the reliability of ancient poetic texts due to possible textual corruptions accrued over their extended period of transmission. Given the significant changes in people, customs, and ideas over time, Bak doubted the likelihood of comprehending the original meaning. He boldly declared that the poetry of China could never be realized in Joseon and advised the fellow Korean literati to reflect the contemporary Joseon context in their poetic compositions (Bak 18th c., 1:34b-35b).

In general, the antagonism against imitation did not result in the rejection of Tang and Song poetry but instead caused the Joseon literati to evaluate them in a new light. Kim Sang-jeong 金相定 (1722-1788) stressed that the essence of Tang poetry was found in the expression of individual emotions, not in imitation. He suggested that instead of emulation, poets should nurture their true nature and emotion and express them genuinely in poetry. Only then, he argued, would they attain the level of Tang poetry (Kim 1804, 1:4b-5b). Throughout the nineteenth century criticisms against imitation continued to escalate and Chinese-styled poems came to be seen increasingly as inferior works (Heo 1910, 16:16a-17a). Eventually, the view that imitation only produces illusory representations of an obscure Other became widespread. Besides listing the failed Korean attempts to recreate Chinese literature, some even cited the examples of failed Chinese attempts to imitate Korean literature in order to prove the cross-cultural validity of their argument (Yi 19th c., 14:556a).

Critique of Ming-Qing Poetry & King Jeongjo’s Literary Reform

A unique and vital part of the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon was its critique of Ming and Qing poetry. As noted earlier, the Ming literati’s commitment to restoring Tang poetry influenced the creation of a similar trend in Joseon. Instead of accepting the Ming literati’s position in the Tang-Song poetry debate, the Joseon literati waged the debate on their own terms. Despite the popularity

of Ming literature in Joseon, the antiquarian movement from the Ming took a different and complex turn in Joseon (Bu 2014, 128). The discussion, which first focused on the methods of imitation, eventually evolved into questioning the very foundation of the antiquarian literary movement, that is, the purpose and possibility of imitation. In the end, as anti-imitation sentiments swelled, Ming poetry and its alleged antiquarianism became the target of criticism.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Joseon literati became increasingly critical of the Ming literati's approach to Tang poetry revival (No 2015, 159). Kim Chang-hyeop 金昌協 (1651-1708), a fierce critic of the Ming's antiquarian literary movement, held the movement responsible for the problems in the contemporary Joseon literary world. In his explanation of the Ming literati's failure to understand Tang poetry, Kim wrote,

In imitating Tang poetry, the people of Ming only imitated (Tang poetry's) grandness and radiance but did not attain its easiness and leisurely elegance; only imitated its lofty extravagance and refined beauty but did not attain its warmth and blandness; only imitated its loud and clear sound but did not attain its harmonious and lingering (sound), and hence produced works completely different (from Tang poetry). (Kim 1754, 34:5a-b)

Kim reproached the Ming literati's selective imitation of Tang poetry and identified the lack of genuineness as the most severe problem in Ming poetry. He stated while both Tang and Song poetry expressed genuine ideas and feelings of the poets, in imitating the appearance and sound of Tang poetry, the Ming poets neglected naturalness, which is the main foundation of good poetry (Kim 1754, 34:5b-6a; Kim 2017).

The most influential critic of Ming-Qing poetry was King Jeongjo 正祖 (r. 1776-1800) who, through an extensive literary reform, tried to purge Joseon poetry of their harmful effects. Jeongjo's literary reform (1787-1792) has been discussed extensively in Korean language scholarship as a systematic endeavor to promote practical literature, which in content was based on orthodox Neo-Confucianism and in style followed the model of classical literature (Bak 2006; Na 2009; Kim 2012). While the idea of literary reform had been proposed in the Joseon court since the beginning of the dynasty as a way to fulfill the civilizing mission of a Confucian government (*Sejongillok* 1430, 49:24a-b; *Ilseongnok* 1776, 33), Jeongjo was the only ruler to methodically implement it as

part of a larger education and government reform. Through his reform, Jeongjo sought to bring back the harmony between Neo-Confucian scholarship and literary pursuit, an ideal that he believed had been carried out in the early years of the dynasty until Joseon literature became plagued with damaging trends from Ming and Qing (Jeongjo 1814, 163:11a-b).

Poetry reform was an important part of Jeongjo's literary reform. The king cited Song Neo-Confucian Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007-1072) poetry reform of the eleventh century and announced the same kind of change was necessary for Joseon (*Ilseongnok* 1777, 52). Jeongjo's agendas for poetry reform, which we learn from his edicts, publications, and personal instructions, reflect his desire to influence and participate in the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon. On the whole, the king's ideas of poetry corresponded with the eighteenth-century developments in the debate. First, he recognized both Tang and Song poetic traditions as standards for poetic composition. He emphasized the importance of learning from both traditions without exclusive competition (Jeongjo 1814, 9:21a-b). Second, in so doing, Jeongjo (1814, 180:31b-32a) promoted Song poetry, especially the poetic works by Zhu Xi, which he regarded as ideal examples embodying the unity of scholarship and aesthetics. Finally, he openly criticized the antiquarian trend in Ming poetry and identified it as a root cause of imitation-driven poetry in Joseon, whose damaging impact, according to Jeongjo, was worse than that of Catholicism (*Jeongjoillok* 1791, 33:46b).

From his perspective as a ruler, the imitative trend in literature came with political and social implications. Most concerning to him was the impact on the preparation of civil officials. He was troubled by civil officials who lacked abilities to compose official documents on real-life issues as their literary training had been based on imitating the ancient literary works (*Ilseongnok* 1781, 95; 1784, 143). Hoping to transform the poetic movement of his days, Jeongjo personally directed the compilation of exemplary poetic works. The *Flowers of Regulated Verses* (*Yulyeong* 律英), published in 1799, was a collection of regulated verses selected by the king himself, featuring the works by 49 Tang poets, 13 Song poets, 6 Ming poets, and 11 Joseon poets. Through this conscientious selection of works, Jeongjo painted a clear picture of a relative hierarchy of poetic traditions in which Joseon surpassed Ming. Jeongjo's (1814, 180:18b-19a) most ambitious poetry project was the publication of the *Grand View of Poetry* (*Sigwan* 詩觀), an anthology in 560 volumes of commendable poems from China, from the classical period up to the Ming dynasty.

Jeongjo's anthology builds on the collection of Chinese poetry anthologies published by various Joseon scholars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The compilers of these collections critiqued Ming dynasty poetry anthologies and focused on highlighting poems that could be useful in practical social settings and personal learning (Choe 2019). By promoting discriminatory adaptation and critical evaluation of Chinese poetry through the creation of independent anthologies and criticisms, Jeongjo openly attacked the imitative trend in Joseon poetry (Yi 1993). While the collection includes examples of Ming poetry, in his personal introduction, the king identifies Ming poetry as being inferior to Tang and Song poetry. Moreover, as an implicit explanation for not including Qing poetry, Jeongjo (1814, 180:25b) simply states his intention of not considering the poems from China since the fall of the Ming for reasons he preferred not to mention.

Jeongjo's stance on Ming-Qing poetry reveals the complex relationship Joseon had with the two Chinese dynasties. On the political level, Jeongjo is known for actively promoting state-wide celebration of Joseon's loyalty to the fallen dynasty, Ming, for its support for Joseon during the Imjin War (1592-1598). By expanding and personally directing the ritual of the Daebodan (The Altar of Great Gratitude), which commemorated the spirits of the Ming emperors, Jeongjo sought to strengthen Joseon's cultural identity as the legitimate successor of Ming's Confucian civilization and to curtail the growing power of the pro-Qing faction within the court (Yu 2009, 134; Gye 2011). Given this political context, Jeongjo's open criticism of Ming poetry reveals a complex attitude toward Ming, combining a show of loyalty and critical evaluation. Considering how, in the late fourteenth century, the Joseon state was reprimanded by the Ming court for not following its literary standards in diplomatic documents (Alstone 2008), and how, in order to prevent such political mishap, King Sejo 世祖 (r. 1455-1468) requested the Ming court to allow the admission of Joseon students in the Chinese education system (*Sejo sillok* 1460, 21:20b-21a), Jeongjo's disapproval of Ming poetry certainly can be seen a clear divergence from the position of the Joseon court two centuries earlier.

At the same time, while condemning the poetry of the Qing dynasty and voicing his disapproval of Qing Emperor Kangxi's literary reform (Kang 2000, 25-26), Jeongjo also expressed concerns about Joseon's literature's not meeting the Qing literary standards. He was particularly troubled by the trend

in Joseon literature of mixing formal and informal expressions in writing (*Jeongjo sillok* 1781, 11:10b). Believing that diplomatic documents written in such a fashion could reflect negatively on Joseon, Jeongjo issued a special order to the Qing-bound envoys to refrain from using vernacular expressions found in the late Ming and early Qing *xiaopin* (notebook style essays 小品) that had wide readership in Joseon (*Jeongjo sillok* 1787, 24:33b). The fact that he did not include Qing poetry in his anthology yet simultaneously was concerned about Qing's perception of Joseon literature exposes the paradox in Jeongjo's cultural policy.

Taken as a whole, Jeongjo's poetry reform makes evident the weakening force of Ming loyalism in Joseon's political and cultural scene. His careful orchestration of the ritual dedicated to the Ming's imperial line and his strategic undermining of Ming literature reveal that the rhetoric of Ming loyalism was subject to appropriation to serve political purposes. Indeed, as Gye Seung-beom has noted, Ming loyalism in eighteenth-century Joseon was a highly contested idea. While few denied its importance, opinions clashed over its proper expressions (Gye 2011, 167). All the while, the literary reform was a desperate attempt by Jeongjo to counter the growing influence of literary trends from Qing and to encourage the production of instructive, useful, and original literature in Joseon. It reflects the complex political realities of Joseon, which internally refuted Qing's legitimacy but externally had to accept Qing's dominance. In the context of the Tang-Song poetry debate, Jeongjo's poetry reform was his ambitious project to elevate the status of Joseon's poetry to the position of a rightful heir in the lineage of true poetry that carried on the spirit of the Five Hundred Poems of the *Shijing* as well as the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties (Hong 1843, 16:3b-4a).

Conclusion: Indigenization of Sinitic Poetry in Late Joseon

The history of the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon reflects the contested relationships Joseon had with various Chinese dynasties regarding the discussion of Joseon's history and identity in the field of literature. The varied ways in which the debate unfolded reveal the Joseon literati's efforts to discover, negotiate, and assert their position and voice in the grand context of Sinitic literary culture in the region. As shown throughout the paper, while the debate's

general course of development in Joseon corresponded with that in China, the rhetoric in Joseon emphasized the differences, as much as similarities, between China and Korea. Overall, a parallel discourse of pride and angst can be sensed in the debate in Joseon. On the one hand, the Joseon state and its literati clearly articulated and celebrated the ideas of Joseon's greatness, independence, and contribution to the transmission and growth of shared literary heritage. On the other hand, they also expressed their anxieties of learning and writing in a non-native language, their sense of limitations, as well as fear of failure. Poetry, which had built bridges between Chinese and Korean literati across time and space, became a means of expressing the cultural distance—both closeness and separation—between them.

In the end, the dynamic debate regarding Tang-Song poetry led to creative indigenization of Sinitic poetry in Joseon. Over time, the focus shifted away from philosophical and political considerations to a more stylistic discussion of Tang and Song poetry, which, by late Joseon, came to be seen as literary categories open to individual interpretations (Bak 2018). In general, the differences between Tang and Song poetry were expounded in parallel terms: romantic vs. realistic, universal vs. individualistic, and visual vs. narrative (Ju 1998), analyzed based on content, form, expression, and style (Bak 2012, 181).

The journey to indigenization was a gradual and evolving process that began in mid-Joseon and reached full maturity in the eighteenth century. Scholars like Kim Chang-hyeop, Bak Je-ga, Hong Man-jong 洪萬宗 (1634-1725), and Yi Ui-hyeon 李宜顯 (1669-1745) became the leading voices in the movement towards indigenization of Sinitic poetry in Joseon. They critically examined both Tang and Song poetic traditions, assessed their relative strengths and weaknesses, and expounded how each tradition can benefit individual literary pursuits. These scholars stressed the importance of personally acquired experience and knowledge of poetry and the need for diverse training (Kim 1990). Bak Je-ga advocated for “Joseon-style poetry” that embodies locally inspired content, true emotions, and individuality (Han 2018). The desire for indigenous Sinitic poetry culminated in the development of the theory of genuineness, promoted by Hong Man-jong, Kim Chang-hyeop, and Yi Ui-hyeon, which identifies genuineness as the highest level of poetic mastery (Bak 2009). All in all, the Tang-Song poetry debate became an essential part of Joseon's literary legacy and served as a catalyst for dynamic theoretical explorations and creative literary experimentations in poetry.

References

- Alston, Dane. 2008. “Emperor and Emissary: The Hongwu Emperor, Kwōn Kūn, and the Poetry of Late Fourteenth-century Diplomacy.” *Korean Studies* 32: 104-47.
- Bak, Hyang-nan. 2018. “*Palja Baekseonchaek* eul tonghae bon Bak Je-ga ui jakpum seonjeong gijun gwa Dang-Song munhak eul boneun sigak” [Bak Je-ga's Selection Principles and Perspectives on Tang-Song Literature Found in His *Writing on One Hundred Proses Written by Eight Great Masters*]. *Hanguk munhak nonchong* [Theses on Korean Literature] 80: 137-59.
- Bak, Hye-jin. 2006. “Jeongjo dae munche banjeong ui jihyang gwa uiui: Ildeungnok e natanan Jeongjo ui munjanggwon eul jungsim euro” [The Intention and Significance of Jeongjo's Literary Reform: Insights on Jeongjo's Theory of Literature from the Records of Daily Enlightenment]. *Gyeongye eomunhak* [National Language and Literature] 37: 139-70.
- Bak, Je-ga 朴齊家. 18th century. *Jeongyugak-jip* 貞齋閣集 [Collected Works of Jeongyugak]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Bak, Se-chae 朴世采. 1732. *Namgye-jip* 南溪集 [Collected Works of Namgye]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Bak, Su-cheon. 2009. “*Sohwa sipyeong* ui bipyeong yangsang” [An Overview of Literary Criticism in the *Sohwa sipyeong*]. *Hanguk hansu yeongu* [Journal of Sinitic Poetry in Korea] 17: 121-49.
- Bak, Sun-cheol. 2012. “Hanguk sihwa e natanan jon-Dang-pa jon-Song-pa ui pyeongnon yeongu: Yi Baek, Du Bo, So Sik, Hwang Jeong-gyeon eul jungsim euro” [Study of Pro-Tang and Pro-Song Poetry Criticisms in the Remarks on Poetry from Korea: Focusing on Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian]. *Jungguk inmun gwahak* [Chinese Human and Social Sciences] 52: 173-97.
- Bu, Yu-seop. 2014. “Sin Heum gwa Myeong-dae munhak: Myeong-dae bokgo sihak gwa jeosul eul jungsim euro” [Sin Heum and Ming Literature: Focusing on the Antiquarian Poetics and Publications of Ming]. *Minjok munhwa yeongu* [Journal of National Culture] 65: 123-51.
- Choe, Seok-won. 2019. “Munhak jeok jeonbeom euroseo Dang-si e daehan jisik ui yutong gwa hwaksan: Joseon ui Dang-si seonjip ganhaeng gwa suyong ui yeoksa reul jungsim euro” [The Circulation and Dissemination

- of Knowledge of Tang Poetry as Literary Standards: A History of the Publication and Reception of Tang Poetry Anthologies in Joseon]. *Jungguk eomun nonchong* [Journal of Chinese Language and Literature] 93: 183-204.
- de Bary, Wm. Theodore, and Richard Lufrano, eds. 2000. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gang, Hye-seon. 2000. *Jeongjo ui simunjip pyeonchan* [King Jeongjo's Publication of Poetry and Prose Anthologies]. Seoul: Munheon gwa haeseoksa.
- Gye, Seung-beom. 2011. "Joseon sok ui Myeong nara: Daebodan eul tonghaeseo bon Joseon jibaechung ui Junghwa insik" [The Ming Dynasty Inside Joseon: The Joseon Political Leaders' Views on China Seen through the Altar of Great Gratitude]. *Myeong Cheong sa yeongu* [Journal of Ming-Qing History] 35: 153-85.
- Han, Christina. 2013. "Between Poetry and Philosophy: The Neo-Confucian Hermeneutics of Zhu Xi's Nine Bends Poem." *Asian Philosophy* 23 (1): 62-85.
- Han, Yun-suk. 2018. "Chojeong Bak Je-ga yesul ui Joseon-pung e gwanhan yeongu" [A Study of the Idea of Joseon-style Arts by Chojeong Bak Je-ga]. *Dongyang cheolhak yeongu* [Journal of East Asian Philosophy] 93: 83-108.
- Heo, Gyun 許筠. 17th century. *Seongso bubugo* 惺所覆瓿藁 [Humble Manuscript of Seongso]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Heo, Hun 許薰. 1910. *Bangsan-jip* 舫山集 [Collected Works of Bangsan]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Hong, Seok-ju 洪奭周. 18th century. *Yeoncheon-jip* 淵泉集 [Collected Works of Yeoncheon]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Hong, Yang-ho 洪良浩. 1843. *Igye-jip* 耳溪集 [Collected Works of Igye]. <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Hwang, Gyeong-won 黃景源. 1790. *Ganghan-jip* 江漢集 [Collected Works of Ganghan]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Ilseongnok* 日省錄 [Records of Daily Reflections]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Jeongjo 正祖. 1814. *Hongjae jeonso* 弘齋全書 [Complete Works of Hongjae]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Jeongjo sillok* 正祖實錄 [Veritable Records of King Jeongjo]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Jo, Jeong-eop. 1984. *Zhong Han Ri shihua bijiao yanjiu* [Comparative Study of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Remarks on Poetry]. Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe.
- Ju, Seung-taek. 1998. "Joseon malyeop Dang-si pung gwa Song-si pung ui galdeung yangsang" [An Overview of the Discord between Tang-style Poetry and Song-style Poetry in Late Joseon]. *Hanguk sihak yeongu* [Journal of Korean Poetry Study] 1: 321-45.
- Kim, Chang-hyeop 金昌協. 1754. *Nongam-jip* 農巖集 [Collected Works of Nongam]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Kim, Dong-jun. 2017. "Jeongchi gwolleok gwa ui sanggwang gwangye ro bon Kim Chang-hyeop, Kim Chang-heup ui munhak bipyeong gwa geu seonggyeok" [Literary Criticisms by Kim Chang-hyeop and Kim Chang-heup and Their Connections to Political Authorities]. *Hanguk hanmunhak yeongu* [Journal of Korean Literature in Hanmun] 67: 139-77.
- Kim, Gyeong-mi. 1990. "Bak Je-ga ui munhak insik gwa siron ui yangsang" [An Overview of Bak Je-ga's Literary Thoughts and Theory of Poetry]. *Urimunhak yeongu* [Journal of Our Literature] 8 (December): 60-79.
- Kim, Jae-chan 金載瓚. 19th century. *Haeseok yugo* 海石遺稿 [Posthumous Works of Haeseok]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Kim, Jeong-hui 金正喜. 1986. *Wandang jeonjip* 阮堂全集 [Complete Works of Wandang]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Kim, Jong-seo. 2007. "Sihwa e natanan Samdang siin e daehan bipyeong yangsang" [Aspects of Criticisms of the Three Tang Poets in the Remarks on Poetry]. *Hanmun hakbo* [Annals of Sino-Korean Literature] 17: 309-58.
- Kim, Man-jung 金萬重. 1702. *Seopo-jip* 西浦集 [Collected Works of Seopo]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Kim, Sang-jeong 金相定. 1804. *Seokdang yugo* 石堂遺稿 [Posthumous Works of Seokdang]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Kim, Tae-hui. 2012. "Jeongjo ui munche jeongchaek ui yangmyeonseong: Hangmun jeok seonggyeok gwa jeongchi jeok seonggyeok" [The Double-Sidedness of Jeongjo's Literary Reform: Its Scholarly and Political Characteristics]. *Hanguk dongyang jeongchi sasangsa yeongu* [Journal of Korean and East Asian Political Thoughts] 11 (1): 77-98.
- Na, Jong-myeon. 2009. "Jeongjo ui munhak sasang e daehaye" [About

- Jeongjo's Literary Thoughts]. *Dongyang munhwa yeongu* [Journal of East Asian Culture] 3: 51-70.
- No, Gyeong-hui. 2012. "17-8 segi Joseon gwa Edo mundan ui Dang-si seonjip suyong gwa ganhaeng yangsang bigyo yeongu" [A Comparative Study of the Reception and Publication of Tang Poetry Anthologies in 17th- and 18th-century Joseon and Edo]. *Dasan gwa hyeondae* [Dasan and Today] 3: 135-69.
- _____. 2015. *17-segi jeonbangi Han-Jung munhwa gyoryu* [Korea-China Cultural Exchanges in the Early 17th-century]. Seoul: Taehaksa.
- Qiu, Meiqiong, and Jianci Hu. 2000. "Ming dai shixue piping zhong de Tang Song zhi lun" [The Tang-Song Poetry Debate in the Ming Dynasty Poetry Criticisms]. *Jiangxi jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* [Journal of Jiangxi Institute of Education] 21 (2): 11-14.
- Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 [Veritable Records of King Sejong]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Seo, Geo-jeong 徐居正. 1478. *Dongmunseon* 東文選 [Anthology of Eastern Literature]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- _____. 1705. *Saga-jip* 四佳集 [Collected Works of Saga]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Sim, Gyeong-ho. 1992. "Joseon hugi minjok uisik gwa Hansi" [Late Joseon Ethnic Nationalism and Hansi]. *Hanguk hanmunhak yeongu* [Journal of Korean Literature in Hanmun] 15: 125-50.
- Sin, Gyeong-jun 申景濬. 1910. *Yeoam yugo* 旅菴遺稿 [Posthumous Works of Yeoam]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Sin, Heum 申欽. 1629. *Sangchon-go* 象村稿 [Manuscript of Sangchon]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Sin, Yu-han 申維翰. 1770. *Cheongcheon-jip* 靑泉集 [Collected Works of Cheongcheon]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Wang, Yingzhi. 2012. *Qing dai Tang Song shi zhi zheng liu bian shi* [The Evolution of the Tang-Song Poetry Debate in the Qing Dynasty]. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe.
- Xu, Anqi. 2007. "Hanguo shihua zhong de Song shi lun" [The Theory of Song Poetry in Korean Remarks on Poetry]. *Jungguk inmun hakhoe haksul daehoe balpyo nonmunjip* [Proceedings from the Association of Chinese Humanities Conference]: 67-84.
- Yang, Gyeong-u 梁慶遇. 1647. *Jeho-jip* 霽湖集 [Collected Works of Jeho]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yang, Huimin. 2012. "Lun Chaoxian chao chong Tang shi ren qun Han shi chuanguzuo ji yingxiang" [The Influence of Pro-Tang Poets of Joseon on the General Composition of Hanmun Poetry]. *Chongqing ligong daxue xuebao* [Journal of Chongqing University of Technology] 16 (1): 100-03.
- Yi, Dan-ha 李端夏. 17th century. *Oejae-jip* 畏齋集 [Collected Works of Oejae]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Saek 李穡. 1626. *Mogeun-go* 牧隱藁 [Manuscript of Mogeun]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Sik 李植. 1674. *Taekdang-jip* 澤堂集 [Collected Works of Taekdang]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Su-gwang 李睟光. 1633. *Jibong-jip* 芝峯集 [Collected Works of Jibong]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Sun-in 李純仁. 1891. *Godam ilgo* 孤潭逸稿 [Draft Manuscript of Godam]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Ui-gang. 1993. "Jeongjo ui Dang-Song palgamun bipyeong sogo" [A Study of Jeongjo's Evaluations of the Writings of the Eight Great Tang Masters]. *Minjok munhwa* [National Culture] 16: 145-70.
- Yi, Ui-hyeon 李宜顯. 1766. *Dogok-jip* 陶谷集 [Collected Works of Dogok]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yi, Yu-won 李裕元. 19th century. *Gaogorak* 嘉梧藁略 [Poetry Manuscript of Gao]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yu, Bong-hak. 2009. *Gaehyeok gwa galdeung ui sidae: Jeongjo wa 19-segi* [The Age of Reforms and Conflicts: Jeongjo and the Nineteenth Century]. Seongnam: Singu munhwasa.
- Yu, Deuk-gong 柳得恭. 18th century. *Yeongjae-jip* 泠齋集 [Collected Works of Yeongjae]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yu, Geun 柳根. 1608. *Okbong-jip* 玉峯集 [Collected Works of Okbong]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yu, Mong-in 柳夢寅. 1832. *Eou-jip* 於于集 [Collected Works of Eou]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.
- Yu, Seong-jun. 2008. *Cheong sihwa wa Joseon sihwa ui Dang siron* [The Tang Poetry Debate in Qing Dynasty Remarks on Poetry and Joseon Dynasty Remarks on Poetry]. Seoul: Pureun sasangsa.
- Yun, Geun-su 尹根壽. 1597. *Woljeong manpil* 月汀漫筆 [Casual Records of Woljeong]. Available at <https://db.itkc.or.kr/>.

- Zha, Hongde. 2014. *Yuan dai shixue tonglun* 元代诗学通论 [An Overview of the Yuan Dynasty Poetics]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe.
- Zheng, Yongxiao. 2016. "Zong Tang, lian Tang yu Song Jin Yuan shi feng de shanbian" [The Evolution of Pro-Tang Trend and the Trends in Song, Jin, and Yuan Poetry]. *Nandu xuetan* [Nandu Academic Forum] 36 (1): 57-62.

Christina HAN (chan@wlu.ca) is Associate Professor of Asian History at Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford Campus, Canada. She is also a Curatorial Consultant and Research Associate for the Korean Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum and has served as a guest curator for the museum's Korea Gallery. She has published widely on cultural history, art, and literature of Korea and China. Her books include *Korea around 1900: The Paintings of Gisan* (2005) and *Solitary Cloud: Poetry of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn* (2016).

Abstract

This paper examines the development and implications of the Tang-Song poetry debate in Joseon. The debate, which started in China during the late Song period, was introduced to early Joseon through the Ming dynasty. While embracing the Chinese literati's evaluations of Tang and Song poetic traditions and their reverence for Tang poetry as a paragon of poetic excellence, the Joseon literati also formed critical views on the debate, informed by their unique cultural and political realities. This paper identifies three key factors that led to the distinct development of the debate in Joseon: namely, 1) the influence of orthodox Neo-Confucian ideology, 2) the growing awareness of Joseon's temporal and cultural distance from China, and 3) King Jeongjo's literary reform. While Song poetry was rejected as an inferior model by the Ming participants in the debate, the Joseon literati came to its defence due to their commitment to the Song Neo-Confucians and their literary works. Citing Joseon's distinct history and culture from those of the Chinese dynasties, they also formed critical responses to the trend of imitating Tang poetry. More importantly, the debate in Joseon entailed the renunciation of Ming-Qing poetry and the promotion of Joseon poetry, best exemplified in King Jeongjo's literary reform. Taken as a whole, the Tang-Song poetry debate served as a catalyst for dynamic theoretical explorations and indigenization of Sinitic poetry in Joseon, Korea.

Keywords: Tang-Song poetry debate, Joseon poetry, Ming-Qing poetry, King Jeongjo, literary reform, indigenization

