

Article

Dreams in Wartime:
Dream Records and Dream
Interpretation Recorded in 1592
in O Huimun's *Swaemirok*
(*Record of a Refugee* 瑣尾錄)

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Introduction

On the 27th day of the eleventh lunar month of 1591, O Huimun (吳希文 1539-1613), a middle-aged member of the *yangban* class in his early fifties, set out from his home in Seoul on a journey south to collect tribute (*gongmul* 貢物) from his country estates and to visit one of his married sisters, identified as the wife of Im Gyeongheum 林景欽, in Chirimchon 鷗林村, Yeongam-gun 靈岩郡 near Mokpo 木浦 in present-day South Jeolla Province. During this journey south in the first three months of the lunar year 1592, he recorded some evidence of preparations for the impending invasion by Japan, including the enlistment of Buddhist monks for military labor service projects and the harsh treatment of civilians by military officials, who were urgently trying to strengthen the defenses of strategic sites around the southern provinces of the peninsula (Finch 2019, 377-78).

Nevertheless, O Huimun appears to have been completely taken by surprise, when on the 16th day of the fourth lunar month of 1592, he first received news of the Japanese invasion at Busan, which had in fact occurred three days earlier on the 13th day of the fourth lunar month (“Imjin namhaeng illok,” *Swaemirok* [Record of a Refugee], 5a-5b: 16.4.1592).¹ In the subsequent months, the Japanese invading forces came ever closer to Jangsu 長水, a county (*gun*) in the east-central region in present-day North Jeolla Province, where O Huimun was residing under the protection of his wife’s elder brother Yi Bin 李贊, the magistrate (*hyeongam* 縣監) of Jangsu and a righteous army (*uibyeong* 義兵) commander. Separated from his elderly mother, wife and children, who had all been in Seoul at the outbreak of the war, O Huimun was eventually forced to take refuge among the ruins of the Buddhist temple Seonamsa 西南寺 in nearby Mt. Yeongchwi (Vulture Peak 靈鷲山)² for eighty-six days to avoid the

advancing enemy troops (Seo 1992, 78).

O Huimun undoubtedly experienced intense stress as a consequence of this precarious existence, and it was perhaps in an effort to take his mind off the dangers of his situation and his constant anxiety for his other family members that he kept a daily diary of his experiences, to which he gave the title *Swaemirok* (*Record of a Refugee* 瑣尾錄), which is derived from a passage in the *Shijing* (*Book of Odes* 詩經) (Jang 1991, 93-94). One of the most salient features of this “diary of situation” is the author’s careful recording of his own dreams.³ Korean pre-modern dream literature such as Kim Siseup’s *Geumo sinhwa* (*Tales of Mt. Geumo* 金鰲新話) and Kim Manjung’s *Gunnmong* (*Nine Cloud Dream* 九雲夢), not to mention various dream stories to be found in Iryeon’s *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* 三國遺事), are all well-known milestones in the history of Korean literature, but these much less well-known and more mundane accounts of dreams recorded in *Swaemirok* provide us with a rare glimpse into the interior life of a classically educated member of the Neo-Confucian *yangban* class in mid-Joseon times. This article will focus on the dreams recorded in the first volume of *Swaemirok*, comprising “Imjin namhaeng illok” (Daily Record of a Journey South in 1592 壬辰南行日錄) and “Imjin illok” (Daily Record of 1592 壬辰日錄).⁴

Traditional East Asian Views of Dreams

Before examining O Huimun’s dreams in detail, it would be helpful to have an awareness of the attitude towards the significance and interpretation of dreams that prevailed in Neo-Confucian Ming China and Joseon at that time. We

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1. All page number references to “Imjin namhaeng illok” and “Imjin illok” in this article are from the transcribed manuscript, which includes photographic reproductions of the original manuscript, hosted by the Academy of Korean Studies, Jangseogak Royal Archives, 10.01.21, <http://yoksa.aks.ac.kr/main.jsp>. The dates following the page number references are according to the lunar calendar. For a complete English translation of “Imjin namhaeng illok,” see Finch 2019, 369-98. For the most comprehensive account of the Imjin War (1592-1598) in English, see Hawley 2005.

2. Vulture Peak (Sk. Gṛdhrakūṭa-parvata) was the name of the site where the Buddha was said to have

preached such Mahāyāna sermons as the *Lotus Sutra* (*Beophwagyeong* 法華經). See Charles Muller, “靈鷲山” *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*. <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E9%9D%88%E9%B7%B2%E5%B1%B1>. Accessed 31 July, 2021.

3. The term “diary of situation” was coined by Steven Kagle and refers to a diary that was started due to the author’s desire to record unusual life circumstances such as a journey or the outbreak of war, both of which are applicable in the case of O Huimun’s *Swaemirok* (Kagle 1986, 3).

4. It should be mentioned that “Imjin namhaeng illok,” which begins on the 27th day of the eleventh lunar month of 1591 and lasts until the end of the sixth lunar month of 1592, was not kept on a daily basis. *Swaemirok* only becomes an actual daily record with the beginning of “Imjin illok” on the 1st day of the seventh lunar month 1592. For a basic chronological outline of the complete contents of *Swaemirok*, see Finch 2009, 5-7.

know that O Huimun took his dreams relatively seriously insofar as he went to the trouble of recording them in a detailed way in his diary, which is otherwise largely filled with practical information about his daily life as a wartime refugee, as well as reports on the progress of the first year of the war that he acquired from his brother-in-law Yi Bin. The first volume of the diary also includes verbatim copies of exhortatory missives from King Seonjo 宣祖 (1552-1608) and the crown prince Gwanghaegun 光海君 (1575-1641) as well as many other documents penned by military officers, righteous army generals and Confucian scholars.

Despite his assiduity in recording his dreams, however, O Huimun appears to have been somewhat ambivalent in his attitude towards them. On the one hand, due to his Neo-Confucian rationalism, he sometimes commented on his dreams as not having any real significance, while on the other hand, he could not help posing questions to himself in his diary concerning what the dreams might have portended. As will be seen, occasionally he even made his own interpretations of them based on his own intuition or classical Chinese precedents. This paradoxical interest in and attachment to dreams as well as divination and fortune telling among the Neo-Confucian elite of Joseon, despite their adherence to Confucian rationalism and rejection of “superstitious” beliefs, has been pointed out by the Korean scholar Shin Byung-ju (2015, 301).⁵

Nevertheless, dreams did have a Confucian case to be taken seriously insofar as Confucius himself towards the end of his life famously lamented: “Extreme is my decay! For a long time I have not dreamed, as I was wont to do, that I saw the Duke of Zhou (Zhou)” (Legge 1861, 60). It was also on the basis of this well-known statement in the *Lunyu* (*Analects* 論語) and the attribution of the Tang dynasty work, *Zhou gong jie meng* (*Interpretation of Dreams by the Duke of Zhou* 周公解夢) to him that the Duke of Zhou became the “deity of dreams” in Chinese culture.⁶

In the Daoist tradition, however, Zhuangzi maintained that a person in harmony with the Dao would have no dreams, “The pure man of old slept without dreaming and awoke without anxiety” (Coward et al. 1988, 288). In

fact, O Huimun, although a Confucian *yangban*, like most of his peers, also enjoyed staying at Buddhist temples and echoes this Daoist sentiment in a poem entitled “Yusan Temple” 遊山寺 appended to the volume of the diary for the lunar year 1594, in which he mentions that while staying at the temple his spirit became so clear that he did not have a single dream (*honcheong muil mong* 魂清無一夢) (“Gabo illok,” *Swaemirok*, 105a).

As Pi-ching Hsu (2006, 68) points out, however, the Daoist view of dreaming was not the accepted opinion in Neo-Confucian Ming China, in which dreams were seen as valid reflections of the emotional life of the dreamer. In fact, there were six categories of dreams laid down in the *Zhou li* (*Rites of Zhou* 周禮), a classical Chinese text that would most likely have been known to O Huimun as a well-educated member of the *yangban* class in Joseon. These six categories were as follows: “authentic dreams (*zheng meng* 正夢), fright dreams (*e meng* 噩夢), thought dreams (*si meng* 思夢), waking dreams (*wu meng* 寤夢), happy dreams (*xi meng* 喜夢), and horror dreams (*ju meng* 懼夢)” (Hsu 2006, 67).⁷ According to Hsu, “the authentic dreams,” which came to the dreamers when their minds were at peace, could be used for dream divination. But the others had roots in the dreamers’ mental or physical states before going to sleep. Rather than giving them divine clues to portend the future or suggest solutions, most dreams were “the self trying to get a message across to the self” (Hsu 2006, 68).⁸

It should be mentioned that in traditional Chinese thought, in addition to the six *Zhou li* categories, there were also ten categories listed in Chapter 28 “Dreams Expounded” (*Meng lie* 夢列) of *Qianfu lun* (*Critical Essays of a Recluse* 潛夫論) by Wang Fu 王符 (c. 85-163) of Eastern Han, namely, “straightforward (*zhi* 直), symbolic (*xiang* 象), produced by concentration (*jing* 精), longing (*xiang* 想), personal (*ren* 人), stimulating (*gan* 感), seasonal (*shi* 時), oppositional (*fan* 反), pathological (*bing* 病) and affective (*xing* 性)” (Raphals 2013, 187).⁹

5. For an examination of O Huimun’s engagement with and attitudes towards traditional East Asian divination, fortune telling and Shamanism, see Finch 2021.

6. For an excellent overview of dreams and dream interpretation in pre-modern Chinese culture, see Ong 1981.

7. The original text explaining the six categories of dreams in “Zhan meng” 占夢, in the “Chun guan, Zongbo liguan zhi zhi” 春官 宗伯禮官之職 section of *Zhou li, juan* 25, 1a-2a, is as follows: “春官宗伯: 占夢: 掌其岁时, 观天地之会, 辨阴阳之气. 以日月星辰占六梦之吉凶, 一曰正梦, 二曰噩梦, 三曰思梦, 四曰寤梦, 五曰喜梦, 六曰惧梦. 季冬, 聘王梦, 献吉梦于王, 王拜而受之. 乃舍萌于四方, 以磨恶梦, 遂令始难驱疫.” Chinese Text Project, available at: <https://ctext.org/rites-of-zhou/chun-guan-zong-bo/ens>. Accessed 1 October, 2021.

8. The phrase “the self trying to get a message across to the self” quoted by Hsu is from Thompson, 1988, 73.

9. For an account of these categories, albeit with slightly different English translations, in which the

In this article, however, O Huimun's dreams will be examined in terms of four of the six traditional *Zhou li* categories, namely, "thought dreams," "waking dreams," "fright dreams," and "authentic dreams."

O Huimun's "Thought Dreams" (*si meng* 思夢) of His Wife and Father

The largest number of O Huimun's dreams appear to fall into the *Zhou li* category of "thought dreams" (C. *si meng*; K. *samong* 思夢), namely, dreams that were caused by the dreamer's yearning thoughts, as they featured people who were absent, and about whom O Huimun felt deeply anxious in his waking life. This ancient category of "thought dreams" as well as "waking dreams" appear to be similar to Sigmund Freud's idea of "Tagesrest" (day-residue or "remains of the day"), namely, memories of waking experiences and concerns that provide the basic content for dreams, which are then acted upon by unconscious desires during sleep (Freud 1914, 436-40).

Friedrich Nietzsche also proposed the idea of the "restorative" function of dreams as a means of helping people to cope with the complexities of everyday life: "The dream carries us back into earlier states of human culture, and affords us a means of understanding it better....To a certain extent the dream is a restorative for the brain, which during the day is called upon to meet the severe demands for trained thought, made by the conditions of a higher civilization" (Jung 1916, 28). It could be argued, therefore, that O Huimun's dreams that enabled him to encounter, albeit in a dream state, members of his immediate and extended family as well as a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, which formed the broad network of relationships of a Joseon *yangban*, helped him to endure the severe disruption of those vital relationships caused by the onset of the Imjin War (1592-1598). As will be seen, however, dreams also contributed to O Huimun's anxieties because, as well as being interpreted as an affirmation of the closeness of relationships, a dream visitation in East Asian culture could also be interpreted as a visitation of the spirit of someone who had died.

O Huimun's Dreams of His Wife

Foremost in number of O Huimun's "thought dreams" in the lunar year of 1592 are those that featured the appearance of his wife, about whom he wrote affectionately in his diary:

All her life our family has been poor, and we have only got by with difficulty. She was not able to relax her face even for a single day. Then all of a sudden this disturbance has happened; if we cannot meet again, and she dies, in all my life how will I be able to overcome my sorrowful feelings?
(“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 14b: 28.5.1592)

O Huimun's expression of regret towards his wife over his own inability to secure a government position, and the poverty of his family as a consequence, appears to have been a common lament of *yangban* men and is reminiscent of the Goryeo scholar official Choe Nubaek's tomb inscription for his wife Yeom Gyeongae:

And when I was involved in military matters, she endured hardship in our poor home and often made and sent military uniforms...How she followed me through all of these difficulties for twenty-three years I cannot entirely record. (Lee and de Bary 1997, 184)

In the lunar year 1592 O Huimun recorded a total of eleven dreams in which his wife appeared. He speculated that these dreams of his wife were proof of their close emotional attachment to one another on the one hand, but he was also concerned that they might have been prognostications that his wife had already died and was visiting him in his dreams as a consequence.

On the night of the nineteenth day last, I saw my wife in a dream looking just like she used to in the past. Since I came south, she has not appeared even once in my dreams, so what is the reason for this dream? Is she living or is she dead? It is sad. It is sad. (“Imjin namhaeng illok,” *Swaemirok*, 10b: 28.5.1592)¹⁰

author compares them with the dream types and their interpretation in *Oneirocritica* (*Interpretation of Dreams*) by the Greek diviner Artemidorus (2nd century AD), who was roughly contemporary with Wang Fu, see Ong 1981, 153-63.

10. In this passage O Huimun referred to his wife by the deprecatory term "*hyeongcheo*" (thorny wife 荊妻) and elsewhere in the text by the term "*hyeongpo*" (thorny calico 荊布). The more common term in literary Sinitic in premodern China, however, would have been "*jolhyeong*" (stupid thorn 拙荊). It should be noted that wives also used similarly deprecatory terms to refer to their husbands as did

As much as O Huimun perceived his dreams of his wife as confirming his emotional attachment to her and heartfelt concern for her predicament, however, he was also equally concerned about his initial failure to dream about his elderly mother and frequently expressed feelings of guilt over what he saw as evidence of his own lack of filial piety—a feeling that accorded with Confucius' own expression of regret for no longer dreaming of his cultural hero the Duke of Zhou in the *Analects* mentioned earlier.

In the following passage, after awakening from a dream of his wife and youngest daughter referred to simply as *dana* (final child 端兒)—a term which appears to be a literary Sinitic form of the contemporary Korean word *mangnae* (youngest child)—O Huimun speculated about the reason for the frequency of the dreams of his wife.

In a dream at dawn, my wife and I were in our house together with our family, and she looked exactly as she did in ordinary times. Our youngest daughter (*dana* 端兒) was powdering her face and preening herself. I embraced her, kneeled down next to her, and stroking her cheek, asked, “Haven't you been thinking about me?” While shedding tears, I was in the middle of telling my wife of all the loneliness I had felt since we had been separated, when before I had finished speaking, I suddenly awoke and found myself lying under a tree with the sky already brightening in the east. As I thought deeply about the contents of the dream, tears fell without my realizing it. Since the disturbance broke out, I have dreamed (of my wife) three times, so is she alive or is she dead? Why is she appearing to me so frequently in my dreams? (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 33b: 3.7.1592)

Nevertheless, despite wondering about the significance of his dreams, O Huimun also frequently denied that they had any rational validity, and in this way clearly indicated his conflicted attitude towards dreaming caused by his Neo-Confucian rejection of engaging with the spiritual realm, an attitude that had been clearly expressed by Confucius in the *Analects*:

Ji Lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead. The Master said, “While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?” Ji Lu added, “I venture to ask about death?” He was answered, “While you do not know

life, how can you know about death?” (*Lunyu*, Xian Jin, 12)

This Neo-Confucian skeptical rationalism, however, coexisted alongside the prevailing tradition of attributing significance to dreams, for example, so-called “birth dreams” (*taemong* 胎夢) prognosticating the destiny of a yet unborn child. This tradition existed, of course, not only in Joseon folk culture but also more widely in the East Asian cultural sphere, and even in other writings of Confucius himself as we have seen concerning his dream of the Duke of Zhou. O Huimun's reflection on his dream in this instance concluded with an expression of feelings of guilt for not having had a dream about his elderly mother throughout the time they had been separated by the ongoing Japanese invasion.

What is the reason that I have not seen my elderly mother in my dreams even once? Things that happen in dreams are not to be taken seriously, but even though I have wanted to have a dream of her, it has not happened. Is it because I lack sincerity and filial piety? My sorrow grows ever deeper. (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 33b: 3.7.1592)

Eleven days later, O Huimun encountered his wife once again in a dream and speculated that these frequent dream encounters were indicative of their devotion towards one another.

I slept at the base of a rock in the mountains. At the break of dawn, I saw my wife in a dream looking exactly as she did in normal times in the past, and we discussed the marriage of our eldest daughter. What is the reason for this? Her face looked pale so she must certainly have died. As we will probably never be able to meet again in this life, I was unable to hold back my sorrowful tears. Since being separated by the disturbance, this is the fourth time she has appeared in my dream. Could this be because we have been devotedly thinking of one another? (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 38b: 14.7.1592)

Once again, to counterbalance this indulgence in affectionate thoughts for his wife, he concluded his reflections with a mandatory mention of his concern for his elderly mother related to another dream of his nephew Sim Yeol 沈說 (1569-1646), who O Huimun believed had accompanied his mother in

parents when referring to their own children (Mathews [1943] 1960, 155-56; 180).

her flight from Seoul.¹¹ Here, as in almost all cases of dreams that O Huimun interpreted as being inauspicious, no detail is provided about the actual dream's content, perhaps out of the fear that any inauspicious portents would be given more substantiality and consequently be more likely to come true due to the act of his recording the content in his diary. It should be mentioned, however, that in his diary entry on the 29th day of the twelfth lunar month of 1597, O Huimun mentioned a current folk belief that the writing down of an inauspicious dream was a way to transform it into an auspicious dream ("Jeongyu illok" 丁酉日錄, *Swaemirok*, 25b: 1597.12. 29), and in another entry on the 11th day of the eleventh intercalary lunar month of 1593, he mentioned a proverb that stated that an inauspicious dream could be interpreted as having the opposite meaning ("Gyesa illok" 癸巳日錄, *Swaemirok*, 87a: 1593. Intercalary 11. 11).

In a daytime dream I saw Sim Yeol 沈說, but the dream was not a good omen. What could it mean? Could it be that [Sim] Yeol 說 has taken my elderly mother to Gangneung? If that is the case, she will be safe, and there is no need to worry. This may be said to be fortunate. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 38b: 14.7.1592)

Subsequently on his birthday, O Huimun, after dutifully reminding himself of the pain his mother suffered in giving birth to him, once again expressed the concern he felt for his absent family. He dreamed briefly of his wife and was once more reduced to tears.

Today is my birthday, which is to say, the day my elderly mother suffered. Where are my elderly mother and wife and children now? As I think of them today are they weeping together? I cannot experience the difficulties of my elderly mother, wife and children together with them as they wander at large for a thousand leagues, and my body is uncomfortable as I have been hiding among these rocks for one month now. How can I not be grief-stricken at these feelings of compassion (for my family)? Tears flow weakly from my eyes.

In my dream at dawn, I vaguely saw my wife and then awakened suddenly. A scops owl came and hooted in a silkworm oak at the bottom of the steps (of a ruined Buddhist temple). The sound filled the whole valley, and when I heard it, my heart felt even more painful, and I could not stop myself from shedding sorrowful tears. This is the fifth time I have dreamt of my wife since the disturbance began. What is the reason for this? It has been a long time since we have been separated from each other, enduring countless hardships, but if we can each preserve our lives, we will certainly be able to meet again. However, if from among my elderly mother, wife and children, and younger siblings, one person should die first, we will never be able to meet in this life again. I am praying day and night in my heart, so surely the gods of heaven and earth (*cheonji sinmyeong* 天地神明) will be moved.

("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 41b-42a: 25.7.1592)

It should be mentioned here that this frequent and unabashed shedding of tears by a member of the *yangban* class that is recorded in *Swaemirok* was also noted by a rather bewildered and embarrassed Captain Basil Hall in his account of his brief encounter with a Joseon official over 200 years later in 1816:

The Chief now began crying violently, and turning towards the village walked away, leaning his head on the shoulder of one of his people. As he went along, he not only sobbed and wept, but every now and then bellowed aloud. We had been nowise prepared for such a scene, and were extremely sorry for having pushed matters to this extremity. (Hall [1818] 1990, 37)¹²

The frequent shedding of tears by O Huimun and his *yangban* peers recorded in *Swaemirok*, which might be viewed as a sign of weakness, appears to have had an important cathartic function that enabled them to endure the intense stress and trauma of wartime and premodern life in general as well as regularly affirming the authenticity of the emotional underpinnings of familial and interpersonal relationships.

With the onset of autumn in 1592 and still living among the ruins of an abandoned Buddhist temple in Mt. Yeongchwi, O Huimun again dreamed of

11. Sim Yeol, whose mother was O Huimun's younger sister and who had been looked after by O Huimun's family after the death of his mother, was the son of Sim Suwon 沈粹原 and went on to hold an official post in the reign of King Injo (r. 1623-1649) (Shin 2012, 46-47n31).

12. The greater frequency of openly crying in non-Western cultures was also commented on around this time by the naturalist Charles Darwin (1872, 154-55) and subsequently by psychologist Alvin Borgquist (1906, 180), whose views on the subject were based mainly on the reported observations of missionaries.

his wife not just once but this time on three consecutive days, convincing him that she must have died and that he was now being visited nightly by her spirit. An example of this kind of belief in Joseon times can also be found in King Sukjong's encounter with the deceased Queen Inhyeon in a dream towards the end of the *Tale of Queen Inhyeon* (*Inhyeon wanghu jeon* 仁顯王后傳), in which the queen revealed that the royal concubine Jang Huibin had caused her death through shaman curses (Rutt and Kim 1974, 224). Visitations of spirits in dreams can also be found in Kim Manjung's *Nine Cloud Dream* (*Gunmong*),¹³ Kim Siseup's *Tales of Mt. Geumo* (*Geumo sinhwa*) and, of course, numerous premodern Chinese tales, many of which would have been known to Joseon *yangban* (Ong 1981, 18-53).

For the first time in his diary, O Huimun expressed the desire to end his life rather than continue enduring the intense anxiety he felt for his family and the growing conviction that his wife and children had not been able to survive the vicissitudes of the war.

I slept at the base of a rock in the mountains. When the autumn rain finally ceased, the clouds and mist cleared away, and as the morning sun arose, the melancholy wind did not cease. In a dream last night my wife appeared and Yi Siyun 李時尹 as well; what is the reason for this? For three days my wife has appeared continuously in my dreams, and I think it must be because she has already died and due to the affectionate thoughts we had for each other in normal times, her soul (*jeonghon* 精魂) is frequently appearing in my dreams? How did she manage to take care of all the children before her eyes and then die? If they did not all die together, did they (the children) weep somewhere in the mountains and die of starvation? Thinking in this way grieves me to the heart, and I just want to end my life. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 61b-62a: 16.8.1592)

The final two dreams recorded in 1592 were also of family members, including O Huimun's second eldest son O Yunhae—who reassured him in the dream that his third eldest son O Yunham had not died—his eldest son O Yungyeom, and his own wife. Once again the dreams provided little comfort to O

Huimun and simply further convinced him that his relatives must by now all have died.

Again I had a dream in the night in which O Yunnam 吳潤男 appeared looking just like he did in the old days. I asked "Where did you come from?" and he answered, "I went to Gwangju to tend the (ancestral) grave and now as I am on my way home, I dropped by to see you." Then I called my wife to come and see him. What is the reason for this? She must be dead. How sad, how sad. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 66b: 25.8.1592)

I was at the temple. In a dream in the night I saw Yunhae just like he was in the past. I said "Your younger brother Yunham was in Hwanghae-do, and they say the Japanese robbers overran there, so he must have died?" Yunhae answered, "Why would that fellow have died? I heard that he is fine." What is the reason for this? Since being separated I have not seen him once in my dreams, and now he appeared for the first time. As soon as I woke up, I wept uncontrollably. I also saw my wife and Yun-gyeom faintly, but their faces were not clear. How sad. How sad. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 78a: 6.9.1592)

O Huimun's Dream of His Deceased Father

In an extensive dream recorded on the 9th day of the eighth lunar month of 1592, O Huimun finally experienced a dream encounter with his deceased father. Although he expressed a sense of gratitude for having been able to meet his father in a dream, nowhere in the diary did he ever express any sense of a lack of filial piety for not dreaming of his father more often in the way that he lamented for his lack of dreams of his elderly mother. Presumably, this was because unlike his mother, his father was no longer living at that time. It is also worth noting, however, that during his childhood and youth, O Huimun appears to have been primarily under the protection and care of his maternal relatives, a feature of Goryeo society that continued until the seventeenth century in Joseon despite the dominance of the Neo-Confucian ideology and its emphasis on the paternal family line (Finch 2009, 60). Furthermore, as has been mentioned earlier, in the first year of the Imjin War, O Huimun was protected not by a paternal relative but by his wife's elder brother, Yi Bin, the magistrate of Jangsu.

13. In the case of the *Nine Cloud Dream* the spirit visitation was, in fact, a form of practical joke played on the protagonist, but it nevertheless reveals that in pre-modern East Asian culture such a phenomenon was believed to be possible.

I slept at the base of a rock in the mountain. Even though the rain stopped at dawn, the morning mist did not clear up. Also, last night I clearly saw my [deceased] father [in a dream]. When I asked him where he was now, he replied that as there wasn't any place to go to. At first he was just going to stay where he was, but in accordance with a strict order from the royal court, everyone in the capital was sent away, so he could not avoid leaving and fleeing. Also, when I asked where my wife and children were, my father replied, "the day before yesterday your wife and children took a boat and arrived on Jeju Island." Again I said, "When they come up from Honam, will I be able to meet them here? Now you say they have gone to Jeju, I won't be able to see my children soon, how pitiful, how pitiful," and then I shed tears. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*: 48a-48b: 9.8.1592)

O Huimun's "Waking Dream" (*wu meng* 寤夢)

O Huimun's account of his dream of his father on the 9th day of the eighth lunar month of 1592 mentioned above continued with content reflecting O Huimun's concerns about his family's gravesite, which he subsequently attributed to the fact that during the previous day he had heard and discussed reports of the Japanese looting of graves. He based the interpretation of this dream on an unnamed "ancient text" that stated that things that are talked about when one is awake, subsequently reappeared in dreams. This "ancient text" was most probably the *Zhou li*, or a classical commentary on it, in which case the category of dream he was referring to was a "waking dream" (C. *wu meng*; K. *omong* 寤夢) (Hsu 2006, 67n2).¹⁴ He later shared this dream with a fellow *yangban* refugee Eungil 應一 Yi Gyeongbaek 李慶白, who was also separated from his close family members. This demonstrates that O Huimun not only considered his dreams to be subject matter that merited being recorded in his personal diary and shared with close family members, but that they were also suitable as a topic of conversation with members of his own *yangban* class outside his immediate family circle.

14. This interpretation of the nature of a "waking dream" is based on the *Zhou li* exegesis of Zheng Xuan (127-200 CE), who defined "waking dreams" as dreams that are caused by what the dreamer talks about before sleeping. Hsu (2006, 67n2) himself, however, doubts the validity of this exegesis and considers "waking dreams" to be akin to daydreams.

[In the dream] I also met the wife of Heo Tan 許坦 who lives by the family grave in Gwangju. She is in fact the illegitimate daughter of my cousin. I asked, where my younger sister was intending to flee to, and she answered that she was by the side of Huicheol [O Huimun's younger brother], but as my younger sister had nowhere to go, she stayed at home and did not flee. I also asked, "Is there no problem with the family grave?" and my younger brother answered that our uncle (*sukju* 叔主) from Yonggung 龍宮¹⁵ had broken some of the stone statues, but the rest were all right. The wife of the slave Eongnyong, who takes care of the grave, walked past carrying a jar of water on her head and sat down. What is the reason for this?

Yesterday I talked with Eungil, and he told me that he had heard that the [Japanese] robbers were digging up the tombs. Our family gravesite (*seonyeong* 先塋) is on the other side of the river in the Gwangju region [in Gyeonggi Province near Seoul] next to a big road, and as it has stone statues that stand out, I am deeply worried that the wicked robbers have come and desecrated the graves.¹⁶ There is an ancient saying (*go-eo* 古語) that something that happens in the daytime will definitely appear in a dream at night, so this certainly appeared in my dream because we had been talking about it.

Also, ever since this disturbance broke out there is something I have always wanted. Even in a dream, I have wanted to find my father once, but it did not happen until last night when I was able to see his face. Also, I saw my brother and conversed with him just like in normal times. I suddenly awoke and realized that it was a dream, I folded the quilt, got up and then sat down thinking deeply of my father's face, and as it clearly seemed that I had seen him, my heart was filled with feelings of sadness, and tears flowed without my realizing it.

Later I called Eungil, and when I told him about what had happened in my dream, he also could not stop sighing. Eungil is the courtesy name of Yi Gyeongbaek. He has an elderly father, wife and children, and I have an elderly mother, wife and children. It is now five months without either of us knowing whether they are alive or dead, so whenever we talk together, we often end up weeping. Our heartfelt feelings towards our elderly parents

15. Yonggung 龍宮 is present-day Yecheon-gun 醴泉郡 in North Gyeongsang Province.

16. Throughout *Swaemirok* the Japanese invaders are generally referred to as "robbers" (*jeok* 賊), "Japanese robbers" (*waejeok* 倭賊), or "vicious robbers" (*hyungjeok* 凶賊).

and our wife and children are the same, so how could our sorrow and yearning for them be shallow? If this dream is true, could it be that one day, we will see them again? Ah, ah! It is so sad. (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 48a-48b: 9.8.1592)

O Huimun's “Fright Dreams” (*e meng* 噩夢)

As mentioned previously, O Huimun almost never described the content of inauspicious dreams in his diary but simply recounted that he had had an inauspicious dream, which would have fallen into the traditional category of “fright dreams” (C. *e meng*; K. *angmong* 噩夢) or possibly “horror dreams” (C. *ju meng*; K. *gumong* 懼夢). There was one exception in the dreams that he recorded in 1592, however, when he dreamed of catching two sparrows, eating them raw, and then spitting them out. He questioned what this might have signified but did not attempt any reply to his own rhetorical question. If the dream occurrence in any way reflected O Huimun's wartime life, it was a reminder of the constant challenge of finding sufficient food to feed himself and his household, a state of affairs that persisted throughout the whole period of the Imjin War and its aftermath until he and his family returned to their home in Seoul and he concluded his diary on the 27th day of the second lunar month of 1601. In later volumes of the diary, once O Huimun and his family had been reunited, he kept meticulous records of the foodstuffs he and his family received, often from better-off *yangban* and local administrative officials, such as his son-in-law Sin Eun-gu 申應集, the magistrate of Hamyeol 咸悅, and his own eldest son O Yungyeom 吳允謙 (1559-1636), the magistrate of Pyeonggang 平康, making his diary an important primary source for the culinary history of this period (Cha 2007, 703-19). These diary records also provide substantial evidence of the mutual support system that sustained the *yangban* class in Joseon Korea, which was tested to breaking point during the socio-economic upheaval of the Imjin War years.

I slept at the base of a rock in the mountain. In last night's dream I saw my wife and eldest daughter, and they looked exactly as they did in normal times. I caught two sparrows, tore them apart with my bare hands and ate them raw. My mouth was filled with foul-tasting blood, so I spat them out onto the road. What kind of prognostication is this? On awakening, I

could not overcome my feelings of sadness. (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 56b: 13.8.1592)

In a subsequent dream O Huimun dreamed that he had an infant son despite the fact that three of his sons were already adults and the fourth was approaching marriageable age. In the dream the son died. On awakening he immediately concluded that it was an omen of the death of all his family members in their flight from the Japanese.

I slept under a rock in the mountain. I dreamed a dream in the night in which I seemed to have a youngest son who was around three or four years of age and who had an illness and was almost dead. I placed him on my knees and suddenly he died. I immediately gave [the child] back to my wife and lamented out loud. At that moment I awoke; what kind of portent is this? I do not have a three or four-year-old son, but I had this kind of portent. Now that I think about it, my wife and children must have all fallen into a pit and died... (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 57b: 14.8.1592)

Although O Huimun was eventually reunited with all his family members at the end of 1592, he did lose his youngest daughter (*dana*) to illness five years later on the 1st day of the second lunar month 1597 at Yuljeon near Suwon 水原 in Gyeonggi Province. This family tragedy occurred when O Huimun and his family were travelling from their former place of refuge in Imcheon 林川 in South Chungcheong Province to Pyeonggang in Gangwon Province. This decision to relocate despite his daughter's worsening condition had been made for three main reasons, namely, rumors that preceded the second Japanese invasion of Joseon (Jeongyu jaeran 丁酉再亂, 27.8.1597-16.12.1598), the fact that O Huimun's son-in-law Sin Eun-gu the magistrate of Hamyeol, who had provided his family with regular food supplies during their stay in nearby Imcheon, had resigned from his post, and the recent appointment of O Huimun's eldest son O Yungyeom to the post of magistrate of Pyeonggang.

O Huimun's “Authentic Dreams” (*zheng meng* 正夢)

In this section we will examine three of O Huimun's dreams to which he attributed symbolic or divinatory significance as well as an additional dream by

a child of an acquaintance that he recorded in his diary as being an augury of impending peace.

O Huimun's Dream Encounter with a Japanese Soldier

The first of O Huimun's symbolic dreams comprised the final part of the dream encounter with his father mentioned previously, in which he also had a brief encounter with a Japanese soldier in Seoul with whom he engaged in a brief conversation—presumably in Korean. O Huimun subsequently speculated that this dream encounter with the enemy was a prognostication of the expulsion of the Japanese forces from Seoul by the Ming troops that had intervened in the early stages of the war. Although he seems to have treated this dream as an “authentic dream” (C. *zheng meng*; K. *jeongmong* 正夢) namely, a dream that was considered to be reliable for divination purposes according to the dream categories in the *Zhou li*, the whole account was once again concluded with an almost obligatory comment on the illusory nature of dreams, perhaps to assuage his Neo-Confucian conscience for going into such detail about a single dream in his diary and assigning such an auspicious significance to it.

Also, in the dream, the robbers in Seoul had already left, but just one Japanese entered someone's home looking for something to eat and said that he would then be gone forever. Then the owner of the house took out some rice, put it in some water, and gave it to him. I asked the Japanese person, “How many of you are there?” and he said that they were extremely many, almost thirty thousand. What is the reason for this? Reflecting back on this, definitely all the robbers in Seoul have been chased away by the Heavenly Troops [i.e., the Ming army]. Even though things that happen in dreams are undoubtedly illusory, I saw my elderly mother [father] in a dream last night, and this is exactly how I remembered it. (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 48a-48b: 9.8.1592)

O Huimun's Dream of a Broken Bow

Among the many dreams of his wife and other relatives living and dead, O Huimun also had his most clearly symbolic dream in which he dreamed that his bow had been broken. He speculated in his diary that such a dream would be bound to be interpreted as being inauspicious if he were to tell it to anyone

else, but he was determined to interpret it in an auspicious way. In order to do this, he called upon his own knowledge of the Chinese classics and equated the broken bow in his dream with an episode in ancient Chinese history in which the King of Zhou 周王 had left his war horses to the south of Mt. Hua 華山 as they were no longer necessary in a time of peace. The broken bow for O Huimun, therefore, became a prognostication of the imminent end of hostilities between Japan and Joseon. As such this dream would have belonged to the *Zhou li* category of “authentic dreams.” It should also be mentioned that interpreting an ostensibly ominous dream in an auspicious way had a long tradition in pre-modern Chinese dream interpretation (Ong 1981, 191).

In a dream at dawn my bow was broken; what kind of portent is this? If I tell anyone else, they will undoubtedly say that it cannot be auspicious, but I think it is auspicious. It is not inauspicious. What I mean to say is, I have been dreaming night after night about my wife and also this broken bow, so it definitely means that the gang of wicked robbers [the Japanese invaders] will be defeated and that we will no longer have to worry about the war. Throwing away one's bow and not using it is like when King Wu of Zhou (K. Chuwang 周王) left his [war] horses to the south of Mt. Hua 華山, the imperial clan (*jongsil* 宗室) was safe again, and the people lived in safety. So likewise after my elderly mother, wife and children's wandering, we will be able to meet again, so how can it be an inauspicious portent? (“Imjin illok,” *Swaemirok*, 58a: 14.8.1592)

The episode concerning King Wu of Zhou 周武王 is from the “Successful Completion of the War” (Wu cheng 武成) section of the *Book of History* (*Shujing* 書經), in which there is the following record:

In the fourth month, at the first appearance of the moon, the king came from Shang to Feng, when he hushed all the movements of war, and proceeded to cultivate the arts of peace. He sent back his horses to the south of Mount Hua, and let loose his oxen in the open country of Tao-lin, showing to all under heaven that he would not use them [again].¹⁷

17. *Shangshu* 尚書. Chinese Text Project. Available at: <https://ctext.org/shang-shu/successful-completion-of-the-war>. Accessed January 1, 2021. The CTP English translation is based on the translation in Legge 1865, 308.

O Huimun's Dream of Fish

There are two further dreams recorded in 1592 that O Huimun considered propitious. Five days after the dream of the broken bow, O Huimun had a dream of fish swimming in clear water that he also interpreted as foretelling the return of peace.

In a dream last night I was walking from Gwandong 館洞 to Seonggyungwan 成均館 past a stream, and unlike in the past when it was all dried up, it was now filled with water with fish swimming about in it. In my dream the previous day, the eastern stream was also clear and overflowing, so it seems that this is a sign that the country will be at peace again. The East and the West will reconcile with each other; instruction in the [Confucian] classics will flourish; and our Way will be established greatly. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 58a: 19.8.1592)

A Child's Auspicious Dream

The final auspicious dream that O Huimun recorded on the 28th day of the twelfth lunar month of 1592 was not his own dream but that of the young son of a *yangban* acquaintance Hong Jongnok 洪宗祿. Hong's son, a child who was still unable to read and write, had had a dream before the onset of the war of an old man with white hair, who had taught him a verse of poetry:

The rain on the way to the capital is blue. The east wind blows and the horse's hoof is light. The happy sounds of songs of victory and cheering for an official who has achieved high office fill Luoyang. ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 108a: 28.12.1592)

O Huimun concluded his account by writing that everyone had interpreted this dream as meaning that peace would come in the second or third lunar month and that heaven had revealed this to the boy because of his sincerity ("Imjin illok," *Swaemirok*, 108a: 28.12.1592).

Although O Huimun was finally reunited with his family members before the end of 1592, it was not until six years later that his "authentic dreams" of peace finally came true when in 1598 the last Japanese troops withdrew from Joseon after the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣 秀吉 in the same year. For

O Huimun and his family, however, normal life did not resume until he finally returned to his family home in Seoul several years later on the 27th day of the second lunar month, 1601, after an absence of over nine years, and brought his diary to a close with the words: "My writing paper has all been used up, and now that I have returned to Seoul, I no longer have free time so I am putting down my writing brush" ("Sinchuk illok," *Swaemirok*, 27.2.1601).

Conclusion

As can be seen from this selection of dreams from the diary *Swaemirok*, O Huimun's dream encounters with his relatives were both a source of comfort and anxiety for him. Isolated from those closest to him as he hid in Mt. Yeongchwi with only the company of other refugees from the local administrative office and some Buddhist monks, these dream encounters with his wife, parents, and other relatives went some way to alleviate his loneliness and reconfirm the enduring nature of his interpersonal relationships, but at the same time the dreams awakened his fears for the fate of his immediate family members and also his wide circle of relatives and acquaintances. As we have seen, these fears were undoubtedly exacerbated by the prevailing folk belief that the spirits of the deceased could visit the living through dreams. Dreams that could be interpreted as being auspicious and auguries of peace, on the other hand, provided O Huimun with some hope for the future in midst of the many military defeats and disasters that occurred in the first year of the war.

An important factor in the alleviation of O Huimun's stress and anxiety also appears to have been the ease with which he had recourse to tears as his dreams were frequently followed by the shedding of tears upon awakening. O Huimun's frequent shedding of tears, therefore, far from being a sign of weakness, appears to have contributed to his psychological resilience in enduring the hardships of his refugee life and separation from his family. While O Huimun and his family were undoubtedly supported physically by their extended family network and the mutual support system of the *yangban* class, his dreams and tears, as well as conversation with his peers—often accompanied with the liberal consumption of alcohol—divination, and the keeping of his diary in literary Sinitic all appear to have contributed to O Huimun's ability to

withstand the psychological trauma of the years he spent as a refugee avoiding the Japanese invaders and fending for himself and his family.

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Abstract

This article examines the dreams recorded by O Huimun (1539-1613) during the period of the Japanese invasion of Joseon in the lunar year 1592 to gain an insight into the interior life of a member of the *yangban* class in sixteenth-century Joseon. The largest category of these dreams concern people who were absent through death or separation due to the war, particularly members of his own family, such as his elderly mother, wife, children, and his deceased father. O Huimun's dreams of people almost invariably invoke heartfelt sadness in the diary's author and frequently result in the reported shedding of tears. Other dreams were interpreted by the author as being more symbolic in nature, and in these cases, O Huimun would often attempt his own interpretation or even record the opinions of other members of his refugee household and acquaintances. This article will examine a broad selection of the dreams recorded in "Imjin namhaeng illok" and "Imjin illok," which comprise the first volume of *Swaemirok* (*Record of a Refugee*) covering the lunar year 1592, and categorize them in accordance with the traditional dream categories outlined in the *Zhou li* (*Rites of Zhou* 周禮) in order to demonstrate how dreams and dream interpretation functioned as a form of psychological support for a Joseon yangban steeped in Neo-Confucian rationalism.

Keywords: *Swaemirok*, O Huimun, Japanese Invasion of 1592 (Imjin waeran), dream records, diary

